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A Cinematic Atopia: Robert Smithson and the Filmic Afterlife of the Soviet Avant-Garde

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A Cinematic Atopia:

Robert Smithson and the Filmic Afterlife of

the Soviet Avant-Garde

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Art History

by

Zachary Rottman

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Cinematic Atopia:

Robert Smithson and the Filmic Afterlife of

the Soviet Avant-Garde

by

Zachary Rottman

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor George Baker, Chair

This dissertation reconsiders the legacy of American artist Robert Smithson

(1938–73) through his reception of Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948), famed Revolutionary

Soviet filmmaker. From his early canonization, Smithson has been virtually synonymous

with the emergence of aesthetic postmodernism. Radically redefining sculpture as plural

and dispersed (as in his nonsites) or else site-specific, subject to physical deterioration,

and mediated by film and photography (as with his signal earthwork *Spiral Jetty*),

Smithson's practice has been consistently positioned as a rigorously logical,

programmatic critique of Greenbergian modernism and the idealism subtending its values

of autonomy and opticality. To that end, Smithson's work is understood, too, as

"postminimal," extending the anti-aesthetic provocations that Minimalist objecthood

inherited from the Soviet avant-garde precedent. In focusing narrowly on Constructivist sculpture of the early 1920s, however, accounts of this generation's revival of that avant-garde have ignored the Revolutionary cinema to which it gave rise. Such an oversight is especially significant given that Eisenstein's films were undergoing widespread reassessment beginning in the 1960s, during which time they were rapidly assimilated by Smithson, an artist exemplary of his generation for being not only a sculptor but also a cinephile and filmmaker.

Taking seriously Smithson's cinephilia and filmmaking practice, as well as his manifest interest in Soviet cinema specifically, this dissertation reconsiders a canonical postmodernist through the radical model of Eisenstein's films. In particular, it shows Eisenstein's theory of dialectical montage to be teeming amidst Smithson's work and animating the paradoxes, binaries, and discontinuities that proliferate through his entire practice, even, or perhaps especially, when that practice does not take recourse to the physical material of film. In doing so, an unfamiliar Smithson emerges—not the quintessential logician of postmodernity but, following the libidinal subtext of Eisensteinian montage, an artist concerned with hellish monstrosity, perversion, sexuality, and violence consistent with his reading of Georges Bataille. The destination may no longer be Revolutionary utopia but what Smithson described in 1971 as a "cinematic atopia"—an entropic nether-place of razed boundaries, ruined hierarchies, and obliterated categories that will come to define the artist's devolutionary "montage" of sculpture and film.

This dissertation of Zachary Rottman is approved.

Miwon Kwon

Steven Nelson

Megan Luke

George Baker, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

For Moldy Boy

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Acknowledgments

Coming to the end of this dissertation feels to me like the sequence from Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film where the artist staggers forth in fits and starts down the arced length of his newly-completed earthwork. As if in pursuit, as if in feeble flight from some unseen force bearing down upon him from above, he zigzags along the earthen pathway in strange, fitful spasms only to reach, at long last, the work's center, its very heart, its terminus, which turns out to be about as climactic as a cul-de-sac. Nothing to do now but rewind and go back the way he came. Or perhaps it is more like his collaborative film *Swamp*, where the artist sadistically prods his wife Nancy Holt forward through a reedy marsh, her vision narrowly confined to the 16mm Bolex camera through which it is her wretched plight to look while she makes slow and uncertain progress through the bramble to nowhere in particular. "Just sort of go out into the clearing there," Smithson's voice instructs shortly before the film abruptly ends. "Just move to that clump on the other side." Smithson—as he exists in his work and in his archives and in his writings—has been this kind of Virgil for me, too, drawing me deeper into the spiraling involutions of a practice less about decisively reaching some end point than about the process of finding (or not finding) one's way.

In attempting to find my way, in any case, in endeavoring to cut a path through the bramble, I am deeply indebted, first and foremost and above all, to my adviser, George Baker, who emboldened me to follow this course of hazards wherever it might lead. George, you have been a true source of inspiration and encouragement and support, and everywhere this project bears the indelible marks of your tutelage and mentorship. Thank you. I hope our scholarship continues to meet in the subterranean passages and

rank sewers of art history. I owe a similar debt of gratitude to my committee members, Miwon Kwon, Steven Nelson, and Megan Luke, whose intellectual examples are likewise reflected throughout this project. Miwon, I am lucky to have worked so closely with you during the MA process years ago: you taught me to embrace writing as a process, to allow it to manifest the convolutions of thought and the sequence of reasoning in terms that now strike me as richly Eisensteinian. Steven, your commitment in seminars to surveying recent literature taught me what a dissertation could look like in the first place. And Megan, in some ways—in many ways—this project started with you, for it was your Spring 2013 seminar that stoked my curiosity about Russian Constructivism and its international variants, that made me wonder about how radical form could radically function.

This dissertation has benefited immeasurably from a variety of institutional sources. It would not have been possible without the financial support of UCLA's Dissertation Year Fellowship as well as various travel and research grants from my home department. It owes its existence, as well, to the incredible staff of the many archives that I consulted for both research and screenings: Anthology Film Archives, the Archives of American Art, Electronic Arts Intermix, New York University Archives, UCLA Special Collections, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. I reserve special appreciation for Ashley Swinnerton of MoMA's Film Study Center, who facilitated countless screenings for me during the earlier part of this process. The days-long film binges to which I was treated there remain among my fondest memories of the past years. I want to also express special gratitude to the Getty Research Institute, which has been a second institutional home for me for nearly five years now. Thank you to

Alexa Sekyra, to Sabine Schlosser, and to the library and archive staff without whom this project would also never have happened. Indeed, in one very important way there could have been no better venue for undertaking this dissertation, since operating at the Getty Research Institute meant operating, as well, in spiritual proximity to the late Annette Michelson, whose archives and library reside there. I never had the pleasure of meeting you, Annette, but you too are everywhere in this project. While circumstances prevent me from browsing through them now, dozens of books whose first pages bear the handwritten inscription of your name line the shelves of my cubicle. It is telling, I think, that the library I assembled literally consists of yours.

While this dissertation project unfolded in Los Angeles and at UCLA, in so many ways the meandering scholarly journey that led here began long before. My undergraduate studies at Vassar College provided my first introduction to art history through the examples set by Molly Nesbit, who believed in me early on, and Nick Adams, who first taught me to look for Utopia. I am likewise thankful for the program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester, where I initially embarked on my graduate career. In particular I would like to thank my mentors there, Rachel Haidu and Douglas Crimp. Rachel, you first modeled for me what it meant to be an academic, what it was to write, and I will always remember your intellectual generosity. And Douglas, you helped me understand that I was an art historian in the first place (even if you weren't exactly pleased about it!). You are missed.

Many others have contributed directly and indirectly to this project, to my formation, to my thinking. Thank you to Dell Upton and Bronwen Wilson at UCLA; to Britt Salvesen at LACMA; to my friends and interlocutors at the Getty Research

Institute—David Bardeen, Gary Fox, Thisbe Gensler, Edward Sterrett. And, of course,

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Towards the end, Jamin An and Jenevive Nykolak, who endured draft after draft of

material on nausea and eroticism and tractors, were critical to helping me cross the finish

line. Their insight and their moral support were essential in completing such a project.

While the intellectual work of this dissertation owes everything to my many

mentors and colleagues and interlocutors, I could not have made it through without my

friends and family outside the academy. Reminding me always to go elsewhere—to the

Sierras, to the arcade, to the San Gabriel Valley, to the Topanga break—my friends have

helped me keep my sanity and ensured that this manuscript will not be the only memory-

trace of the past four years. And to my family and extended family: You no longer have

to ask if I am finished; I am. Now I'll come to visit more often.

Sarah, Sarah, Sarah. I remember once seeing a flyer for a support group called

something like, "I'm a Graduate Student, but My Partner Isn't." It struck me as funny at

the time, even a little sad. Were the stresses and pressures of graduate school really so

different from other professions? Get it together, people! Only after you followed me to

Los Angeles did I understand how real that dynamic was, of what it was like to have an

audience during agonizing periods of writer's block, real or imagined, of what it was like

having someone else counting on my incremental progress each day. I wish I could say

that writing a dissertation has brought out only the best of myself, but you, and really

only you, know that that has not always been the case. Thank you for always being there,

for being patient, for being kind, for being my enantiomorph. And thank you, above all,

for waiting for me, even though I suspect I'll always be running to keep up.

Vita

Education and Degrees awarded

M.A. 2014   University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Art History

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Publications

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"3D Timeline." In *3D: Double Vision*, by Britt Salvesen. Los Angles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2018.

"Eye on Design: Andrea Zittel's Aggregated Stacks and the Collection of Palm Springs Art Museum." *caa.reviews*. (2016)

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Art Council Endowed Scholarship in Art History, Dept. of Art History, UCLA, 2017
UCLA Graduate Division Research Mentorship, 2015
UCLA Graduate Division Summer Research Mentorship, 2014–15
Henry Luce Foundation American Art Dissertation Research Award, UCLA, 2014
Slattery Fellow, University of Rochester, 2010–11

Introduction

Robert Smithson and the Radical Aspiration

> The artist should be an actor who refuses to act.
>   —Robert Smithson[1]

Towards the end of Sergei Eisenstein's two-part *Ivan the Terrible*, the black-and-white film convulses into full color. We have just learned of a plot to assassinate Tsar Ivan: Fiercely opposing his actions to consolidate power and strip authority from the feudal Boyar class, Ivan's aunt Yefrosinya plots Ivan's murder, which would ensure the passage of the Tsardom to her inept son, Vladimir, and his power, implicitly, to her. Surreptitious witness to these conspiratorial machinations, Ivan's loyal henchman Maliuta soon appears, only to extend an ominous invitation to cousin Vladimir to attend the Tsar's banquet that same evening. After an ordinary fade to black marking the scene's end, the film suddenly climaxes in grotesque and carnivalesque color amidst a tumult of dancing, singing, feasting, and all manner of orgiastic excess, as Ivan plies his naive cousin with wine and expertly plumbs him for secrets of the insurgent plot. With the addition of new chromatic resources, Eisenstein's self-conscious preoccupation with theatricality and artifice rises to a fever pitch: Saturated by chthonic reds, the banquet hall is plunged into a vision of hell, with Ivan's loyal army of "Oprichniki" metamorphosed into reveling demons and Ivan himself growing putrid and ghastly under conspicuous layers of greenish makeup (fig. 0.1). Similarly overwrought is Ivan's sinister performance of benevolence as he feigns compassion for his cousin, who reassures Ivan that he doesn't even want the Tsardom in the first place (fig. 0.2). As if caught up in the spirit of

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[1] Robert Smithson, "A Refutation of Historical Humanism [1966–67]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 337.

revelry, Ivan spontaneously orchestrates a mock coronation for poor, drunken Vladimir, whose jollity turns sullen and uneasy under the weight of the Tsar's regalia (fig. 0.3). The matin bells toll, the party is now over, yet we sense that Ivan's cruel scheme is not as he rouses his now-sleepy cousin, urges him forward, commands that he, as "Tsar," follow custom and lead the solemn assembly to the cathedral. There, mistaken for his uncle, Vladimir will be stabbed to death, victim of his mother's counterrevolutionary coup (fig. 0.4).

Eisenstein's final film, *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, was completed in 1946, two years after Part I, yet scenes like this one all but guaranteed that it would never see the light of day. It was Joseph Stalin who had initially commissioned the project: Evidently he identified with the historical autocrat, a "great and wise ruler," in his estimation, whose infamous regime he wanted Eisenstein to recast in a more progressive light—Ivan the Terrible as a model revolutionary, perhaps, as the visionary architect of a united, nationalist Russia. "Ivan the Terrible was the first," Stalin confidently asserted of the Tsar's protectionist policies, "Lenin was the second." The third, we can only imagine, would be Stalin himself. Chronicling the Tsar's defiance of the feudal Boyars and his embrace of the masses, in any case, *Ivan the Terrible*, Part I, received the Premier's official stamp of approval in the form of the Stalin Prize. Not so for Part II, however. The color banquet scene was not cited directly, but it may well have been, for at issue were Eisenstein's extravagant styling and Ivan's gratuitous cruelty, which contributed to a long list of the film's "aberrations and errors." Stalin, for example, complained that Eisenstein did not do enough to stress the necessity behind Ivan's harsh repressions, whereas his close adviser, Andrei Zhdanov, condemned Eisenstein's "fascination with shadows" and

Ivan's pointed beard as overly distracting.[2] Specific grievances aside, any subversive

content must have cut deep, for Part II was ultimately suppressed and plans for Part III

aborted entirely. It was therefore not until 1958—well after Stalin's death and the

thawing of his regime—that Eisenstein's final film was released in the Soviet Union. The

film made its U.S. debut the following autumn in New York, where, amidst reviving

interest in revolutionary Soviet cinema in the United States, it remained a regular fixture

at repertory theaters throughout the 1960s, never to retreat back into obscurity (fig. 0.5).

Perhaps Robert Smithson encountered *Ivan the Terrible* in 1964 or '65 at the

Bleecker Street Cinema, which was not far from his West Village apartment and which

featured the film with extraordinary frequency during those years—every three or four

months on average (fig. 0.6).[3] Or perhaps he saw it at any number of other repertory

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[2] Stalin and his advisors, Vyacheslav Molotov and Andrei Zhdanov, met with Eisenstein and actor Nikolai Cherkasov, who had portrayed Ivan, on February 25, 1947. A record of this meeting exists in the form of detailed postliminary notes made by Cherkasov, which are anthologized in Sergei Eisenstein, "Stalin, Molotov and Shdanov on 'Ivan the Terrible' Part Two," in *The Eisenstein Reader*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. Richard Taylor (London: British Film Institute, 1998). Largely the Party leaders focused on what they deemed the film's historical inaccuracies, which obviously interfered with the ideologically correct version of Ivan they wished to emphasize. Here I am stressing their repeated objections to Ivan's wanton cruelty and Eisenstein's over-the-top styling, however they also make much of other elements of the film, including Ivan's indecisiveness and the portrayal of the *oprichniki* as mob-like and disorganized. For a brief primer on the film, including the political circumstances behind its production and destruction, see Yuri Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), especially 12–14.

[3] Located at 144 Bleecker Street, the Bleecker Street Cinema was easily within walking distance from Smithson's apartment at 799 Greenwich Street, where he (and eventually his wife, Nancy Holt) lived from 1963 until his death in 1973. Its program featured *Ivan the Terrible* no less than seven separate times during 1964–65. I have compiled this data, as well as data from other repertory theaters, from daily and weekly movie advertisements published in the *New York Times* and *Village Voice*, however a far more comprehensive archaeology of New York City's repertory cinema landscape ought to be attempted in an effort to provide a more accurate quantitative context for the otherwise extraordinary frequency with which Eisenstein's films seem to have been shown. A more complete view would have to consider additional sources of advertising and compare the frequency of Eisenstein screenings (as well as those of his cohort—Vertov, Pudovkin, and Dovzhenko, to name a few) to other repertory favorites in order to get a true sense for the filmmaker's actual presence and accessibility. For a history of New York's repertory

theaters proliferating throughout the city—places like the Upper East Side's New Yorker Theater, the Upper West Side's Thalia, or the Elgin Theater in Chelsea, among many others—between which *Ivan* was programmed for multi-day runs on at least twenty occasions during the six-year period from 1960 to 1965. Wherever it was that he saw it, however, the film evidently left a strong impression on him, for by 1967 it had inspired an unpublished essay largely devoted to the famous Soviet filmmaker entitled "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman, or Paradoxes of the Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema" (fig. 0.7). Like Stalin, Smithson did not mention the color banquet scene in particular, but, also like Stalin, he may well have, since his infatuation with Eisenstein's "masterpiece" similarly concerned its obtrusive, over-the-top theatricality and Ivan's Mephistophelian cruelty, features that Smithson favorably identified as belonging to the filmmaker's "mannerist" sensibility. Citing in particular Eisenstein's approach to acting not as an external revelation of some profound, authentic, interior emotion but as a language-like array of discrete signs, the essay applauded the filmmaker's rejection of "expressive naturalism" and his embrace, instead, of artifice and conventionality. "Each emotion is constructed rather that directed," Smithson explained of the film. "Ivan is a set of manners, or a collection of devices." What the artist therefore found so mannerist about the film was its "pseudo, sick, perverse, false, phony and decadent" anti-naturalism, as well as its equally sinister perversion of morality, so beautifully personified in its malevolent protagonist. Eisenstein's repudiation of "accuracy" and his embrace of excessive, conspicuous artifice did not constitute a violation of art, as it

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theaters, see Ben Davis, *Repertory Movie Theaters of New York City: Havens for Revivals, Indies and the Avant-Garde, 1960-1994*, 2017. For more on the history of the Bleecker Street Cinema in particular, see Ben Davis, "The Bleecker Street Cinema: From Repertory Theater to Independent Film Showcase," *Cinéaste* 38, no. 1 (2012): 14–19.

clearly had for Stalin; such perverse impulses were precisely what made Eisenstein "an artist of the first order."[4]

Mannerism completely preoccupied Smithson during this moment of 1966–67 as he articulated an aesthetic position in opposition to the hegemonic modernism erected by Clement Greenberg and proselytized by Michael Fried. Over the course of some nine essays written during this time, six unpublished, Smithson embraced the mannerist sensibility for its exaggerated artifice and grotesque excess, celebrating its parodic subversion of Renaissance classicism and its naïve humanistic ideals. Painters like Pontormo, Michelangelo, and Parmigianino, not to mention filmmakers like Eisenstein, clearly modeled for Smithson an art historical counter-model to the aesthetic condition he had himself inherited. Almost as soon as it appeared, however, the term "mannerism" vanished completely from Smithson's lexicon, as if it and its Eisensteinian locus were but a blip, an anomaly among the restless artist's polymathic and eccentric set of interests. Indeed, it is not exactly a surprise that his mostly private machinations on the subject have largely been ignored by the literature, particularly when one considers that, in mannerism's stead, a new and far more memorable term began to proliferate amidst Smithson's writing: dialectics.[5] While mannerism's conspicuous and excessive

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[4] Robert Smithson, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 350.

[5] One important exception here is Jennifer Roberts, who alludes to Smithson's interest in mannerism as a model for what he described as a "winding-down of time." Anticipating my own line of argument, Roberts writes that "the aftereffects of Smithson's encounter with Pontormo can be surmised throughout his work of the mid- and late sixties," arguing in particular that the frozen, spiraling composition of a painting like Jacopo Pontormo's *The Descent from the Cross* (1525–28) prefigures a work like Smithson's *Gyrostasis* (1968), which embodies a similar condition of stasis evoking crystallization. In spite of what Roberts describes as the "screwlike composition" of Pontormo's painting, however, she somewhat curiously emphasizes the work's sense of inertia, ultimately situating its "winding-down of time" within the artist's larger

illusionism represented an infernal perversion of the pious idealism Smithson understood to be animating modernism just as it had Renaissance classicism, "dialectics" exited the realm of the art historical to evoke a very different set of concerns. He wielded the term to capture the artwork's dynamic contingency, its relational existence in actual time and space, its status as an object-like entity in terminally entropic flux, destined, ultimately, for oblivion—all attributes that spoke directly to what would become some of Smithson's most significant and lasting contributions to aesthetic discourse. Hence the earthworks that the artist would soon make, which, in opening themselves up to physical decay and deterioration, "collaborat[ed] with entropy" in a manner that the artist understood to be dialectical.[6] Hence, too, the indeterminate relationships instantiated by the site/nonsite pairs he inaugurated in 1968, in which the gallery-bound nonsites pointed dialectically elsewhere—to not only remote places but also to remote, geologically registered times— such that the work resisted stasis and closure.

It is my contention that Smithson's interests in mannerism and in Eisenstein ought not to be ignored, that they are not so anomalous as they may at first seem, that Smithson's abandonment of the language of mannerism in favor of dialectics at the moment of 1967–68 is not exactly discontinuous. For one thing, the artist's encounter

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engagement with "the crystalline structure of time." While I do not dispute her account, mine will privilege not stasis but the spiraling flux characteristic of mannerist compositions, exploring the ways in which mannerism manifests the heterogeneity, discontinuity, and conflictual dynamics of montage. See Jennifer Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 36–39. Ann Reynolds also mentions Smithson's interest in the subject in a short discussion of his essay "Abstract Mannerism" and its critique of Greenberg. Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 65–66.

[6] Grégoire Müller and Robert Smithson, ..."...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, Is a Cruel Master [1971]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 256.

with *Ivan* transpired amidst a larger renewal of interest in post-Revolutionary Soviet cinema and a reckoning with the unavoidable legacy of a figure like Eisenstein—a crucial conceit of this dissertation that I will explore at length below. For another, this moment marked Smithson's increasing fixation upon cinema as he steadily discontinued his prolific essayism in favor of film and video projects and the storyboard-like "movie treatments" that began to accompany larger projects. To take seriously his engagement with cinema as an artist and as a cinephile means, among other things, taking seriously the momentary glimpses we do get into the nature of his investment in the medium and its history. Above all, however, what the artist meant by mannerism, what he discovered in *Ivan*, to a large extent prefigured the dialectical conceits underwriting his best-known work. It is precisely through the personage of Eisenstein, in other words, that we are able to see a continuity of concerns that runs through the artist's entire practice. For Eisenstein's theory of montage, as we will see over the course of this dissertation, encompasses what Smithson meant by mannerism and dialectics both. Yes, montage specified a materialist approach to film editing that privileged not continuity but discontinuity, that imagined cinema as a highly constructed and artificial language-like entity in which meaning would not inhere but rather from which meaning emerged by way of violently conflicting juxtapositions orchestrated over the interval of the cut. However, the self-reflexive juxtaposition stipulated by montage, to say nothing of the technique's pedagogical consequences, was never confined to the literal act of splicing together film. In fact, while Eisenstein felt the essence of cinema to lie in montage— "Cinematography," he wrote, "is, first and foremost, montage"—he nevertheless understood montage as a principle that also existed outside of cinema and prior to it,

which meant that the sense of the cinematic to which it gave rise was, rather

paradoxically, not exclusive to film as such.[7] When it came to the high artifice and

opaque styling of a film like *Ivan the Terrible*, well, this too was montage, and Eisenstein

would have been the first to say so; and when Smithson designated the film "mannerist,"

he was, in effect, grappling with the alienating effects of its expansive application of

precisely that cinematic technique.

What I am suggesting is that dialectical montage—as theorized by Eisenstein and

as received by Smithson—emerges as a logic teeming amidst Smithson's work,

convulsing just below the surface of his practice and thought. To be sure, montage *qua*

film editing, particularly in accordance with Eisenstein's conflictual model, largely does

characterize the discontinuous condition of a film like Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, in many

ways the culmination of this dissertation. Indeed, in discussions of that film, art historians

have regularly deployed the term "montage," Eisenstein the implicit referent, as generic

shorthand for the artist's self-conscious and deliberate adoption of discontinuity.

However, to the degree that this dialectical procedure is ultimately far more capacious

and expansive—to the degree that it designates a cinematic logic without necessarily

requiring the material of film—ultimately "montage" gives a name to a sensibility that

runs throughout Smithson's practice: it courses through his fragmentary and hellishly

apostate drawings and collage works of the early 1960s; it animates his back-and-forth

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[7] In one of his more famous essays, for instance, Eisenstein elaborated the "cinematographic traits of Japanese culture that lie outside of the Japanese cinema," present in his admittedly limited understanding of its ideogrammatic characters, its poetry, its theater. Sergei Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram [1929]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 28.

travel from art world centers to peripheral "backwater or fringe" areas[8]; it undulates

beneath the polyvocal and richly citational travelogues that resulted, themselves products

of textual collage; its pulse can be felt in the oscillation between site and nonsite, which

displaced raw material from the periphery to the gallery; and, of course, it designated the

engine behind the dynamics of the *Spiral Jetty*—again, not just as a technique deployed

in the film, nor just in the structure of the earthwork, which has been read as a contraction

of site and nonsite into a single muddy dialectic of water and earth, but also, and above

all, in the heaving collision of the two in what amounts to nothing less than a montage of

the sculptural and the filmic.[9] While I stop short of claiming Smithson's body of work as

"paracinema"—Jonathan Walley's term for aesthetic practices of the period in which

artists like Tony Conrad, Anthony McCall, and Paul Sharits explored the condition and

logic of cinema without recourse to the physical medium of film—this dissertation, at a

fundamental level, attempts to rethink Smithson's ostensibly sculptural practice in terms

of the cinematic.[10] In doing so, however, my project privileges a historically specific

conception of the cinematic, proposing the theory of dialectical montage as a

gravitational center in Smithson's practice that helps constellate in a meaningful way the

artist's concomitant concerns with mannerist theatricality, dialectical conflict and flux,

and cinema, all at this pivotal juncture in his career.

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[8] Robert Smithson and Paul Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution [1972]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 293.

[9] On the sculptural *Spiral Jetty* as both site and nonsite, see, for example, Ann Reynolds, "Reproducing Nature: The Museum of Natural History as Nonsite," *October* 45 (1988): 109, https://doi.org/10.2307/779047. In it, Reynolds writes of the earthwork that both "site and nonsite collapse into the vertiginous patterning of a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown."

[10] Jonathan Walley, "The Material of Film and the Idea of Cinema: Contrasting Practices in Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film," *October* 103 (2003): 15–30.

To do so would mean not only a new, revolutionary model of cinema with which to reevaluate Smithson's practice; it would also mean nominating the radical logic of montage as potentially capable of reframing Smithson's generation. For Smithson was not the only artist who, in the wake of minimalism, came to adopt cinema as an extension of a sculptural practice in such a way that can be helpfully reconceptualized according to montage. Indeed, by the end of the 1960s it would become increasingly apparent that at least one facet of minimalism's afterlife *was* specifically filmic, that the sculptural proposition vaguely designated "postminimalism" took special recourse to the material and logic of film. In addition to Smithson's own turn to cinema, one thinks of figures like Joan Jonas, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra, all of whom in various ways and to varying degrees recruited the resources of film as means of extending their sculptural practices. At the same time filmmakers like Sharits or McCall were deploying cinema in a way that had become increasingly expansive, environmental, even sculptural, as the film apparatus and viewing experience entered the space of the gallery. In both cases we are facing a confluence of the sculptural and the filmic in such a way that, seeming to operate between the two mediums, deepened minimalism's transgression of modernist medium specificity ("neither painting nor sculpture" had been Donald Judd's prescription).[11] To lay claim to the eruption of Eisensteinian montage in the late 1960s and '70s as a model for this confluence, then—as an operation, that is, that brokered a dialectic between the sculptural and the cinematic—is to contribute to and hopefully complicate existing models describing "postminimal" and also "postmodern" expansion, textuality, temporality, and indexicality; it is to propose a new vocabulary, inherited from

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[11] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects [1965]," in *Complete Writings: 1959–1975* (Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2005), 181–189.

the Soviet avant-garde, with which to describe the proliferation of category-destroying practices in Smithson's time.

That said, in contrast to the frameworks that have canonically absorbed Smithson's practice—largely abstract and highly theoretical accounts of postminimal and postmodern erosions of mediumhood, which I will survey later—my project's emphasis on the legacy of dialectical montage has the benefit of being concrete and consistent with the minimalist genealogies that directly preceded Smithson's generation. For minimalism, as we know, had already been involved in a reception and partial recovery of Constructivism after its decades-long occlusion in the West. Smithson's evident enthusiasm for Eisenstein and the relevance of that model for his larger "postminimal" generation can therefore be seen as a continuation of minimalism's "neo-avant-garde" return to the post-revolutionary Soviet avant-garde. Indeed, that minimalism had a filmic afterlife in exemplary postminimal practices in the first place corresponds with its Soviet forebears insofar as it restaged Constructivism's own shift, to borrow a phrase from Benjamin Buchloh, "from *faktura* to factography"[12]—from, that is, an abstract sculptural program that refused the bourgeois conventions of aesthetic signification to a deeply politicized media practice. To that end, this dissertation implicitly reposes the kinds of questions endemic to the Soviet avant-garde: What might be at stake in the transformation from a spatially-extensive sculptural paradigm to the temporal axis of cinematic? What might it mean for a sculptural voiding of composition to give way to narrative, textuality, and the kind of choreography of perception orchestrated by montage? And what might it mean for sculpture not only to transform or develop into

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[12] Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (Fall 1984).

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cinema, as it had in the post-Revolutionary Soviet milieu, but also in some sense to

merge, collide, or even, to adopt Eisenstein's language, copulate with it?

To claim Smithson and, by extension, his larger "postminimal" milieu as

continuous with minimalism's retrieval of the Soviet past, however, is not only to suggest

that they return to the Soviet avant-garde via minimalism, that they continue or extend

(rather than rupture or break with) minimalist preoccupations in staging an analogous

transformation from the sculptural to the filmic. It is also, and more importantly, to make

visible a second theoretical trajectory linking filmic postminimalism to the Soviet avant-

garde, namely via the radical post-Revolutionary Soviet cinema itself. In the first case,

postminimal film practice would be positioned as inheriting the Soviet avant-garde on

minimalism's terms—seriality, non-composition, structural transparency, the subversion

of authorship and suppression of the artist's hand. In excavating a second trajectory

linking postminimalism to the post-Revolutionary Soviet avant-gardes, however—a

trajectory mediated not be minimalism and its predominantly formal reception of

Constructivism but by Constructivism's own filmic extensions, in this case in the cinema

of Eisenstein—this dissertation attempts to inflect existing accounts of art after

minimalism with values inherited directly from that cinematic avant-garde, montage

above all.

And yet this dissertation goes one step further than that. For, as we will see in due

course, Smithson reads Eisenstein somewhat against the grain, as well. If montage

conventionally stipulates a programmatic strategy for conceiving paradox, conflict,

semiosis, and the direct involvement of the spectator in a range of self-reflexive cognitive

processes—if it responded to the imperative "not only to depict life," as Eisenstein's

contemporary Sergei Tret'iakov explained, "but to create it anew in the process"[13]—in

Smithson's hands the technique will also disclose a rather unexpected, libidinal language

of hellish monstrosity, eroticism, and madness consistent with the artist's reading of

Georges Bataille. The result may no longer be the utopian project of building socialism

but what Smithson described in 1971 as a "cinematic atopia"—an entropic nether-place

of razed boundaries, ruined hierarchies, and obliterated categories. As distinct from the

"utopia" to which it alludes, Smithson's "atopia" and the postminimal landscape to which

I implicitly ascribe it suggest that montage, in its most radical and abstract applications

after minimalism, might ultimately lead not forward toward the cognitive clarity

envisioned by Eisenstein but backward in a gesture of entropic, muddy devolution.

A Contrapposto of the Mind

If there were Russian subtitles on that, they would have drooled over it.
    —Joyce Wieland[14]

Around the time that Smithson would have encountered *Ivan the Terrible*,

Annette Michelson visited New York City. The critic had been living in Paris since 1950,

returning to the U.S. every five years or so "to have a look around." But when she visited

in 1965, she encountered a situation that was dramatically new and unexpected as artists

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[13] As quoted in Devin Fore, "The Operative Word in Soviet Factography," *October* 118 (2006): 100.

[14] As quoted in Iris Nowell, *Joyce Wieland: A Life in Art* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2001), 294. Made in reference to the exclusion of Shirley Clarke's 1962 film *The Cool World* from early avant-garde film canons, such as those consolidated by Anthology Film Archives' Essential Cinema program, Joyce Wieland's comment here primarily represents a grievance about women filmmakers' underrepresentation in the discourse surrounding advanced film practices. That she sarcastically suggests that Russian subtitles may have made the film's radicality recognizable, however, also points to the clear privileging of the Soviet school of filmmaking within such discourses.

began sloughing off the mantle of modernism. "[W]hat had seemed to me the somewhat *monolithic* quality of the art world was dissolving or was fragmenting into something much more interesting," she explained.

> That is to say, with all due regard that one could have for the generation of Abstract Expressionists, there seemed to be something else happening. And that fragmentation involved not simply a number of openings—other forms of practice—in painting and perhaps in sculpture; it involved *as well* openings into performance, and even the beginnings of openings into cinema. And I was very intrigued by that.[15]

Michelson returned to Paris after that, returned to the city that had catalyzed and cultivated her largely autodidactic education in cinema, but only briefly. For she promptly relocated to New York City, where she became rapidly absorbed into the world of advanced art criticism that orbited around *Artforum*, at that time still based in San Francisco and Los Angeles.[16] By September 1966 she had contributed her first essay to the magazine, and by December 1966 she had joined its masthead as a contributing editor along with the likes of Michael Fried.[17] Within the space of two years, she had already carved out a place for herself in New York. "I seem to be becoming one of the new, hot,

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[15] Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum, 1962-1974* (New York: Soho, 2000), 80–81.

[16] Michelson discusses her initial relocation to Paris in 1950 and her formative years there in an interview with avant-garde film scholar Scott MacDonald: Scott MacDonald and Annette Michelson, "Annette Michelson," in *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema*, by Scott MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), especially 32–33. She discusses her motives for relocating back to New York in Newman, *Challenging Art*, 80–81. Various archival documents from Michelson's papers at the Getty Research Institute (chiefly correspondence dating from 1965) indicate that she visited the United States in April 1965 and, over the subsequent months, debated relocation. While it is unclear precisely when she moved, she appears to have been settled by November, at which point archival documents evidence her new address on MacDougal Street. *Artforum*, meanwhile, moved its editorial headquarters to Los Angeles in the fall of 1965 and in the spring of 1967 to New York.

[17] For a complete bibliography of Michelson's writings until 2003, which aids in reconstructing her scholarly activity during this period, see Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey, eds., *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, Film Culture in Transition (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 275–282.

film critics, in a few official and non-official eyes," she confided in a letter back to Paris in January 1967. "I find it terribly funny—but interesting too."[18] Meanwhile, *Artforum* editor Phil Leider, who had himself been curious about cinema, was at that same moment considering introducing film criticism into the pages of the still-young magazine, and Michelson's presence no doubt helped push the magazine in that direction.[19] Following its relocation to New York City, *Artforum* introduced a monthly film column written by Manny Farber in the November 1967 issue, and the magazine's first feature on cinema (Farber on Godard) appeared less than a year later in October 1968. When Michelson visited New York in April 1965, she sensed an art world on the verge of an expansion that would assimilate cinema; in little more than three years, *Artforum* would come to embody that very spirit, at least for a time, as it sought to absorb a range of practices that were no longer limited to sculpture and painting, as it sought to subject works of cinema to the methodological instrumentation of art criticism.

Among the more remarkable early documents of this conjunction of art and film in the pages of *Artforum* was an essay Michelson published in its February 1969 issue devoted to, of all things, Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Its second feature-length article concerning cinema, Michelson's essay "Bodies in Space: Film as 'Carnal Knowledge'" was a milestone for the magazine, not only because Kubrick's film, as an exemplar of a highly industrialized cinema, threatened to open *Artforum* decisively

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[18] Annette Michelson to Noël Burch, "Letter from Annette Michelson [Presumed] to Noël Burch [Presumed]," January 16, 1967, Box 1 Folder 2, Annette Michelson Papers, Getty Research Institute.

[19] While introducing cinema to *Artforum* seems to have been Leider's idea, Michelson was only too happy to encourage his ambition, specifically when it came to hiring Manny Farber to write a monthly film column, a critic whose work Michelson had admired for some time. For both Leider's and Michelson's recollections of this event, see Newman, *Challenging Art*, 229–230.

beyond the realm of painting and sculpture and to the arena of mass culture but also, on a more rudimentary level, because the film had been violently panned. In the realm of film fandom, Kubrick remains the retrograde prototype of misunderstood auteur and heroic, visionary genius; however such superlatives were not always accorded the director, least of all following the release of *2001*, a film which aroused a frothy controversy amongst film critics who seemed unable to decide whether it was psychedelic spectacle or expensive pap. Its release was the sort of storied cultural event that tapped into critical anxieties within the older film establishment, whose ruthless attacks of the film were made all the more indignant by its inexplicable popularity, particularly among the drug-fueled, hippie counterculture. Such, it seemed, was the fate for a film like *2001*—doomed to be either a critical failure or opulent psychadelia, or worse, both.

In some of her earliest writing after returning to the United States, Michelson lamented the absence of an intellectual tradition of film criticism in this country, a condition which was reflected in the wanting reception of Kubrick's science-fiction epic.[20] Appearing in *Harper's*, for instance, Pauline Kael's infamous condemnation of *A Space Odyssey* was content to dismiss the film rather vaguely as mere spectacle: it was a "monumentally unimaginative" and "big expensive movie," she wrote, as if Kubrick, with studio backing, could do "every dumb thing he wanted to do" and "[act] out a kind of super sci-fi nut's fantasy."[21] Likewise Andrew Sarris's equally notorious pan in the *Village Voice* joylessly rejected it on similar terms—"a thoroughly uninteresting failure"

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[20] See, for example, Michelson's 1968 review of the English-language translation of André Bazin's writings: Annette Michelson, "What Is Cinema?," *Artforum* VI, no. 10 (Summer 1968): 67–71. See, too, Annette Michelson, "The Camera as Fountain Pen," *Evergreen Review* XI, no. 48 (August 1967).

[21] Pauline Kael, "Trash, Art, and the Movies," *Harper's Magazine; New York, N.Y.*, February 1, 1969, 74, 81.

that was "merely a pretext for a pictorial spread in *Life* magazine."[22] The art discourse

unfolding in a venue like *Artforum*, by comparison, must have struck Michelson as a

more precise and rigorous instrument to bring to bear on cinema. While already by 1965

she was actively seeking an alternative to Clement Greenberg's hegemonic model of

modernism,[23] for instance, Michelson undoubtedly recognized that Greenberg's criticism

at least had the virtue of philosophical grounding, coherence, exactness; that it aspired to

an objective set of criteria, however dogmatic it turns out to have been in his case. As her

project of addressing cinema from the more scrupulous intellectual framework evidently

supplied by advanced art discourse developed over the coming decade, Michelson

eventually drew the battle lines explicitly: "most film critics now at work, are simply not,

nor ever will be, equipped for the critical task on the level which the present flowering of

cinema in this country demands."[24]

    When in 1969 Michelson brought that critical apparatus to bear on *2001*, what

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[22] Andrew Sarris, "[Films in Focus?]," *Village Voice*, April 11, 1968. Sarris is referring to the April 5, 1968 issue of *Life*, which featured an essay on *2001* richly illustrated with stills from the film. Equally famous, however, was Sarris's reversal of his indictment after revising the film "under the influence of a smoked substance," yet this reappraisal was no more rigorous that his initial review. Andrew Sarris, "Films in Focus," *Village Voice*, May 7, 1970. For a brief discussion of the critical reception of *2001*, see R. Barton Palmer, "2001: The Critical Reception and the Generation Gap," in *Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey*, ed. Robert Kolker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13–27.

[23] Writing to Michelson on the occasion of his "Three American Painters" show at Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum (April 21 – May 30, 1965), Michael Fried responded that "I feel strongly that it is no good simply *wishing* there were a viable alternative to the kind of critical position Greenberg occupies." His comment suggests that Michelson had expressed a desire to Fried by this point for such an alternative. Michael Fried to Annette Michelson, "Letter from Michael Fried to Annette Michelson," May 17, 1965, Box 1 Folder 1, Annette Michelson Papers, Getty Research Institute.

[24] Emphasis removed. Michelson's bellicosity is in response to film critic Peter Gidal's dissatisfaction with the dense theoretical language underwriting her work, in particular her discussion of Michael Snow's *Wavelength*. The context in which this exchange appeared will be discussed later on. Annette Michelson, Peter Gidal, and Jonas Mekas, "Foreword in Three Letters," *Artforum* 10, no. 1 (September 1971): 9.

resulted was an essay that was patently uninterested in questions of narrative, that did not

get easily distracted by debates as to the gratuitousness of its special effects. Rather than

dismissing its scale, its ambition, its "proud marshalling [*sic*] of vast resources,"

Michelson saw Kubrick's film as among "the most sophisticated and ambitious ventures

of our culture." This was a film that was "revelatory," she felt, that was an "Epiphany"—

not as it had been for so many of the film's enthusiasts, tripping on heroic doses of acid

("It's God! It's God!" one man is said to have screamed as he ran through the screen[25])

but in the sense that it generated a cognitive effect, that it produced a certain kind of

knowledge. The film, Michelson wrote, "forc[es] the spectator back, in a reflexive

gesture, upon the analytic rehearsal of his experience."[26] What she had in mind were the

ways in which *A Space Odyssey* no longer adhered to ordinary, gravity-bound conditions

of perception as figures walked and floated and passed through space in new and

unfamiliar orientations; what she had in mind was the heightened attention brought to

basic motor skills made tedious, protracted, and extraordinary when performed in zero

gravity and constrained by space suits. In estranging perception and bodily movement

from their physical conditions, in other words—of verticality, say, or gravitation—*2001*

encouraged a particular self-reflexive mode of cognition: "Viewing becomes, as always

but as never before, the discovery, through the acknowledgment of disorientation, of

what it is to see, to learn, to know, and of what it is to be, seeing."[27] For Michelson the

film was "maieutic" in that respect, a kind of quasi-Socratic exercise in the production of

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[25] Dan Chiasson, "Anybody There?," *The New Yorker*, April 23, 2018.

[26] Annette Michelson, "Bodies in Space: Film as 'Carnal Knowledge,'" *Artforum* VII, no. 6 (February 1969): 56.

[27] Michelson, 58.

cognition. Ostensibly an exemplar of supreme cinematic illusionism made fuller by persuasive special effects, *2001* nevertheless "impels us [...] to rediscover the space and dimensions of the body as theatre of consciousness."[28] And insofar as *2001* accomplished this feat of self-reflexivity, it was also a film that encouraged a dialectic on the part of the spectator, a "*contraposto* [*sic*] of the mind," as she memorably put it, as we oscillate between the luxurious illusion before us and our increasingly palpable sense of our own bodies—not in outer space but in the humdrum space of the everyday that we inhabit while watching this film.[29] Invoking the famous Lifting of the Bridge sequence from *October*—in which Eisenstein distended a single instant where the leaves of a bridge part by repeating and repeating again the same moment, thus compelling, in its violation of our continuous experience of temporality, an awareness of cinema's uniquely plastic temporality as secured by montage—Michelson felt that *2001* constantly induced a stance of critical detachment and knowledge.

A "maieutic" cinema, a self-reflexive cinema, a cinema that promoted a cognitive effect as to the nature of the illusion before us, its material base, its very apparatus—if Michelson's scholarship of the late 1960s and '70s shared in a coherent project, these would be its essential terms. In her own time, she found these values iterated in Kubrick's sci-fi epic, however her passing reference to Eisenstein's *October* was no accident, for it was the revolutionary tradition of Soviet cinema where these techniques were first pioneered, and the films of Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, above all, provided the most important prototypes.

Michelson first sketched out the contours of this project shortly after relocating to

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[28] Michelson, 63.

[29] Michelson, 59.

the United States in her celebrated 1966 essay "Film and the Radical Aspiration," which described a certain utopianism built into the cinema from its earliest moments, a yearning, a sense of the medium's possibilities that was exemplified in Soviet film of the 1920s. This was a cinema defined by bricolage, experimentation, and exploration, a cinema galvanized by a "general climate of anticipatory enthusiasm" as filmmakers like Eisenstein and Vertov came to terms with the properties and possibilities of the medium.[30] And it was a cinema, crucially, whose innovations coincided with a parallel set of aspirations that animated the social sphere as modernism's great utopian experiments, chief among them the Bolshevik Revolution, got underway. "[A] certain euphoria enveloped the early film-making and theory," Michelson explained.

> For there was, ultimately, a very real sense in which the revolutionary aspirations of the modernist movement in literature and the arts, on the one hand, and of a Marxist or Utopian tradition, on the other, could converge in the hopes and promises, as yet undefined, of the new medium.[31]

The "radical aspiration" therefore described a revolutionary utopian spirit energizing formal and social realms alike, a dream in which cinema and politics had been united, in which the positing of a new society, a new body politic, a new social order was explored in and through and alongside the positing of a new cinematic rhetoric and syntax. "The revolutionary aspiration, both *formal and political*," Michelson wrote, "achieved a moment of consummation in the Russian film of the 1920's and early 1930's."[32] And while Michelson did not go into detail about the precise techniques and dynamics and

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[30] Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration [1966]," in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney, Praeger Film Books (New York, Praeger Publishers 1970, 1970), 406. Originally published as Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," *Film Culture*, no. 42 (Fall 1966).

[31] Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," 1970, 407.

[32] Michelson, 413.

strategies comprising this radical aspiration in this particular essay, her subsequent work

on Soviet cinema made clear that it had everything to do with the self-reflexive maieusis

she later attributed to *2001*, everything to do with the dialectical "*contrapposto* of the

mind" it demanded.[33] After all, for artists like Eisenstein and Vertov, concerned as they

were with educating and edifying the masses and cultivating a revolutionary

consciousness, mindless indoctrination had never been an option. Instead, cinema had to

encourage active cognition and self-reflexive involvement in order to deliver a critical,

intelligent, and conscientious spectator commensurate with the socialist future. As

Eisenstein once wrote, quoting Marx, "Not only the result, but the road to it also, is part

of truth. The investigation of truth must itself be true, true investigation is unfolded truth,

the disjuncted members of which unite in the result."[34] Cinema had to aspire to be this

kind of road, and the conflictual dynamics of dialectical montage provided one of the

more important ways of doing so.

Of course, the dream of this "radical aspiration" was to be only a dream, and one

whose glow had, by the end of the 1920s, begun to fade. The arrival of sound film,

Michelson lamented, only further entrenched cinema's inexorable tendency towards

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[33] Michelson's corpus on Soviet cinema during the period in question includes the following essays: Annette Michelson, "The Man with the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* X, no. 7 (March 1972): 60–72. Annette Michelson, "Screen/Surface: The Politics of Illusionism," *Artforum* XI, no. 1 (September 1972): 58–62. Annette Michelson, "Camera Lucida Camera Obscura," *Artforum* XI, no. 5 (January 1973): 30–37. Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading 'Capital,'" *October* 2 (1976): 27–38, https://doi.org/10.2307/778417. Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading 'Capital' (Part 2)," *October* 3 (1977): 82–89, https://doi.org/10.2307/778438. Mikhail Kaufman, "An Interview with Mikhail Kaufman," *October* 11 (1979): 55–76, https://doi.org/10.2307/778235. That said, themes associated with her notion of the "radical aspiration" occur across virtually all her scholarship of the period, with some version of maieutic self-reflexivity as her key criterion when evaluating cinema.

[34] As quoted in Sergei Eisenstein, "Word and Image [1938]," in *The Film Sense*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 32.

uncritical naturalism, and around the world filmmaking was quickly becoming industrialized anyhow, stanching the proliferation of experimentation and serving narrower ideological aims than ever. In the Soviet Union, meanwhile, the spirit of the Revolution was rapidly hardening into repressive Stalinism as Lenin's successor inaugurated his First Five-Year Plan (1929–32). The story of film's radical aspiration was thus a story of loss, of mourning; it was, for Michelson, a "Fall from Grace," which effected an irrevocable "split between formal and political aspects of radical or revolutionary effort."[35]

And yet the critic nevertheless felt she was witnessing a renewal of this radical aspiration in her own time—not only in an anomalous industrial product like *2001: A Space Odyssey* but also, and more to the point, in the contemporaneous efflorescence of the so-called avant-garde, experimental, underground, and artist cinemas. Militantly amateur and independent, abstract and non-narrative, the films of individuals like Hollis Frampton, Joyce Wieland, Paul Sharits, Ken Jacobs, Michael Snow, and George Landow—among many, many others, to be sure—mounted a "categorical rejection of the aesthetics grounded in the conventions" of cinematic storytelling.[36] Staked on an "aesthetic of autonomy," the "elimination of narrative as plot," and an "aspiration toward the condition of 'objecthood,'" the films of this generation, Michelson argued, aspired to a "negation, critical or apocalyptic, of the middle-class society that supported Hollywood, its aesthetic, industry, and art."[37] Their work was not literally revolutionary in the sense that it had been for Eisenstein and Vertov; instead it seemed to sublimate the deeply

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[35] Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," 1970, 413.

[36] Michelson, 415.

[37] Michelson, 416, 419.

intertwined set of formal and political commitments from the 1920s, transforming them into a mode of formal and procedural radicalism that sought to utterly subvert the conventions of filmic narrative, the industry on which it depended, and the ideological consequences of both.[38]

Eventually Michelson's 1976 founding of *October* along with Rosalind Krauss and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe would serve as a monument to this aspiration—a magazine committed to advanced art of the present and dedicated to "that moment in our century when revolutionary practice, theoretical inquiry and artistic innovation were joined in a manner exemplary and unique."[39] In the interim, however, her most ambitious attempt to survey this renewed radical aspiration took the form of a special September 1971 issue of *Artforum*, devoted entirely to cinema and published under the imprimatur of Vertov's all seeing Kino-Eye, for Michelson something like an emblem of the radical aspiration (fig. 0.8). Ostensibly the issue was designed to introduce filmmakers involved with the efflorescence of radical cinema practices to a readership more familiar with recent developments in sculpture and painting—Frampton, Wieland, Sharits, Jacobs, Snow, and Landow were all included.[40] And yet Michelson also invited two cinematically-inclined

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[38] Michelson's essay remains somewhat unclear on the precise nature of the "radical aspiration" as it manifested in the 1960s. She attributes formal radicalism to the European cinema of the period, suggesting that directors like Godard and Resnais were working within a national film industry and producing recognizably feature films while simultaneously actively expanding the vocabulary and syntax of that industry's conventions of cinematic narrative; whereas the American tradition sought to achieve total autonomy and reject those conventions altogether— less extending the possibilities of a given language than inventing a new one altogether. To my mind, both traditions involve a sublimation of revolutionary politics into form and a generic sense of "criticality," however Michelson reserves the term "sublimation" for the French context, preferring to view the American context in terms only of subversion.

[39] "About October," *October* 1 (1976): 3.

[40] "In 1971, I was invited by Phil Leider, who was just about to leave *Artforum*, to do a special film issue of that magazine," Michelson explained of the issue's genesis. "It provided the first

artists to contribute to the issue, as if claiming them, too, as partaking of the radical

aspiration. One of them was Robert Smithson, an artist who was known to have

frequented Anthology Film Archives along with artists like Joan Jonas, Richard Serra,

Andy Warhol, and others, and who, scarcely one year before, debuted the supremely self-

reflexive work of sophisticated montage that was his *Spiral Jetty* film.[41]

In many ways Michelson could not have been more pleased with Smithson's

contribution, for it amounted to nothing less than the artist's most cogent statement on the

terms and conditions of cinematic illusionism. Entitled "A Cinematic Atopia,"

Smithson's essay directed the reader to a borderland, a limbo, a (non-)space between the

elsewhere that was film's illusory image ("the sites in film are not to be trusted," he

wrote[42]) and its negation—something like the here-and-now of its site of reception, its

material support, its physical conveyance. Emblematic of this condition of limbo was his

concept for a subterranean cinema whose sole program would be a film that documented

the site's very excavation: "What I would like to do," Smithson wrote, "is build a cinema

in a cave or an abandoned mine, and film the process of its construction. That film would

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opportunity to introduce a large audience to developments that seemed to me to be of prime
importance in independent American filmmaking." As she elaborated in the first issue's
foreword, moreover, the issue was "designed to evoke […] the urgency of recognition for an
achievement whose importance will eventually be seen as comparable to that of American
painting in the 1950s and onwards." Moreover, Michelson felt that independent filmmaking had a
great deal to do with developments in painting and sculpture, and vice versa. As such, this special
issue of *Artforum* desired nothing less than to incorporate such film practices into a domain that
was, Michelson felt, proper to them. Annette Michelson, Richard Serra, and Clara Weyergraf,
"The Films of Richard Serra: An Interview," *October* 10 (1979): 71, 81,
https://doi.org/10.2307/778630.

[41] On Smithson's anecdotal presence at Anthology, see Michael Ned Holte, "Shooting the
Archaeozoic (on Robert Smithson)," *Frieze*, no. 88 (February 2005): 79–80.

[42] Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia [1971]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*,
ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 141. Originally published as
Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," *Artforum* 10, no. 1 (September 1971): 53–55.

be the only film shown in the cave."[43] Insofar as the cinematic elsewhere and the

sculptural here-and-now of its reception paradoxically convened over the same speluncar

site, Smithson's hypothetical scenario exacerbated the disjunction between the two,

opening up an interval between them that promised the kind of cognitive "contrapposto

of the mind" that Michelson associated with Soviet montage. That the "atopian" non-

place Smithson invented also bodies forth the more familiar non-place of utopia, in other

words, and that it appears in an issue of *Artforum* that stands as a veritable manifesto on

Michelson's radical aspiration, invites us to think the crossing of the filmic and the

sculptural, indeed their dialectical collision, not only in formal-structural terms but also

the explicitly social ones endemic to Eisenstein's theory of montage. In borrowing its

name from both Smithson's essay and Michelson's larger project, this dissertation seeks

to link the two, ultimately suggesting that the "atopian," montage-like merging of the

filmic and the sculptural that seems to describe Smithson's trajectory as well as so many

of the practices of his larger generation needs to be seen, at least at first, in terms of the

utopian strivings of its secret radical aspiration.

The Constructivism-Minimalism Genealogy

> By 1921 the Russians were announcing the death of art—and today there seem to
> be a growing number of people who agree with them.
> —Ronald Hunt in *Artforum*, September 1967[44]

Michelson's "radical aspiration" and the intellectual project it describes

fundamentally takes the form of a transmission structure that connects an originary avant-

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[43] Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," September 1971, 55.

[44] Ronald Hunt, "The Constructivist Ethos: Russia, 1913–1932 (Part 1)," *Artforum* VI, no. 1 (September 1967): 23.

garde moment of the 1920s and its repetition, renewal, and recurrence in the 1960s and '70s. At its most basic level, this dissertation seeks to reconstruct the cinematic channel of transmission that interested Michelson, to explore its stakes, to ask how we might see anew the aesthetic developments of her New York milieu from the perspective of the model she produced. On its face such a project risks redundancy; after all, Michelson's scholarly activity unfolded in plain sight in *Artforum* and then *October*, by no means obscure venues. Yet I am not sure that Michelson fully explored the implications of the model that she herself laid out, and, more importantly, I am not sure that Art History has fully assimilated that model in the first place—particularly when compared to the more familiar reception stories that we tell of the Soviet avant-garde.

Here is the story that we know, a story about sculpture. Following the 1962 publication of Camilla Gray's pioneering study *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922*, and in tandem with the emergence of a new sculptural attitude that came to be called Minimalism, there seemed to be a resurgence of principles and strategies endemic to the Constructivist avant-garde. Particularly in the context of the still-dominant paradigm of Abstract Expressionism, it was striking to see a generation of artists who seemed patently uninterested in painting and who turned increasingly toward the language and materials and procedures of heavy industry to produce decidedly non-arty objects that evoked or else directly alluded to the Constructivist precedent. There was Carl Andre's reprisal of Rodchenko's spatial constructions in his wooden sculpture of the early '60s; there was Dan Flavin's fluorescent light series *Monument to V. Tatlin* begun in 1963; there was Robert Morris's 1964 *Untitled (Corner Piece)*, which, in occupying the literal space of the gallery, restaged the operations of Tatlin's *Corner Counter-*

Reliefs; there was also Morris's 1966 pair of essays "Notes on Sculpture," where the

artist directly credited Tatlin for being not only "the first to free sculpture from

representation" but also the first to "establish it as an autonomous form" (figs. 0.9–0.11).

Even before Gray's book, moreover, there was Andre's brazen claim in 1962 that "Frank

Stella is a Constructivist."[45] And this is to say nothing of the contemporaneous critical

consensus, in which Constructivism was regularly invoked by Minimalism's various

apologists.[46] By way of techniques of seriality, the erasure of the artist's hand, strategies

of non-composition, overtures to heavy industry, and, above all, the artwork's unfolding

in a space that was increasingly understood to be *our* space, it seemed clear during the

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[45] For Morris's quotes, see Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture [1966]," in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 224. For Andre's claim about Stella, see Hollis Frampton and Carl Andre, *12 Dialogues 1962–1963*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1980), 37. Many of these instances of Constructivism's reception of Minimalism are drawn from James Meyer's exhaustive study of minimalism: James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). According to Meyer, Andre (and probably fellow students Hollis Frampton and Frank Stella) encountered the work of Rodchenko during their high school studies at Phillips Andover Academy in a class taught by Patrick Morgan. See Meyer, 290 fn. 144. Similarly, Barbara Rose emphasizes Morgan's importance in Frampton's and Andre's formations: Newman, *Challenging Art*, 60. For Frampton's own recollection of this era, see Hollis Frampton, "Letter to Enno Develing [1969]," in *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters*, by Hollis Frampton, ed. Bruce Jenkins (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009), 279–284.

[46] In Barbara Rose's 1965 *Art in America* article "A B C Art"—what Gregory Battcock called "one of the first major essays devoted to a definition of Minimal style and its characteristics"— Rose proposed a genealogy for the new minimalist sensibility in the historical avant-gardes: Duchamp's readymade and Malevich's black square. To cite a second example, the year before in a radio broadcast (which would be published in *Art News*, edited by Lucy Lippard, in September 1966), Bruce Glaser explicitly questioned Donald Judd and Frank Stella on the connection of each artist's work to Constructivism and twentieth-century European abstraction more broadly. See Barbara Rose, "A B C Art [1965]," in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 274. And Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd [1966]," in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 148–164. In what was the most rigorous early apology of minimalism, Michelson's 1969 account of Robert Morris's work understood minimalist sculpture's literal presence in space as a renewal of Constructivist strategies: Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression," in *Robert Morris: Corcoran Gallery of Art, November 24 - December 28, 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969). Michelson's essay is anthologized in Julia Bryan-Wilson and Robert Morris, eds., *Robert Morris*, October Files 15 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013).

1960s that we were witnessing a fervent resurgence of interest in the Soviet avant-garde, in large part thanks to the increased access that Gray's book provided.[47]

That there was a retrieval of Constructivism at all was notable, for part of the story that we tell insists that until the 1960s, and really much later than that, we had extremely circumscribed access to the Soviet avant-garde. Gray's book certainly helped in this respect, but it was not until Christina Lodder's 1983 *Russian Constructivism* that we really had a sense of what Art History had missed in terms of the Soviet avant-garde's political aspirations and its transformations over the course of the 1920s.[48] In one of the earliest efforts to narrate a critical historiography of Constructivism, Benjamin Buchloh argued that the West received a profoundly impoverished version of that avant-garde through the figure of Naum Gabo. The Russian artist's 1946 relocation to the United States virtually guaranteed that he would become the movement's main ambassador and spokesperson, which was a problematic status for him to hold given that his deeply aestheticized version of Constructivism violated its most basic premises as it had first emerged in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution.[49] If Constructivism sought to destroy

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[47] This narrative about the influence of Gray's book upon the minimalist generation has become so entrenched within a certain telling of twentieth-century art history that a chapter is devoted to this event in the *Art Since 1900* survey. See "1963c" in Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 470–474.

[48] Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

[49] Buchloh's "Cold War Constructivism" originated as a paper delivered at a 1986 conference. Benjamin Buchloh, "Cold War Constructivism [1986]," in *Reconstructing Modernism*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 85–112. Buchloh alleged a campaign of misinformation about Constructivism on Gabo's part, as well as that of his brother's, Antoine Pevsner, both of whom asserted that they had originated Constructivism and that they were forced to flee to the West due to the Soviet State's suppression of artistic activity after 1922. In their 1920 "Realistic Manifesto," for instance, Gabo and Pevsner claim that "everything has its own essential image," suggesting that art's role is to represent that image. Indeed, one senses that the brothers' invocation of "realism" speaks to a stripping away of the object's particularities like color, line, volume, and mass, in order to reveal a universal, underlying, ontological entity beneath. Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, "The Realistic Manifesto [1920]," in *The Tradition of*

the category of art, insisting on contingency (versus modernist autonomy), materiality and *faktura* (versus modernist opticality), and transparency of construction (versus, in Gabo's case, transparency of materials), Gabo's work inverted its most radical propositions in such a way that obscured access to Constructivism's more fundamental political aspirations. Thus, Buchloh concluded of Gabo's "constructive idea" that "Constructivism […] finally had reached the stage of the 'mirage.' What had once been tactile and contingent had become 'optical'; what had been rigorously anti-illusionistic in emphasizing weight, physical mass, and process, in foregrounding surface and texture, and in 'baring the structural device' had turned into an 'illusion of modalities.'"[50]

Hal Foster soon extended Buchloh's project, no longer focusing on the figure of Gabo and his easy assimilation to the Modernist canon of depoliticized formalism but alleging a more diabolical occlusion of Constructivism that occurred on a larger institutional level. Indeed, for Foster the "reception" of Constructivism in the West amounted to a persistent *mis*reception or even *non*reception: on the rare occasions when it did enter European and American institutions and art historical discourses, he argued, the ideological (read: bourgeois) structures determining them effectively suppressed, displaced, or else sublimated Constructivism's most radical communitarian

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Constructivism, ed. Stephen Bann (New York: Viking, 1974), 9. In 1937, similarly, Gabo defines a "constructive idea" in terms of its expression of "absolute forms." Naum Gabo, "The Constructive Idea in Art [1937]," in *The Tradition of Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann (New York: Viking, 1974), 214. Based primarily on a formal reading of Gabo's work, Rosalind Krauss sustains precisely these allegations in her 1977 book, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*: namely that his stereometric method performs a revelatory role, as if guaranteeing the availability to vision of some inner structure, some stable and absolute truth, undergirding an object's form. She juxtaposes Gabo's work here with Tatlin's, which she argues rejects such idealized notions of transcendent vision and a mode of seeing that somehow occurs outside of actual space and time in insisting instead on occupying literal space. She has in mind Tatlin's *Corner Counter-Reliefs* in particular. Rosalind Krauss, "Analytic Space: Futurism and Constructivism," in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977), 39–67.

[50] Buchloh, "Cold War Constructivism [1986]," 104.

implications.[51] For example, there was Alfred Barr, Jr.'s 1927–28 visit to Moscow, in

which the future shaper of the canon of modern art ultimately ignored the more radical

practices he encountered ("an appalling variety of things," he complained) in favor of

more familiar cultural objects ("I must find some painters if possible").[52] Likewise there

was Clement Greenberg's criticism, in which Constructivism dropped out of his

genealogy for Modernism altogether. Little wonder, then, that when Constructivism was

evoked in the industrially-inclined practices of sculptors like David Smith and Anthony

Caro, it was in such a way that ultimately reasserted Modernist values of formal

abstraction and authorship. Styled as blowtorch-wielding laborers, in other words, Smith

and Caro recalled the Constructivist precedent only to sublimate it in the mythical figure

of the author. Aided by Camilla Gray's study, however, the Minimalist generation, Foster

argued, was involved in a more accurate retrieval of Constructivism's radicality. Judd's

"one-thing-after-another" seriality, for instance, offered a technique of noncomposition

that circumvented human subjectivity as that traditional fount of artistic expression;

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[51] To support his argument, Foster summarizes Constructivism as responding to an essential contradiction between (bourgeois) Art and (socialist) Production—the former privileging a fetishistic relationship to the artwork as object of visual delectation, wholly autonomous from life, the latter prioritizing a collectivized production of objects that sought to transform the social sphere. Using the familiar device of the Klein square, Foster expands this primary opposition in order to schematize Constructivism's various manifestations in a non-teleological manner: the autonomous, technophilic sculpture of Naum Gabo, which reduces Constructivism to a mere idea or style (Art/Not Production); Tatlin's "Culture of Materials," which sought a new pictorial paradigm but for a new social order (Art/Production); so-called laboratory Constructivism, whose experimentations had the status of neither art nor full-fledged production (Not Production/Not Art); and Productivism (Production/Not Art). While Foster admits the reductive nature of such a schema, he deploys it here to illustrate Constructivism's horizons of possibility and to lay bare the West's privileging, even fetishizing, of only those of its manifestations that sustained the category of Art. Hal Foster, "Some Uses and Abuses of Russian Constructivism," in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914–1932*, ed. Richard Andrews and Milena Kalinovska (Seattle, Wash.: Henry Art Gallery, 1990), 241–253.

[52] Alfred H. Barr, "Russian Diary 1927-28," *October* 7 (1978): 21, https://doi.org/10.2307/778383.

Flavin's 1963 series *Monument to V. Tatlin* suggested sculpture's literal presence in actual space through its luminous glow; and Carl Andre's reading of Frank Stella as a "Constructivist" privileged the procedural transparency of the artist's brushstroke in a manner reminiscent of Tatlin's and Rodchenko's notions of *faktura*.[53] In spite of its formal, material, and procedural overtures to Constructivism, however, Minimalism did not, in the end, go far enough for Foster, ultimately retaining the category of art that Constructivism sought to destroy, particularly as Constructivism itself had transformed from an abstract sculptural program to more radical mass-cultural practices—production, design, journalism, and cinema.

In summary, we are facing a lapse in Constructivism's reception, a gap separating post-Revolutionary Russia from a renewal of interest in that moment occurring some four decades later. The question that remained was what it all meant, what was at stake in Minimalism's retrieval of that avant-garde precedent, limited as it seems to have been. In his well-known *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger coined the term "neo-avant-

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[53] For an in-depth discussion of the term "*faktura*" and its development in Russian avant-garde circles from "the very locus of artist subjectivity" to "the site of its explicit erasure," see Maria Gough, "Faktura: The Making of the Russian Avant-Garde," *RES* 36 (Autumn 1999): 32–59. With respect to Andre's "Constructivist" reading of Stella's work according to a deductive logic his work shared with Rodchenko's *Spatial Constructions*, see Maria Gough, "Frank Stella Is a Constructivist," *October* 119 (2007): 94–120. For Gough, Andre's invocation of the term offered little more than a name for the modular and non-relational procedures underpinning Stella's striped canvases of 1958–59 as well as his own modular *Pyramids*, dating to 1959. Also relevant here is "Composition and Construction," the first chapter of her book on Constructivism and its Productivist aftermath: Maria Gough, *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 21–60. The modernist imperative toward "non-relationality" and "non-composition" as a means of evacuating or critiquing the conventional locus of artistic authorship is a long-standing interest of Yve-Alain Bois's. See, for example, Yve-Alain Bois, "The Difficult Task of Erasing Oneself: Non-Composition in Twentieth-Century Art" (Unpublished lecture, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N. J., March 7, 2007), https://video.ias.edu/The-Difficult-Task-of-Erasing-Oneself. Julia Bryan-Wilson also mentions the important allegiance Andre's early work announces with Rodchenko in Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

garde" to describe this bifurcated historical model—the originary Dada, Surrealist, and

Constructivist avant-gardes of the 1920s and the later resurgence of their techniques,

procedures, and attitudes. For Bürger this repetition was a repetition in the worst sense:

the neo-avant-garde's reiteration of the historical avant-garde was ineffectual and

inauthentic—a betrayal that ultimately reaffirmed the very values that the original avant-

garde gesture sought, but finally failed, to negate.[54] While later accounts of the

Minimalist/Constructivist connection retained Bürger's fundamental structure, they did

not as easily dismiss the validity of the neo-avant-garde return. Above all, Hal Foster has

insisted on the disciplinary and political necessity of such repetitions, incomplete though

they may have been. Looking to the psychoanalytic mechanism of *Nachträglichkeit*, or

deferred action—a belated recognition of the traumatic event by which that event is

cognized for the first time—Foster argued for the urgency of a neo-avant-garde insofar as

it made available the otherwise repressed trauma exacted by its historical precedent.

While Minimalism may not have fully consummated Constructivism's more radical

ambitions, in other words, Foster nevertheless attributed to it something like Michelson's

"radical aspiration," suggesting that this generation, in cognizing the trauma of the

Constructivist avant-garde for the first time, extended that avant-garde's mission,

ultimately it in order to critique the very institutions that had participated in its

assimilation.[55]

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[54] As Bürger put it, the neo-avant-garde "institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions." Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Theory and History of Literature 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 58.

[55] These concerns occur throughout Foster's work. See in particular Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," *October* 70 (October 1, 1994): 5–32, https://doi.org/10.2307/779051. Buchloh, too, was important in revising Bürger's inflexibility as

The Filmic Pathways of the Soviet Avant-Garde

Such has become the story we tell: the Constructivist avant-garde sought to destroy the bourgeois category of art in the service of the Revolution; the radicality of that gesture was effectively suppressed for decades amidst the rise and institutionalization of Modernism's more rigid, formalist, and depoliticized teleology; and as artists in the 1960s sought to break with the paradigm of Modernism, they excavated what they could of Constructivism's revolutionary radicality (which wasn't much) in order to enable a new kind of radicality that took aim at art's institutions. It is a compelling story, persuasive, making entirely plausible targets of Cold War politics and modernism's bourgeois institutions both for this lacuna in knowledge. And it is a story that serves a purpose for those among us who desire an art practice that could be, if not revolutionary, then at least political, critical, subversive; that could harbor something like a radical aspiration. If only we had known about Constructivism and its discontents sooner.

And yet perhaps we did. Perhaps we knew a great deal about the Soviet avant-garde, its most politicized manifestations in fact, even if art history has not yet recognized it. Here is another story, a story that lies dormant in Michelson's filmic model of the

to the validity of the "neo-avant-garde," although Buchloh tends to reserve that word for non-critical invocations of the historical avant-garde. Buchloh remains a vicious critic of "neo-avant-garde" practices like Yves Klein's, for instance, that return to the historical avant-garde only to disavow (in order to assimilate) its most radical propositions. However, he is a vigorous defender of practices like Conceptualism that "detach themselves […] from the legacy of the historical avant-garde" rather than merely returning to them—that is, practices that imagine a "radically different basis for critical interventions in the discursive and institutional frameworks determining the production and reception of contemporary art." Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), xxiv. See also Benjamin Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time," *October*, no. 37 (Summer 1986). And Benjamin Buchloh, "Theorizing the Avant-Garde," *Art in America*, November 1984, 19.

radical aspiration. Over the course of the 1920s, Constructivism underwent a radical

transformation as artists abandoned art-making and entered directly into production—of

useful and socially-necessary objects (what we now refer to as Productivism) and of fact-

based journalism, photography, and film (a mass-cultural reorientation encompassing

what is called "factography" but extending also to cinema).[56] While much of this material

was unrecognizable *as art* in the West until Lodder's 1983 book, the filmic manifestation

of this avant-garde was easily recognized *as film* and began making its way beyond

Soviet borders through cinematic channels. Eisenstein's second film, *Battleship Potemkin*

(1925), was practically the very first to make it to the United States: in spite of deep

American ambivalence about the Soviet experiment, it made its highly anticipated

stateside debut at the very end of 1926 to general fanfare and enthusiasm, thanks in no

small part to improbable advocacy from the likes of Douglas Fairbanks, who, along with

his wife, Mary Pickford, had seen the film earlier that year in Berlin, who enthusiastically

travelled on to Moscow to meet its maker, and who was instrumental in bringing it back

to the United States. "Russians produce the finest pictures in the world," Fairbanks

reported in the wake of his visit. "I consider *Potemkin* the greatest cinema of modern

times."[57] Upon its release, as Eisenstein's biographer Marie Seton put it, *Potemkin* "burst

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[56] On this transformation, see Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography." See, too, Leah Dickerman, "The Propagandizing of Things," in *Aleksandr Rodchenko*, ed. Magdalena Dabrowski, Leah Dickerman, and Peter Galassi (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 62–99. More recently Maria Gough and Christina Kiaer have greatly expanded our understanding of the scale and scope of Productivist activity. See Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005). And Gough, *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution*.

[57] As quoted in Vladimir Petrić, "Soviet Revolutionary Films in America (1926-1935)" (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York, N.Y, New York University, 1973), 61, 62, http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/302689092/citation/DE25214C2078490FPQ/1. See also Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A Biography* (London: Bodley Head, 1952), 87.

unexpectedly on an astonished world."[58] Quite simply, no one had yet seen anything

quite like it. As one journalist wrote in a 1929 *Film Weekly* article, "America took this

director to its heart when his *Potemkin* towered out as one of the outstanding films of its

year."[59] Meanwhile, news of the film and its techniques began filtering through the

English-language press, often directly in the form of Eisenstein's own writings: film

magazines like *Close Up*, periodicals like *The Nation* and *Variety*, and newspapers like

the *New York Times* all widely publicized the Soviet filmmaker's groundbreaking

approach to cinema.[60] Indeed, when it came to describing that approach, it is

extraordinary to note just how blunt Eisenstein was in such articles: he openly avowed his

hostility to art, he professed his interest in filming masses rather than individual

protagonists, he insisted on the necessity of breaking with theatrical precedent in using

non-actors. His was to be a functional cinema, one that did not seek to "excite vicarious

participation in the lives of the persons of the drama" but that had a "physiological"

effect.[61]

        In some ways *Potemkin*'s early triumph and notoriety did not mean much. Or

rather, its triumph and notoriety did not, on their own, guarantee that the film would

necessarily have a future, an afterlife. At the time "the movies" were mostly understood

to be mere popular entertainment, ephemeral and disposable. The still-young medium had

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[58] Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 86.

[59] Betty Ross, "Film Director Who Does Not Believe in STARS," *Film Weekly*, March 25, 1929.

[60] For a chronological bibliography of English-language translations of Eisenstein's writings from 1927–46, see Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 269–276.

[61] Sergei Eisenstein, "Mass Movies," *The Nation*, November 9, 1927. The content of this essay were republished later that year in the *New York Times* as "Eisenstein's Technique," *New York Times*, December 25, 1927.

its enclaves of enthusiasts, yes, but cinema still did not have a history nor a mode of study, which meant that individual films and their reputations tended to vanish into obscurity. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) changed all that. Thanks to a $100,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Museum established its Film Library on May 17, 1935 in response to a growing consensus that cinema deserved a history.[62] MoMA President A. Conger Goodyear, for one, lamented that "As an art [the motion picture] is practically unknown and unstudied. […] [T]he bulk of all films that are important historically or aesthetically, whether foreign or domestic, old or new, are invisible under existing conditions."[63] Likewise, museum trustee and Film Library President John Hay Whitney opined that "The situation is as though no novels were available to the public except the current year's output or as though no paintings could ever be seen except those

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[62] And also in keeping with the Museum's original aims. Barr's catholic vision for the institution, after all, had always extended to cinema. "In time the Museum would probably expand beyond the narrow limits of painting and sculpture," he wrote retrospectively, "in order to include departments devoted to drawings, prints, and photography, typography, the arts of design in commerce and industry, architecture (a collection of *projet* and *maquettes*), stage designing, furniture and the decorative arts. Not the least important collection might be the *filmotek*, a library of films." Alfred H. Barr, "Chronicle of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture," in *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1967* (New York: The Museum, 1977), 620. Already in 1932, little more than a year since the Museum's November 1929, Barr began to craft "a carefully graded list of films which I thought worthy of inclusion in a film collection" based in part upon Paul Rotha's groundbreaking 1930 survey, *The Film Till Now*. Barr, as quoted in Mary Lea Bandy, "Nothing Sacred: 'Jock Whitney Snares Antiques for Museum': The Founding of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library," in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change.*, ed. John Elderfield, Studies in Modern Art, 5 (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 82. Upon returning to the Museum in 1933, Barr met its recently-hired librarian, Iris Barry, who shared his enthusiasm for cinema and was instrumental in the next phase of development in what would become the Film Library. She had a unique pedigree to assist in this respect: she had co-founded the Film Society of London in 1925, the following year she authored the book *Let's Go to the Movies*, and after coming to the United States she helped found the New York Film Society in 1930. On Barry's arrival to MoMA, see Bandy, 82. For more on Barry's biographical formation, see Robert Sitton, *Lady in the Dark: Iris Barry and the Art of Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[63] Museum of Modern Art, "Press Release Announcing Impending Announcement of Founding of Museum of Modern Art's Film Library," June 21, 1935, MoMA Press Release Archives 1929–97 [online].

painted during the previous twelve months."[64] Film Library staff agreed, describing its

raison d'être this way:

> Unfortunately films themselves are singularly evanescent. Certain celebrated
> pictures enjoy a life long in comparison to the brief existence of the average
> screen production. Short versions of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and of *Potemkin*
> have been visible occasionally during the past year and *It Happened One Night*
> has not yet vanished totally. Generally speaking, however, a film two years old is
> a film which will not be seen again.[65]

Parts archive, distributor, research center, and pedagogical initiative, the Film Library

sought to correct this situation, to give cinema the history it deserved, to elevate the

movies to a status equal with art. At first its activities largely consisted of assembling

thematic, multi-part film series, a circulating collection which the Film Library loaned

out to universities and other museums that shared an intellectual interest in cinema to use

for pedagogical purposes. But after the Museum permanently relocated to its 11 West

53rd Street location in 1939, which included brand new screening facilities, the Film

Library's exhibition activities increased markedly as it began to mount hugely ambitious

months- and even years-long film cycles of its own. In the face of public ridicule and

incredulity, these initiatives demanded that the movies be preserved as a legitimate object

of scholarly inquiry, demanded that this ostensibly ephemeral and disposable form of

popular entertainment be not only archived for posterity but actively seen and studied.[66] It

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[64] Museum of Modern Art. John "Jock" Hay Whitney played a central role in the founding of the
Film Library. In addition to being an art collector, polo player, film enthusiast, and museum
trustee, Whitney was also a key investor in Technicolor, which led to his direct involvement in
Hollywood in the mid-1930s. Undoubtedly it was not just Whitney's clout at the Museum but
also in Hollywood that made the Film Library's mission possible. For more on Whitney's role,
see Bandy, "Nothing Sacred."

[65] "The Founding of the Film Library," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 3, no. 2
(1935): 2, https://doi.org/10.2307/4057939.

[66] After Barry approached D. W. Griffith during her time in Hollywood, for instance, she
reported that Griffith "said amiably but firmly that he, for one, was not interested in the

would not be an exaggeration to say that the discipline of film studies owes its existence

in very large part to the precedent set by the Film Library.[67]

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preservation of his own films and that nothing could convince him that films have anything to do with art"—this from the director of *Birth of a Nation* (1925), regularly cited along with *Potemkin* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* as one of the most famous films. Iris Barry, "Film Library, 1935-1941," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 8, no. 5 (1941): 6, https://doi.org/10.2307/4057830.

[67] It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Film Library's founding, not only for cultivating a scholarly attitude towards film and consolidating a canon of cinema (one which, it must be said, largely remains intact to this day) but also for simply making historical films available for viewing, at first through distribution programs and later through regular in-house screenings. Haidee Wasson's work has been instrumental in unpacking the importance of the Film Library's founding for the discipline of film studies. See in particular Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Haidee Wasson, "Studying Movies at the Museum: The Museum of Modern Art and Cinema's Changing Object," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2008), 123–148. And Haidee Wasson, "'Some Kind of Racket': The Museum of Modern Art's Film Library, Hollywood and the Problem of Film Art, 1935," *Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 5–29. For another historical account of the Film Library's founding, see Bandy, "Nothing Sacred," 82.

Before the founding of the Film Library, there had been select efforts to seriously address cinema and historicize it. Early examples of English-language landmarks in the development of film studies include the Swiss magazine *Close Up* (1927–33) and Paul Rotha's important survey *The Film Till Now* (1930). Academically, the University of Southern California (USC) was an early pioneer in offering production-centric film studies beginning in 1929, with a bachelor's degree in film available by 1932, however other universities would not follow suit until the 1940s. The first doctoral sequence in film studies in the United States would not be offered until 1970 at New York University (NYU). For further details regarding the development of film studies in America, see Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2008), especially the contirbutions by Stephen Groening, Dana Polan, and Michael Zryd.

It is important to note that, while MoMA's Film Library truly was exceptional in terms of the scope of its ambition, there were other models for film archives at that point, as well. For example, on their first trip to Europe to begin acquiring films, the Film Library's curator, Iris Barry, and her husband, Film Library Vice President and General Manager John E. Abbott, noted the existence of select initiatives to collect and preserve film in Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow, and Stockholm. However, they also reported that none of these archives met the same kinds of comprehensive, international, and archival standards that the Film Library had outlined for itself. See Barry, "Film Library, 1935-1941," 8.

Among the more comprehensive primary source accounts of the founding of the film library is "The Founding of the Film Library." This essay is republished in a ca. 1939 compilation of the Film Library's "Film Notes": Museum of Modern Art, *Film Notes: Being the Program Notes for the Film Library's Circulating Programs* (New York: The Museum, 1935). (Note that this volume is incorrectly dated 1935 due to the fact that it contains the first page of the 1935 *Bulletin*

While the Film Library began circulating its initial film programs during the 1935–36 season and only occasionally hosted screenings designed to publicize those programs,[68] it would still be several more years until *Battleship Potemkin* and other exemplars of Soviet cinema finally began to enter its repertoire, which they did beginning in 1940. This delay was not for lack of effort. Given the newness of the type of archival initiative the Film Library represented, collecting cinema was not exactly a straightforward task; even finding key movies was hard enough, to say nothing of convincing copyright holders to participate.[69] In advance of the 1936–37 season, the Film Library's head curator, Iris Barry, and its director, her husband John E. Abbott, embarked on a months-long trip to Europe to begin acquiring foreign films. Along with London, Paris, Hanover, Berlin, Warsaw, Helsinki, and Stockholm, Moscow and Leningrad (present day St. Petersburg) were high on their list of destinations, but Soviet authorities

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cited above.) Film Library representatives retroactively discuss the entity's founding in Barry, "Film Library, 1935-1941." And Richard Griffith, "The Film Library," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 24, no. 1 (1956): 4–21, https://doi.org/10.2307/4058283.

[68] Prior to the Museum of Modern Art's permanent relocation to its 11 West 53rd Street location in May 1939, the Film Library occupied a temporary home in a rented office space at the Columbia Broadcasting Building at 485 Madison Avenue. Lacking a suitable theater, the Film Library conducted screenings only infrequently, usually offsite at the Dalton School and occasionally at the American Museum of Natural History, and these tended to be limited to one- or two-night engagements designed to publicize the Film Library's circulating programs. For a chronological account of the Museum's historical development, see Barr, "Chronicle of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture." For mention of the Film Library's temporary location, see, for example, "The Founding of the Film Library."

[69] "It is not widely realized that a motion picture cannot usually be bought or otherwise procured as can a book or a painting," Barry wrote of the very fundamental difficulty of building a cinema collection, "or that, even if a print of a film be so obtained, its physical possession does not necessarily entail the right to its use or showing." Iris Barry, "Why Wait for Posterity?," *Hollywood Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1946): 131, https://doi.org/10.2307/1209552. On the specific copyright challenges involved, Barry elaborated that "The men who finance and produce motion pictures, as well as the men and women who make them, are inevitably and primarily concerned, not with history of the films of the past, but with the films they are planning for tomorrow or making today." "The Founding of the Film Library," 2.

seemed particularly skeptical of their intentions once they arrived there.[70] While the Film

Library quickly expanded its offerings to include German, French, and Swedish

programs,[71] then, for years the Soviet tradition remained a specter, with *Potemkin* above

all regularly invoked across press releases and program notes as if to secure its legacy

even before it became widely available again.[72] It was not until 1939 that the Film

Library finally began to receive important samples of Soviet filmmaking, which it rapidly

incorporated into a new program devoted to that national cinema available in the 1939–

40 season.[73]

At that point, Soviet cinema increasingly became an inextricable part of the

canon. During its fifth season alone (1939–40), the Film Library mounted two major

series that prominently featured *Potemkin* and other samples of revolutionary cinema:

"The Non-Fiction Film: From Uninterpreted Fact to Documentary" (November 27, 1939–

January 6, 1940) and "Ten Programs: French, German, and Russian Films" (January 8–

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[70] For a report on what Barry and Abbott accomplished during this trip, including inventories of films that were promised to them, see "Report on the Work and Progress of the Film Library, December 9, 1937," December 9, 1937, I.14, Museum of Modern Art Archives, Early Museum History. For another account of this important early acquisition trip, including the belated arrival of Soviet material, see Barry, "Film Library, 1935-1941," 9–10. See also Iris Barry, "The Film Library and How It Grew," *Film Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (1969): 19–27, https://doi.org/10.2307/1210306.

[71] By December 1937, the Film Library had four circulating film programs: "Series 1: A Short Survey of the Film in America, 1895–1930" (six programs, released January 1936); "Series II: Some Memorable American Films, 1896–1935" (five programs, released January–March 1936); "Series III: The Film in Germany and the Film in France" (nine programs, released January 1937); and "Series IV: The Swedish Film and Post-War American Films" (thirteen programs, released October 1937). "Report on the Work and Progress of the Film Library, December 9, 1937."

[72] For instance, the program accompanying its very first Series of 1935–36, "A Short Survey of the Film in America, 1895–1930," referenced the Soviet tradition. In the notes for Griffith's *Intolerance*, Barry invokes the film's "rapid cross-cutting the like of which was not seen again until *Potemkin*." Museum of Modern Art, *Film Notes*, n.p.

[73] Museum of Modern Art, "Press Release Announcing Acquisition of French, German, and Russian Films," January 2, 1940, MoMA Press Release Archives 1929–97 [online].

March 27, 1940). The cinematic equivalent of a chronologically- and geographically-structured permanent collection, these repertory sequences sketched out the main contours of Film Library's surveys over the coming decades and consolidated its core canon, which was expanded and reconstituted in the larger and more ambitious surveys to come: the two-part "A Cycle of 300 Films" (June 30, 1941–February 1942); "The Art of the Motion Picture 1895–1941" (January 1–December 31, 1945); "The History of the Motion Pictures, 1895–1946" (September 16, 1946 – December 28, 1947); and the two-part "The Film Till Now" (July 5, 1948–July 15, 1951). Soviet cinema remained an incontrovertible part of these surveys and the definitive history of film they came to represent: not one transpired without the revolutionary call-to-arms that was *Potemkin* (a film that was shown at least 37 times at MoMA between 1939 and 1951), and, as the Film Library expanded its holdings, other exemplars of Soviet cinema increasingly entered the rotation—excerpts from Vertov's *Kino Pravda* newsreels (1922–25), Eisenstein's *October* and *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), Vsevelod Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926), and Alexander Dovzhenko's *Arsenal* (1928) to name just a few. All of which is to say that the very same institution alleged to have obscured the Constructivist avant-garde, to have actively interrupted its reception, was responsible for preserving, distributing, and circulating some of that very same avant-garde's most radical incarnations.

It must be admitted that while the Soviet cinema was immediately canonized at MoMA's Film Library, it was largely assimilated to modernist narratives that privileged technical progress and formal innovation. Alfred Barr, Jr., for instance, was early on a proponent of Eisenstein's cinema, lauding *Potemkin* in 1928 as "more than an important artistic experience. In the history of the motion-picture it was obviously epoch-

making."[74] The future museum director spent a great deal of time with the filmmaker

during his well-known visit to Moscow in the winter of 1927-28, but, as with the rest of

the anti-aesthetic activities proliferating amidst the Soviet avant-garde, he was far less

interested in Eisenstein's functionalist ambitions ("I approach the making of a motion

picture in much the same way that I would the equipment of a poultry farm or the

installation of a water system," the filmmaker claimed[75]) than the ways in which his

films, in spite of themselves, succeeded as art. "It is rumored that *The Ten Days* [i.e.,

October] has not been good propaganda, even in Russia," Barr explained smugly. "It is

too subtle, too metaphorical, too abstract in its sequences, too careless of narrative clarity;

it is, in other words, too fine a work of art."[76] After its founding, likewise, the Film

Library largely contributed to Soviet cinema's reconciliatory assimilation into larger

historical narratives of cinematic evolution. Its literature almost always acknowledged

Soviet filmmakers' revolutionary aspirations, for example, but in the end privileged their

pioneering of montage, their dynamic tempos and cinematography, their unprecedented

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[74] Alfred H. Barr, "Sergei Michailovitch Eisenstein [1928]," in *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, ed. Irving Sandler and Amy Newman (New York: Abrams, 1986), 142.

[75] Barr, 143. Barr cites a 1927 article in the *Nation* here, a version of which (with slightly differing translations) seems also to have been published in the *New York Times*. See "Eisenstein's Technique."

[76] Alfred H. Barr, "The LEF and Soviet Art [1928]," in *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, ed. Irving Sandler and Amy Newman (New York: Abrams, 1986), 140. Similarly, Barr wrote that Eisenstein's "ostentatious utilitarianism loses some force when one learns in conversation that his engineering was architectural, that he was also an amateur painter and during the war served as a staff artist." Barr, "Sergei Michailovitch Eisenstein," 143. Barr's de-radicalization of Eisenstein, of course, was but an isolated instance of his larger dismissal of the Soviet avant-garde—its category-bending activities, its political rhetoric, its anti-aesthetic aspirations. The activity of the Left Front of the Arts (LEF), which included Alexander Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, and Sergei Tret'iakov, to name a few, "is a courageous attempt to give to art an important social function in [the] world," Barr admitted, however it "is formed of men who are idealists of materialism. […] The LEF is strong in the illusion that men can live by bread alone." Barr, "The LEF and Soviet Art [1928]," 140–141.

realism, their unusual preference for non-actors.[77] Still, we are dealing with narrative

cinema: it had to be difficult to fully displace politics from films whose content was so

explicitly Revolutionary. And for those who were looking, glimmers of historical context

lay scattered throughout program notes, clearly pointing the way to the deeply political

imperatives animating such films.[78]

To anticipate a second objection to the narrative of Soviet cinema's afterlife at

MoMA as I have been presenting it here, I must also acknowledge that that afterlife was

not continuous. Whether due to Iris Barry's 1951 retirement, the Film Library's

abandonment of the large-scale survey format, or perhaps a larger Cold War chill, there

was a lull in Soviet film programming at MoMA for a good part of the 1950s, even if

Eisenstein remained one of film history's undisputed masters. Indeed, Michelson felt that

there was a hiatus in critical work on Soviet cinema until the later 1960s when she began

to actively teach the subject at New York University's newly founded School of the

Arts.[79] But already beginning with the Film Library's brief 1959 retrospective of

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[77] See, for example, Museum of Modern Art, *Film Notes*, n.p. Or Museum of Modern Art, "Press Release Announcing the Expansion of Series III: The Film in France and in Germany and the New Six-Program Series, 'The Russian Film,'" January 2, 1940, MoMA Press Release Archives 1929–97 [online]. While the subject will be dealt with in passing throughout this dissertation, the realism attributed to Eisenstein's films is too large a topic to discuss here. For my purposes, it is enough to say that MoMA prominently subordinated Eisenstein's films under documentary programs in the years following the founding of its Film Library in 1935.

[78] Film notes for the Film Library's 1940 series "Ten Programs: French, German, and Russian Films," for instance, highlight the centrality of the State's possession of the film industry per Lenin's August 27, 1919 decree: "Thus Russian placed its film industry on a basis that provides an economically distinct motive for film creation unlike that of other countries. Film-makers became directly responsible to their audience, and education and propaganda took the place of the box-office as the motivating force behind all film production." Museum of Modern Art, *Film Notes*, n.p.

[79] Michelson's attributes this "hiatus" in scholarship squarely to "political and social factors": "[A]lthough the nineteen twenties and thirties had seen a fervent reception of Soviet film throughout the West," she wrote, "the post-war climate had, in this country particularly, not favoured the continued study of this highly important source of production." Annette Michelson,

Eisenstein's work, which newly granted access to his entire existent corpus—not only

Potemkin and *October*, but also *Strike* (1925), *Old and New* (1929), several iterations of

his never-completed *Que Viva México* project (filmed between December 1930 and

January 1932), *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), and *Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (1945)[80]—Soviet

cinema began to make its comeback, remaining a predictable presence at the Museum

thereafter. Culminating with a "huge Soviet film show" in 1969, the Film Library would

continue to prominently integrate this cinematic tradition into a variety of its

programming over the course of the decade and beyond, ensuring that Eisenstein and his

cohort would remain key fixtures in its canon.[81] It is difficult to imagine an analogous

fate for Constructivism at the Museum, to say nothing of its more radical, Productivist

manifestations.

Perhaps there were attempts to assimilate Soviet cinema to an innocuous story of

technical and formal innovation; and perhaps there were gaps in Soviet cinema's

reception at the Museum. Even so, I'm not convinced that these films were ultimately

deradicalized and depoliticized, in short, "occluded," as Foster and Buchloh had alleged

was the fate of Constructivism. For the alternative, cinematic channel of the Soviet avant-

garde's transmission did not end with the Film Library and its canonization of directors

"An Account of the Development of Studies in Soviet Cinema at New York University over the Past Two Decades" (c 1987), 1–2, Box 82 Folder 3, Annette Michelson Papers, Getty Research Institute.

[80] The only feature-length film missing from this retrospective was *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II. Completed in 1946, Eisenstein's last film had only just been released in the United States in the months before this retrospective, suggesting that it simply may not have been available at the time of its planning.

[81] Among the Museum's 1960s and '70s film programs that prominently featured the Soviet film tradition were: "Nine Russian Films, 1917–1928" (1966), "The Soviet Film" (1969), "Kino Eye of the 20's" (1970), the two-part "Soviet Silent Cinema" (1974–5), and "Soviet Cinema," (1979). However, exemplars of Soviet cinema were peppered throughout other, thematic programs, as well, such as "Self Referential Cinema" (1971) and "Anthropological Cinema" (1973).

like Eisenstein. Significantly, a robust body of English-language literature was also

available, which historicized, contextualized, and politicized the Soviet tradition—or at

the very least readied it for the critical reappraisal that Michelson helped initiate in the

late 1960s. For instance, Eisenstein's writings became available in English translation at a

surprisingly early date and in volumes that continue to be used widely to this day.

Appearing in 1942 and 1949 respectively, *The Film Sense* and *Film Form* were both

edited and translated by Jay Leyda, an American who had studied with Eisenstein in

Moscow during the early 1930s before returning to the United States in 1936 to work at

the Film Library, bringing with him first-hand knowledge of the Soviet filmmaking

milieu as well as Russian language skills.[82] The Film Library's program notes may have

privileged questions of technical and formal innovation, but the essays contained in

Leyda's edited volumes provided a clear logical basis for connecting those innovations,

above all montage, to Eisenstein's ambitions of revolutionary operativity. Then in 1952

Marie Seton published her biography of Eisenstein, which chronicled the full scope of his

directorial activities in the context of his revolutionary energies, tackling not only well-

known films like *Potemkin* and *October* but also the rest of the director's corpus.[83] And

published in 1960, Leyda's *Kino*, the first English-language survey of Russian and Soviet

cinema, inserted Eisenstein into an even more meaningful historical and political context.

At the risk of belaboring my point, the revolutionary political background was explicit

throughout Leyda's *Kino*, which never strayed far from historical conditions when

describing individual films. Consider the conclusions arrived at, already in September

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[82] On Leyda's role in the early years of the Film Library, see Bandy, "Nothing Sacred." See also "Jay Leyda: A Brief Chronology," *October* 11 (Winter 1979): 152–53.

[83] Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*.

1917, by a meeting of workers' educational organizations, which Leyda quotes in full:

> [The cinema] appears as the bearer of the ideas of the ruling class with the intention of the strengthening of bourgeois conceptions and morals among the proletariat. Under the conditions of genuine peoples' power the cinema can be formed into a real and potent weapon for the enlightenment of the working class and the broad masses of people, and one of the most important means in the sacred struggle of the proletariat for the release from the narrow path of bourgeois art.[84]

Such sentiments yoking Soviet film to radical imperatives are ubiquitous in Leyda's book—indeed across the widely-available literature on Eisenstein and his milieu—foreclosing on the hypothesis of any kind of "occlusion" when it came to the revolutionary ambitions animating the Soviet avant-garde's cinematic incarnations. The new filmmaking techniques pioneered by the Soviets, it was clear, were inextricable from the Revolution.

The Postminimal "Montage" of Sculpture and Film

> We have always had a school: the [Museum of Modern Art's] film department was our grammar school and university, as 42nd Street and our own [Film-Makers'] Cinematheque have been our graduate school. The film department was and is unique in the world, and no one has valued the Museum more, or for better reason, than we filmmakers.
> —Hollis Frampton, Ken Jacobs, and Michael Snow, 1969[85]

By 1962 when Gray's *The Great Experiment* appeared—a book largely credited with introducing Constructivism to the minimalist generation and making possible in the West a new era of art historical scholarship on the subject—the cinematic manifestation of the Soviet avant-garde had undergone a very different reception than its sculptural

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[84] As quoted in Jay Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 109.

[85] Hollis Frampton, Ken Jacobs, and Michael Snow, "Filmmakers versus the Museum of Modern Art," *Filmmakers' Newsletter* 2, no. 7 (May 1969): 2.

forebears. It was canonized, of all places, at the Museum of Modern Art, the very site of

Constructivism's alleged erasure, and it was supported by a robust body of English-

language literature. But what of it? Interesting as they are, these facts may be, for the art

historian anyway, only interesting. After all, we are dealing with two separate disciplines,

two separate traditions. Surely the reception history of Soviet cinema is not exactly

relevant when it comes to the task of historicizing painting and sculpture.

And yet we are no longer historicizing painting and sculpture, at least not

exclusively, and certainly not as they have been traditionally conceived. For Smithson's

generation, one that came of age in the early- and mid-1960s, was involved in a

remarkable cross-fertilization and interdisciplinarity. Consider Joan Jonas's retroactive

comment, what could have been a mantra for an entire generation: "I didn't see a major

difference between a poem, a sculpture, a film, or a dance."[86] Jonas's films like *Wind*

(1968) and *Songdelay* (1973) bodied forth performative, ephemeral, and site-specific

actions but in such a way indeed that seemed to blur categories and issues of priority—

were these filmic documents, or were they works on film? Or consider Richard Serra, an

artist who lived with Jonas; who, as a result, grew keenly interested in dance and

performance; who witnessed film being adopted by the likes of Yvonne Rainer and Andy

Warhol; who was close with Michael Snow and took it upon himself to promote Snow's

groundbreaking film *Wavelength* (1967) abroad; who, after the 1970 opening of

Anthology Film Archives, was a regular student of its Essential Cinema program; and

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[86] Joan Jonas, *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions, 1968-1982*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1983), 137. Douglas Crimp reflected on this art historical moment in similar terms, describing it as "that moment in the late sixties when traditional art practices had given way to a multiplicity of new activities, thereby disrupting the continuity of a century of modernism." Jonas, 8.

who began making films himself in 1968, *Hand Catching Lead* most famously, in close

collaboration not only with artists like Jonas but composers like Philip Glass and future

documentarians like Robert Fiore. To the extent that his so-called hand films of 1968

directly figured what, for Serra, were sculptural procedures—actions like "to drop," "to

grasp," "to collect," "to heap," "to gather" all come from his famous *Verb List* of 1967–

68—the artist appeared to be reconceiving sculpture as pure process, which is to say no

longer oriented exclusively toward the production of an object.[87] "People didn't call

themselves filmmakers or composers or musicians or painters or sculptors," Serra

recalled. "You didn't want to identify."[88] Or consider the formation of Castelli-

Sonnabend Tapes and Films in 1974, a gallery entity designed to confront the distribution

issues unique to film and video as artists increasingly turned to media. While it would

only expand, its inaugural catalogue offered the media-based work of some thirty-one

artists, among them Vito Acconci, Nancy Holt, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Keith

Sonnier, and William Wegman.[89] Or consider cinema's intrusion into the gallery with

Paul Sharits's "locational film pieces" of the early 1970s and exemplified by *Shutter*

Interface (1975), an installation which included the filmic apparatus in the work, or

Anthony McCall's "solid light films" like *Line Describing a Cone* (1973), which

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[87] This is Benjamin Buchloh's reading of what he described as Serra's practice of "sculptural film," which I will briefly discuss later. Benjamin Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film in the Work of Richard Serra [1978]," in *Richard Serra*, ed. Hal Foster, October Files 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 1–19.

[88] Richard Serra, *Conversations about Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 33.

[89] For more on Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films (also often rendered Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films), see Erika Balsom, "Original Copies: How Film and Video Became Art Objects," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 1 (2013): 97–118.

transformed cinema's beam of light into a sculptural and volumetric presence.[90] As

Michelson recalled of this period from the vantage of 1979,

> To someone like me, involved with the history of independent filmmaking in this
> country over the past fifteen years or so, it is evident that the relationship of
> pictorial and sculptural enterprise to film is extremely important; that is, film has
> been nourished by that enterprise. […] It is very difficult to understand the films
> of Snow, Frampton, etc., without some reference to painting and sculpture of the
> mid- and late '60s. It was a time of considerable interaction.[91]

When it came to "neo-avant-garde" sculptors of the minimalist generation, then, perhaps

it was reasonable to look chiefly at their reception of Constructivism; for a generation of

artists with more catholic tastes and particularly an interest in cinema, however, Foster's

and Buchloh's non-reception narratives look increasingly inadequate in their failure to

address a larger conjunction of disciplines underway during this moment. The filmic

reception of the Soviet avant-garde, in a word, no longer becomes merely interesting for

the art historian; it was, as Frampton, Jacobs, and Snow wrote, a matter of this

generation's education.

As that trio also suggested, moreover, this was an education that was not

occurring exclusively at MoMA either. The Film Library may have helped establish a

basic canon in its ambitions to survey cinema's entire history, but when it came to

digging deeper the Museum's sporadic screenings of Eisenstein's films throughout the

decade paled in comparison to the offerings at New York's proliferating art and repertory

theaters, sources of tertiary education that iterated and permuted the canon, making it

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[90] For a survey of film and video installation as it pertains to this moment, the exhibition
catalogue accompanying Chrissie Iles's 2001 exhibition *Into the Light* at the Whitney Museum of
American Art is an indispensible resource. Chrissie Iles, *Into the Light: The Projected Image in
American Art, 1964-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art : Distributed by Harry
N. Abrams, 2001).

[91] Michelson, Serra, and Weyergraf, "The Films of Richard Serra," 71. Michelson also discusses
the New York to which she returned in the mid 1960s in Newman, *Challenging Art*, 80–81.

available on a more continuous basis and throughout the city. At theaters such as the

West Village's Bleecker Street Cinema, the Upper East Side's New Yorker Theater, the

Upper West Side's Thalia, and the Elgin Theater in Chelsea, as I have already suggested,

Eisenstein was always part of the curriculum: *Potemkin* was included in no less than

forty-five repertory cinema programs during the 1960s; *Nevsky* at least forty-three; *Ivan

the Terrible* at least twenty-six; *Strike* at least nine; and *October* at least eight. A

cinematically-inclined artist would have had the opportunity to watch or re-watch various

parts of Eisenstein's *oeuvre*, on average, once each month for the duration of the

decade.[92] With its opening at the end of 1970, Anthology Film Archives soon inserted

Soviet cinema into its own vision of the canon, codified in its cyclical Essential Cinema

program. In addition to regularly attending "late-night movies on 42nd Street and many

underground films" from 1962–66 by one account,[93] we know that Smithson was also

among those who skulked around Anthology after its opening along with the likes of

Serra, Jonas, and Andy Warhol. And for someone like Smithson, moreover, this

education was heavily supplemented by readings, as well. For his library contained the

fragments of curricula encompassing a wide variety of cinematic subjects, chief among

them the Soviet tradition: he owned Leyda's translation of Eisenstein's *Film Form* and

Seton's biography of the filmmaker along with plenty of other books that prominently

canonized Eisenstein like Parker Tyler's *Classics of the Foreign Film* and Andrew

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[92] For the source of this data and my sampling methodology, see footnote 3 above.

[93] Alan Moore et al., "Chronology," in *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, by Robert Hobbs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 232.

Sarris's *Interviews with Film Directors*.[94]

Meanwhile, formal education, too, was increasingly becoming an option. Citing the imperative "to join the new revolution in the arts," New York University (NYU) inaugurated its School of the Arts in the fall of 1966 with a Theatre Program and coursework in film production and history.[95] Beginning in the 1967–68 academic year, the School of the Arts introduced a clearly defined Institute of Film and Television, which offered an M.A. degree in cinema.[96] Annette Michelson joined the list of faculty as Visiting Lecturer that year, teaching her first class, "The Film and the Modernist Revolution in the Arts," in the spring semester. By 1969–70, Michelson was listed as faculty and, in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art's "huge Soviet film show" of fall 1969, taught her first seminar on Soviet cinema.[97] Beginning in the 1970–71 academic year, the School of the Arts inaugurated the nation's first doctoral program in film history and, as Assistant Professor, Michelson's teaching load expanded to include not only Soviet cinema but also, and in keeping with her sense of the radical aspiration,

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[94] For an inventory of Smithson's library, see Lori Cavagnaro, "Robert Smithson's Library," in *Robert Smithson: Learning From New Jersey and Elsewhere*, by Ann Reynolds (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

[95] Entitled "Revolution and the Arts," the inaugural statement of NYU's School of the Arts, written by its founding Dean, Robert W. Corrigan, closely associated the School's founding with the tumultuous historical situation—this "age of explosion," as he put it: "The main problem in an age of explosion is how to be revolutionary in the true sense: the harnessing and redirection of force. In establishing a new School of the Arts, New York University hopes to meet this challenge in the arts by providing the same full-scale professional training it offers through its schools of medicine, law, and engineering." "New York University Bulletin, School of the Arts, Announcement • 1966–1967," *New York University Bulletin* LXVI, no. 36 (September 5, 1966): 16.

[96] "New York University Bulletin, School of the Arts, Announcement • 1967–1968," *New York University Bulletin* LXVII, no. 37 (August 7, 1967).

[97] "Supplement to Announcement, 1968–1969, 1969–1970: School of the Arts, New York University Bulletin," *New York University Bulletin* LXIX, no. 38 (September 29, 1969).

the avant-garde and experimental cinema of the present.[98] Advised by Michelson, the first

dissertation project produced by the program was Vlada Petrić's history of Soviet

cinema's early reception in the United States.[99] "[I]t is clear to us, and a source of no

little satisfaction," Michelson later wrote of the School of the Arts' Graduate Cinema

Program, "that our efforts in fostering an interest in Soviet Film have helped to generate

[…] a wider acquaintance with the practice and theory of the Soviet film-makers of the

past and present."[100] She had in mind her pedagogical activities at NYU, however those

activities also manifested themselves in the pages of *Artforum*, where Michelson's

important theoretical treatments of Eisenstein and Vertov appeared beginning in 1972.

Needless to say, this too was a venue which contributed to artists' film education in the

late 1960s and '70s—Smithson above all, who published some nine pieces in the

magazine between 1966 and his death in 1973.

Whether or not the term "postminimalism" is invoked, the practices of this

generation that actively sought out its cinema education are often understood to belong to

a minimalist genealogy, as I have suggested earlier. Minimalism, of course, inaugurated a

medium agnosticism by way of its neither-painting-nor-sculpture gambit; in inhabiting

instead a condition of objecthood, from which part-to-part compositional relationships

[98] A doctoral program in cinema studies at New York University had first been proposed in 1968, but this proposal was withdrawn due to insufficient faculty and library resources. George Amberg, "Proposal for a Doctoral Program in Cinema in the School of the Arts," c 1970, 38, Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, 1956-1981, New York University Archives.

[99] Petrić, "Soviet Revolutionary Films in America (1926-1935)." For a sampling of press about NYU's doctoral program in cinema, see "Pictures: Columbia Training Film Directors, NYU Going For Cinematic Ph.D.s," *Variety*, May 21, 1969. "Ph.D. Cinema Course Approved for N.Y.U.," *New York Times*, 1970. And "1st Film PHD Program Established At NYU," *Back Stage*, August 28, 1970.

[100] Michelson, "An Account of the Development of Studies in Soviet Cinema at New York University over the Past Two Decades," 4.

had been voided, minimalism externalized those relationships, making them a phenomenological function of the viewer's ambulation in space; and the result was an experience of sculpture no longer as static and pictorial but durational, theatrical, contingent.[101] As Robert Morris wrote presciently, "The experience of the work necessarily exists in time."[102] In the wake of the "crux" that was minimalism, then, sculptural practices in many ways radicalized minimalism's innovations, taking for granted, for instance, sculpture's inextricability from its enframing institutional locale or the availability of its temporal axis. But given the condition of "pluralism" plaguing the art of the late 1960s and '70s, given its stylistic heterogeneity, what precisely art after minimalism meant or what it looked like or how it extended minimalism was far more uncertain and up for grabs. Was "postminimalism," as Benjamin Buchloh recently wrote in the context of Richard Serra's work, an "anti-minimalism" insofar as it reintroduced the artist's hand that minimalism and its preference for the industrially fabricated had eradicated? Short of a break or negation, did postminimalism's prefix instead specify a reaction to and departure from minimalism's cold and rigid geometries in favor of sensual organicism, erotic innuendo, and lush tactility—characteristics of Eva Hesse's work, as Robert Pincus-Witten suggested in the 1971 essay where he first invoked the term? Ought "postminimalism" refer to the process-based and materiologically-

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[101] I am summarizing here the locus classicus of minimalist discourse, which is a trifecta of essays authored between 1965 and 1967: Donald Judd's "Specific Objects," Robert Morris's two-part "Notes on Sculpture," and Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood. For Judd's essay, see Judd, "Specific Objects [1965]." Morris's and Fried's essays are anthologized in Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968). For a secondary discussion of minimalism as a "crux" that both realized modernism's medium-specific imperative and, in doing so, also iniated a break with modernism, see Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 35–70.

[102] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2 [1966]," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 17.

determined "anti-form" that Robert Morris identified in his 1968 essay of the same name and on display in the Leo Castelli Gallery show he organized that same year? Or, quite to the contrary, was art after minimalism characterized by the *de*materialized conceptualism Lucy Lippard would associate with figures like Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, and Joseph Kosuth? Indeed, was the very category, as Rosalind Krauss thought, misleading insofar as it erroneously insisted on a distinction between sensibilities that were, in fact, continuous?[103]

Like the category "postminimalism," the meaning of artists' adoption of film after minimalism also remains undecided. Michelson suggested above that film had been "nourished" by the enterprise of sculpture, yet the question of how it may have been nourished, as well as vice versa, persists. For someone like Buchloh, cinema seemed to offer an avatar for duration and temporality, a way of directly refiguring sculpture as process. For sculpture to have a filmic extension in Serra's work, for instance, necessitated new, hybrid categories like "sculptural film" with which to designate a type

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[103] Rosalind Krauss was among those who critiqued the proliferating attribution of "pluralism" amongst accounts of early-1970s art. See, for example, Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1 [1977]," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 196–209. For Buchloh's reading of postminimalism as an anti-minimalism, see Benjamin Buchloh, "Richard Serra's Early Work: Sculpture between Labor and Spectacle," in *Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years* (New York: Museum of Modern Art ; London, 2007), 56. For Pincus-Witten's account, see Robert Pincus-Witten, "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime," *Artforum* X, no. 3 (November 1971): 32–44. Pincus-Witten's account owes much to Lucy Lippard's 1966 "Eccentric Abstraction," both an essay and an exhibition bearing its name, that began to examine a sculptural language developing after minimalism. Lucy R. Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," *Art International* X, no. 9 (November 1966). For Morris's "anti-form," see Robert Morris, "Anti Form [1968]," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 41–46. For Lippard's "dematerialized" model, see Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968). For Rosalind Krauss's argument that minimalism and so-called postminimalism were in fact involved in the same project of demonstrating the externality of language, see Rosalind Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility: Reflections on Post-'60s Sculpture," *Artforum* 12, no. 3 (November 1973): 43–53.

of object that could no longer properly be said to be either. For Craig Owens, cinema

offered a proxy for the condition of "textuality" that had erupted when sculpture became

increasingly decentered. Smithson's "nonsites" of 1968, Owens argued, seemed to

relinquish sculpture's traditional autonomy and embrace, instead, a condition of

relationality amongst a dispersed network of signs that was necessarily experienced as

quasi-filmic temporal succession. For Krauss, on the other hand, cinematic practices

could be seen as responding to the condition of textuality in another way, namely in

privileging indexicality as a means of resisting the signifier's postmodern unmooring.

There was also her sense that cinema, as a medium, was a kind of assemblage of

disparate parts lacking any ontological center: film, she thought, might serve as a model

for what she diagnosed as a "post-medium" condition. Perhaps, too, cinematic practices

could be plotted somewhere in sculpture's "expanded field," what Krauss had described

as a logical terrain opened up by modern sculpture's termination as that which was

neither architecture nor landscape.[104]

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[104] I am glossing here what I take to be the dominant frameworks for understanding the cinematic overtures and affinities of not only something called "postminimalism" but also "postmodernism," which, in many cases, similarly aligned itself with a minimalist genealogy. On sculpture's temporal horizons in general, see Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking Press, 1977). For Benjamin Buchloh's notion of "sculptural film" as it applies to Serra's film work of the late 1960s, see Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film in the Work of Richard Serra [1978]." On the postmodern condition of "textuality," particularly as it applies to Smithson's work, see Craig Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," in *Beyond Recognition*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 40–51. For Krauss's theory of an indexical logic underwriting art after minimalism, see Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 2 [1977]," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 210–219. Hal Foster helpfully summarizes Owens's "textuality" and Krauss's "indexicality" in terms of practices that either exploit or resist postmodernism's simulacral conditions: Hal Foster, "The Passion of the Sign," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 71–98. On sculpture's "expanded field"—a model, it must be said, that does not invoke cinema directly—see Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field [1979]," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 276–290.

More recently, there has been an effort to historicize not only the expansion of sculptural practices into cinematic terrain but also cinema's introduction to the gallery in ways that had become increasingly sculptural and environmental, and these accounts, too, implicitly engage a postminimal genealogy. Chrissie Iles's 2001 exhibition *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964-1977* at the Whitney Museum of American Art provided an important opportunity to revisit this phenomenon. For Iles, the phenomenological strategies discovered by minimalism and that made visible sculpture's spatial and institutional conditions were turned upon the otherwise ethereal moving image in such a way that effected the revelation of the film and video apparatus. What was postminimal about such practices, in other words, was their subjection of cinema to the kind of embodied, phenomenological scrutiny that had been the unique purview of minimalist sculpture.[105] Eric de Bruyn, similarly, has understood minimalism's filmic extensions in terms of what he described as a "topological turn": if minimalism operated according to a Euclidean model of space, one which relied on clear divisions of subject and object, interior and exterior, the "topological" practices exemplary of postminimalism stipulated a "chiasmic intertwining of an embodied self and the everyday world it inhabits" in a way that was exploited by artists working in cinema—Dan Graham, for one—in what amounted to a critique of the "central perspective of classical cinema."[106]

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[105] As Iles explained, "The spectator's attention turns from the illusion on the screen to the surrounding space, and to the physical mechanism and properties of the moving image." Chrissie Iles, "Between the Still and the Moving Image," in *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art : Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 33.

[106] Eric de Bruyn, "Topological Pathways of Post-Minimalism," *Grey Room*, no. 25 (2006): 42. It bears mentioning that de Bruyn's sense of postminimalism's "topological turn" is consistent

However, other scholars have suggested that the postminimal crossing of film and sculpture was not necessarily as simple as a critique of illusionism nor that it was quite as teleological as Iles's and de Bruyn's accounts implied. In his archeology of the "expanded cinema" as it emerged in the mid-1960s, for instance, Andrew Uroskie inverted the equation to suggest that it was sculpture that followed cinema's lead rather than vice-versa: the kind of film installations to which Iles pointed, Uroskie argued, were less the benefactors of minimalist phenomenology than of expanded cinema practices and their inquiry into what he described as the "paradoxical site specificity of cinematic practice."[107] In his work on Anthony McCall's film installations of the mid-1970s, on the other hand, George Baker has suggested that the postminimal conjunction of sculpture and film derived from a deep concern with medium: for sculpture to become cinematic (in, say, Serra's case), or for cinema to become sculptural (as in McCall's) was no abdication of medium; rather, in pushing sculpture or film to their logical limits, each form transgressed itself, each began to communicate and correspond with the other in ways that revealed new continuities between them.[108] Whereas Branden Joseph has argued that McCall operated between discourses to different effect: his practice unfolded less between film and sculpture as forms than between each one's spectatorial mode—the

with other readings of art after minimalism, among them Yve-Alain Bois's "picturesque" account of Richard Serra's public sculpture, which stipulates a fragmentary experience of the sculpture by which it is gradually discovered, thus disallowing the kind of mastery of the architectural plan or aerial photograph. See Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around 'Clara-Clara' [1983]," in *Richard Serra*, ed. Hal Foster, October Files 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 59–95. For de Bruyn's reading of Graham's films, see Eric de Bruyn, "The Filmic Topology of Dan Graham," in *Dan Graham: Works 1965–2000*, ed. Marianne Brouwer (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2001), 26.

[107] Andrew V. Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 11.

[108] George Baker, "Film beyond Its Limits," *Grey Room*, no. 25 (2006): 92–125.

"subject-centered" phenomenological model at stake in minimalism (and, for him, in postminimalism as well) and the spectacle of narrative cinema. For Joseph the artist's hybridized practice ultimately mounted a subversive critique—not only of illusionism per se (as was the case for someone like Iles) but of the ideological conditions of mass media: the way in which McCall's work "cinematizes" the environment, the way in a work like *Long Film for Four Projectors* "slices" and "cuts" through space with its beams of light, seemed only to perform our interpellation by mass media.[109]

While their conclusions differ, the basic observation of so many of these accounts is that we are dealing with a crossing of mediums, a collision of forms, a continuity based fundamentally upon a discontinuity. Needless to say, these are the terms of cinematic montage. In excavating a forgotten filmic channel to the Soviet avant-garde, in suggesting that a principle like montage and the radical aspiration underwriting it were available to artists of the 1960s and '70s, were part of its education, I am suggesting that these "postminimal" practices extended minimalism in a different way. They inherited from minimalism's phenomenological and durational lessons, yes; however, to see cinema as a model, especially the radically self-reflexive modality prototyped by the Soviets, requires rethinking the postminimal collision of sculpture and film in terms of the pedagogical, subversive, and cognitive terms of Eisensteinian montage. To do so would mean to deepen existing accounts of "postminimalism" in positioning the crossing of film and sculpture as not only a transformation of minimalism's phenomenological discoveries but also consistent with the transformations of the Soviet avant-garde

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[109] Branden W. Joseph, "Sparring with the Spectacle," in *Anthony McCall: The Solid Light Films and Related Works*, ed. Christopher Eamon (Evanston, Ill. : San Francisco, Calif: Northwestern University Press ; New Art Trust, 2005), 35–76, 94–142.

precedent that minimalism had cognized. While this dissertation dwells mostly on Eisensteinian notions of the cinematic as they invade Smithson's drawn and sculptural work, ultimately it is oriented to the discontinuous collision of film and sculpture in *Spiral Jetty*, a work whose dynamics I see as the logical, even dialectical, culmination of the artist's engagement with montage. And yet, over and over this dissertation will land in the deeply libidinal language of perversion, cruelty, erotics, and violence, suggesting that the montage model, at least in Smithson's hands, not only partakes of the utopianism of the radical aspiration—a liberating destruction of hierarchical and hegemonic categories, say—but also the "atopian" production of amnesia, confusion, and madness that increasingly seems to be the subtext of montage and the "continuity" that it promises.

Chapter Summary

My base assumption, it should by now be clear, is that Smithson as well as his larger cohort—a generation, as Michelson surmised already in 1966, marked by the "convergences and cross-fertilizations" of a multitude of aesthetic disciplines[110]—were at least familiar with Soviet material and very likely much more than that, that they absorbed something of Eisenstein's theory of montage, its linkage with revolutionary politics, and his fiery rhetoric asserting art's urgent role in combatting bourgeois ideology. This dissertation seeks to unpack that linkage, to examine what the reverberations of the Eisensteinian might look like in Smithson's case, an artist exemplary of his generation's interdisciplinarity and a figure virtually synonymous with the emergence of postmodernism. Organized in a roughly chronological manner, this

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[110] Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," Fall 1966, 42.

project will follow a trajectory from Smithson's early "mannerist" drawings and collage work through his "dialectical" Nonsites and Mirror Displacements of 1968–69 before culminating with his larger site-specific interventions of 1970 like *Partially Buried Woodshed* and *Spiral Jetty*. Each chapter will center around a different film of Eisenstein's in an effort to draw out different facets of montage; and consequently each will understand the cognitive effects of that technique in slightly different terms as I trace its nuances and dialectical development through Smithson's practice. To that end, this dissertation's organization is not merely chronological. In accordance with the internal transformation of Smithson's practice, it also responds to the artist's ongoing radicalization and expansion of the principle of montage—from a compositional logic (describing the internal dynamics of Smithson's early drawing and collage works) to a textual one (characterizing the relational dynamics of site and nonsite, of work and institutional frame) to what I will describe as the "atopian" (a term that will speak to the admixture of the spatial and the temporal that ultimately comes to fruition in the *Spiral Jetty*).

Amidst the vast scholarship devoted to Smithson, little attention has been paid to his fervent interest in mannerism—a remarkable oversight considering the extent to which this term animated the artist's practice during the early and mid 1960s. This dissertation seeks to rectify that omission in its first chapter, which enumerates the Eisensteinian resonances of the term in order to clarify what it meant for Smithson. Entitled "To Hell with Modernism," Chapter One focuses on the artist's identification with mannerism in his 1967 response to Fried's modernist diatribe "Art and Objecthood" and will explore the way in which his sculptural works of the period mounted a parodic

riposte to high modernist abstraction. As the literature to which he had access readily

divulged, mannerist aesthetics upended Renaissance ideals of beauty, naturalism, and

humanism during the sixteenth century; in the context of the hegemonic discourse of

modernism, likewise, Smithson's importation of mannerist principles from Eisenstein's

Ivan the Terrible provided an analogous anti-idealist, even hellish force with which to

articulate a strategic aesthetic alternative. In spite of its ostensible expunging of

figuration, for instance, Abstract Expressionism appeared to Smithson to sustain certain

Renaissance ideals insofar as its spontaneous painterly gestures disavowed art's

fundamental artificiality. And this is to say nothing of the painters themselves, whose

naïve performances of heroic machismo betrayed a similar credulity with respect to the

naturalistic structure of expression. Whereas mannerism, particularly as exemplified in

Eisenstein's attitude towards acting, offered Smithson a sinister and apostate aesthetic

that shamelessly embraced artifice and theatricality, that pushed it to wild, conspicuous,

and, above all, self-conscious excess. These attributes, moreover, were reflected in his

work of the early- and mid-1960s. His drawings, for instance, openly adopted a figurative

idiom pushed into the realm of the obscene, the sacrilegious, the perverse: in juxtaposing

erotic imagery with religious iconography, such works, I argue, self-consciously wielded

the figuration that had fallaciously been eradicated from the Abstract Expressionist

canvas and parodied its idealist, dogmatic, and pious subtext.[111] I will carry this logic to

Smithson's early abstraction, too—works like *Alogon #1* and *#2* (1966), *Pointless*

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[111] In addressing Smithson's early work in terms of mannerist hellishness, this chapter will
generate some friction with a certain tendency in the literature to privilege the artist's seemingly
earnest professions of faith during the late 1950s and early '60s, a tendency that was originally
recovered by Eugenie Tsai and that has since been explored by scholars like Jennifer Roberts and
most recently Thomas Crow. This literature will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1.

Vanishing Point (1968), and *Leaning Strata* (1968), to name a few that he showed during

his first two solo exhibitions at Dwan Gallery in 1966 and 1968—to demonstrate the

ways in which his sculptural work partook of this attitude in their attempts to warp,

distort, and parody the laws of perspective.[112] To understand montage according to

mannerist model of theatrics in *Ivan the Terrible* will ultimately mean to understand

Smithson's relationship to modernism not in terms of surpassing or overcoming it but in

terms of a perverse and hellish corruption of modernism from below.

Unlike mannerism, dialectics is a far more familiar concept in the body of

literature on Smithson, perhaps because of its straightforward affinity with his

site/nonsite works, which the artist explicitly understood in those terms. However,

implicit in his mannerist model—its salaciousness, its high artifice, its heterogeneity, its

self-conscious anti-naturalism—were the operations of dialectics: if, as Arnold Hauser

wrote in a volume on mannerism that Smithson owned and clearly studied, a "dialectical

principle […] underlies the whole of the mannerist outlook," it is because exemplary

sixteenth-century paintings, like collage *avant la lettre*, comprised fragmentary images

and were structured in terms of conflict.[113] To see the mannerist and the dialectical as

continuous, then, will lead to a very different understanding of what dialectics may have

meant for the artist. To that end, Chapter Two, "From Work to Sext," explores the shift in

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[112] Of the voluminous literature on Smithson, Jennifer Roberts's 2005 book places the most emphasis on the artist's early fascination with mannerism in a way that anticipates my own inquiry. However, Roberts is concerned largely with the ways in which the spiraling mannerist composition modeled a frozen and non-dynamic temporality, or what Smithson, in the press release of his 1968 Dwan show, described as a "winding-down of time." While I do not disagree with Roberts's reading, mine will occupy the other pole of the dialectic in exploring the ways in which mannerist composition models not crystalline stasis but dynamic, bawdy, and excessive hilarity. See note 5, above.

[113] Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 13.

Smithson's rhetoric from mannerism to dialectics beginning in 1968, a moment that coincides with the inauguration of two important bodies of work that not only deploy the logic of montage but also were conceived by the artist as explicitly dialectical exercises: his relational Nonsites and his Mirror Displacements. The canonical postmodern readings that have absorbed this work lay claim to its decentered and dispersed "textuality," a condition, as Roland Barthes theorized, inviting the reader's more direct involvement as a kind of traveler amidst a nonhierarchical and nonlinear landscape. I approach these "textual" bodies of work and the sense of travel implicit in each through Smithson's Mexican sojourn in the spring of 1969 and the resulting travelogue, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," which appeared in that year's September issue of *Artforum*. Here, the model of montage is no longer Eisenstein's over-the-top *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, but his *Que Viva México*, a famously unfinished project—and, in its own way, a kind of travelogue—that was well-documented in the literature to which Smithson had ready access and that, during the 1960s, existed in various reconstructed forms. Problematically, Eisenstein viewed Mexico as the very incarnation of dialectical montage in its paradoxical landscapes, its collision of ancient and modern civilizations, its juxtaposition of vital sensuality with violent morbidity. Anticipating Smithson's own fragmented rendering of Mexico in "Incidents," Eisenstein aspired to capture this dialectic in his film. Looking to Georges Bataille's theory of eroticism, however, I suggest that for both artists the structure of discontinuity at stake in the dispersed condition of textuality ultimately conceals an erotic desire for self-annihilation—a desire implicit in a term privileged in Smithson literature above all others, "entropy." Proceeding from his interest in mannerism, then, I argue that dialectics may be not only a

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figure for travel—whether optical as in his mirror works, hypothetical as in his Nonsites, or actual as in his own travelogues—but also a technology of disorientation: to be lost between site and nonsite, between mirror and reflection, or amidst the serpentine space of Smithson's travelogues, I claim, is analogous to an erotic (and entropic) loss of self.[114]

Chapters One and Two propose Eisenstein's cinema as a model for Smithson's drawings, sculptural work, and essayism, suggesting—provocatively, I hope—ways in which a cinematic (and specifically Eisensteinian) logic pervades his practice even when it does not explicitly deploy the material of film. Beginning in 1968, however, Smithson did turn to the medium of film, where, I argue, his engagement with montage is most radically borne out. This will be the topic of Chapter Three, "Devolution from Above," which focuses on Smithson's 1970 sculpture and film, *Spiral Jetty*. Here, I look to Eisenstein's fourth feature, *Old and New* (1929), as a model, a film that theatricalizes the collectivization and industrialization of agriculture as it was mandated under Stalin's First Five-Year Plan. Insofar as the film centers around one peasant community's acquisition of a tractor, my chapter draws out what Eisenstein had in mind when he repeatedly likened his revolutionary cinema to a tractor and montage to its engine. Some four decades later, tractors and cinema converged once again in Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*,

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[114] Once again, Jennifer Roberts's book has provided one of the more in-depth accounts of Smithson's Mexico project. In particular, she reads his "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan" closely against its namesake, John Lloyd Stephens's *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán*, demonstrating that it inverts Stephens's key premises, above all his imperialist insistence on vision and visuality. If Stephens's project was structured around the making-visible of the Yucatán—uncovering ancient archeological sites, for instance—Smithson's manifests a sense of indifference, disorientation, and obfuscation. My account differs in its conclusions, suggesting that Smithson's Yucatán project as well as his contemporaneous nonsites and Mirror Displacements manifest an erotic logic that ultimately prefigures the entropic thrust of projects like *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) and *Spiral Jetty* (the sculpture and the film, both 1970) that will be the subject of my third chapter. Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History*, 87–113.

and from this latter milieu I propose an alternative model of what it might mean for cinema to become tractor-like—less utopian than entropic, less evolutionary than devolutionary. To that end, this third chapter (and to a certain extent this dissertation as a whole) insinuates itself into more recent scholarly attempts to come to terms with Smithson's films *as films*, a topic that had been long neglected by art history, too often content to relegate the *Spiral Jetty* film to the status of secondary document. This important body of research has helped describe the specificity of Smithson's cinema practice, exploring the *Spiral Jetty*'s resonance with, for example, Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), or Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), even making passing reference to Eisensteinian montage.[115] However, in explicitly privileging the Eisensteinian model, in moving from its libidinal resonances with mannerism (hellish excess) to Mexico (erotic discontinuity) and finally to the tractor (constructive or else destructive operativity in the world), ultimately this chapter suggests that the montage model will provide a way of conceptualizing not only

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[115] Elizabeth Childs is widely seen as renewing interest in Smithson's films, *Spiral Jetty* especially, as films. Elizabeth C. Childs, "Robert Smithson and Film: The Spiral Jetty Reconsidered," *Arts Magazine* 56, no. 2 (October 1981). For a reading of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* according to a diagrammatic logic inherited from Dada, see George Baker, "The Cinema Model," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Karen J. Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 78–113. For a reading that focuses on Smithson's geological model of temporality as belonging to the phenomenological experience of the film, see Andrew V. Uroskie, "La Jetée En Spirale: Robert Smithson's Stratigraphic Cinema," *Grey Room*, no. 19 (2005): 54–79. For other readings of the film, see Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History*. Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*. And Eva Schmidt, "Et in Utah ego: Robert Smithson's 'Entorpologic' Cinema," in *Robert Smithson: Zeichnungen aus dem Nachlass* (Münster: Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, 1989). It is not uncommon amongst this literature to find passing reference to Eisenstein. Anticipating my own project, particularly the material I address in Chapter Three, Reynolds's exhaustive survey of Smithson's practice acknowledges that "Eisenstein's sense of montage as conflict is certainly operative in *The Spiral Jetty* [film], even if in subtle ways." However, Reynolds does not explore the implications of this relationship—in the film itself and between the film and the sculpture—which, at a very fundamental level, is what I aim to accomplish in the present project. I will engage with this literature more directly in Chapter Three.

the dialectical nature of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork as both site and nonsite, nor only the conflictual structure of the *Spiral Jetty* film, but their interaction. If Eisenstein's tractor-like montage was oriented to the utopian project of building socialism, in Smithson's hands montage ultimately terminates in a condition that I am designating a cinematic atopia—a non-place in which, Smithson wrote, "categories would destroy themselves"; a "limbo" given over to entropic dedifferentiation in such a way that suggests that the desideratum of the postminimal conjunction of the filmic and the sculptural may not be cognitive clarity but confusion.[116] When it comes to the conjunction of the filmic and the sculptural, in other words, for montage to aspire to the condition of the tractor may no longer mean the utopian construction of a new, liberatory condition of hybridity— something like Buchloh's category of "sculptural film," perhaps. Like the entropic fate of Smithson's half-black, half-white sandbox, mixed into gray oblivion,[117] his atopian model instead effects an indistinct blurring and bulldozing of categories, which, in the end, seems less to shore up knowledge than expedite its erasure.

In following this trajectory—from the mannerist convolutions of Smithson's early work to the eruption of an erotic sense of travel in his Nonsites, Mirror Displacements, and travelogues and from there to the amnesiac and maddening conjunction of the sculptural and the cinematic in the *Spiral Jetty*—this dissertation attempts to model a

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[116] Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," 1996.

[117] Smithson's sandbox imagery remains one of the artist's more enduring illustrations of what he meant by entropy: "Picture in your mind's eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on one side and white sand on the other. We take a child and have him run hundreds of times clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn grey; after that we have him run anti-clockwise, but the result will not be a restoration of the original division but a greater degree of greyness and an increase of entropy." Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 74.

kind of dialectical progression from chapter to chapter, demonstrating that at each point

the logic of montage as Smithson understood it undergoes successive stages of extension

and expansion. If mannerist paradox and artifice as discussed in Chapter One describe

montage dynamics as unfolding internal to a given composition and between its part-to-

part relationships, for instance, the Nonsites and Mirror Displacements of Chapter Two

expand this logic outward, as Craig Owens put it, "from work to frame."[118] Consistent

with Owens's notion of postmodern textuality, these bodies of work deploy montage to

destroy notions of aesthetic autonomy, characterizing sculpture as merely one term in a

larger constellation of signs whose passage is articulated in terms of travel. Chapter

Three, then, attempts to extrapolate this dialectic one step further. If "text" was the

dialectical consequence of the site/nonsite dialectic, of the interaction between work and

frame, my final chapter attempts to understand the interaction between one text (the

sculptural *Spiral Jetty*, which, both site and nonsite, Smithson conceived as a "network of

signs […] discovered as you go along"[119]) and another (the *Spiral Jetty* film). Following

Smithson's lead, as I have indicated, I borrow the term "atopia" to capture this new

entity. However, what this type of montage looks like, what exactly it means, indeed how

to conceptualize it as a further step in the transformation from work to text will be this

dissertation's ultimate task.

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[118] Craig Owens, "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After 'The Death of the Author'?," in *Beyond Recognition*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[119] Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty [1972]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 153n1.

A Note on the Double Aspects of Smithson and Eisenstein

There are, as with any artist, multiple Eisensteins. The most familiar Eisenstein is the revolutionary director of *Strike*, *Potemkin*, and *October*—the pioneer of montage, the sober dialectician, the cinema's most rigorous early theoretician—whose work was increasingly stymied by the rising tide of repressive Stalinism in the 1930s. This is the Eisenstein who came to cinema from engineering, who understood cinema's "art" to consist in its mathematical objectivity and its "cold-blooded and calculated construction."[120] This is the Eisenstein who aspired to unprecedented realism and immediacy to shock his audience into class-consciousness. This is the Eisenstein concerned with cinematic ontology, the Eisenstein who understood his medium to essentially consist of montage and to be fundamentally semiotic, not passively reflecting the world but actively constructing it. And for this Eisenstein all of these features belonged critically to cinema's revolutionary operativity: Montage, he felt, was not merely "the means of *unrolling* an idea with the help of single shots" but "an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots—shots even opposite to one another"[121]; montage meant that meaning would not be imposed upon the cinema; indeed montage was like the engine of a tractor, actively driving forward the film, such that meaning would emerge, materially, as a consequence of each subsequent collision.

There is, however, another Eisenstein, one that is most explicit and unavoidable in his wildly obscene sex drawings, for instance, and their unexpected combination of

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[120] Sergei Eisenstein, "Sergei Eisenstein's Reply to Oleg Voinov's Article [1927]," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemona, Udine, Italy: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 143.

[121] Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form [1929]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 49.

erotics and violence. This is the Eisenstein who emerges in biographical accounts of his clownish demeanor, his scatological and prurient sense of humor, his sadistic attraction to cruelty which is manifest throughout his films. This is the Eisenstein who loved Charlie Chaplin and Walt Disney, who admired the circus and the vaudevillian theater. In the case of this latter Eisenstein, the *locus classicus* may no longer lie in exemplary moments of montage—most famously, perhaps, the juxtaposition at the end of *Strike* between the gory slaughter of a bull and the State-sponsored massacre of striking workers that metaphorically links the two events in a way that is calculated to galvanize the audience (although, to be sure, the violence here is telling)—than, for instance, the infamous Cream Separator episode in *Old and New*, in which a glistening, metallic machine ejaculates cream over its ecstatic protagonist, or the phallic cacti of *Que Viva México* whose milky sap must be sensually extracted to produce the libation *pulque*, or even the outrageous and orgiastic color sequence from *Ivan the Terrible* and its murderous aftermath with which I began. Fleeting glimpses of this latter Eisenstein, and in particular his connection with Bataille's logic of base materialism, were first excavated by Georges Didi-Huberman, who discovered important historical connections between the two figures. Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois further gestured to the more sadistic, subversive, and anti-idealist subtext of Eisenstein's films in their Bataillean re-reading of the twentieth century, which aimed to tell a kind of counterhistory of modernism, a reading of modernism "against the grain."[122] While this dissertation is not exactly a

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[122] See Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance Informe, Ou, Le Gai Savoir Visuel Selon Georges Bataille*, Vues (Paris: Editions Macula, 1995). And Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 67–73. As Didi-Huberman points out, and as Krauss and Bois also mention, stills from *Old and New* were included in the a 1930 issue of Bataille's magazine *Documents* (the fourth issue of that year) along with a brief essay by Robert Desnos. While Krauss and Bois's brief Bataillean discussion of Eisenstein owes

project on Eisenstein, Smithson's encounter with the Soviet filmmaker similarly reads

him against the grain, and what emerges is a vision of the great revolutionary director that

is much lower and more libidinal indeed.

Through this Smithson-Eisenstein dialogue, like mirror and reflection, a

Bataillean Smithson emerges in turn, a figure I hope will be somewhat unfamiliar as well.

Smithson remains the postmodernist *par excellence*: whether for abandoning the

strictures of mediumhood and exploring sculpture's "expanded field," for allegorically

opening up the artwork's supposedly hermetic interior to new meaning, or for its site-

specific violation of modernism's vaunted autonomy from profane space and time, an

iconic work like *Spiral Jetty* has been virtually synonymous with the eruption of a

postmodern aesthetic attitude.[123] According to all these models, postmodernism stipulated

a dialectical surpassing of modernism, a tactical negation of modernism's central tenets

that served to advance aesthetic discourse and to correct modernism's idealist and

humanist oversights. As Hal Foster wrote, postmodernism was "less a break with

much to Didi-Huberman, however, they dispute his account, which they view as ultimately idealist: Didi-Huberman's Bataille, they argue, is dialectical in the sense of being "geared toward a final reconciliation, toward the concord of absolute knowledge." Whereas their Bataille, as well as the history of twentieth-century art they are seeking to retell, exemplifies a "strategy to undermine": Bataille's *informe* proposes a "sabotage against the academic world and the spirit," they write. "It is humanism above all that he is after, and thus all systems […]."

[123] I am sketching here what I take to be some of the most important and most enduring frameworks attempting to theorize postmodernism. Rosalind Krauss's "expanded field," for instance, proposed a definitive rupture with the modernist tradition of sculpture as artists of this generation pioneered the logical extensions of its terms and ushered in a definitively post-medium condition. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field [1979]." Craig Owens's theory of allegory, on the other hand, describes such practices as instantiating a palimpsest-like collision of two incongruous texts, which displaces "original" meaning with a supplementary one, thus mounting a quintessentially postmodern critique of the idea that meaning could ever inhere in the artwork. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism [1980]," in *Beyond Recognition*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 52–69. For a genealogy of site-specificity that begins with a break from modernist notions of autonomy, see Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 85–110.

modernism than an advance in a dialectic in which modernism is re-formed."[124]

However, like Eisenstein's enantiomorphic other half, the Smithson who emerges in this

dissertation is somewhat naughtier and more repulsive, a Smithson who does not

logically overcome modernism so much as undermine it. This Smithson is concerned

with excess, artifice, and theatricality (Chapter One); with the simultaneously sensual and

violent erotics of textuality and travel (Chapter Two); with a yearning toward mutilation

and self-annihilation that is the subtext of his *Spiral Jetty* project (Chapter Three). We

already know something about this Smithson, thanks once again to Krauss and Bois, who

have positioned his work—particularly his central concern with entropy—as partaking of

modernism's lowering, as revealing its repressed subtext. Against modernist opticality,

for instance, they link the blurring of boundaries stipulated by entropy to the sense of

disorientation effected by much of his work and to its erasure of the perceiving self that is

otherwise the locus of the visual field's differentiation.[125]

Without having set out to do so, my project participates in the elaboration of this

Bataillean Smithson, which it discovers through the figure of Eisenstein. On the one

hand, my aim will be to simply to flesh out and explore more deeply the libidinal subtext

of Smithson's work to which Bois and Krauss first gestured. In privileging Smithson's

reception of Eisenstein, on the other hand—in arriving at erotics by way of Eisenstein,

and in locating that Bataillean model as latent within Eisenstein's cinema—this project

also makes visible a specific vector of transmission for these ideas, and one which, I

think, has provocative implications. For montage, in Eisenstein's case, always implied

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[124] Hal Foster, "Re: Post [1982]," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 200.

[125] Krauss and Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*, 73–78.

something bodily, whether it was the spectator's inferential involvement in the production of meaning or the kind of somatic violence or shock that the director hoped his films would inflict upon his audience, galvanizing it into revolutionary consciousness. And in thus positioning Eisenstein's films as manuals for the libidinal operations of montage, I am proposing the Soviet avant-garde as a source of not only some utopian "radical aspiration" in the 1960s and '70s but also the lowering operations of the formless, which ultimately calls into question the utopian optimism undergirding any notion of a radical aspiration. Bataille, Krauss and Bois wrote, "loves revolution for the revolt, not for the utopia of its realization."[126] Perhaps this sentiment, above all, is the one that I wish to capture in this dissertation—to coax it out of Smithson's practice, to locate it in Eisenstein's cinema, and, in the end, to enable new ways of thinking the relevance of the Soviet avant-garde for the postminimal 1960s and '70s. To impute a libidinal model of montage to Smithson's work is therefore to inflect privileged terms in the literature with a sense of the carnal. It is to suggest that entropy may not merely be the scientific fate of the universe but also our erotic desideratum.

And Then Turn Away

One final note. Smithson associated mannerism with prompting a "turn away"— from center to periphery, from narrative to facture, from content to form. Following Bertolt Brecht, the artist advocated a policy not of anti-illusionism but of excess illusionism, of "call[ing] attention to the physical elements of illusion," a technique, he continued, that "is true of many Mannerist pictures, where for instance everything turns

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[126] Krauss and Bois, 17.

away from the center of interest. This *turning away* from what is thought to be 'important' is at the bottom of the a-effect."[127] Even the denizens of the mannerist pictorial world, Smithson noted, seem to want to turn away from their horrifying and artificial environs—the "alienated Saint" in Parmigianino's *The Virgin of the Long Neck*, for one, who "turns away from the 'monster'" that is the painting's subject, its ostensibly center.[128] To thus "turn away" was to effect a kind of caesura, a moment of critical detachment whose origins lay so deep within the artwork itself that even its fictive inhabitants were disturbed. The mannerist "turn away" also provided Smithson a comparably agonistic model for how to behave as a self-aware artist. After all, Smithson felt, artists themselves needed to "turn away in disgust" from the idealist myths of naturalism, expressionism, and humanism that had animated so much of the discourse of modernism.[129] To dwell on the periphery—be it that of a painting or of a larger hegemonic discourse—meant in some ways to be alienated from the center, it meant to be an outsider, a stranger, never comfortable, never complicit.

We are dealing here with a corporeal figure for dialectical oscillation and paradox—dialectical movement, that is, reimagined as embodied gesture, negation recast as a "turn away" from what lies before us. As bodily metaphors go, Smithson's "turn away" was somewhat more extreme than Michelson's "contropposto of the mind," an image that emphasized the synthesis of various dialectical tensions held in proprioceptive balance—not only because Smithson's implied a full about-face but also, and more

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[127] Smithson, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman," 350.

[128] Smithson, 352.

[129] "It is time," Smithson wrote in around 1966–67, "for artists to turn away in disgust from all the excuses that self-opinionated criticism has promoted." Smithson, "A Refutation of Historical Humanism," 336.

importantly, because it proposed that the internal motivation for that about-face was visceral, excited by the acute sensations of nausea, horror, or discomfort. If dialectics had an engine, perhaps it consisted less in logical necessity than in the spontaneous swell of retching vertigo. And over and over Smithson's work, particularly in its deployment of montage, seems designed to effect a visceral response that falls along this spectrum—not only disgust and disorientation but also desire and arousal—as we "turn away" from one repugnant or else alluring cartouche figure to the next, from nonsite to site, from mirror to reflection, from sculpture to film, from center to periphery. The problem with the periphery, of course, is that it always threatens to become a new center. Yet Smithson's dialectics, which constantly want to exchange its terms and confuse issues of priority— "Is the Site a reflection of the Nonsite (mirror)," the artist wondered in 1969, "or is it the other way around?"[130]—seem designed, as well, to keep us turning. Indeed, while the initial "turn away" may be motivated by a wave of repulsion or mounting desire that effects a temporary break in the grip of absorptive illusionism, at a certain point the very act of turning and turning again surely begins to generate its own sense of dizziness, nausea, disorientation, rapture. In Smithson's hands, montage aspires to not only the self-reflexive "turn away" that is the prerequisite of dialectical cognition but also a perverse compulsion to spin.[131]

My ambition is that this dissertation will constitute an analogous "turn away"

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[130] Robert Smithson, "Dialectic of Site and Nonsite," in *Land Art*, by Gerry Schum and Ursula Wevers, 2nd Edition (Hannover: Die Galerie, 1970).

[131] While the language of "turning away" belongs to Smithson, I am also intentionally evoking Krauss's essay on James Coleman and what she called the "post-medium condition" as articulated in an essay devoted, in its own way, to "turning away." For Coleman's work, Krauss argued, was involved in a similar self-reflexive artifice, which prompted that turn. Rosalind Krauss, "'...And Then Turn Away?' An Essay on James Coleman," *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 5–33.

from a Smithson we know to one we did not, from center to periphery. In turning to the periphery, however, I do not wish to posit a new center. While I hope that this project's consequence is not to inspire in the reader a sense of nausea, my aim is that, consistent with Smithson's reading of mannerism, the place toward which we turn will only ever be a temporary landing spot in a lengthier journey. In that sense, this dissertation aspires in some ways to the condition of the labyrinth, another privileged figure in Smithson discourse. In his dialectical treatment of the subject, Arnold Hauser described the mannerist picture as a "labyrinth you lose yourself in and do not seek to escape from." The viewer is not centered, he argued, is not grounded by a vanishing point or the logic of mimesis, but is disoriented, left to find her way, turn after turn after turn.[132] Indeed Smithson himself was fond of citing mannerist scholars who even attributed such labyrinthine compositions with physiologically stimulating nausea. In true mannerist form, Smithson's work of the late 1960s until his death shares in this labyrinthine aspect, turning from tangible sites to absent nonsites, from the present to irretrievable pasts and futures. His wide-ranging interests in crystallography, science fiction, thermodynamics, geology, and paleontology, among many others, only contribute to the spiraling convolutions characteristic of his thought.

This dissertation seeks to explore one particular vector through this labyrinth, a vector unified by a constellation of particular concerns—mannerism, dialectics, and erotics—that, I suggest, cohere through the example of Eisensteinian montage and that situate Smithson amongst new and unfamiliar coordinates inherited from the Soviet avant-garde. This is not the same thing as nominating dialectical montage as a unifying

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[132] Hauser, *Mannerism*, 25.

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theory nor erotics as a new privileged term, as if these were, improbably, the secret

solution to his labyrinth. Instead, this project will succeed only if it reveals new pathways

amidst this vast maze—pathways that twist and turn but, like the others, may ultimately

lead nowhere at all. In Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Garden of Forking Paths," its

protagonist wonders about a vast, inscrutable, nonlinear volume on the subject of mazes

written by his ancestor. "I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths," he muses, "of one

sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some

way involve the stars."[133] This dissertation, too, will lead us into pasts and futures—even

to the stars judging by the image of our burning sun that opens Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*

film. However, *this* star is surely not among those belonging to the heavenly firmament,

but rather a blinding source of amnesia, degeneracy, and madness. And then turn away.

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[133] Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions Books, 2007), 23.

Chapter 1

To Hell with Modernism: Smithson's Mannerist Eisenstein

> Now I have you with me, under my power
> Our love grows stronger now with every hour
> Look into my eyes, you will see who I am
> My name is Lucifer, please take my hand
>   Black Sabbath, "N.I.B.," 1970

When we first encounter him in *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, the Tsar has just returned to Moscow. We had left him at the close of Part I in self-imposed exile, strategically awaiting the support of the masses to bolster his mandate. Now, in the wake of a populist procession begging his return, a severe and wild-looking Ivan, clad in imposing and ominous black furs, reappears in his court, where he confronts an assembly of traitorous Boyars congregated there (fig. 1.1). The Tsar is quick to exact retribution, revoking the Boyars' land rights in a speech punctuated by punishing stamps of his scepter. As if this were not menacing enough, he then calls into being the Oprichniki, a paramilitary force comprising loyal followers willing to faithfully carry out his agenda. "As God created men in his own image," Ivan decrees, feverishly brandishing his newfound omnipotence, "so I have created men in mine." Rushing to the scene to intervene on behalf of Boyar interests, Ivan's former friend-turned-adversary Fedor Kolychev makes explicit the malevolent nature of Ivan's threat: "These plans come not from God," he bellows, "but from the devil!"[1]

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[1] Throughout the present chapter, I rely upon the English-language subtitles included in the Criterion Collection's 2001 DVD release of *Ivan the Terrible*. When relevant, however, I will supplement subtitles with the corresponding lines from Eisenstein's scenario for the film, which was published in English translation in 1962. This is intended to account not only for discrepancies among the various translations, but also to more comprehensively represent Eisenstein's intentions, which, as Yuri Tsivian argues, are perhaps nowhere better preserved than in the preparatory materials for the film. For the film's original scenario, see Sergei Eisenstein,

From its opening moments, Part II delivers a new, fiercer and more maniacal Tsar than the one we left at the end of Part I, a Tsar whose adversaries repeatedly associate his transgression of aristocratic tradition with a sinister and fiendish wickedness. If at first, however, Ivan seems apprehensive about these allegations—Kolychev's, for instance, brings the Tsar to his knees to beg for his old ally's friendship—eventually he comes to accept, even embrace it. Nowhere is this better illustrated than an episode occurring about halfway through the film, where Ivan's aunt Yefrosinya orchestrates a performance of the biblical "fiery furnace" story to be executed in the Tsar's presence (fig. 1.2). Intended to publicly shame Ivan and delegitimize his reign, the obvious allegory tells of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who consigns three angelic youths to a fiery death after they refuse to worship his image. As they succumb to the mock flames in an immolation overseen by two grotesque, demon-like jesters, the fateful trio blatantly asks those in attendance, under the exceedingly thin cover of song, why they "serve a devilish, blaspheming and despotic Tsar?"[2] Needless to say, the damning allegory is lost on no one, least of all a child in the audience who points gleefully at Ivan while audibly asking, "Mother, is that the terrible and godless Tsar?" Hooded in heavy black cowls that evoke occult and pagan rite, Ivan's very costume and that of his Oprichniki followers all but

Ivan the Terrible: Screenplay, ed. Ivor Montagu, trans. Ivor Montagu and Herbert Marshall (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962). For Tsivian's discussion of the film-as-idea, which attempts to reconstruct the film from Eisenstein's sketches and scenario, see Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible*.

[2] I offer here an excerpt of the song's lyrics from Eisenstein's original scenario, in which the indictment of Ivan is even stronger:

> Why, O Chaldeans shameless,
> A lawless Tsar
> Do you serve? Why, O Chaldeans diabolical,
> In a Tsar of Satan—
> An outrager, tormentor—
> Do you rejoice?

See Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible*, 173.

confirm the allegation. "From now on I will be just as you say I am!" he growls in full

acquiescence as the scene comes to a close. "I will be terrible!"

If Ivan comes to internalize the allegations of wicked deviance hurled at him by

his enemies, Eisenstein's cinematic rendering of the character traces a similar trajectory

in visually associating him with the devil. The Tsar's angular, Mephistofelian features,

his crazed eyes, his imposing demeanor, his bestial fur coat, his deep operatic basso, or,

as we witnessed in the color banquet sequence with which this dissertation began, his

crimson environs—all of these elements contribute to a palpable sense that Ivan indeed is

depraved and damnable, impious and impure.[3] Like the Satan of John Milton's *Paradise*

Lost, the rebel archangel consigned to the depths of Hell for rising up against God's

unquestioned sovereignty, Ivan too revolted against the very authority that had conferred

him his power. And yet, also like Milton's Satan, Ivan appeals to our sympathy

nonetheless: we comprehend the self-enriching corruption of the feudal Boyars; we

witness their numerous murderous plots against Ivan and his allies; we object to the

hypocritical justification of their power by unquestioned recourse to the church. Whereas

Ivan's adversaries obviously invoke the devil to delegitimize his anti-establishment

agenda while implicitly linking their own with tradition and Christianity, we encounter

Eisenstein's hellish styling of the character with far more ambivalence, to say the least.[4]

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[3] While Ivan's evocation of the devil is extremely pronounced, this is by no means the only figure with which the character is associated. Indeed, Eisenstein's rendering of the character conjures a variety of often contradictory personages and archetypes. As Tsivian explains, Eisenstein tasked his make-up artist Vasilii Goriunov "to make of [Nikolai] Cherkasov's face [i.e., the actor portraying Ivan] a kaleidoscope of fleeting resemblances without ever letting the viewer pin any of them down—from the biblical villain Nebuchadnezzar to the righteous Jew, Uriel Acosta […], from (Leonardo's?) Judas and the conventional stage Mephistopheles to the Jesus Christ of Christian iconography." Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible*, 39.

[4] My invocation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to which I return throughout this chapter, is advised. Not only is it a canonical work of literature that Smithson owned; in portraying Satan in

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Almost two decades before production of *Ivan the Terrible*, Eisenstein found

himself in close proximity to the Tsardom (fig. 1.3). Here he is jauntily perched upon the

Tsar's throne in the defunct Winter Palace, former seat of imperial power, his feet, like

those of a child, dangling helplessly below; here he is irreverently slumped over it in a

cheeky pantomime of ridiculous leisure. When these photographs were made in 1927, it

had been ten years since Russia's last Tsar had warmed that same seat, ten years since the

Palace (temporary seat of the Provisional Government) had fallen to Bolshevik forces

during the night of October 25, 1917. Now it was Eisenstein who occupied the Palace

while making what would be his third film*, October*, a cinematic monument to the

revolutionary events that had precipitated the Tsarist autocracy's demise, shot in the

locations where they occurred. Just like the young boy at the film's denouement (fig.

1.4), who celebrates the Bolshevik seizure of the Palace by wildly mounting the Tsar's

throne, arms and feet thrashing in ecstatic victory, so too do these photographs of

Eisenstein signal both a drunken affiliation with Russia's former locus of power and its

mocking desecration.

In fact Eisenstein identified rather strongly with the Tsardom, or with one

particular Tsar, anyway. In a section of his memoir entitled "Why I Became a Director,"

Eisenstein located the origins of his career in his early adolescence. He was not a good

child, he confessed—the type that misbehaves at a young age so as not to do so as an

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a more sympathetic light as a kind of revolutionary, it was also to become an important resource
in the 1960s resurgence of Satanism, which, as I imply at the end of this chapter, forms a fitting
backdrop for Smithson's hellish reading of *Ivan the Terrible* during that same moment.

adult. He was, to the contrary, a bad child:

> In childhood, [the bad child] does not maim his dolls, smash crockery, or torment animals. But let him grow up and he will be irresistibly drawn toward diversions of this nature.
> He will hunt feverishly for an outlet where it is safest for him to indulge his appetites.
> And ultimately he must become a director. Then he will be in the best position to realise all the potential denied in childhood.[5]

In explicitly associating his filmmaking career with his social maladjustment and repressed sadism, Eisenstein positioned the act of artistic creation as (potentially, anyway) *bad*—disobedient, naughty, deviant, cruel, transgressive, destructive. And, as Eisenstein himself proudly pointed out, his filmography indeed was marked by exceptional violence and bloodshed: ruthless massacres of civilians (*Potemkin*), Bolshevik protestors (*October*), and striking foundry workers (*Strike*); the slaughter and poisoning of animals (*Strike* and *Old and New*); or Ivan's brutal persecution of his Boyar adversaries, whom his loyal Oprichniki will execute one by one. Hence, Eisenstein logically concluded, "it seems no coincidence that it was none other than Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich the Terrible who ruled my mind and was my hero for many years."[6]

Violence was not merely among the film director's preferred subject matter, moreover; in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution it also characterized his conception of the medium's politicized function, its very operativity. "Our cinema is a weapon," Eisenstein wrote only moments after disclosing his admiration for Ivan the Terrible, "to

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[5] Sergei Eisenstein, *Volume IV: Beyond the Stars, The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, ed. Richard Taylor, trans. William Powell, S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 23. While I will be citing "Why I Became a Director" as it was included in *Beyond the Stars*, I should note that this essay was also published in the 1940s as a part of *Notes of a Film Director*, a form that would have been available to the sources on which Robert Smithson came to rely. Sergei Eisenstein, *Notes of a Film Director*, Arts Library (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publ. House, 1946).

[6] Eisenstein, *Volume IV: Beyond the Stars, The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, 24.

be used for combating hostile ideology."[7] Indeed, throughout his writings the director

stressed the subversive ferocity of revolutionary cinema's *raison d'être*, likening the

medium to ammunition,[8] for example, or to a tractor forcibly "ploughing over the

audience's psyche with a class purpose in mind."[9] In both cases, Eisenstein took pride in

the medium's ability to initiate physiological shock in its viewers in a manner that recalls

Walter Benjamin's famous claim about an adjacent avant-garde: "The Dadaists turned the

artwork into a missile."[10] Almost universally amongst avant-gardes of the 1920s,

aesthetic transgression of bourgeois ideology would be understood in terms of such

violence.

Within Eisenstein's filmography, the canonical example of this aggressive and

weapon-like mode comes from his first film, *Strike* (fig. 1.5). Cutting between two series

of otherwise unrelated material—on the one hand documentary footage of a cow being

killed and butchered, on the other staged footage of fleeing strikers being hunted down

and brutally massacred by soldiers—Eisenstein designed the film's culminating sequence

to elicit a visceral response. The *abattoir* remains absolutely external, irrelevant, and

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[7] Eisenstein, 25.

[8] "The film's job is to make the audience 'help itself,' not to 'entertain' it. To grip, not to amuse. To furnish the audience with cartridges [i.e., of ammunition], not to dissipate the energies that it brought into the theater." Sergei Eisenstein, "A Course in Treatment [1932]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 84.

[9] Original emphasis removed. Sergei Eisenstein, "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form [1925]," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemona, Udine, Italy: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 127.

[10] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [1936]," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael William Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 267. For Eisenstein, likewise, every component in cinema should be "mathematically calculated to produce certain emotional shocks […]." Sergei Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions [1923]," in *The Film Sense*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 231.

extraneous with respect to the film's narrative, yet its presence in *Strike*'s climactic

scene, side-by-side with the dramatized massacre, not only metaphorically links the

laborers to cattle but also produces a physical sense of disgust which is profoundly anti-

bourgeois in inflection. Even before making the transition from theater to cinema

Eisenstein had theorized the mechanism behind such ideological violence as the

"attraction," by which he meant

> every aggressive moment [...] that brings to light in the spectator those senses or
> that psychology that influence his experience—every element that can be verified
> and mathematically calculated to produce certain emotional shocks in a proper
> order within the totality.[11]

The attraction specified an acute encounter with unmediated reality, in other words—

"where an eye is gouged out," for example," or "an arm or leg amputated before the very

eyes of the audience"—which helped accomplish what was, for Eisenstein, revolutionary

art's main task: the "guiding of the spectator into a desired direction (or desired

mood)."[12] To that end, Ivan's violent struggle against the aristocratic Boyars, his sinister

transgression of the aristocratic ideological order he inherited, emerges as an even more

direct model for the kind of revolutionary violence that was the medium's very

imperative.

* * *

Robert Smithson would have had ample opportunity throughout the 1960s to

assimilate the revolutionary Soviet cinema, Eisenstein's films above all.[13] Perhaps

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[11] Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions," 230–231.

[12] Eisenstein, 231, 230.

[13] See this dissertation's introduction for a lengthy discussion of the visibility of Eisenstein's films during the 1960s.

because its second part had only recently been released in the U.S., *Ivan the Terrible* in particular was virtually inescapable among the repertory circuit in the years before the artist drafted his essay in response to the film, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema." In it Smithson quoted directly from film critic Parker Tyler's *Classics of Foreign Film*, published a few years before and one of many resources dealing directly with Eisenstein to which the artist had ready access. "Eisenstein," Tyler had written, "knew perfectly well that 'Mephistofeles' and 'wild beast,' the labels he had given Ivan, also applied to *himself*, to the history of his career as man and film artist."[14] It was Eisenstein's private affinity for the historical personage that concerned Tyler most: the character of Ivan was a way for the filmmaker to work out his personal demons, to externalize his own loneliness and "dark isolation," to manifest his "perverse streak." Tyler's commentary was clearly informed by Marie Seton's 1952 biography of Eisenstein, another book Smithson owned which likewise had made much of the biographical correspondences between the two figures, even judging the director "the young Tsar of the new art of film."[15] There is no question, then, that Smithson understood Eisenstein's private sympathies for this misunderstood and hellishly cruel Tsar, as if Ivan—the character, the historical persona—

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[14] Parker Tyler, *Classics of the Foreign Film: A Pictorial Treasury* (London: Spring Books, 1966), 146. Originally published in 1962.

[15] "[A]s Sergei Mikhailovich had flung his challenge to the whole bourgeois world," Seton continues, drawing out the parallel, "so Ivan threw his challenge to the Boyars. As the one, so the other swearing to build a new world." Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 414, 417. Throughout her book, particularly the chapter on *Ivan*, Seton insists upon Eisenstein's self-identification with the historical autocrat and goes to great lengths to extract biographical resonances shared by the two men. Moreover, her book includes both photographs examined above of Eisenstein occupying the Tsar's throne, one of which also reappears in Tyler's book.

modeled the director's own transgressive naughtiness as a self-professed "bad child."[16]

And yet Smithson went one step further. Not only did he comprehend Eisenstein's

identification with Ivan and, transitively, with the Tsar's hellish cruelty; he also located

that hellish cruelty at the level of *Ivan*'s form, specifically in the excessive artifice

characterizing its highly theatrical performances. "Sergei M. Eisenstein in his

masterpiece *Ivan the Terrible* (part II) rejected the expressive naturalism of the

Stanislavsky Method in favor of the Meyerhold Method of 'automatic imitation,'"

Smithson explained:

> The actors are not encouraged to have *deep and profound feelings*, but rather they
> are *built* into the setting of the film. Each emotion is constructed rather than
> directed. Ivan is a set of manners, or a collection of devices.[17]

Acting was not configured as expressive, in other words, as if the actor faithfully

reflected emotions she was tasked with authentically experiencing. Instead, theatrical

performance appeared conventional and semiotic—an array of sign-like gestures merely

pieced together and built up, collage-like, in order to *construct* certain emotions. It was

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[16] In addition to Seton's and Tyler's books, Smithson's library contained several other important resources that would have informed his understanding of Eisenstein, including Eisenstein's collection of essays *Film Form* as well as a volume containing an interview with the director. See Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949). And Sergei Eisenstein, "Sergei Eisenstein," in *Interviews with Film Directors.*, by Andrew Sarris (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 131–139.

[17] Smithson, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman," 350. Smithson appears to have made the Meyerhold connection through Tyler's and Seton's books, both of whom describe Eisenstein's affiliation with that particular school (but neither of whom link it, as Smithson does, to the director's affiliation with the hellish personage of Ivan). Tyler, for instance, writes that "*Ivan*'s two parts attest the strictest application of the Meyerhold Method," citing the fact that the actors "are fabulously responsive human mechanisms, guided by an infallible dynamics of plastic design as well as human emotion." Whereas Seton explains that Meyerhold's theory of "bio-mechanics" "was in direct opposition to the emotional and psychological approach of Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre where internal, contemplative study of a role produced in the actor the natural externalized expression of emotion in his gestures, facial expression and voice inflexion." "All 'naturalism' was bourgeois," she continues, "and Meyerhold eliminated it entirely from his stage, except as a symbol." See Tyler, *Classics of the Foreign Film*, 148. And Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 47, 48.

precisely here, at the level of this non- or even anti-naturalistic approach to acting, that Eisenstein's "malevolent condition" manifested itself. For Smithson, therefore, Eisenstein's hellishness was not necessarily a function of his penchant for violent subject matter, nor was it exclusively congruent with his weaponizing of the medium. Instead, Smithson seemed to suggest, *Ivan*'s theatrical artifice constituted a sinister violation of some sacrosanct aesthetic imperative toward "expressive naturalism."

The Soviet director couldn't have agreed with Smithson's assessment more. After all, his most revolutionary contributions to cinema—which is to say, his most destructive, his most hellish, his most Ivan-like—had everything to do with artifice and techniques of construction that violated the terms of naturalism. For one thing, Eisenstein's famous theory of dialectical montage held above all that meaning did not somehow inhere in the filmic image but that instead, and like the juxtaposition of slaughterhouse and military force in *Strike*, meaning violently erupted at the point of collision between discontinuous element and shots. Like the combinatorial workings of hieroglyphs, Eisenstein thought— wherein "the picture for water and the picture of an eye signifies 'to weep,'" for example, or "a mouth + a child = 'to scream'"—meaning in cinema could be artificially produced over the disctontinuous interval of the cut.[18] Stereoscopy was another figure Eisenstein invoked as an analogue for the operations of montage, since the superimposition of two dissimilar images quite literally gave dialectical rise to a "new, higher dimension"[19]—a dimension, crucially, whose very existence did not precede the spectator but was

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[18] The juxtaposition "of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series," Eisenstein elaborates, "is to be regarded not as their sum, but as their product, i.e., as a value of another dimension, another degree; each, separately, corresponds to an *object*, to a fact, but their combination corresponds to a *concept*." Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," 29–30.

[19] Eisenstein, "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form," 49.

synthesized as a function of her perception. As with hieroglyphs and the stereoscope, so

for cinematic montage: "From the collision of two given factors," he wrote of the

juxtaposition of shots, "*arises* a concept."[20] Such a power to conjure specific meaning

from disparate images was not merely among cinema's capabilities; for Eisenstein, it lay

at the medium's very essence.

The result of Eisenstein's approach to montage was a model of cinematic space

that was not organic and continuous but heterogeneous, riven by violent discontinuity,

rupture, and dialectical conflict. It is for this reason that a film theorist like André Bazin,

committed to cinema's inherent indexical and evidentiary capacity, felt that Eisenstein's

approach to montage in fact violated the medium's imperative toward realism:

> Montage which we are constantly being told is the essence of cinema is, in this
> situation, the literary and anticinematic process *par excellence*. Essential cinema,
> seen for once in its pure state, on the contrary, is to be found in straightforward
> photographic respect for the unity of space.[21]

If, in other words, Eisenstein's aesthetic was metaphorical and associational—if it had

"an abstract result, none of the concrete elements of which are to be found in the

premises"[22]—Bazin favored a cinema that "sends us back to reality,"[23] a cinema that

would not stop at the illusory surface of the screen but that insisted upon the concrete

actuality and integrity of the profilmic event. Indeed, such belonged to the medium's very

destiny—that cinema might "satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our

obsession with realism," as if the apotheosis of mankind's aesthetic ambitions to

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[20] Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," 37.

[21] André Bazin, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," in *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 46.

[22] André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 26.

[23] Bazin, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," 45.

faithfully render the world around it.[24] For Bazin, therefore, the very act of montage, to say nothing of the highly artificial model advanced by the Soviet school, "run[s] the risk of threatening the very ontology of the cinematographic tale."[25]

If Eisenstein's approach to montage was radically discontinuous and textual in its transgression of cinematic naturalism and the unity of profilmic space, the same was true of his approach to acting, itself a locus for montage of a different sort. Eisenstein conceived of performances as similarly heterogeneous entities, logically pieced together from an inventory of conventional gestures.[26] According to Stanislavski's method (the one Smithson had disparaged as expressive), "the actor must feel his role," Eisenstein

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[24] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 12.

[25] Bazin, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," 48. The aforementioned sequence in *Strike* is one example of the "metaphorical" effect disparaged by Bazin. Another instance which comes from *Ivan* testifies to the plasticity of both profilmic space *and* time made possible by montage. As Annette Michelson explains of the coronation sequence from Part I, Eisenstein cuts between close-ups of Ivan being showered with gold coins and reverse shots of spectators in such a way that a short act (i.e., the dumping of coins) is unrealistically lengthened, as if the reservoir of gold coins were endless. This repeats earlier usages of similar techniques in *October* (the repeated lifting of the bridge) and *Potemkin* (the distended Odessa Steps sequence) used to similarly dilate time and draw emphasis. See *Annette Michelson Lecture on Sergei Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible*, 1975, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGNgzL0_V3Y.

The Eisenstein/Bazin debates are canonical in film studies, but it is worth noting, too, that Bazin's ideas were only becoming current to an English-speaking readership at precisely the moment that Smithson was reflecting on Eisenstein. The edited volume that includes both "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage" and "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" first appeared in English translation in 1967. Annette Michelson met the publication with a certain amount of ambivalence, for while it reflected a conservative and recognizably modernist position in its various ontological obsessions, she also admired it as an exemplar of rigorous film criticism, which, as I mentioned in this dissertation's Introduction, she found desperately lacking in this country. For Michelson's review of the English translation of Bazin's *What is Cinema?*, see Michelson, "What Is Cinema?"

[26] To that end, Eisenstein admired Japanese Kabuki theater, where so much of the "acting" involved changes of make-up and costume that functioned like montage. Of a situation where "the actor must change from drunkenness to madness," for instance, Eisenstein explains: "This transition is solved by a mechanical cut. And a change in the arsenal of grease-paint colors on his face, emphasizing those streaks whose duty it is to fulfill the expression of a higher intensity than those used in his previous make-up." Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," 42.

explained in a lecture transcribed by Seton and published in her biography. "The actors

think of material which is additional to their role, in order to produce a state of feeling."

Meyerhold's "conventional theater," on the other hand, assumed that "the state of feeling

has no meaning." Elaborating further, Eisenstein explained that

> Meyerhold's actors complain that they are taught to do things which they do not feel. They say they are empty. One of the actors of the Theatre of Revolution said that Meyerhold instructed (when he directed there): "Say 'mother' louder." In contrast to this [Stanislavski's] Art Theatre would say "Say 'mother' as if she were a long way off."[27]

The actor does not *express* an emotion, in other words; there is no "as if" in the

Meyerholdian theater. Instead, assisted by cinematic montage, the actor forms an emotion

like a sentence, builds it up, montage-like, from a series of discontinuous gestures.

"Without straining to act the feeling itself," Eisenstein concluded elsewhere in his

writings, "it is successfully evoked by the assembly and juxtaposition of deliberately

selected details."[28] Little wonder that *Ivan* in particular aroused such loathing amongst

early critics. "How had Eisenstein come to fashion every character like a marionette?"

one incredulous friend of the director demanded after seeing the film. "What was the

purpose of such stylized movements and formal make-up?"[29]

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[27] Sergei Eisenstein, "Excerpts from Eisenstein's Lectures at the Institute of Cinematography, Autumn 1934," in *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A Biography*, by Marie Seton (London: Bodley Head, 1952), 487, 88. Eisenstein's above commentary on the distinction between Meyerhold and Stanislavski is taken from lecture notes published in Seton's biography on the filmmaker, thus it would have been readily accessible to Smithson. Elsewhere Eisenstein notes the "dynamicism" of his method, a dynamicism that "rests primarily in the fact that the desired image is *not fixed or ready-made, but arises—is born*. The image planned by author, director and actor is concretized by them in separate representational elements, and is assembled—again and finally—in the spectator's perception." Eisenstein, "Word and Image," 31.

[28] Eisenstein, "Word and Image," 42.

[29] Made by Maxim Shtraukh to Seton, this comment appears in her biography of Eisenstein. Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 426.

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Only a few years after Smithson, Roland Barthes also turned to *Ivan the Terrible*. In his 1970 essay "The Third Meaning," first published in English translation in a 1973 special issue of *Artforum* devoted, fittingly, to Eisenstein, Barthes described the peculiar nature of the film still, in particular what he called its "obtuse" or "third" meaning. Temporarily released from the flow of movement and diegesis that fill it constantly and ineluctably with meaning, Barthes argued, the film still not only communicates the expected information about what it is we are looking at and how it relates to the thematic and narrative content of the film (the first and second levels of meaning, respectively); it also discloses a supplemental "third meaning" in its revelation of details that are unintentional and incidental to the film, its characters, its story. Examining one such still from Ivan's coronation sequence in Part I (fig. 1.6), for example, Barthes noted

> a certain compactness of the courtiers' make-up, thick and insistent for the one, smooth and distinguished for the other; the former's 'stupid' nose, the latter's finely traced eyebrows, his lank blondness, his faded, pale complexion, the affecting flatness of his hairstyle suggestive of a wig, the touching-up with chalky foundation talc, with face powder.[30]

The "third meaning" Barthes mused, as if in summary, "has something to do with disguise."[31] To the extent that such "signifying accidents" involved not the film's diegetic world but, in this case, a revelation of its artificial infrastructure and its various disguises, they exhibited an anti- or counter-narrative force. What was "obtuse" about this inventory of observations was that it was somehow uncomprehending, even stupid, with respect to the scene and the film to which the still belonged; that, like the rounding of an obtuse

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[30] Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 53.

[31] Barthes, 58.

angle, it blunted the larger narrative meaning to which the still surely contributed.

That Barthes meditated specifically upon Eisenstein was no accident. As we have seen, the director viewed montage as a tool for tightly orchestrating meaning, for "guiding […] the spectator into a desired direction." For Barthes the same was true of Eisenstein's very compositions and framing, which similarly emphasized and re-emphasized meaning in a way that became monolithic. Thus for Barthes "the Eisensteinian meaning devastates ambiguity"; his cinema "chooses the meaning, imposes it, hammers it home."[32] And yet, when stopped, even Eisenstein's films—*especially* Eisenstein's films—proliferated in incidental, ambiguous, and stupid detail nonetheless. To the degree that this "third meaning" consisted of so many signifiers without signifieds, then; to the degree that it provided access to form emptied of content, the film still ultimately displaced even the most monolithic and overwrought of meaning as it put us in contact, instead, with the kinds of "signifying accidents" preserved exclusively by the medium of photography.

Of course, a *film* is not the same as a *still*, no matter how arrestingly theatrical, thus any such "third meaning," at least as Barthes conceived it, remains theoretically unavailable as long as the film advances. All the same, Barthes's choice of film is striking, since, as Smithson had already alerted us, *Ivan*'s artifice is conspicuous, thick, and gratuitous even without halting its forward progress. Moreover, Smithson suggested

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[32] Barthes describes this emphasis in terms of Eisenstein's "decorativism": richly evocative, the director's compositions suggest certain emotions which are then redoubled "decoratively" elsewhere within the composition. Citing an example from *Potemkin*, Barthes reads grief and sadness into one image of two mourners—"the bowed heads, the expressions of suffering, the hand over the mouth stifling a sob"—which is then reiterated in the arrangement of their hands "in a delicate, maternal, floral ascension towards the face." In other words, each element within a given *mise en scène* reflects and re-reflects the same meaning, a meaning which "is always, in Eisenstein, the revolution." Barthes, 56.

that the degree of *Ivan*'s illusionism was such that it "calls attention to the physical elements of illusion" in the manner of Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect, as if Eisenstein's theatricality might on its own approximate the anti-narrative distanciation ordinarily reserved for the still. Whether in art or in film, such illusionistic excesses encouraged what Smithson described as a "turning away" from the work's center, from its diegesis, from its denotative meaning. As spectators, therefore, we dwell not within a work such as *Ivan* but at its margins, absorbed not by content but distracted by the surplus of material and form.

Stopped, then, or in flux—in Barthes's and Smithson's assessments we are facing a condition in which anti-narrative excess initiates a dialectical suspension between diegetic absorption and critical distance. Certainly in its stills but perhaps also in its performances *Ivan* seems to disclose itself, its very art, to the viewer. At stake for Barthes was not only the essentially photographic condition of cinema, which made possible the still's proliferation of "obtuse meanings," but also what he described, around the same time, as the "birth of the reader." By virtue of its anti-narrative momentum, the completely incidental and unplanned behavior of the still had a tendency to hold at bay the film's "author" and her intention, enabling instead a liberated, non-hierarchical descent into its textuality.[33] At stake for Smithson, on the other hand, was an author's aesthetic decision. In knowingly violating the absorptive conditions of naturalism and in fully disclosing its otherwise self-effacing illusionism, a film like *Ivan* performed a hellish subversion of expressive naturalism. All art relies upon deceitful illusionism of one form or another, Smithson would surely admit; what was infernal about Eisenstein,

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[33] Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author [1968]," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 142–48.

then—what Smithson read into the filmmaker's self-identification with the devilish Ivan—was a refusal to deny that sinful and corrupt condition in favor of openly reveling in it.

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Here is Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck*, the quintessential mannerist masterpiece (fig. 1.7). In his 1965 book on the subject of mannerism, Arnold Hauser described the painting in terms that would be familiar to any student of art history:

> [I]t shows the most exaggerated elongation of forms, the slenderest of bodies, the longest legs and narrowest hands, the most sensitive female face and the most delicately modeled throat, and includes the most irrational combination of subjects, the most disparate proportions, and the most unintegrated representation of space. No pictorial element seems to fit with any other, no figure behaves in accordance with the laws of nature, no object fulfils [*sic*] the function normally ascribed to it. It is impossible to tell whether the Virgin is sitting, or standing, or leaning against a support which may be a throne. The laws of gravity would cause the child to slip from her knees immediately, and there is no knowing whether she is looking at the child or is exclusively preoccupied with herself and her own thoughts.[34]

The impossible physiognomies and distended bodies, the absurd and nonsensical setting, the disunified composition—this was hardly the window onto the world famously conjectured by Leon Battista Alberti, to say the least. In its defiant divergence from nature and its revolt against Renaissance ideals of compositional harmony, Parmigianino's *Madonna* exemplified the very different mannerist sensibility. It was a "tormented art," Hauser wrote, that "deliberately diverged from nature" and that was consequently "denounced and decried for its insincerity and artificiality."[35]

Smithson's essay on *Ivan the Terrible* directly invoked Parmigianino's famous

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[34] Hauser, *Mannerism*, 206.

[35] Hauser, 7, 4.

Madonna, for the artist understood that something about Eisenstein's approach to acting resembled the divergence from nature staged centuries earlier by mannerist painters. By virtue of its very title and its allusions to the "paradoxes of conduct in mannerism as reflected in the cinema," the essay directly identified mannerism with a wider tendency towards over-the-top artifice predominant in recent cinema.[36] When Smithson applauded the Virgin's eyeless visage, her "terrible snake-like glance that seems to turn her child to ice," and the diminutive "alienated Saint" at bottom right, who "turns away from the 'monster'" as if in disgust, we are therefore meant to sense that Parmigianino's decisive repudiation of nature had resurfaced in cinematic performances that similarly refused illusory naturalism, that remained skeptical of the virtue of expression.[37] Like *Ivan*'s performances, moreover—performances in which, to adopt Eisenstein's language from earlier, emotions were "concretized" into discrete gestures and "assembled" in the moment of perception—the disparate pictorial elements in a mannerist picture similarly adhered in a way that can only be described as textual. As such, Smithson suggested, the mannerist picture was not passively seen or recognized so much as actively read. If

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[36] Alongside *Ivan*, Smithson invokes films like Andy Warhol's *My Hustler* (1965), Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), *The Birds* (1963), and *Torn Curtain* (1966), and Roger Corman's *The Trip* (1967). Completed in 1946, *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, seems not to fit chronologically with such a list of films, however it is important to remember its belated reception, which suggests that it was, for Smithson, still recent. While it exceeds the scope of the present chapter, it bears mentioning that so much of Smithson's cinematic taste, especially when it came to science-fiction and horror B-movies, can be productively understood in terms of his mannerist affiliation. As Lawrence Alloway wrote of Smithson's fondness for *The Man from Planet X* (1951), for example, "The movie's incomplete illusion troubled me: my taste was for more expensive films and also for mainline pro-technological science fiction, which had no place in Smithson's library. What he liked about *The Man from Planet X*, and other movies of the genre, was its artificiality, the fact that its conventions could be seen falling apart as one watched the actors in an alien suit totter about the diminutive, foggy set." Subordinating narrative to the palpable opacity of the illusion, such films seemed to do unintentionally what Eisensteinian montage accomplished intentionally. Lawrence Alloway, "Sites/Nonsites," in *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, by Robert Hobbs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 44.

[37] Smithson, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman," 352.

Parmigianino's *Madonna* was, as Smithson claimed, an "infernal abstraction," it was

therefore due not to its refusal to signify (abstraction in the sense of non-representation)

but rather to its exclusive and excessive concern with signification, palpable in its

decisive rejection of nature. As he put it, "it derives from the mind and not sensations."[38]

As I alluded to at the outset of this dissertation, Smithson's concern with

mannerism was not isolated to his essay on *Ivan* but was in fact a rather serious

preoccupation, whose themes the artist explored in no less than nine essays, most never

published, that date almost exclusively to this period of 1966-67.[39] It is from one of these,

for instance, that we receive Smithson's unforgettably visceral description of

Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, which, even more so than his reading of Parmigianino,

captured not only mannerism's divergence from nature but also the hellishness that

resulted (fig. 1.8). Offered up in gleeful riposte to Clement Greenberg, who had once

lamented Michelangelo's "unnaturalistic exaggerations and distortions," Smithson

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[38] Smithson, 352.

[39] At the moment of around 1966–67, Smithson drafted the following six essays, which cohere around their joint reflections upon mannerism and its anti-expressive, anti-humanist, and anti-idealist resonances: "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture," "Abstract Mannerism," "The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics," "A Refutation of Historical Humanism," "Pointless Vanishing Points," and, of course, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of the Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema," all anthologized in Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack D. Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). While these essays on and around mannerism largely seem preparatory and exploratory given that they were never published, the artist did invoke the term publicly in at least three other cases, all relatively brief: in 1965, he favorably described Donald Judd's work as mannerist ("Donald Judd"); in 1966 he linked Robert Morris and Duchamp to mannerism ("Entropy and the New Monuments"); and, in his October 1967 rebuttal to Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood," which I will be discussing below, he invoked the language of mannerism in accusing Fried of unwittingly parodying himself ("Letter to the Editor").

It is worth noting here that Smithson's interest in mannerism, while striking, is not entirely exceptional. Peter Hutchinson, for example, one of Smithson's occasional interlocutors of the time, also sensed an affinity between mannerism and minimalist developments, which he published in September 1966. See Peter Hutchinson, "Mannerism in the Abstract," *Art and Artists*, September 1966.

described the fresco's "sinking city of muscles" as

> submerge[ing] the mind in a somnolence so awful that no escape is possible. […]
> Never has stagnation been more total. Weariness turns into humorous levels of
> moribund grandeur. Every creature undergoes incessant punishment, because of
> the enormous weight of this ironclad universe. Bodies are swollen out of
> proportion, fattened like hogs, they fall downward toward fetid swamps. Heaven
> becomes a pigsty, a dirt enclosure completely airless, flooded with bilge water—
> with skies of dusty tar. Muscles like enormous worms, and polypi fade under a
> sickly ashen light. […] The stars are replaced with twisted mountains of flesh,
> there even evil is corrupted. It all looks so disgusting…so contemptible—a tidal
> wave of infinite carnality, a fleshy mess pouring from heaven (which is no
> place).[40]

This from an image largely devoted to the representation of the saved ascending towards

celestial firmament! Recalling Parmigianino's "infernal abstraction," moreover, Smithson

asserted that Michelangelo achieved such "corruption," such "monstrosities," precisely

because he "did not work from nature" but instead "invented an abstract cosmological

system that he peopled with gods and demons that were anything but real."[41] At stake for

Smithson was not only a subversive inversion of Christian doctrine—heaven transformed

into a pigsty—but also a resulting sense of dark humor making it impossible to see the

fresco as anything but its underlying artifice. The same would be true of Eisenstein's

directorial approach: in declining Stanislavski's "expressive naturalism," Eisenstein

delivered performances that Smithson viewed as similarly "abstract," "monstrous," and

"corrupt." Heaven may not have become a pigsty exactly, but surely the Tsar's throne,

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[40] Robert Smithson, "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture [1966–67]," in *Robert
Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press,
1996), 347, 348. Smithson's essay ostensibly responds to Clement Greenberg, cited at its outset,
who claimed the following in "Modernist Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past" (1952): "However, what
really spoils Michelangelo's sculpture is not so much its naturalism as, on the contrary, its
unnaturalistic exaggerations and distortions, which place themselves more in the context of
pictorial illusion than in that of sculptural self-evidence." Clement Greenberg, "Modernist
Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 161.

[41] Smithson, "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture," 346.

the earthly seat of God's power, was transformed into an ominous vision of hell,

populated not by "real people" so much as opaque and palpable performances. "Could it

be," Smithson mused in his essay on Michelangelo, "that great art has a 'knowledge' of

corruption, while 'natural' art is innocent of its own corruption because it is mindless and

idealess?"[42]

* * *

Greenberg's distaste for Michelangelo was just the tip of the iceberg. Not unlike

Ivan's icy reception, mannerism too had been long besieged by epithets alleging various

violations of good taste and naturalistic aesthetic values. Erwin Panofsky, for one,

denigrated mannerism's "artificial world" as "complicated," "unresolved and

unresolvable," "distorted and twisted," "convulsive."[43] Exemplars of mannerist sculpture

in particular seemed to exhaust him for their dynamic refusal to consolidate a single

viewing position and in aspiring, instead, to the *figura serpentinata*:

> [A] Manneristic statue, far from allowing the beholder's eye to rest upon one
> predominant and satisfactory view, "seems gradually to turn round so as to
> display, not one view but a hundred or more," to quote Benvenuto Cellini, one of
> the chief representatives of this style. Each of these views being just as interesting
> and, on the other hand, just as "incomplete" as the other, the beholder feels indeed
> compelled to circulate around the statue.[44]

Heinrich Wölfflin was even less patient. "Nobody would wish to make Michelangelo

personally responsible for what happened to Central Italian art," he began in an

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[42] Smithson, 346.

[43] Erwin Panofsky, *Three Essays on Style*, ed. Irving Lavin (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 38, 23, 24.

[44] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, 1st Harper torchbook ed., Harper Torchbooks. Academy Library ; TB1077 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 175.

unmistakable tone of mourning:

> Spaciousness and beauty of proportion became alien concepts; the feeling for the potentialities of a plane surface or spatial area became completely atrophied. Painters began to rival one another in the atrocious overcrowding of canvases, in a dissolution of forms which deliberately sought a contradiction between the amount of space available and the objects in it. […] Art became completely formalised and no longer paid any attention to nature, constructing motives of movement according to personal formulae and making of the human body a purely schematic machine of joints and muscles.[45]

For Wölfflin, as for Panofsky, "the mediocrities of Mannerism" thus amounted to nothing but the decay and degeneration of a superior aesthetic sensibility grounded in the empirical study of nature and ideals of beauty, harmony, symmetry, and order.[46]

Mannerism's fate changed by the 1960s, however, when the subject's art historical reappraisal had become unavoidable. "One of the notable events in the art-world in the last few years," John Shearman remarked in his 1967 book on the subject, "is that Mannerism has again become fashionable."[47] The first lines of Hauser's Marxist treatment of the subject, published two years prior, likewise asserted "the rehabilitation of a misunderstood or neglected style."[48] Smithson owned and evidently studied both books, along with several others published in the 1960s, all of which partook of the subject's revaluation.[49] What these studies share is a dramatic shift in criteria: displacing

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[45] Heinrich Wölfflin, *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, trans. Peter and Linda Murray (London: Phaidon, 1952), 202.

[46] While it remains immaterial to my argument, I note that Smithson's library did include volumes that would have manifested this point of view, including Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology*, cited above.

[47] John K. G. Shearman, *Mannerism* (New York: Penguin, 1967), 11. While his book did not appear until 1967, Shearman's prefatory note is dated to 1965, suggesting that a revival of mannerism was already visible by that earlier moment.

[48] Hauser, *Mannerism*, 3.

[49] In addition to Hauser's and Shearman's books, Smithson's library contained the following studies of mannerism, all of which, significantly, appeared during or immediately preceding the

conventional standards of artistic achievement—naturalism, beauty, harmony—art

historians like Shearman and Hauser evaluated mannerism according to new questions of

art's function, its perceptual and physiological effects, and its historical situation at a

moment of sociopolitical crisis. As a result the very terms of mannerism's erstwhile

dismissal as artificial, complicated, distorted, and convulsive were recoded as positive.

One oft-lauded characteristic of the mannerist picture in this 1960s wave of

scholarship, for instance, concerned its compositions. Dynamic, irrational, crowded,

unclear—such compositional attributes were decisively at odds with Renaissance

aspirations to pictorial (and thus narrative) clarity. "A mannerist work of art […] is no

holy of holies you enter in solemn awe and reverence," Hauser wrote. "[I]t is a labyrinth

you lose yourself in and do not seek to escape from."[50] The meandering and associative,

even distracted, descriptions of mannerist masterpieces—Smithson on Michelangelo's

Last Judgment or Hauser on Parmigianino's *Madonna*, to name two we have seen—

reflect this decentered dynamicism. Frequently described as dizzying, nauseating, and

repulsive, moreover, such compositions were deemed successful by this wave of art

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moment of Smithson's infatuation with the topic: Giuliano Briganti, *Italian Mannerism*, trans. Margaret Kunzle (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962). Franzsepp Würtenberger, *Mannerism: The European Style of the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Michael Heron (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1963). And Daniel B. Rowland, *Mannerism: Style and Mood, an Anatomy of Four Works in Three Art Forms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964). An earlier example includes Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature, 1400-1700* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955). I take Hauser's "rehabilitation of mannerism" to be particularly relevant here, given that his study (like Smithson's own interest in the subject) is motivated by certain "mannerist" developments in more recent aesthetic production. He cites in particular Surrealism: "The path that led to the revaluation of mannerism was laid by modern expressionism, surrealism, and abstract art, without which its spirit would have remained basically unintelligible." Hauser's tendency to see mannerism less as a movement than an anti-establishment sensibility, logic, or set of operations that recurred in the twentieth century would certainly have been attractive to Smithson, who, as we will see, appears to have been seeking alternatives to dogmatic modernism.

[50] Hauser, *Mannerism*, 25.

historians precisely for their physiological effects. Of the "unattractive, inhospitable,

uncomfortable" *Last Judgment*, for instance, Hauser wrote that the fresco "makes a cold

and rigid, severe and repellent impression, and does nothing whatever to satisfy the

spectator's desire for a sense of Utopian happiness or to fulfil [*sic*] his dream of

harmony."[51] In another evident favorite resource of Smithson's, Wylie Sypher put it

similarly, arguing that

> Mannerism is experiment with many techniques of disproportion and disturbed
> balance; with zigzag, spiral, shuttling motion; with space like a vortex or alley;
> with oblique or mobile points of view and strange—even abnormal—perspectives
> that yield approximations rather than certainties.[52]

However, Daniel Rowland's account of the mannerism's physiological consequences

made the strongest claim of all, contending of Pontormo's works that

> the eye can never come to rest on anything, but is kept constantly traveling around
> and around the composition following the curving lines of drapery until a sense of
> nausea is produced. Just as one feels nauseous at sea when motion is constant and
> there is no firm place to rest, so Pontormo produces a kind of visual nausea.[53]

Thus art historians of this generation revalued not only compositional turmoil and

incoherence but also its visceral spectatorial effects.

For Shearman, such transformations in aesthetic ambition pointed to mannerism's

"confident assertion of the artist's right […] to make something that was first and last a

work of art."[54] It was, in other words, a profoundly self-conscious art, aware of its

condition as such and openly engaging its own history and conventionality. That such

self-consciousness emerged during a moment of political upheaval in the early sixteenth

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[51] Hauser, 167, 172.

[52] Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature, 1400-1700*,
116–7.

[53] Rowland, *Mannerism*, 15.

[54] Shearman, *Mannerism*, 171.

century, moreover—oft-cited are events like the plague in 1520s Florence, its fall to siege in 1530, and the sack of Rome in 1527[55]—led Hauser in particular to interpret mannerism's stylistic transformations as nothing less than aesthetic revolution. If Renaissance aesthetics betrayed a utopian outlook by virtue of its naturalistic vision of a beautiful, ordered, and harmonious world, the emergence of a mannerist sensibility gave the lie to such fallacious "fictions" and "wish-dreams": "[F]aith in man collapsed," Hauser wrote, "and out of the ruins there arose the anti-humanist spirit of the Reformation, of Machiavellism, and of the mannerist sense of life."[56] Mannerism did not entail some technical devolution or stylistic regression, in other words, as if some improbable lapse in sixteenth-century artists' abilities to accurately render the world around them. Like a brand of aesthetic diabolism, it instead specified an eruption of secular and skeptical self-consciousness, which violently and grotesquely revolted against a reigning aesthetic order whose underlying idealistic and humanistic morals could no longer be sustained. Hence, Hauser wrote, mannerism offered "a much truer reflection of the age than the ostentatious peace, harmony, and beauty of the classics."[57]

* * *

In the early 1960s, years before Smithson initiated his private reflections upon mannerism, his work bore important resemblances to this sixteenth-century idiom nonetheless. From hermaphroditic figures and excretory subject matter to the explicit pilfering of images from mannerist masterpieces, Smithson's early pen-and-ink drawings

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[55] See, for instance, Rowland, *Mannerism*, 3.

[56] Hauser, *Mannerism*, 8.

[57] Hauser, 7.

openly adopted figuration while explicitly jettisoning any fidelity to human physiognomy or studied, empirical nature. Surely a dizzying and busy drawing like *Conversion* (1961), for instance, bears no naturalistic pretenses whatsoever, conjuring forth a host of angelic nudes, stigmatic Christs, and various flora, beasts, and amoebae, all of which emanate upwards in a chaotic and dynamic tangle (fig. 1.9). Their source appears to be a mad friar at lower right, who cohabits a sepulchrous realm with a hermaphroditic demon and whose lecherous gaze has congealed into some vile protozoa discharging itself from his eye socket. Yet the nature of the promised "conversion" remains unclear as our gaze spirals endlessly through the pictorial detritus. *Untitled [Second Stage Injector]* (1963) similarly features hermaphroditic nudes, a limbless torso whose breasts squelch sludge, homoerotic seraphs pumping gas, and a demonic figure enwrapped by a serpent devouring its genitals (this last one borrowed directly from Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*) (fig. 1.10).[58] All of this, moreover, is perversely, profanely, juxtaposed with a collaged image of a machine whose presence turns pornographic as two metallic devices (or is it three?) go at it. To cite a third and particularly exquisite specimen, consider *Untitled [Pink Linoleum Center]* (1964) and its depraved cast of cartouche characters (fig. 1.11). Performing mannerism's quintessential turn away from the center (i.e., the absorptive illusion) and toward the periphery (i.e., the repulsive opacity of its facture)—a feature of these early works that, as I discuss in Chapter 2, anticipates the center/periphery dialectic that will be at stake in the artist's nonsites[59]—*Pink Linoleum Center* deflects attention away from the

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[58] "A snake chewing a penis" is how Smithson succinctly and genially described this "hilarious" moment in Michelangelo's fresco. Smithson, "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture," 348.

[59] I follow Eugenie Tsai here, who points out that such works prefigure Smithson's site/nonsite dialectic, which similarly confuse center and periphery and suggest that the work is always where

pink void where we expect the work to unfold and toward the simultaneously repulsive

and alluring nudes, evidently purloined from the pages of erotic magazines, that adorn its

literal perimeter. There is the voluptuous goddess reclining seductively on a jagged,

empurpled crystalline bed; the lollipop-eating hunk sitting spread-eagle atop some vile,

cloacal effluvium; the twink to the right standing atop a pink glob of sputum and casually

urinating into a cup held by a nude angel below, himself standing atop a green amoeba-

like mass sprouting the occasional tuft of hair; and finally, among the more inoffensive

characters, the buxom cowgirl, a discomfiting and unholy union of angel and porn star.

"The renaissance used nudity without much self-consciousness," Wylie Sypher wrote in a

passage that must have resonated with Smithson. "But mannerism discovered the more

insidious pleasures of nakedness—which is self-conscious nudity; and it used nakedness

insolently, provokingly, with intent to shock or to mock."[60] Rendered at different scales

and inhabiting the nonspace of the work's periphery, the figures inhabiting these pictorial

worlds contribute not to a static scene but instead seem designed to offer temporary

landing points for our carnalized gaze, excited by both arousal and disgust, as if these

alternating visceral responses were the engine that might keep our gaze moving about the

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we are not. Eugenie Tsai, *Robert Smithson Unearthed : Drawings, Collages, Writings*, Columbia Studies on Art ; No. 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 32. As Smithson later explained of his concern with this dynamic in the context of his nonsites: "I was interested in the fringes around these areas. […] I found that I was dealing not so much with the center of things but with the peripheries. So that I became very interested in that whole dialogue between, let's say, the circumference and the middle and how those two things operated together." Smithson and Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution," 295.

[60] Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature, 1400-1700*, 110.

perimeter in the "ceaseless motion" so often attributed to the mannerist composition.[61]

Now, while I am not dealing here with Smithson's most explicitly Christian drawings and paintings of around 1960–61, the religious iconography that recurs in works such as *Conversion*, *Second Stage Injector*, and *Pink Linoleum Center* has been read as continuous with many of the artist's seemingly sincere theological preoccupations. Indeed, ever since Eugenie Tsai's 1991 recovery of Smithson's early work, there have been sporadic attempts to consolidate a Catholic Smithson, which is perhaps unavoidable given the frankly unexpected proliferation of religious imagery and themes in his work during the late 1950s and early '60s, to say nothing of the disarmingly earnest professions of faith found throughout his personal correspondence. At the risk of oversimplifying this literature, scholars such as Tsai, Jennifer Roberts, and most recently Thomas Crow have shared a desire not only to take seriously Smithson's biographical embrace of Catholicism but also to produce continuity between these ostensibly anomalous early concerns and his "mature" work.[62] While I do not dispute the sincerity of Smithson's piety exactly, the enthusiastic resacralization of his work seems to ignore the ways in which its religious themes are consistently violated and invaded by the erotic,

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[61] "Mannerism is characterized by a lack of focus, a condition of unstable equilibrium," Daniel Rowland explains. "The result is that the eye […] remains in ceaseless but apparently aimless motion, and a feeling of seasickness, as Alfred Einstein called it, is the result." Rowland, *Mannerism*, 78.

[62] Tsai, for example, writes that Smithson's early work was "seminal, crucial to an understanding of his entire artistic production." For Roberts, the artist's early work introduced themes of timelessness and tranquility that would change over the course of his practice "from Christian revelation to crystallography and four-dimensional geometry, to a rhetoric of exhaustion or acedia, and to a fractal aesthetics locked in recursive symmetries." And Crow argues that religious themes run through the artist's entire body of work, even suggesting that a work like *Spiral Jetty* constituted a form of Christianity by other means. For Tsai's early recovery of Smithson's early work, see Tsai, *Robert Smithson Unearthed*. For Roberts's account, see Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History*. And for Crow's, see Thomas E. Crow, *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art* (Sydney: University Of Sydney, 2017).

the carnal, the profane. Perhaps it could be argued, as Tsai did, that this strange collision of subject matter merely speaks to the "conflict of spirit" the artist felt in a secularizing and faithless world, or that, as Roberts has allowed, it simply reflected Smithson's "engagement with the lugubrious premonitions of Christian mystics bemoaning a fallen world," putting "divinity and modernity into an antagonistic, even painful, juxtaposition."[63] Yet what Smithson's later preoccupation with mannerism makes palpable are the ways in which his invocation of religion also appears strategic, self-conscious, and parodic, particularly in its naughty juxtaposition with the commodity culture of the present and its depraved erotic detritus. To read his mannerist concerns of around 1966–67 back upon his work from earlier in that decade, in other words—to see that early work as thinking through, theorizing, and prefiguring many of those same concerns—invites us to occupy the other end of the dialectic in prioritizing not the pious Smithson but his hellishly corrupt counterpart. More than this, to occupy the "other side of the dialectic" of course also means acknowledging that there is a dialectic at all: As other critics have suggested, the privileging of Smithson's Catholicism as a vehicle for the production of continuity across his entire *oeuvre* has tended to obscure its otherwise radical breaks, particularly between his "early" and "mature" work.[64] This dissertation, on the other hand, is structured around a series of dialectical transformations that occur throughout his practice, which, simply put, cannot tolerate any static monolith, least of all God Himself.

[63] Tsai, *Robert Smithson Unearthed*, 16. Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History*, 15, 16.

[64] As George Baker writes, the sacralization of Smithson "trivializes the formal break that Smithson makes from his early lyrical and expressionist concerns to his mature work in favor of a supposed continuity of 'theme.'" Baker, "The Cinema Model," 85.

While Smithson's recourse to unprecious pen-and-ink works on paper, to a figurative idiom pushed to the point of cartoonish caricature, occurred in a biographical moment of faith, then, the artist's mannerist preoccupations remind us that they also occurred at a moment when figuration was not particularly tolerated. The vision of modernism promulgated by Clement Greenberg above all understood painting as a self-critical inquiry into its own conditions. "Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art," Greenberg explained in "Modernist Painting," the 1960 essay largely seen as culminating his depoliticized vision of medium-specific modernism.[65] "All recognizable entities […] exist in three-dimensional space, and the barest suggestion of a recognizable entity suffices to call up associations of that kind of space."[66] In other words, any mimetic fragment in painting violated its medium-specific mandate: the very whiff of illusionistic representation distracted from the optical revelation of painting's essential flatness. Needless to say, Smithson belonged to a generation that refused Greenberg's dogmatic modernism.[67] And from this perspective, Smithson's early drawings manifest a logical form of aesthetic protest against the hegemonic condition he inherited. His work staged not just a return to figuration but one whose parodic, over-the-top, licentious nature encoded its knowing self-consciousness.

Smithson's pictorial world of eroticized angels and demented clergy disappeared

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[65] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting [1960]," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. Four: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 86.

[66] Greenberg, 88.

[67] The hegemonic discourse of Greenberg and Fried confronted every artist of Smithson's generation, but it was particularly irksome to him. Nancy Holt is quoted as saying that Greenberg was an "obsession" of Smithson's, for example. As quoted in Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, 64.

by around 1964 in concert with the emergence of his "mature" work—sculptural

abstractions made of metal, plastic, and Plexiglas surely more in step with the sculptural

idiom that would come to be called minimalism.[68] And yet his concerns with anti-

naturalistic and hellish excess by no means also disappeared but only continued in his

prolific reflections upon mannerism. Indeed, the anti-modernist critique that remained

largely implicit in his figurative drawings of the early 1960s became explicit in his essays

of 1966–67, which not only explored mannerism's logic but invoked its precedent as a

means of disparaging the Abstract Expressionist paradigm, which he presciently accused

of an illusory naturalism lingering beneath its non-representational forms. Greenbergian

modernism had called for the abolition of mimesis and figuration in favor of art that was

transparent about conditions specific to its medium, however Smithson knew that this

abolition was only apparent, that the "abstract" canvases in fact trafficked in old humanist

mores through their very commitment to the idea of *expression*. "All expressive art is

representational," Smithson wrote in one essay. Expressionism, he continued in another,

"is merely realistic naturalism without any figures."[69]

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[68] Ever since Robert Hobbs's 1981 monograph on the artist, the literature has almost exclusively focused on Smithson's "mature" abstract sculptural work after 1964. The term itself belongs to Smithson, who helped initiate this convention, explaining towards the end of his brief career, "I would say that I began to function as a conscious artist around 1964. I think I started doing works then that were mature. I would say that prior to the 1964–65 period I was in a kind of groping, investigating period." Smithson and Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution," 283.

[69] Robert Smithson, "The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics [1966–67]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 338. And Smithson, "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture," 346. Smithson elaborated publicly on this position in a series of 1972 interviews with Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art: "I just felt that—they [i.e., Abstract Expressionists] didn't really understand, first of all, anthropomorphism, which had constantly been lurking in Pollock and de Kooning. I always felt that a problem. I always thought it was somehow seething underneath all those masses of paint." Smithson and Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution," 283.

Smithson was targeting a central myth animating Abstract Expressionism, namely the idea of the artist as expressive subject who inscribed his authentic and "unconscious" feelings upon the canvas, as if, to adopt a phrase from Eisenstein, "straining to act the feeling itself." In this view, the Abstract Expressionist canvas was like an automatic transcription of pure, unconditioned subjectivity. One thinks of Jackson Pollock's "immediate" and "direct" process, for instance. "When I am in my painting," he memorably said, "I'm not aware of what I'm doing."[70] Hal Foster later designated this phenomenon the "expressive fallacy," arguing that the heroic abstract expressionist gesture was in fact a code—which is to say a rhetoric, a language—for immediacy, improvisation, pre-linguistic spontaneity. "[E]xpressionism denies its own status as language," he wrote; it merely "simulate[s] direct expression."[71] What was "naturalistic"

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[70] Jackson Pollock, "Interview with William Wright [1950]," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 22–24. And Jackson Pollock, "My Painting [1947-1948]," in *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, ed. Ellen G. Landau (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 139–140.

[71] Hal Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy," in *Recodings* (New York: New Press, 1984), 60, 61. While Foster's 1984 essay deconstructs expression, it is primarily concerned with "postmodern" work of his own present—artists like Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, James Casabere, and Matt Mullican—which itself refutes that myth in manifesting the antithetical position that there is no "reality beyond representation." Implicitly such artists are reacting against the abstract expressionist paradigm, but Foster finds a more contemporary and thoroughly reactionary antagonist in the "neo-expressionist" revival of these ideas. While his discussion focuses on art of the 1980s, Foster does find earlier precedents of this anti-expressive attitude in Jasper Johns's work of the 1950s and, later, Roy Lichtenstein's more explicit send-up of abstract expressionism in his *Brushstrokes* series of 1965–66. For an earlier critique of the myth of expression and particular a model "of the Self conceived as constituted prior to its contact with the space of the world," see Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility: Reflections on Post-'60s Sculpture." Krauss reprises this view in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, arguing that an artist like Donald Judd, for instance, mounted "an attack on the credibility of an illusionistic (or interior) model of meaning in art." Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, 258. Yet if Judd evacuates the space of interiority by denying sculpture syntax—his "one-thing-after-another" notion of seriality meant, among other things, that parts would not be set into meaningful compositional relationships that indexed subjective decision-making—Smithson adopts the opposite tack: not denying composition but instrumentalizing it to exaggerate artifice and render illusion palpable.

about abstract expressionism, in other words, was the mimetic logic persisting beneath its autographic brush strokes, which *look like* unmediated authenticity. In having knowingly and self-consciously adopted figuration in the years before, Smithson therefore partook of this forbidden fruit and indulged its religious subtext, therefore doing openly and parodically what the expressionists so deeply repressed.

Not only did Smithson allege that such problematic unselfconsciousness lurked beneath expressive paint surfaces; he also understood this pernicious, lingering naturalism to extend to that same generation's everyday performances of brooding machismo. Citing photographs of art world luminaries recently published in books purporting to "document" New York's bohemia, Smithson's *Ivan* essay disparaged their "phony naturalism of we're-just-ordinary-guys-doing-our-thing," alleging that "the artist or critic poses or fakes being unaffected, he imitates everyday, mundane, natural events—such as playing baseball, on-the-job painting, or drinking beer."[72] Like the expressive brush stroke, which denies its status as language, such images struck Smithson as textbook Stanislavski in their disavowal of affect and obfuscation of artifice in the name of naturalistic authenticity. "The act of artistic innocence is no longer very convincing," Smithson lamented in another essay. "Artists should be conscious of the roles they are playing."[73] Hence Smithson's attraction to Eisenstein's directorial mannerism in *Ivan*: not only did the film's hellish artifice utterly ruin the naturalism still

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[72] Smithson, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman," 349. The books Smithson cites in particular are Fred W. McDarrah's *The Artist's World* (New York: Dutton, 1961) and Alan Solomon's *New York: The New Art Scene* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), both of which feature photographs of artists in their natural environs that are meant to read as impromptu, spontaneous, and candid. Somewhat ironically, McDarrah's book includes a photograph of "Bob Smithson's party."

[73] Smithson, "A Refutation of Historical Humanism," 336.

lingering beneath Abstract Expressionism's thick autographic swathes of paint; extending to the realm of life, it also undermined artists' everyday swagger in modeling, instead, a way of behaving in the world in a self-conscious manner. Little wonder that Smithson so frequently invoked Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol in the context of mannerism, figures not only whose work was parodic and excessive but also who themselves cultivated hellishly non-earnest personae. Of course, the wry sarcasm that characterizes so much of Smithson's own writing should similarly be understood as a mannerist revolt against a generation of self-serious and unwitting naturalists.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

"A pocket history of Camp might, of course, begin farther back—with the mannerist artists like Pontormo, Rosso, and Caravaggio." Appearing in 1964 and more or less contemporary with Smithson's reflections on mannerism, Susan Sontag's famous essay needs no introduction.[74] "Notes on 'Camp'" attempted to survey a particular aesthetic sensibility that Sontag associated with pop art and gay subculture; and in its emphasis on and embrace of all manner of artifice, excess, and parody—to say nothing of its positioning of artists like Pontormo, Rosso, and Caravaggio as its originators—that sensibility bore a remarkable affinity with what Smithson meant by mannerism.

For one thing, Sontag strongly associated Camp with theatricality, with excess,

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[74] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp' [1964]," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 280. "Notes on 'Camp'" was first published in *Partisan Review* in an issue that Smithson very likely owned. For an inventory of the periodicals he owned, which included some twenty-four issues of the quarterly between 1964 and 1973, see "Inventory List of Unfilmed Books and Periodicals," c. 1970s, Box 11 Folder 20, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, American Archives of Art.

with a "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration."[75] "All Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice," she explained. "Nothing in nature can be campy."[76] For another, she emphasized its preoccupation with style over content—not just any style, moreover, "but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the 'off,' of things-being-what-they-are-not."[77] Hence Camp's obsession with ostentatious and extravagant décor, costume, furniture, and ornamentation. Camp, too, involved a parodic consciousness insofar as it "converts the serious into the frivolous."[78] "Camp is art that proposes itself seriously," Sontag elaborated, "but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is 'too much.'"[79] And, like mannerism, which seemed to borrow freely from pictorial convention without regard to naturalism or overall coherence, as if it were a kind of collage by other means, "Camp sees everything in quotation marks."[80] Indeed, even the essay's very form—an inventory of some fifty-eight fragmentary "jottings"—directly recalled the heterogeneity so often attributed to the mannerist composition, whose effects, as Daniel Rowland wrote, "are the result of the violent yoking together of apparently unrelated elements."[81]

It is for these sorts of reasons that Sontag appreciated a film like Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963) so much, a 40-some-minute orgy (literally and figuratively) of nude bodies and fabulous costume and fantastic décor which dispensed with any and all

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[75] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 275.

[76] Sontag, 279.

[77] Sontag, 279.

[78] Sontag, 276.

[79] Sontag, 284.

[80] Sontag, 280.

[81] Rowland, *Mannerism*, 76.

sense of narrative and professionalism, betraying instead what Sontag described in a separate essay as a "maddening indifference to every element of technique, a studied primitiveness" (fig. 1.12).[82] It was a film that was about sheer pleasure, that reveled in its own outrageous and chaotic sumptuousness: "at practically every moment there is simply a tremendous amount to see on the screen."[83] At the same time, *Creatures* was also a film that belonged to a particular tradition that Sontag dubbed "the poetic cinema of shock," a tradition that, notably, included Eisenstein.[84] And yet, very much unlike *Creatures*, Eisenstein's films were decidedly *not* Camp—about this Sontag was clear. They "are seldom Camp because, despite all exaggeration, they do succeed (dramatically) without surplus. If they were a little more 'off,' they could be great Camp—particularly *Ivan the Terrible I & II*."[85] Perhaps they were excessive and over-the-top, then, but Eisenstein's films nevertheless prevailed as films and as narratives; they did not fail in the way that Camp had to. And this is a fundamental point, because as much as mannerism has in common with Camp, it ultimately specifies something very different, or at least furnishes additional criteria and considerations that remain absent from Camp.

One important attribute of Camp, for instance, was its embrace of the androgynous. "Camp is the triumph of the epicene style," Sontag wrote.[86] "The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility. […] What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women

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[82] Susan Sontag, "Jack Smith's 'Flaming Creatures' [1964]," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 228.

[83] Sontag, 228.

[84] Sontag, 227.

[85] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 284.

[86] Sontag, 280.

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is something masculine."[87] Hearkening back to Platonic notions of a perfect and wholly unified "third sex," Sontag was suggesting that the exquisite unity of the androgyne, its synthesis of the male and the female, the masculine and the feminine, captured something of Camp's theatrical impulse, its excessiveness, its artifice, its concern with beauty and desire that were, in this superb specimen, "too much."[88] In that sense, Smith's *Flaming Creatures* was exemplary of Camp. It was "more about intersexuality than homosexuality," she wrote in her essay on the film.

> [O]ne cannot easily tell which are men and which are women. These are "creatures," flaming out in intersexual, polymorphous joy. The film is built out of a complex web of ambiguities and ambivalences, whose primary image is the confusion of male and female flesh. The shaken breast and the shaken penis become interchangeable with each other.[89]

In its gender-bending overtures to the epicene, then, *Creatures* embodied something of Camp's obsession with hyperreal perfection, as if combining the male and the female might produce some artificial pinnacle of beauty and exquisite locus of heightened desire.

Mannerism, however, at least in Smithson's hands, could not tolerate such idealized beauty, no matter how artificial and exaggerated it may have been. Indeed, it is telling, I think, that Smithson's "mannerist" drawings and collages, such as *Untitled [Second Stage Injector]*, invoked the figure not of the androgyne but of the hermaphrodite, which calls to mind less some Platonic ideal of unified perfection than an abrupt juxtaposition of body parts and genitalia that, for the artist, perhaps served as an

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[87] Sontag, 279.

[88] In her 1973 book *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, Carolyn Heilbrun described androgyny in terms of this kind of utopian union. Androgyny specified a "movement away from sexual polarization," she wrote, a liberatory continuum among which "human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom." Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Knopf, 1973), ix, xi.

[89] Sontag, "Jack Smith's 'Flaming Creatures,'" 230.

avatar for the "unnatural" in a different way. If the androgyne was for Camp a locus of

exaggerated desire and smooth, over-the-top unity, Smithson's figures—not only as

hermaphroditic assemblages but also given their various bodily excretions and obviously

pornographic origins—seem more designed to repel, or at the very least to produce a

desire that is also actively undermined. In clearly juxtaposing male and female

physiological traits and signifiers, Smithson's figures correspond more closely to the

"androgynous" photomontages of Hannah Höch—her *Dompteuse* (c. 1930), for example

(fig. 1.13). As Maud Lavin has written, this body of Höch's work insists less on some

campy ideal composite than on the "impossibility of reading a single gender."[90] The

works "can never be resolved into a unity; it is always two genders."[91] While Lavin

describes this body of work in terms of androgyny, in other words, it results in a kind of

dialectical "oscillation" on the part of the viewer "between a male heterosexual position

and a female homosexual one" that seems to exceed the ways in which Sontag had

conceived of androgyny operating in Camp.[92] Like Höch's photomontages, Smithson's

"mannerist" drawings appear intent on combining the conventionally masculine and

feminine physiological signifiers promulgated in erotica—voluptuous breasts and

makeup paired with chiseled jaws, bulging muscles, and male genitalia—in a way that

emphasizes less continuity than discontinuity, less synthesis than divergence, and whose

consequence, however problematic, consist as much in generating desire as repelling it.

Which is to say that Smithson's angelic nude bodies—hermaphroditic or otherwise,

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[90] Maud Lavin, "Androgyny, Spectatorship, and the Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch," *New German Critique* 51 (Autumn 1990): 70.

[91] Lavin, 74.

[92] Lavin, 84.

engaged in salacious acts or else demonstrating the full spectrum of repulsive bodily

discharge—can be read as avatars for the kinds of visual nausea and repulsion and

repugnancy that he associated with mannerism.

A second characteristic of *Flaming Creatures* that secured its status as Camp was

its embrace of the aleatory, which reflected an amateurish lack of polish and a cool

indifference to professionalism. *Creatures* was, for Sontag, like a filmic Happening in

that respect, the result being a work with "no story […], no development, no necessary

order […]":

> One can easily doubt that a certain piece of footage was indeed intended to be
> overexposed. Of no sequence is one convinced that it had to last this long, and not
> longer or shorter. Shots aren't framed in the traditional way; heads are cut off;
> extraneous figures sometimes appear on the margin of the scene[…].[93]

In that sense, Smith's film possessed "the sloppiness, the arbitrariness, the looseness of

pop art. It also has pop art's gaiety, its ingenuousness, its exhilarating freedom from

moralism."[94] Indeed, one thinks of Andy Warhol's impersonal and disaffected posture,

exemplary of his and pop's postmodern critique of authorship and intention. Warhol

wanted to "be a machine," after all, strategically adopting the materials and forms of

mass culture—screen-printing and cinema, for instance.[95] At the same time, his work also

always involved an aleatory relinquishing of authorial intent, visible in the form of his

collaborations, his attribution of his best ideas to others, his embrace of accidents clearly

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[93] Jack Smith, *Flaming Creatures*, 1963, 228.

[94] Sontag, "Jack Smith's 'Flaming Creatures,'" 229.

[95] G.R. Swenson and Kenneth Goldsmith, "What Is Pop Art? Answer from 8 Painters, Part I," in *I'll Be Your Mirror* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004), 18.

visible across his ostensibly machine-like and serial screen-printed works.[96] While there remains some tension here, then—Camp was "dead serious" for Sontag, not flippant[97]—Smith's openness to chance and amateurishness seemed to produce in *Creatures* something sincere and naïve, an artifact to be measured against the yardstick of excess and pleasure rather than narrative success.

As with androgyny, pop's campy relinquishing of authorship also had no place in Smithson's imagining of mannerism, a term which was synonymous with self-consciousness and authorial intent. Indeed, for Smithson the kinds of visceral and sickening consequences of the mannerist work—its labyrinthine and incoherent compositions, its monstrous denizens, its insincerity and bad-faith rejection of mimesis—were the result not of naïveté but of subversive and sinister purpose. This was why the same thing that assured Alfred Hitchcock's failure as Camp—his knowing self-parody, Sontag felt, "reveals […] a contempt for one's themes and materials"[98]—also guaranteed that his films were, for Smithson, "Mannerist on every level": "Hitchcock's actors, like the figures in pictures by Jacopo da Pontormo, seem trapped in a beautiful prison that produces intricate types of 'visual nausea,'" Smithson wrote. "His settings are a vast simulacra built by an evil demiurge, and peopled with frozen automatons."[99] Whereas the

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[96] The topic of Warhol's postmodern critique of authorship, particularly through serial and aleatory procedures, is far too expansive of a topic to discuss here. For one example, particularly as it relates to Warhol's cinema, see David E. James, "Andy Warhol: The Producer as Author," in *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[97] This is one of the many places in Sontag's essay where there is some ambiguity and even contradiction. For Sontag, the best examples of Camp are naïve, unintentional, "dead serious." And yet she also suggests that Camp can be "either completely naïve or else wholly conscious." Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 283.

[98] Sontag, 282.

[99] Smithson, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman," 353.

artifice and stylistic surplus of Camp were ultimately accidental, visible only after the

fact in the process of the work's appropriation and revaluation ("This is why so many of

the objects prized by Camp taste are old-fashioned, out-of-date, *démodé*," Sontag

explained[100]), Hitchcock's mannerism depended on the filmmaker's authorial self-

consciousness. And in that sense, too, Eisenstein was exemplary. For he understood

cinema's revolutionary imperative to consist essentially of a pedagogical thrust: while

Eisenstein clearly reserved for the spectator a participatory role as the locus of cinema's

production of meaning, montage was nevertheless responsible for "guiding […] the

spectator into a desired direction (or mood)."[101]

But perhaps above all—more than mannerism's embrace of hermaphroditic

discontinuity vis-à-vis Camp's interest in androgynous unity, more than mannerism's

emphasis on authorial intent vis-à-vis Camp's aleatory indifference to authorship—

mannerism forced the issue of morality and thus politics in a way that Camp decidedly

did not. For Sontag, after all, Camp was "disengaged, depoliticized—or at least

apolitical"; it was primarily "a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation—not judgment."[102]

The same was true of *Flaming Creatures*, a film that did not move in "the space of moral

ideas, which is where American critics have traditionally located art," but in an "aesthetic

space, the space of pleasure."[103] Particularly given its art historical referent, however,

mannerism specified a category that was inextricable from its religious subject matter and

thus inextricable from morality. It was never about a "freedom from moralism" as

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[100] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 285.

[101] Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions," 230.

[102] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 277, 291.

[103] Sontag, "Jack Smith's 'Flaming Creatures,'" 231.

Creatures had been; it was never "about joy and innocence," at least not excessively, at least not terminally.[104] To the contrary, mannerism, as we have already seen, involved a knowing transgression of Renaissance standards and ideals, of beauty, harmony, naturalism, hierarchy, and proportion. If its canvases were artificial and excessive, this was never merely to excite pleasure but to intentionally perform a sinister perversion of the morality underlying Renaissance aesthetics, of what Hauser had described as the utopian "wish-dreams" inscribed in Renaissance works. If Camp was secular or, perhaps better, atheist, in other words, mannerism was like a fallen angel, operating in relation to the sacred which it was actively determined to debase. It embraced the ignoble and the carnal in the name of revolt. As Satan confided of his own scheme in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, mannerism aspired "in one day to have marred / What he Almighty styled." And we, mannerism's viewer, like the lapsarian victims of Satan's seduction overcome by postcoital disgrace, have been consequently "despoiled / Of all our good, shamed, naked, miserable."[105]

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[104] Sontag, 229.

[105] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Books, 2003), book 9, lines 136–137, 1138–1139. While it exceeds the scope of the present discussion, it is worth noting that, in spite of Sontag's suggestion that Camp is apolitical, we are well aware, of course, that its privileging of sheer pleasure was subversive in its own right and, in fact, very often could not be tolerated by prevailing cultural mores. *Flaming Creatures*, after all, is notorious for the various controversies it generated, legal and otherwise, perhaps most famously the May 3, 1964 arrest of Jonas Mekas, Ken Jacobs, Florence Karpf (now Flo Jacobs), and Jerry Sims. While we do not need mannerism to help us make the connection, the hellish questions of morality that are endemic to it surely offer useful terms for conceiving *Creatures* as more overtly political. For among other things, mannerism reminds us that carnal pleasure, for instance, was always the purview of the devil. For more on *Flaming Creatures* and its various controversies, see J. Hoberman, *On Jack Smith's "Flaming Creatures" (and Other Secret-Flix of Cinemaroc)* (New York: Granary Books, 2001).

In one of the few instances in which he invoked the term publicly, Smithson anachronistically imputed a mannerist sensibility to Donald Judd's minimalist sculpture in a 1965 catalogue essay. "Just as the Mannerist artists of the sixteenth century permuted the facts of the Classic Renaissance," Smithson wrote, "so has Judd permuted the facts of Modern Reality."[106] Surely nothing could be further in temperament from such exemplars of sixteenth-century devotional painting than minimalism. Little about Judd's boxes— their sleek industrial finishes, their clean geometries, their formal reductiveness, their ostensibly mathematical rationality—brings to mind the terrible, distended bodies populating the mannerist pictorial world and its hellscapes. Indeed, we are far more accustomed to minimalist apologetics that invoke the historical avant-garde as a genealogical origin for its anti-aesthetic seriality and erasure of the artist's hand— constructivism above all.

Yet, as we have seen, Smithson had come to understand mannerism less as a style than as a prototypical set of structural operations including the logic of montage for transgressing a hegemonic order that he associated with the Renaissance and modernism alike. "What is called 'cool' today," Smithson elaborated about current art in one of his unpublished essays,

> is in a way the rebirth of the Mannerist sensibility. That chilly style has replaced the naïve hot-blooded notion of the artist as a 'painting animal.' If it can be said that Abstract Expressionism originated in the 'unconscious' within a 'natural' frame of reference, then it can be said that the New Abstraction or Post Painterly Abstraction originated in an ultra-consciousness and far from anything called

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[106] Robert Smithson, "Donald Judd [1965]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 5. Originally published as a brief catalogue essay in University of Pennsylvania. Institute of Contemporary Art, *Anthony Caro, John Chamberlain, Donald Judd, Alexander Liberman, Tina Matkovic, David Smith, Anne Truitt.* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1965).

nature.[107]

To that end, Judd's geometrically precise, "cool" metal boxes seemed to parody not

figuration but the lingering naturalism underpinning expressionism. They mocked

modernism's self-seriousness and humanist aesthetic mores with soulless and literally

hollow metal boxes that were not created in the artist's studio but fabricated, Smithson

tells us, at places with names like Allied Plastics and Bernstein Brothers, Tinsmiths.

Indeed, they seemed almost to literalize one of Hauser's quintessentially mannerist

recipes, "form independent of content becomes an empty shell."[108] In claiming Judd as

mannerist, then, Smithson was attributing to his generation a parodic consciousness, in

the improbable mold of *Ivan the Terrible*, that rejected modernism's "phony naturalism"

in favor of something that was, simply, phony—artificial, insincere, and empty just like

Meyerhold's actors.[109]

To find Smithson reflecting upon mannerism most fervently at precisely a

moment that he had expelled figuration from his practice and moved into his "mature"

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[107] Robert Smithson, "Abstract Mannerism [1966–1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 339.

[108] Hauser, *Mannerism*, 13.

[109] Smithson's 1965 essay on Judd was not the only time he publicly claimed an artist of his own generation as mannerist. In his well-known 1966 essay "Entropy and the New Monuments," Smithson likewise described the work of Robert Morris in such terms. In particular, he wrote, Morris's "wall structures are direct homages to Duchamp," which "deploy facsimiles of ready-mades within high Manneristic frames of reference." Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments [1966]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 19. If Judd's fabricated boxes parodically depleted the artwork of its conventional reservoirs of aesthetic value—expression and authorship, for instance—an artist like Morris, in invoking Duchamp's impassive and decidedly artless readymades, repeated and exaggerated a different strategy that was similarly hostile to such aesthetic values.

While I am interpreting Smithson's mannerist nomination of Judd in terms of emptiness, moreover, it would be fruitful to consider Judd's work in terms of its illusory and allusive excesses following an early piece by Rosalind Krauss: Rosalind Krauss, "Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd," *Artforum* 9, no. 9 (May 1966): 24–26.

period, then, is perhaps not so strange after all. Indeed, so much of his work of the mid

1960s, as Judd's, can be read as a demonstration of what a hellishly mannerist critique of

modernism might look like. Works like *Four-Sided Vortex* (1965) and *Mirror/Vortex*

(1965), for instance, seemed intent on shattering the illusion of a centered subject, which

was the idealist consequence of perspectival space (figs. 1.14–1.15). For one thing, the

viewer approached these works not vertically, not as Albertian windows onto the world,

but as squat, trash can-like receptacles down at and into which he or she gazed.[110] And

what the viewer saw, as the works' titles suggested, was not a coherent and centered

image with a fixed vanishing point that anticipated a centered subject commensurate with

it, but a "vortex" of kaleidoscopic and incoherent fragmentation. The mirrored planes that

comprised these works' interiors literally converged at a point, yet that point would not

ground perception as a vanishing point was supposed to but would literally vanish as it

dispersed vision amidst its reflecting shards. As Robert Hobbs wrote, "the use of the

word 'vortex' in the title of this sculpture [*Four-Sided Vortex*] appropriately calls to mind

the irrational rationality that concerned Smithson."[111] In refusing to consolidate a fixed

image or central viewing point, then, these works can be seen as constituting a kind of

mannerism without figures—all of the exquisite fragmentation, disorientation, flux, and

incoherence of the most nauseating Pontormo yet dealt with abstractly.

Even more acutely than his mirrored *Vortex* works of 1965–66, Smithson's

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[110] As has been extensively discussed in Bataillean re-readings of modernism, the vertical orientations of painting and sculpture constituted one of the key techniques of preserving and constructing an idealist subject. See, for example, Rosalind Krauss's Bataillean analysis of Pollock and her recovery of his work's primary horizontal axis in Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). For a larger discussion of the implications of horizontality for the idealism underwriting modernist discourse, see Krauss and Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*.

[111] Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 64.

Enantiomorphic Chambers (1965) refused its viewer the position of visual mastery that

perspectival space ordinarily guaranteed. As Ann Reynolds has traced, the origin of the

work's design was a diagram for a stereoscope whose stereo pair the artist replaced with

mirrors. If the stereoscope positioned the viewer as the locus for the virtual, three-

dimensional image's synthesis, however—if it orchestrated the gaze of each eye, guiding

it to two dissimilar images such that they would fuse in and for the viewer—the mirrors

comprising Smithson's blown-up apparatus led perception outward, dispersing vision and

splitting it.[112] As Reynolds elegantly described it, *Chambers* thus did not resolve an

image but produced instead "momentary blindness." At first glance this blindness seems

to contest the dialectical clarity with which Eisenstein associated the stereoscope, a

device that demonstrated the quintessential function of montage to synthesize two

absolutely dissimilar images into one of a higher order and a higher dimension. And yet

as a result of this momentary blindness, Reynolds continued, viewers "also gain a new

'sight,'" for

> what they see is not just what they see in the mirrors, which is nothing, but also
> what they normally don't see. They catch themselves in the act of seeing that
> contradicts their conditioned thoughts about seeing, particularly their
> understanding of retinal fusion.[113]

In the case of the "illusion without an illusion"[114] that was Smithson's *Enantiomorphic*

Chambers, we get a stereoscope that erases vision only to consolidate knowledge of a

different sort. Like the mannerist artifice from which we "turn away" in a movement of

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[112] I borrow these latter terms from Hobbs, who wrote of *Chambers* that "vision becomes dispersed. Our usually fused binocular vision is split and disembodied." Hobbs, 39.

[113] Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, 61. See also Ann Reynolds, "Enantiomorphic Models," in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Eugenie Tsai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 137–140.

[114] Robert Smithson, "Pointless Vanishing Points [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 359.

visceral self-awareness, in other words, the *Chambers*' dispersal of vision anticipated a viewer who was not centered before the artwork but lost and blindly groping among it—no longer figuratively amidst a labyrinthine pictorial space, however, but actually, as if caught within a mirrored vortex that ultimately undermined the conventional relationship between artwork and beholder.

At the end of 1966 at his first solo show at Dwan Gallery, Smithson debuted a body of work that deployed mannerist strategies in another way. Both *Alogon #2* and *Plunge* (both 1966) involved repeated sequences of painted steel, geometrical forms, thus making clear overtures to the seriality and industrial fabrication characteristic of minimalist sculpture (fig. 1.16). However, their carefully stepped quadratic sequences lent an illusionistic order to each: increasing or decreasing in size, each work articulated its own illusion of foreshortening, of perspectival recession or protrusion—an illusion, importantly, that conflicted with the spatial conditions of the gallery space in which they were seen. Viewed from the larger side, for example, each work seemed to rapidly disappear into deep space at an exaggerated rate; whereas, from the smaller side each work weirdly resisted the sense of visual recession expected of a serial form, even seeming to protrude towards the beholder since the units farthest away appeared, paradoxically, not smallest but largest. As Hobbs put it, "the sculptures, which appear to recede to a vanishing point, warp real gallery space and make it appear illusionistic."[115] That *Alogon #2* and *Plunge* were installed opposite one another at Dwan such that one ascended while the other descended, and vice-versa, meant an even greater attempt to undermine the sense of space instantiated by the gallery architecture. "In this way

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[115] Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 69.

Smithson played on the three-dimensional perspective that the pieces manifest," Hobbs continued. "If one piece appears to recede into space, the other becomes larger. The artist thus hints at a game of perspective which he then upsets; he makes the gallery space illusionary and then reaffirms its reality."[116] It was for this reason that Smithson's first Dwan show of 1966 was, for Reynolds, decidedly at odds with the concerns of minimalism with which this body of work is often subsumed. Unlike Robert Morris's *L-Beams* (1965), after all, in which the viewer was supposed to have a clear gestalt image of each "L" form, a stable and fixed mental map against which to measure his or her phenomenological experience of the work, with *Alogon #2* and *Plunge* "the more he or she moves around the work, the more the viewer is subject to the contradictions between the work and the space it occupies."[117] These works were more "mannerist" than minimalist, then, because their refusal to consolidate a stable center—their refusal even to abide by the laws of perspective that naturalistically approximate our experience of the world—meant that they generated a kind of paradoxical and disorienting clash of orders. Like *Enantiomorphic Chambers*, they anticipated a viewer who was no longer figuratively wandering through a labyrinth that was mannerist pictorial space but was instead caught amidst it, circumnavigating works that refused to stay still.

At the artist's second solo show at Dwan Gallery in March 1968, finally, Smithson showed a suite of works including *Pointless Vanishing Point*, *Leaning Strata*,

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[116] Hobbs, 74.

[117] Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, 26. Reynolds, moreover, has demonstrated that Smithson directed these works to be photographed in ways that seemed designed only to heighten this type of spatial ambiguity, confusing the monocular scheme of perspective imposed on the image by the camera and the illusory perspective generated by the forms' sequential growth or diminishment. The result were photographs that were at the very least ambiguous but that very often involved a clash of perspectival orders.

and *Shift* (all 1968) that continued to reify what the artist described as the "artificial

factors of perspective" long-repressed by "naturalistic" art (fig. 1.17).[118] The exhibition

poster made clear how a piece like *Leaning Strata*, for instance, related compositionally

to the perspectival grid, how its stepped trapezoidal parts in fact derived from a series of

orthogonals converging at a central point (fig. 1.18). Insofar as these works literalized

and objectified the "linear artifices" of perspective, they not only reasserted that artifice,

otherwise repressed, but also grotesquely twisted, warped, and congealed it into

"pointless" formats in an absurd burlesque of figuration's underlying logic. Even as the

works invoked the functioning of perspective, moreover, they did not succumb to its self-

effacing illusionism.[119] "The point of convergence is always being lost," Smithson

explained in terms that echoed the kind of decentering we have seen with

Enantiomorphic Chambers, *Alogon #2*, and *Pluge*. "[Y]ou can walk around and they just

destroy themselves as perspectives."[120] Recalling the mannerist *figura serpentinata* and

its refusal to consolidate a single viewpoint, in other words, the vanishing point promised

by a piece like *Leaning Strata* would never materialize as the viewer circumnavigated it.

Like Smithson's drawings and collages of the early '60s, whose compositional activity so

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[118] Smithson, "Pointless Vanishing Points," 358.

[119] My reading of this body of work in terms of its parody of perspective borrows from Robert Hobbs. Of *Shift*, for example, Hobbs wrote that Smithson "took the schema of one-point perspective, turned it on its side, shifted the orthogonals as one might a deck of cards, and then severed the resulting projection from its point of terminus to create a decontextualized rationality. He had the resultant shape enlarged in three dimensions to create a sculpture that points absurdly to its logical schematic origins." Whereas *Pointless Vanishing Point*, Hobbs wrote, "represents a solidification of the orthogonals of traditional linear perspective into stair-stepped lines that terminate before converging. The sculpture presents a no longer useful concept of vision. […] In this sculpture, perspective is literalized, made concrete, and rendered useless." Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 87, 98.

[120] Robert Smithson and Dennis Wheeler, "Four Conversations Between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson [1969–70]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, by Robert Smithson, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 216.

often unfolded not at the center but, in keeping with mannerism and its labyrinthine compositions, at the periphery, works like *Leaning Strata* and *Pointless Vanishing Point* withheld the centralizing vanishing point they seemed to promise, preferring instead only its incidental and peripheral armature. The absence of the vanishing point, moreover—the works' denial of static image and fixed compositional center—was thematized in the spiraling forms they so often assumed, a figure of infinitude which speaks, abstractly, to the centripetal pointlessness of the works. To adopt a mannerist sensibility, then, need not mean to literally deform the naturalistic work of art, pushing closely-observed figures to hellish and monstrous excess. To the contrary, the mannerist sensibility specified a technique of distorting naturalism's very structures, perniciously buttressing the very myth of the expressive, authorial artist.

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From the vantage of Smithson's unpublished cogitations on mannerism, the arrival of Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" in the Summer 1967 issue of *Artforum* could not have been more opportune. Fried, you will recall, had condemned minimalist art (he preferred to call it "literalist") for what he understood to be its non-art, object-like theatricality. The successful modernist work of art had to "defeat or suspend its own objecthood," he wrote; it had to repudiate its basic materiality, transfigure its earthly substance into ethereal opticality; it had to inspire the conviction of an aesthetic encounter in transcending the humdrum ordinariness of everyday actuality.[121] Whereas the minimalist box, dumb and object-like, merely persisted in profane space—in *our*

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[121] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood [1967]," in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 120.

space—where it became an inconsequential part of a larger environmental situation that now depended upon the co-presence of an ambulatory spectator and that necessarily unfolded in time. Which is to say that the minimalist box inaugurated a condition otherwise specific to theater. Hence, Fried wrote, "the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art."[122]

If Smithson's 1968 Dwan show offered a sculptural manifestation of the mannerist sensibility, his punchy and parodic rebuttal to Fried, which appeared in *Artforum* two issues later in the form of a letter to the editor, did so discursively. Among the artist's chief grievances was Fried's hypocrisy. What he found so hypocritical, so unwittingly ironic about Fried's *anti*-theater diatribe was precisely its theatricality: "What Fried fears most," Smithson summarized, "is the consciousness of what he is doing—namely being himself theatrical."[123] Taunting Fried as a "fanatical puritan," "orthodox modernist," and "keeper of the gospel of Clement Greenberg,"[124] Smithson made it impossible to ignore the ecclesiastical overtones of the critic's distinct brand of theater: the sanctimonious rhetoric, the lapsarian narrative, the Manichaean drama that unfolded between the sacred and the profane, the eternal and the mortal, the absolute and the contingent, between modernist deliverance and, as Smithson wrote with evident glee, "hellish objecthood."[125] Fried was the "phony naturalist" in the mold of Stanislavski that Smithson had elsewhere decried, unable and unwilling to accept his own sinful condition.

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[122] Fried, 125.

[123] Robert Smithson, "Letter to the Editor [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 66.

[124] Smithson, 66.

[125] Smithson, 67.

And who, after all, will forget Fried's valedictory blessing? Modernist presentness was not just aesthetically correct; presentness, he concluded, was *grace*. Quickened by the theology of Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-century preacher invoked at the outset of the essay, Fried employed "presentness" to mean that "at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest," that it was involved in a "perpetual creation of itself" in a manner analogous to Edwards's God, manifestly absolute and immutable in the face of a vicissitudinous and ever-changing actuality.[126] Instantaneous "presentness" thus promised nothing less than salvation from the infernal endlessness staged by minimalist objecthood. Little wonder that Smithson interpreted Fried's essay as a kind of spectacular sermon, a desperate and moralizing and unconsciously performative plea for faith in the face of "a radical skepticism, known only to the dreadful 'literalists.'"[127] Pursuing the analogy between hell and objecthood implicit in Fried's essay, Smithson offered his own invocation of Edwards in admiring affirmation of the infernal implications of minimalist endlessness: "There will be no end to this exquisite, horrible misery," Edwards writes of God's everlasting damnation. "When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts. […]"[128]

It was not only Fried's zealous piety that contributed to his essay's theatricality, however. For Smithson also understood "Art and Objecthood" to be a performance of Fried's *modernism*, a performance that the artist reimagined in terms of a kind of involuntary mannerism. "He becomes," Smithson wrote of Fried, "in effect the first truly

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[126] Fried, "Art and Objecthood [1967]," 146.

[127] Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," 67.

[128] From "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Republished in Jonathan Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

manneristic critic of 'modernity.' Fried has set the stage"—pun intended, surely—"for *manneristic modernism*."[129] What Smithson meant was that, beneath his practiced authority and staid neutrality, Fried was legibly operating within a specific discursive tradition. "Art and Objecthood" was conventionally modernist, in other words; it was overdetermined; it was *in the style of*. And true to the mannerist sensibility, Smithson implied, Fried adhered to the discourse of aesthetic modernism to the point of its distortion, exaggeration, and parody, to the point where its very conventionality and constructed artifice became palpable. As such, the artist lampooned the essay as "a kind of ready-made parody of the war between Renaissance classicism (modernity) versus Manneristic anti-classicism (theater)."[130] Smithson critiqued Fried's rhetoric for being overly conventional and stylized, in other words, but in fact admired those qualities also insofar as they performed a departure from modernist fantasies of vanquishing theater. The trouble, then, was not Fried's mannered anti-theater at all; the trouble was his false consciousness, his repressive obliviousness to his own modernist histrionics, which unknowingly aligned with the theatricality he attributed to the very object of his "mimic fury." As Smithson put it in a different context, "It's something like the homosexual who acts like a Nazi."[131]

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[129] Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," 66.

[130] Smithson, 66.

[131] Smithson, "Abstract Mannerism," 339. Smithson is not talking about Fried here so much as the kinds of "tough guy" artists of which Fried approved. While Smithson's provocative imagery seems designed to highlight a certain kind of repressive false consciousness, he clearly also has in mind Kenneth Anger's 1963 film *Scorpio Rising*, an oneiric assemblage of homoerotic and Nazi imagery. The deeply self-aware nature of *Scorpio Rising* could not have been lost on Smithson, who referred admiringly to its "California surfaces" in his contemporaneous 1966 essay "Entropy and the New Monuments." See Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," 20.

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In 1969 Annette Michelson published a catalogue essay on Robert Morris titled

"The Aesthetics of Transgression." As its title suggests, the text lay claim to the artist's

transgressive revolt against modernist aesthetics, in particular a "tenacious Idealism" of

the kind that was on full view in Fried's infamous essay of two years before. Michelson's

was, of course, not the earliest objection to Fried's idealism—Smithson's letter, among

other things, had her beat there.[132] It was, however, the most theoretically rigorous and

comprehensive early apology for minimalist objecthood to date. She did not quibble

much with Fried's sense that the protected aesthetic realm of timeless presentness had

somehow been violated by minimalism. Instead she radically revalued that violation. The

transcendent aesthetic condition that Fried so cherished, she argued, depended upon an

idealist distinction between the real space of the viewer and the artwork's virtual space—

the former given over to corporeal presence and profane duration, the latter to the

ethereal and immaterial realm of vision. What made Morris's work "transgressive" for

Michelson, what made it "radical," was its skeptical line of questioning directed at

precisely this boundary between the real and the virtual. In occupying actual space and

thus being "copresent" with us Morris's work configured our space and the artwork's

space as identical, which in turn facilitated our reflection upon the perceptual conditions

of sculptural experience. Michelson viewed Morris's work as "cognitive," then, insofar as

it brought about a knowledge effect: it "redirects attention, heightening consciousness of

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[132] Smithson, it must be said, was not alone in taking immediate issue with "Art and Objecthood." His response was one of several printed in *Artforum*'s "Letters to the Editor" section in the two issues immediately following the publication of Fried's provocative article. For instance, a short letter from Allan Kaprow—which, interestingly, similarly deployed a rhetoric of mockery—appeared in the September 1967 issue of the magazine.

what it is to attend and perceive."[133] If Fried's presentness, like Greenberg's opticality, posited an aesthetic experience that was purely visual, exquisitely instantaneous and timeless, Morris's "transgression" of the boundary between actual and virtual space recarnalized aesthetic experience as embodied and durational.

Among her main claims, Michelson proposed a historical model for the kind of transgression staged by Morris's minimalism—its temporality, its desecrative presence in actual space—in the Soviet avant-garde. "The revolutionary tradition of constructivism," she explained, with Tatlin and Rodchenko in mind, was similarly involved with an "extension of sculptural form into the space of action."[134] Tatlin's corner-reliefs in particular inaugurated sculpture's "intrusion into […] real space": Eschewing any framing pedestal and suspended at the juncture between two walls, which is to say between the virtual realm of aesthetic experience and the actual space of the viewer, they engaged a "dialectic" between these two poles, "mov[ing] into the real space of the functional while preserving the aesthetic nonfunctional character of sculpture."[135] All of which is consistent with constructivism's larger ambitions to transform the artwork in the service of revolution, to destroy its bourgeois heritage by reinserting it into life. Michelson's essay thus anticipated Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, which theorized Dada, Surrealism, and Constructivism in terms of a similar negation of the

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[133] Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression [1969]," in *Robert Morris*, ed. Julia Bryan-Wilson, October Files 15 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013), 39. Emphasis removed. Originally published as part of the exhibition catalogue: Michelson, "Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression." For a rich account of the early critical reception of "Art and Objecthood" by Michelson and, not long after, Rosalind Krauss, see Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, especially 239–243.

[134] Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," 43.

[135] Michelson, 44, 43. Emphasis removed.

category of art—in particular its bourgeois autonomy, its very separateness from life—precisely by embedding it back within life praxis.[136]

In claiming that Morris "inherits from the revolution and its aesthetic innovations," Michelson's essay crystallized a more nebulous and imprecise contemporaneous tendency to defend minimalism by recourse to the Soviet avant-garde.[137] As I have discussed at length in this dissertation's introduction, already by the mid-1960s constructivism in particular had become something of a privileged object and point of return for a generation of artists and critics seeking to characterize the nature of minimalism's aesthetic break with modernism. Carl Andre's modular *Pyramids* of 1959, Robert Morris's *Untitled (Corner Piece)* of 1964, Dan Flavin's 1963 series *Monument to V. Tatlin*—these were only the most explicit homages to the Constructivist precedent set by the likes of Rodchenko and Tatlin. And such references were not lost on early commentators like Barbara Rose and Bruce Glaser either, who, even before Michelson, intuited minimalism's overtures to the Soviet avant-garde precedent. As I have also discussed in the introduction to this project, Michelson's essay anticipated, too, a continuing tradition of identifying minimalism's transgressive objecthood with the privileged Constructivist precedent. Hal Foster, for example, understood the minimalist

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[136] While Bürger does not attend to Constructivism's later transformations, it is worth noting that with the emergence of Constructivism's radical Productivist manifestations the artwork truly did start to disappear into the realm of life, forfeiting some of the dialectical tension noted by Michelson. In an attempt to destroy art, artists like Lyubov Popova, Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and Vladimir Tatlin attempted to enter the realm of production, where they designed everyday commodities like coats, stoves, textiles, and product packaging. The efficacy of Productivism's negation of art accounts to a certain extent for its relative invisibility from art history. Only more recently have these practices of design been recuperated and recognized as part of a radically anti-art platform, most importantly in Christina Kiaer's and Maria Gough's 2005 books. See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*. And Gough, *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution*.

[137] Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," 46.

"neo-avant-garde" to return to constructivism by virtue of its industrial materials and the artist's posturing as laborer.[138] Maria Gough, on the other hand, has argued of Carl Andre's interest in Constructivism that it centered upon his work's modularity, which he viewed as a way of defeating the artwork's conventional "relationality"—that is, its subjective and arbitrary pictorial composition.[139] It was thus precisely Constructivism's quintessentially avant-garde desire to transform the category of art—to displace its arbitrary "relationality," its illusory nature, and its bourgeois separateness from life with modular structures, deductive and materiological strategies of non-composition, industrial materials, and functionalist overtures—that secured its privileged status as a model for minimalism, both in minimalism's own moment and in later accounts of its transgression of modernism.

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In his relentless critique of Eisenstein's first film, *Strike*, Dziga Vertov attacked its "actorly material," its "circus elements," its various "high art and decadent fractures"—in short, all those elements borrowed from other arts, theater in particular, and therefore not specific to the medium of film as such. The stakes for Vertov were high: that *Strike* had not yet severed its ties with theater and the category of art more

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[138] Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?" An edited version of this appeared in Foster's book of two years later, which deals in a larger way with various avant-garde genealogies: Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

[139] Gough, "Frank Stella Is a Constructivist." Importantly, such questions about how to objectively motivate art animated the Constructivist avant-garde, as well, specifically in its debates about construction versus composition. Associated with artists like Wassily Kandinsky, the value of "composition" was rejected as arbitrary and subjective, whereas "construction" promised to ground form objectively in materiological and functional considerations. See Gough, *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution*.

generally meant that the film remained problematically linked with an anachronistic, politically incorrect, and decidedly pre-Revolutionary bourgeois worldview. In a word, *Strike* was nothing but "art cinema," an ideological relic. "Why do the people who made *Strike*," he deplored, "having led the film almost to the fence of theatre, not let it go out of the gate of the sacred garden of 'art'?"[140]

In contrast to Eisenstein's imagining of cinema in terms of highly orchestrated discontinuities and collisions, Vertov championed a radically anti-art approach to filmmaking. For Vertov, who cut his teeth making newsreels in the immediate aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the camera was not a storytelling medium for the creation of fiction, fantasy, and artful tableaux, but a scientific instrument tasked with the objective documentation of the world. Indeed, such an imperative belonged uniquely to the mechanical and impartial "Kino-Eye" that was the filmic apparatus, whose various techniques—slow, fast, and reverse motion key amongst them—granted especial access to the world as it really was, not as we have been conditioned to see it. As such, he thought, cinema had to sever its connections with the bourgeois aesthetic traditions of the pre-revolutionary past—with theater via its actors, with literature via its fictional story, indeed with art itself via its very illusory artifice and inventedness. Vertov's twenty-three cinematic "issues" of *Kino-Pravda* (1922–25) and the longer "film-objects" that would follow—films like *Kino-Eye* (1924) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)—therefore staged what he described as a "struggle against capitalist sorcery and deceit" by laying bare the facts of reality for a proletarian spectator newly capable of recognizing the

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[140] Dziga Vertov, "Kino-Eye on 'Strike' [1925]," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemona, Udine, Italy: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 125.

material conditions of his existence. [141] One thinks, for instance, of the earliest *Kino-Pravda* reel, which tackled the problem of famine in showing stark footage of emaciated children—a fitting counterpoint to be sure to the kind of extravagant fantasy associated with Hollywood cinema. "The *kinocs* do not struggle against 'art,'" Vertov explained in clear sympathy with the contemporaneous Productivist attitude, "but deny the existence of 'art.'"[142]

From the journalistic perspective of Kino-Eye, then, *Strike* surely deserved Vertov's vitriol. It is true that Eisenstein always stressed the visceral and provocative efficacy of actuality, which explains not only his preference for on-location shooting and non-actors but also the unprecedented realism long associated with his films. Indeed, so scrupulous was his approach to staging historical events that stills from his recreation of one violent protest in *October* have been erroneously reproduced as documentary artifacts.[143] Yet, as we have seen, Eisenstein was only too happy to deploy narrative and artifice in his work, so long as it meant the mass agitation of the film-going public.[144] Recall once more *Strike*'s famous massacre scene, in which Eisenstein cut between documentary footage of a cow being gruesomely, routinely, slaughtered and the equally

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[141] Vertov, 126.

[142] Dziga Vertov, "To Kh. Khersonsky, from Dziga Vertov Excerpt from a Letter of May 1926]," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemona, Udine, Italy: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 135. For a useful primer on Vertov's own approach to cinema as an instrument of cognition, see Annette Michelson, "Introduction," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), xv–lxi.

[143] Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, 231–232. The scene in question depicts the July 4, 1917 demonstrations in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg), which ended violently when the Provisional Government fired upon protesters.

[144] On the dialectic in Eisenstein's work between realism and artifice, see Rosalind Krauss, "Montage 'October': Dialectic of the Shot," *Artforum* XI, no. 5 (January 1973): 61–65.

gruesome, though staged, footage of military forces mowing down striking workers with automatic weapons. While the footage may have read as "realistic," it was brought together in a way that utterly disrupted any sense of actuality, that dialectically violated the continuity of profilmic space such that a critic like Bazin could only interpret it as a betrayal of the medium's ontological imperative. After all, Eisenstein's montage "did not show us the event," he lamented, "it alluded to it."[145] But for Eisenstein, of course, the juxtaposition of the two spatially and diegetically unrelated images achieved the desired "attractional" effect, producing a shocking and viscerally sickening analogy that would move the audience to action. "*Strike*," Eisenstein thus wrote in response to Vertov, "has no pretensions to being an escape from art, and in that lies its strength."[146]

In aspiring not only to the "attractional" forcefulness of reality but also its artificial manipulation by montage, Eisenstein viewed his work as revealing itself to its viewer—its very art, its processes of constructing cinematic meaning. All arts, the director explained—painting, poetry, music—are composed, made of various component parts combined by the artist. Yet they are combined such that they "lose all visible signs of being combined, appearing as one organic unit." Only cinema's successive nature, particularly in the case of Eisenstein's conflictual model of montage, lays bare the ways

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[145] Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," 25.

[146] Eisenstein, "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form," 127. Productivist theorist Boris Arvatov summarizes the debate between Vertov and Eisenstein succinctly, when he wrote in 1925 that "This struggle comes down to the affirmation on the part of Vertov that the film *Strike* is reactionary because of its representational plot, and to the affirmation on the part of Eisenstein that Kino-Eye is reactionary because of its passivity." Boris Arvatov, "Agit-Kino and Kino-Eye [1925]," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemona, Udine, Italy: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 130. For a larger selection of exchanges between Vertov and Eisenstein and their proxies, see Yuri Tsivian's anthology *Lines of Resistance*, in particular the chapter "Vertov Versus Eisenstein." Yuri Tsivian, ed., *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (Gemona, Udine, Italy: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004).

in which its parts, its individual shots, have been combined. As in the example of *Strike*, montage stipulated a conspicuous, often jarring, violation of continuity. "Thus," Eisenstein concludes, "the cinema is able, more than any other art, to disclose the process that goes on microscopically in all other arts."[147] Montage, in other words, had the power not only to facilitate a certain line of reasoning according to a revolutionary ideology but also to lay bare its mechanisms in a way that encouraged active engagement and cognition. This was precisely what Smithson had meant in claiming *Ivan* as hellishly corrupt: in the realm of its montage-like performances especially, the film did not repress its illusory artifice but openly divulged it.

At stake in Smithson's invocation of mannerism, then—at stake in his own historical return to the figure of Eisenstein—was not the expected "neo-avant-garde" transgression of modernism by recourse to Constructivist techniques, which, for critics like Fried and Greenberg anyway, very much threatened the category of art as such. At stake, to the contrary, was a debauched revelry in that very category to the point of conspicuous, repulsive, parodic excess. Following Eisenstein's "mannerist" model, Smithson embraced artifice and constructedness at their limits, at their most palpable, most hellish, most alienating.[148]

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[147] Sergei Eisenstein, "Through Theater to Cinema [1934]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 5.

[148] I am apprehensive about giving the wrong impression here. Vertov was vocal about his desire and intention to fully break with the category of art, yes. But in invoking his example, I am by no means implying that minimalism entailed or even necessarily desired a similar break. It is true that, for Fried and Greenberg, minimalism forfeited the category of art, lapsing into the non-art categories of what Fried called "objecthood" and what Greenberg derided as "Good Design," however this is not the position I am refuting. Instead, what I have been attempting to highlight here is a prevailing narrative in art history: what made minimalism a threat to the category of art for the likes of Fried and Greenberg, and what made minimalism radical and transgressive for someone like Michelson, had everything to do with its renewal of the Constructivist precedent and its various anti-aesthetic procedures and techniques—industrialism, seriality, deductive and

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In 1966, during the moment that Smithson was reflecting upon mannerism, Eisenstein, and modernism's relentless idealism and humanism, a San Francisco- and Los Angeles-based organist named Anton Szandor LaVey founded the Church of Satan, which would preach skeptcisim of organized religion, its laws, its hypocrisy. "Man has always created his gods, rather than his gods creating *him*," LaVey later wrote in a rich evocation of Marx. "Say unto thine own heart, 'I am mine own redeemer.'"[149] In 1967 the Church would perform its first satanic baptism and marriage, both highly publicized, and in 1968 Satan entered the public imaginary yet more fully with films like Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* and, less known, *The Devil Rides Out*. Kenneth Anger would complete his film *Invocation of my Demon Brother* in 1969, which featured footage of LaVey and a soundtrack by Mick Jagger. That same year saw the release of The Rolling Stones' *Beggars Banquet*, featuring Jagger's "Sympathy for the Devil," a song that described its infernal protagonist as an omnipresent and impartial arbiter of

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materiological logics of noncomposition, modularity. Whereas my discussion, which relies on the recovery of a filmic channel of transmission connecting Eisenstein to Smithson, leads to a mannerist model for minimalist transgression—a transgression, that is, reimagined in terms of excess, artifice, monstrosity, and parody. To the extent that I invoke Vertov's anti-art model of "Kino-Eye," then, it is only to further draw out the degree to which Eisenstein's own approach to cinema and to montage consisted in an embrace and exaggeration of cinema's essential condition as art. For Greenberg's position on minimalism as lapsing into the non-art condition of "Good Design," see Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture [1967]," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. Four: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 250–256. For a further discussion of what Greenberg meant by this category, see Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 211–221.

[149] Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 40, 33. Karl Marx put it thus: "*man makes religion*; religion does not make man." Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right,'" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 53.

chaos, in complacent attendance at historical moments of violent upheaval—crucifixions, revolutions, world wars, assassinations, and the 1917 collapse of the Russian autocracy.[150] "Something very funny happens when we start that number," Jagger confessed in response to the stabbing that infamously took place during that song at the disastrous Altamont Free Concert of December 6, 1969.[151] Popular music increasingly became Lucifer's preferred vehicle of mass dissemination, and in 1970 Black Sabbath released its self-titled debut—an album that announced the birth of the hell-obsessed genre of heavy metal and thus Beelzebub's victorious infiltration of mass consciousness. Truly a pop culture phenomenon, the album peaked at 23 on the Billboard 200 and remained on the list for some 66 weeks. "The Age of Satan," as some scholars have dubbed the period, was upon us.[152]

That Smithson owned Black Sabbath's debut is not particularly surprising given

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[150] Jagger's lyrics narrate this last event as follows:

> I stuck around St. Petersburg
> When I saw it was a time for a change
> Killed the czar and his ministers
> Anastasia screamed in vain.

[151] Jagger's comment was recorded as part of *Gimme Shelter*, the Maysles Brothers *cinéma vérité* documentary of the band's 1969 U.S. tour, and came in response to viewing footage from the concert that documented the fatal stabbing of Meredith Hunter by a Hells Angel moonlighting as concert security.

[152] This brief timeline owes much to Chris Mathews, who dates the contemporary rise of Satanism in popular culture to 1966 with LaVey's highly publicized activities but suggests that it truly entered the mainstream through popular cinema and music. He attributes pop music in particular as "the most visible and confrontational contemporary adoption of Satan." Chris Mathews, *Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 178, http://openurl.cdlib.org?sid=UCLA:CAT&genre=book&__char_set=utf8&isbn=9780313366406. Asbjorn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa Petersen similarly designate this period of the late 1960s and early '70s "the Age of Satan," by which they mean that it crystallized as a pseudo-religious ideology, primarily through LaVey. Asbjorn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

both the album's ubiquity and the artist's eclecticism.[153] Nor is it particularly surprising,

given Smithson's move away from the explicitly hellish language of mannerism already

by the late 1960s, that he did not pursue the band's follow-up releases of the subsequent

years. To be sure, Smithson was neither secret Satanist nor secret metalhead. And yet,

this explosion of hellishness in the realm of pop culture during the late 1960s helps

contextualize Smithson's preoccupation with mannerism during that same period, as if

the artist belonged to, even anticipated, a larger cultural mood, a larger strategy of

cultural transgression by way of a sinister and monstrous underworld. More than

anything Satan embodied during this moment an embrace of our lapsarian condition, our

corporeal desires, our material pleasures. To follow the left-hand path, as LaVey

proselytized, meant to resist the hypocrisy of the faithful and the hegemonic repression of

carnality. "Open your eyes that you may see," Satan beckoned. "For I stand forth to

challenge the wisdom of the world; to interrogate the 'laws' of man and of 'God'!"[154]

* * *

Milton's *Paradise Lost* opens *in media res* with Satan and his dark legions freshly

consigned to Hell after a failed revolution against almighty God. Satan could no longer

bear the "Tyranny of Heav'n," the blind servitude that was his eternal plight. However

ideal, however perfect, Heaven depended upon immutable hierarchies and unimpeachable

laws that impinged upon his freedom:

At first I thought that liberty and Heav'n

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[153] An inventory of Smithson's record library is held at the Archives of American Art. "Inventory List of Unfilmed Phonograph (Music) Records," c. 1970s, Box 11 Folder 21, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, American Archives of Art.

[154] LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 30.

> To Heav'nly souls had been all one; but now
> I see that most through sloth had rather serve[155]

Hence, he wondered, "But what if better counsels might erect / Our minds and teach us to cast off this Yoke?" Things ended badly for Satan and his "Godless crew," needless to say, and, reawakening in Hell, they immediately plan their next move. Swift retribution is proposed by one fallen angel, who suggests a new campaign against God that might finally deliver his throne, but this idea is declined in recognition of the futility of such a battle against omnipotent power. After deliberation, Satan himself embarks on a perilous journey to Eden where he, "artificer of fraud," will initiate the fall of God's new creation, mankind, tempting it to taste of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge:

> [...] If then his Providence
> Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
> Our labour must be to pervert that end,
> And out of good still to find means of evil[156]

Such is the nature of Satan's revolution—not to displace the hegemony of God but to endlessly corrupt it.

As Georges Bataille wrote, the revolutionary task is not to make "an eagle above eagles, a *supereagle* striking down authoritarian imperialism." Instead, he revives Marx's "old mole," a figure for the revolution that "hollows out chambers in a decomposed soil repugnant to the delicate nose of the utopians," a revolution that "begins in the bowels of the earth, as in the materialist bowels of the proletarians."[157] In Smithson's retrieval of a mannerist Eisenstein, in his embrace of the filmmaker's hellish excess, I propose that we

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[155] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, book 6, lines 164–166.

[156] Milton, book 1, lines 162–165.

[157] Georges Bataille, "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix 'Sur' in the Words 'Surhomme' and 'Surrealist' [1929–30?]," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, vol. 14, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 34–35.

face an analogous situation: not a futile *coup* of hegemonic idealism but its debasement

and degradation through a seductive embrace of corrupt knowledge.

Chapter 2

From Work to Sext: Erotic Travel through the Yucatán

> Sentences like "skylines" are made of separate "things" that constitute a *whole* syntax.
> Robert Smithson[1]

> Unless for some perverts the sentence is a *body*?
> Roland Barthes[2]

A few years after impishly posing as Tsar (see Chapter 1), Sergei Mikhailovich

Eisenstein would assume the guise of another terrible figure, this time a Spanish

conquistador in the mold of Hernán Cortés (fig. 2.1). Wearing a plain doublet finished

with a ruff collar, billowing Venetians, and ornate laced boots, he steps forth through a

trompe-l'oeil archway as if from another world and from another time. At his back stand

the cupolas of Saint Basil's and the walls of the Kremlin, signifiers of this unlikely

conquistador's Soviet motherland. Before him, we can only guess, is his own New

Spain—a foreign land of mountains and oceans, jungles and deserts, ancient ruins and

modern metropolises. Where we might expect to find weapons or other accoutrements

from the age of discovery and conquest, however, the film director holds only a flimsy

strip of celluloid, dangling delicately from his fingers.[3]

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[1] Robert Smithson, "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 59.

[2] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 51.

[3] While Eisenstein is depicted in an approximation of period-correct dress, I am not aware of an allusion to any specific portrait of Cortés or other Spanish conquistador. Yet this must have been the intended evocation, for Eisenstein recalls in his later memoirs that his face was painted "like Cortés the conquistador's." Eisenstein, *Volume IV: Beyond the Stars, The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, 49.

The portrait was made by muralist Roberto Montenegro in 1931 during Eisenstein's yearlong sojourn in Mexico. Eisenstein was there working on a project, what was to have been his fifth feature film, traveling throughout the country with his assistant director, Grigori Alexandrov, and his cinematographer, Eduard Tisse. *¡Que Viva México!*, as it came to be called, was to be something of a cinematic portrait of and homage to a land, a people, a history that utterly transfixed the Soviet director. Unlike Eisenstein's previous films, it was not to be a narrative, exactly, but what he described as a "vast and multicolored Film-Symphony about Mexico,"[4] a film that would encompass Mexico's diverse cities, villages, regions; that would jump from pre-Columbian ruin to post-revolutionary metropolis; that would speak of the dissonance of beauty and sacrificial violence in the bullfight; that would bring to life the Día de los Muertos carnival of the present and its incongruous elation in the face of death; that would leap from somnolent jungle romance to action-packed desert gunfight; that would introduce its viewer to the menacing maguey cactus and the improbably sweet, milky nectar it harbored. Oriented towards both life and death, the sensuous and the violent, past and present, nature and the man-made—Mexico seemed to offer itself up to Eisenstein as the very embodiment of his theory of montage in its abrupt juxtapositions and turbulent disjunctions, as if the dualities of the dialectic unfolded around him wherever he went, incarnate in the country's quasi-cinematic condition of discontinuity and becoming.

If nothing else, Montenegro's painted likeness of Eisenstein conveys something of the two artists' mutual affection and respect, a token of the personal impact the director must have made on his various hosts and interlocutors as a peripatetic guest in a

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[4] S. M. Eisenstein and V. G. Alexandrov, "Synopsis for 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" *Experimental Cinema*, no. 5 (1934): 5.

new land. Yet Eisenstein's reincarnation as a Cortés-like figure belongs, as well, to a

larger tableau entitled *Reconstrucción*, which situates the filmmaker amidst a vision of

artisanal Mexico following the recent revolution of 1910–20. We recognize, for instance,

a distinctive candelabra from Izúcar de Matamoros at the top, a self-portrait of

Montenegro seen through a window, his assistant on a ladder, and assorted vignettes

evoking other folk traditions, crafts, and music, all tucked into a strange and labyrinthine

scaffolding of stone ledges and archways (fig. 2.2).[5] In the context of this greater scene of

reconstrucción, then, the master Soviet filmmaker emerges as not only a friend but also

something of a comrade, as if a cinematic ambassador from post-Revolutionary Russia

had been invited into another post-revolutionary milieu and hospitably associated with its

unique artistic identity.

And yet Eisenstein's rendering has troubling overtones, too. For the figure of the

Spanish conquistador is a profoundly ambivalent one in Mexico's visual culture, a figure

at once celebrated for his seminal role in the country's uniquely hybrid cultural identity

and condemned for his ruthless obliteration of the indigenous Mesoamerican civilization

that he displaced. The European-trained muralists like Montenegro who rose to

prominence following the revolution—Diego Rivera, Jean Charlot, David Siquieros, or

José Clemente Orozco, to name a few others with whom Eisenstein intersected[6]—

invariably registered this very ambivalence in their work, which so often concerned itself

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[5] No longer extant, Montenegro's portrait was sited at the Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo in Mexico City. For more on this fresco, see Julieta Ortiz Gaitán, *Entre dos mundos: los murales de Roberto Montenegro*, 1. ed. (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994).

[6] Evidencing his admiration for Mexican visual culture, Eisenstein devoted each section of *¡Que Viva México!* to a different muralist, often alluding to formal characteristics of their work. For more on this aspect of the project, see Jay Leyda, *Eisenstein at Work*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books: Museum of Modern Art, 1982).

with the subject of Mexico's complicated history and heritage. Cortés in particular was a near ubiquitous presence in these artists' fresco cycles, appearing by turns heroic and murderous. In Rivera's *History of Mexico* murals at the Palacio Nacional (1929–35), for instance, an armored Cortés is depicted in violent and asymmetrical combat against an Aztec army, ready to thrust a metal-tipped spear into an enemy warrior (fig. 2.3). At the same time, the warfare in which Cortés partakes only reprises a far more ancient scene of brutality unfolding on the wall adjacent, where Aztec warriors violently subdue their own revolting slaves (fig. 2.4). In a tableau transpiring after the conquest, likewise, the conquistador reappears to oversee the exploitation of Indian labor, yet here he is flanked by his native wife, La Malinche, and their son, Martín, the reputed first Mestizo and thus mythical origin of modern-day Mexican culture (fig. 2.5). We may wish to condemn the man, Rivera's mural suggests, but he also belongs to our very identity.[7] José Clemente Orozco, to cite another example, explored a similarly ambivalent terrain in a slightly earlier rendering of Cortés and La Malinche (1924–26). Once again, the union of the European and the Mesoamerican registered in the double portrait conveys a point of cultural origin, a birth of a new civilization. However, even as the denuded pair evokes a prelapsarian Adam and Eve, Orozco has rendered them as grotesque, fleshy volumes who

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[7] For more on the ways in which the entire mural sequence at the Palacio Nacional incorporates metaphors of *mestizaje*, or miscegenation, as a critical part of Mexican culture, see Luis-Martín Lozano and Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera, *Diego Rivera, the Complete Murals*, ed. Benedikt Taschen (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2008), 199. Indeed, as Coronel Rivera suggests in a section entitled "The Triumph of Mestizo Culture," these themes are embodied not only in the murals but their very site: "The [Palacio Nacional] represents the cultural hybridization (mestizaje) characteristic of central Mexico since 1521, having been constructed on the ruins of the *Tlatocayancalli tlahuica* (Tlahuica tribute-collection center) destroyed by Hernán Cortés. Nothing suited the Spanish conquistadors better than reusing a site established by indigenous groups for the same purpose."

tower mercilessly over a fallen indigenous body, as if to emphasize the repulsive legacy of slaughter on which this new mestizo culture would be built (fig. 2.6).[8]

Even outside of such artistic renderings as these, the very myth of Cortés's 1519 arrival is fraught with ambivalence and confusion. Fabled to have been received by the Aztec ruler Moctezuma as the incarnation of Quetzalcoatl, a deity whose return had long been prophesied by a variety of cataclysmic disasters, the conquistador was from the beginning embraced as much as resisted, revered as a god even as his men increasingly wrought havoc on their hosts.[9] Eisenstein would have been well aware of the horrors of the conquest, needless to say. His experience of Mexico was largely informed by Anita Brenner's 1929 book, *Idols Behind Altars*, which quotes at length from colonial reports that describe the various atrocities committed by Cortés's soldiers. "The first thing," she excerpts from a particularly appalling account of the final and irrevocable dissolution of all pretenses to peace,

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[8] Rivera's and Orozco's murals are but two examples of their generation's coming to terms with the figure of Cortés. Other examples of public works to feature the conquistador prominently, and often critically, include: Jean Charlot's *The Conquest of Tenochtitlán (La conquest de Tenochtitlán),* 1922; David Siqueiros's *The Torture of Cuauhtémoc* (also known as *The Torment of Cuautemoc*), 1950; and Orozco's *American Civilization*, 1932, and *The Spanish Conquest of Mexico*, 1938–9.

[9] As Anita Brenner wrote in the book that served as Eisenstein's chief source of information about Mexico, "The return of Quetzalcoatl was set for the end of a cycle that proved to be the last of the Aztec Empire. He was heralded by comets, earthquakes, sinister messengers. Moctezuma was warned that the end of his reign was near, and with it his own death. Then Cortez materialized the white and bearded—maize-like but un-Aztec—human form of the radiant Serpent." Anita Brenner, *Idols behind Altars* (New York: Payson & Clarke ltd, 1929), 18. While any in-depth discussion of the conquest remains beyond the scope of the present chapter, it bears noting that the history of Cortés's arrival is, of course, considerably more complicated, and today there remains some debate as to whether Aztec rulers actually mistook Cortés for Quetzalcoatl's second coming. Nevertheless, this myth was pervasive during the moment of Eisenstein's sojourn to Mexico: Not only was it taken for granted in Brenner's book, which relied on conquistador Bernal Diaz del Castillo's first-person account of the conquest, but it was also featured prominently in the muralists' renderings of Mexican history.

was to cut off the heads and the hands of the musicians, and then they began to slice heads, legs, arms…and rip stomachs open… Some of the heads were crushed…people were cut in half, thrown in heaps…some crawled, their entrails dragging, till they expired… Some jumped over the walls of the courtyards, others went to the top of the temple, or fell among the mangled corpses and pretended they were dead, and thus a few escaped…So great was the flow of blood that streams ran in the courtyard…And still the Spaniards followed them to the top of the temple and hunted for living among the dead,.. it was a muck of intestines and blood.[10]

For someone like Brenner, such was the catastrophic horror from which a new civilization nevertheless blossomed. The result of a transgressive passage across the vast Atlantic, Cortés's arrival meant nothing less than a breach of watery boundaries—separating the old world from the new, the European from the American—which was at once destructive and generative. The conquistador was both origin and end, midwife and executioner, bringer of life and harbinger of death.

Surely Montenegro's portrait of *el conquistador* Eisenstein reads as an absurd send-up of a certain tradition of imperial European portraiture heroicizing Cortés and figures like him, a harmless homage to this larger-than-life film director from the East by parodic recourse to a more local prototype of grandiosity and bombast. But, particularly in the context of Mexico's tradition of muralism and the deep ambivalence to which it speaks, one wonders about the fresco's more complicated evocations. As consequential as Eisenstein's presence may have been, after all, was he involved, at least in part, in a

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[10] Brenner, 71. Brenner is not clear about her exact source here, however it appears to be the written account of a Spanish soldier. As she explains, the relationship between the Spanish and the Aztecs started out peaceably enough, with mutual respect and the exchange of gifts, but soon Spanish soldiers began looting and pillaging, and Moctezuma was put in chains. This particular episode, commonly referred to as the Massacre in the Great Temple, occurred when Cortés was called away to see to an incoming Spanish ship, leaving Tenochtitlan in the hands of Pedro de Alvarado, who initiated the carnage.

pillaging of Mexico somehow analogous to that of Cortés? Was this comradely spirit not only contributing productively to Mexican culture but also stealing and assimilating it, not for its objects and priceless treasures, perhaps, but for its images, its very visage, forever indexed on a strip of celluloid like the one he wields?

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Here is a photograph of Robert Smithson in Mexico almost four decades later (fig. 2.7). It is April 1969, and the artist is in Agua Azul, about halfway through a two-week-long meandering journey through the Yucatán. He is attired in the vaguely Western costume he often chose for such expeditions: boots, wide-brimmed hat, and button-down shirt, all paired somewhat incongruously with dark sunglasses that betray the city slicker's urban origins. In the sprezzatura of his distant gaze and his detached crouch beside an enamelware mug containing what one imagines to be the requisite cup of gritty campfire coffee, Smithson's persona evokes not the figure of the conquistador but that of a different kind of outsider—the big-city artist transformed into a Western anti-hero befitting of the Ennio Morricone movie soundtracks he owned. Famously scored by Morricone, the three so-called Spaghetti Westerns comprising Sergio Leone's 1960s "Dollar Trilogy" all feature such an outsider, such a nameless drifter prototypical of the genre. Making his debut in *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), for instance, Clint Eastwood's Man with No Name rides into a small U.S./Mexico border town from elsewhere—sowing chaos, stoking racial tensions and old rivalries, and richly profiteering along the way— before disappearing as quickly as he arrived. As if in indirect acknowledgment of his own

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theatrical evocation of that mythical archetype, Smithson noted afterwards, "You don't

have to have cows to be a cowboy."[11]

Like Eisenstein before him, Smithson was accompanied by his own entourage—

his wife, Nancy Holt, to whom the above photograph is attributed, and his dealer,

Virginia Dwan. Over the course of about two weeks, the trio traveled to and through

Mexico. The excursion began on Sanibel and Captiva Islands in Florida, where they

visited Robert Rauschenberg, and from there Smithson, Holt, and Dwan proceeded to the

Yucatán, as if following the prehistoric land bridge hypothesized to have once connected

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[11] Robert Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 126. Smithson attributes his quote to "Nudie," who, fittingly, appears to have been the Western tailor and stylist Nudie Cohn and thus an ideal spokesperson for the notion that a Western look could be a self-conscious costume. Very likely Smithson encountered this quote in a June 28, 1969 *Rolling Stone* article about the stylist: Jerry Hopkins, "Nudie: The World's Flashiest Country and Western Stylist," *Rolling Stone*, June 28, 1969. As far as cinema goes, while Smithson's film tastes are known to have gravitated to low-budget science fiction and horror, the presence in his record collection of a 1968 Hugo Montenegro and His Orchestra album comprising arrangements of Morricone's scores from Leone's "Dollars Trilogy" offers some evidence of at least passing interest in the Western, as well. In fact, as I suggest here, evocations of that latter genre can be found throughout his practice, thought, and particularly his choices of attire. For instance, Smithson seems to have donned a cowboy costume not only throughout his Mexico trip but also during other excursions to the mythical West, notably in his summer 1968 trip to Mono Lake, CA, with Holt and Michael Heizer. Smithson recorded the latter trip with a Super-8 camera, and, while a film never came of the footage, Holt posthumously edited one based on Smithson's notes (*Mono Lake*, 1968/2004). In it we find both Heizer and Smithson in Western get-ups, the playful absurdity of which deeply contrasts with Holt's far less theatrical t-shirt and slacks. Indeed, that I describe Smithson's attire in this photograph from Agua Azul as "costume" is advised, since its performative, theatrical, and artificial connotations are deeply consistent with the artist's mannerist sensibility that I outlined in Chapter 1, as if he were absurdly following his own recommendation that "The artist should be an actor who refuses to act." Even more than this, the artist's mannerist attitude bears an affinity with Leone's Spaghetti Westerns in particular—in addition to *Fistful of Dollars*, his "trilogy" included *For a Few Dollars More* (1964) and *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (1966)—which are famous for their highly artificial exaggerations, distortions, and permutations of the genre and its tropes, not least of which is the fact that they were shot not in the American West but in Spain and Italy. While I am unaware of any discourse about this period in the Western's development that specifically invokes "mannerism," it is difficult for me to believe that Smithson would not have made such a connection himself. Regrettably, further discussion of the various iterations of Smithson's Western persona and the correspondences between his mannerist preoccupations and overwrought genre films of the 1960s must remain a subject of future research.

Florida to the Mexican peninsula.[12] Their Mexican itinerary commenced from Mérida, from which point, as Smithson was later to write in his travelogue-like account of the trip, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," they proceeded to "travel at random, like the first Mayans."[13] In a mostly automotive journey that easily amounted to over 1,000 miles, they meandered south through Umán and Muna, Uxmal and Bolonchén de Rejón; along the gulf coast through Campeche and Champotón; inland towards the Mayan ruins in Palenque and to Agua Azul; by plane, to archaeological sites at Bonampak and Yaxchilan that lay further southeast; and back again to Mérida via other gulf cities like Villahermosa, Frontera, Ciudad del Carmen, and Sabuncuy.[14]

Smithson was not only in the middle of a road trip in this April 1969 photograph, however. He was also in the middle of a larger trajectory, one that this chapter will seek to sketch, connecting the nonsites that the artist first debuted a year prior in March 1968 to the larger site-specific pours and rundowns of late 1969 and early 1970—*Asphalt Rundown* in Rome (October 1969), *Concrete Pour* in Chicago (November 1969), and *Glue Pour* in Vancouver (January 1970)—which in turn anticipated even more ambitious projects in which sculpture was rearticulated as a thing to be sited in the landscape and abandoned to entropic deterioration. Between the two were the Mirror Displacements that the artist executed during his Yucatán journey, a genre that he had only just

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[12] On the fabled Florida-Yucatán land bridge, see Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 146–149. According to Smithson's daily planner, the trip to Florida and Mexico lasted from April 15 to May 2, 1969. Robert Smithson, "Engagement Calendar, 1969," 1969, Box 1 Folder 7, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, American Archives of Art.

[13] Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 120.

[14] In addition to the rough itinerary that can be extrapolated from Smithson's "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," my reconstruction of this trip relies on the archival accounts provided by Ann Reynolds and Jennifer Roberts. See Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, 172. And Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History*, 153 fn. 26.

conceptualized and inaugurated in the months before and that he would continue to

elaborate through 1969. As I will suggest in this chapter, the Mirror Displacements

evidence a radicalization of the principle of montage in Smithson's work—from the

hellish compositional logic it had modeled in the context of his mannerist concerns to a

textual (and, as we will come to see, sexual) one commensurate with the dispersed and

discontinuous nature of the project.

At each of nine sites along the meandering journey Smithson and his entourage

sliced through the Yucatán, the artist installed twelve mirrors, give or take—inserting

them into the earth, laying them upon it, cantilevering them out from it, or else wedging

them into thickets of tree limbs and root systems (figs. 2.8–2.16). Like the other

ephemeral works he was to make over the course of the journey—he flipped over some

rocks to reveal earthen pits below (*Overturned Rock #1*), he planted a dead tree upside-

down (*Third Upside-Down Tree*), and he assembled white limestone rocks into a pile to

create an "earth map" of the ancient supercontinent Gondwanaland (*Hypothetical

Continent of Gondwanaland*)—Smithson photographed each ensemble of mirrors in situ

before dismantling it.[15] In that sense, too, Smithson's Mexican project bore some

superficial resemblance to Eisenstein's, for while the image of the artist in Agua Azul

does not show him with the accoutrements of photography as had been the case in

Eisenstein's portrait (recall his proud exhibition of a celluloid strip), surely the camera

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[15] This is only a partial inventory of the works Smithson made during this trip. For instance, the artist also produced other ephemeral works near Palenque and extensively photographed a hotel there, which he would later incorporate into a 1972 slide presentation titled "Hotel Palenque." I am also leaving out the handful of ephemeral works he produced on Sanibel and Captiva Islands, including *The Hypothetical Continent in Shells: Lemuria*, *Mirror Short, Sanibel Island*, and, with the assistance of Robert Rauschenberg, who was living on Captiva Island, *Second Upside-Down Tree*. On the works Smithson produced in Florida, see Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 146–149.

was his chosen instrument, as well. More than that, Smithson's ephemeral Mirror

Displacements, also like Eisenstein's film, conjured something of the *terroir* of the place

itself. For the cycle that they instantiated—the temporary efflorescence of each work and

its inevitable disappearance—recalled the ancient Mesoamerican civilizations that

themselves once flourished in these locales before sinking back into the jungle,

reabsorbed into an original state of undifferentiation, "deformed and beaten down by the

pressure of years." "If you visit the sites," Smithson later wrote of these works, "you find

nothing but memory traces."[16]

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   If Smithson knew anything about *¡Que Viva México!*, it would have been by way

of the film's own kinds of memory traces.[17] For Eisenstein's fifth feature film was never

finished. During Smithson's lifetime, as today, the film had the dubious honor of being

one of the great scandals of film history, one of its legendary uncompleted monuments,

its legacy persisting only in the form of documentation, plans, scenarios, and various

unauthorized cuts. As Parker Tyler lamented in his 1962 *Classics of the Foreign Film*,

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[16] Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 127, 132.

[17] As I do throughout this dissertation, I am hypothesizing Smithson's familiarity with *¡Que Viva México!* given his general cinephilia and its particular registration in his library. For example, Smithson clearly studied Marie Seton's biography of Eisenstein closely, as evident in his essay on *Ivan the Terrible* (see Chapter 1). Her book goes into great detail about the director's Mexico project, a well, quoting widely from various scripts, preparatory documents, epistolary exchanges, and drawings. Parker Tyler's *Classics of the Foreign Film*, another resource in Smithson's library, likewise features *¡Que Viva México!* prominently in its pantheon of cinematic achievement. And while Smithson died before the 1979 release of the Grigori Alexandrov's cut of the film (the most "complete" version of the film we have, produced by Eisenstein's former assistant director), he would have nevertheless had access to other versions of the film throughout the 1960s, although admittedly they were not screened as regularly as other Eisenstein films. In what follows, my account of *¡Que Viva México!* relies heavily on Alexandrov's 1979 version of the film (in particular the Kino Lorber release) in addition to Eisenstein's many written scenarios.

"The story of this magnificent film must remain the most golden illusion ever conceived in an art medium and then shattered into pieces."[18]

Among Smithson's substantial library, one of this shattered film's many memory traces persisted in his copy of Marie Seton's 1952 biography of the filmmaker. In it we learn that Eisenstein had not initially intended to go to Mexico at all, but to Los Angeles, where he arrived during the summer of 1930 at the invitation of Paramount Studios. It was not long before "Hollywood's Messenger from Hell," as one particularly aggrieved member of the American right slandered him, became a considerable publicity liability for his would-be employers.[19] Nearly forced to return home, Eisenstein secured last-minute funding from the Soviet-sympathizing novelist Upton Sinclair and his wife, Mary Craig, to pursue a film project in Mexico instead. Along with assistant director Alexandrov and cinematographer Tisse, Eisenstein arrived in Mexico City on December 9, 1930, and over the course of the next fourteen months the three would shoot over 200,000 feet of film, the equivalent of some forty hours' worth of material. Due to repeat cost overruns and delays, however—to say nothing of Sinclair's growing incredulity that Eisenstein's miles of rushes could amount to a single, coherent film—the project's increasingly impatient benefactors eventually refused to send further funds. Production ground to a halt by February 1932, and Eisenstein, Alexandrov, and Tisse were finally

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[18] Tyler, *Classics of the Foreign Film*, 78.

[19] Seton's biography goes into detail about this one-man smear campaign, initiated by one Major Pease, as well as the deleterious effects it had on Hollywood's good will towards Eisenstein. The epithet "Hollywood's Messenger from Hell" was the title of one of Pease's various anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic pamphlets, in which he accused Eisenstein of being a "Bolshevik murderer," a "robber," a "sadist," and a "monster." For a brief primary account of Pease's xenophobic rabble-rousing, see "Censorship Rages On and On," *Rob Wagner's Script*, June 28, 1930.

forced to return to Moscow without any of their footage, for which Eisenstein had unknowingly forfeited the copyright.[20]

Eisenstein's film, therefore, was never made. Others were. Determined not to wholly forfeit his considerable investment, an enterprising Sinclair hired Hollywood producer Sol Lesser to salvage a feature from Eisenstein's seemingly incoherent mélange of footage. The result, *Thunder Over Mexico*, premiered in New York on September 22, 1933.[21] From the moment of the film's debut, Tisse's stunning photography was almost universally lauded, but the praise ended there. Clearly comprehending the import of Eisenstein's techniques of montage, even the popular press lamented the absence of the Soviet master's hand from Lesser's cut. Meanwhile more enthusiastic American cineastes utterly revolted: they were thrown out of theaters, they organized petitions, they inked

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[20] Many detailed accounts of Eisenstein's time in Mexico exist. In addition to Seton's biography, see Harry M. Geduld and Ronald Gottesman, *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair: The Making & Unmaking of Que Viva Mexico!* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970). The correspondence compiled in this volume, largely to and from Eisenstein and/or Sinclair, testifies to the genesis of the project and its rather abrupt termination. Additionally, see Inga Karetnikova and Leon Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, 1st ed (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991). In addition to a brief essay on the history of Eisenstein's Mexico project, Karetnikova and Steinmetz include various documents, scenarios, and treatments authored by Eisenstein that help give a sense of his vision. For a more recent scholarly account of Eisenstein's Mexico project, which offers an in-depth analysis of the filmmaker's conception of the country as a historical and cultural entity, see Masha Salazkina, *In Excess: Sergei Eisenstein's Mexico*, Cinema and Modernity (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[21] *Thunder Over Mexico* was only one of the films cobbled together from Eisenstein's footage. That same year Lesser also made a film called *Eisenstein in Mexico* (about 51 minutes); and in 1934 Sinclair hired Lesser again to produce *Death Day* (also known as *Day of the Dead*, about 17 minutes). Marie Seton would later cut together *Time in the Sun*, which premiered in 1939 and which, unlike Lesser's cuts, received some exposure during the '60s and '70s at New York City repertory theaters, where Smithson would have had ample opportunity to see it. In 1954, the footage for *¡Que Viva México!* was donated to the Museum of Modern Art, from which Jay Leyda created two "study" films the following year. In 1979, MoMA gave the original negatives to Moscow, and, that same year, Eisenstein's former assistant director, Alexandrov, put together a version of the film released under its original title. As mentioned, this 1979 version of *¡Que Viva México!* is regarded as the closest approximation available of Eisenstein's original vision, although it is necessarily incomplete, as production had not been finished when the crew was recalled to Moscow.

manifestos. *Thunder Over Mexico*, they cried, was "a tragedy," a "vulgarization," a "miscarriage," an "aesthetic crime." Eisenstein's vision had been "vandalized," "butchered," "massacred," "mutilated."[22] The very procedures of montage pioneered by Eisenstein had, in Lesser's hands, become violent indeed.

For Eisenstein, the slow realization that his film was lost came as an immense tragedy. He had held out hope for months after his departure from Mexico that Sinclair might finally make good on his promise, that the footage for *¡Que Viva México!* might be on each arriving ship. News of *Thunder Over Mexico* ended all that, and he grieved its loss terribly as one might grieve the loss of a loved one. "Day after day he talked of killing himself," his biographer tells us. "For three weeks Eisenstein behaved like a man going out of his mind."[23] And little wonder. For the distant land of Mexico had been beckoning for over a decade. First kindled by Jack London's revolutionary tale, *The Mexican*, which Eisenstein had adapted for the Proletkult theater in 1920–21, his curiosity about the place was only reignited by *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) starring Douglas Fairbanks, an early favorite of his that he likely saw in the following years.[24]

[22] See, for instance, M.H, "In Old Mexico," *New York Times*, September 25, 1933. And "Ushers Bounce Young Kirstein," *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1933, https://search.proquest.com/docview/163101768/abstract/C5C8360F664A4269PQ/14. "Documentary Films," *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1934. "Manifesto on 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" *Experimental Cinema*, no. 5 (1934): 14. And Seymour Stern and V. G. Alexandrov, "Introduction to 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" *Experimental Cinema*, no. 5 (1934): 3–4.

[23] Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 251.

[24] Geduld and Gottesman estimate that Eisenstein must have encountered *The Mark of Zorro* between 1921 and July 1926, when he met Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford during their travels to Moscow in enthusiastic pursuit of the man who made *Battleship Potemkin*. Geduld and Gottesman, *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair*, 4. Eisenstein discusses the film's formal influence in Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today [1944]," in *Film Form*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1949), 195–255. For a discussion of Pickford and Fairbanks's reception of *Potemkin*, see Petrić, "Soviet Revolutionary Films in America (1926-1935)," 61–62.

And when Diego Rivera visited Moscow in 1927, Eisenstein's adoration of Mexico surged once more. "The swarthy Diego, photographs of his frescoes and his colourful tales," Eisenstein later recalled of the muralist, "all fanned the flames of my longing to get there and to see it all with my own eyes."[25] When at last he did, well, Eisenstein fell madly in love. "The moment I saw Tetlapayac," he recollected of a Hidalgo hacienda that would be prominently featured in his film, "I knew it was the place I had been looking for all my life."[26]

Above all what gripped Eisenstein, what captured his patently exoticizing imagination, was Mexico's heterogeneity, its uncanny sense of hybridity, paradox, juxtaposition. Like modern-day Mexico's mestizo origin story in the European Cortés and the autochthonous La Malinche, Mexico was a collision of the disparate. "Do you know what a 'Serape' is?" he wrote Sinclair in April 1931, his brimming enthusiasm palpable.

> A Serape is the striped blanket that the Mexican Indio, the Mexican charro—every Mexican wears. And the Serape could be the symbol of Mexico. So striped and violently contrasting are the cultures in Mexico running next to each other and at the same time being centuries away.[27]

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[25] Eisenstein, *Volume IV: Beyond the Stars, The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, 412. On Eisenstein's discursive encounters with Mexico in advance of his actual visit, see Salazkina, *In Excess*, especially 22–27. See also Geduld and Gottesman, *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair*, 3–7.

[26] Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 195.

[27] Sergei Eisenstein, "First Outline of 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" in *The Film Sense*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 251. This particular version of Eisenstein's scenario (a transcription of a hand-written document held at MoMA) proliferates in the literature on and by the filmmaker. In addition to Leyda's translation of *The Film Sense*, excerpts appear in Seton's biography. This "scenario" is separate from the one published later in *Experimental Cinema*, which also dates to 1931 and from which Seton also quotes liberally: Eisenstein and Alexandrov, "Synopsis for 'Que Viva Mexico!'" Seton's book additionally contains a 1947 version of the scenario in its entirety: Sergei Eisenstein, "Eisenstein's Introduction to the Scenario of the Film 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" in *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A Biography*, by Marie Seton (London: Bodley Head, 1952), 504–512.

Mexico, he felt, was ancient yet modern, fertile yet morbid, sensuous yet violent, eternally unchanged yet clearly bearing the scars of history. "Wherever you look," he wrote, "the whole country seems to have just risen from the two oceans that wash her shores—everywhere she seems to be in a state of 'coming into being.'"[28] Echoing his equally exoticizing attributions of montage to Japanese culture from 1928–29, Eisenstein had clearly now turned to Mexico as a veritable incarnation of his dialectical theory, an entire land that was in quasi-filmic flux as a result of its conflicting and colliding dynamics.[29]

As was his more general understanding of the country, Eisenstein's attitude here, too, was clearly informed by Anita Brenner, who expressed a similar, and similarly problematic, awe in the face of this dynamic land. Mexico, she wrote, was a place

> torn into sudden transition, from the most luxuriant tropics to the grey, arid, rock-built heights around volcanoes. […] The dramatic and untimed juxtapositions of climates and landscapes are like the days, which everywhere go suddenly and without twilight, from white light into the nights. And they are like the storms, short, powerful, saturating. Crops grow richly, disappear quickly. The land seems unfinished, and at the same time forever fixed.[30]

And this was only its geological and climatic incongruities. Brenner also noted the strange conjunction of temporalities, for instance—the fact that, "In the heart of the capital, rock serpents stare at the automobiles and street-cars that daily scramble past."[31] In similar terms she described the ancient Chichen Itza as a "city more than once rebuilt"

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[28] Eisenstein, *Volume IV: Beyond the Stars, The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, 412.

[29] As I alluded to in this dissertation's Introduction, for instance, Eisenstein excitedly elaborated the "cinematographic trains of Japanese culture"—in particular its ideogrammatic characters, its poetry, and its theater—in his well-known 1929 essay "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram." See, too, his 1928 essay, "The Unexpected," which specifically addresses montage principles in Japan's Kabuki theater. Both essays are anthologized in Eisenstein, *Film Form*.

[30] Brenner, *Idols behind Altars*, 13.

[31] Brenner, 30.

and whose "heterogeneous wheel of styles connect it with different epochs, north and south."[32] To the extent that Mexico, then, "takes […] liberties with time and space,"[33] as she summarized, Eisenstein's film would aspire to that same condition, would seek to capture Mexico as the complex serape it was. Such a film would not be, could not be, a monolithic narrative of the sort that Sinclair may have desired. After all, Eisenstein patiently explained to his patron, "no plot, no whole story could run through this Serape without being false or artificial."[34] Instead such a film would be closer to the compartmentalized heterogeneity that had characterized the fresco of which Eisenstein found himself a part, closer, that is, to Montenegro's complex scaffolding of discontinuous vignettes. For what Eisenstein envisioned was not one film exactly but "four novels framed by prologue and epilogue," a cinematic serape made of six disparate parts "held together by the unity of the weave."[35]

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The kinds of exotic tropes that characterized Eisenstein's experience of Mexico—its heterogeneity, its conflicting sense of temporality, its hybrid lineage, its irreconcilable geographies—would not have been unfamiliar to Smithson. Recalling Eisenstein's "serape" metaphor, for instance, one book Smithson owned described Mexico as a land

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[32] Brenner, 43.

[33] Brenner, 14.

[34] Eisenstein, "First Outline of 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" 251.

[35] Eisenstein and Alexandrov, "Synopsis for 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" 5. Eisenstein, "First Outline of 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" 251. The importance of Brenner's book for Eisenstein's film cannot be understated. *Idols Behind Altars*, one study of *¡Que Viva México!* explains, "is indispensable reading for anyone who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of the Mexican film." Geduld and Gottesman, *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair*, 5. For more on Brenner's formative impact upon Eisenstein, see Salazkina, *In Excess*.

of "fantastic beauty" that paradoxically "concealed horror."[36] Another echoed Anita

Brenner's sense of temporal disjunction in characterizing the Mexican native as having a

> profound sense of a cultural continuity extending back into his country's
> prehistory. He has a vivid recollection of a period equivalent in time to the
> European Middle Ages; and more, he has a detailed picture of a long era which in
> Europe is usually called the Dark Ages, and which in Mexico coincided with the
> first structures of the resplendent Toltec civilization. The Mexican recalls these
> periods through the sculpture, pottery, pyramids, and temples of Chichén Itzá,
> Monte Albán, Teotihuacán, through the pre-Columbian epic poems of
> Mesoamerica; through the descriptions of temples and cities of Mexico recorded
> in the chronicles of the early *conquistadores*.[37]

Smithson put it somewhat more simply when it came to such inventories of clashing

sensibilities and temporalities. Mexico was an "alien world" that "could not be

comprehended," he explained retrospectively in a 1972 interview. "The jungle had grown

up over these vanished civilizations."[38]

For Smithson as for Eisenstein before him, the perceived "alien" and

"incomprehensible" nature of Mexico pervaded the work he made there, as if the Mirror

Displacements, like *¡Que Viva México!*, structurally reiterated something of the place's

heterogeneous, multifaceted, and discontinuous nature. For, while the Mirror

Displacements may not have aspired to be serape-like exactly, they nevertheless

advanced a certain logic of interweaving and interpenetration that bore important

affinities with Eisenstein's textile model. Take the second, sixth, and eighth Mirror

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[36] C.A. Burland, *The Gods of Mexico* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 3.

[37] Willis Barnstone, "Introduction," in *Mexico before Cortez: Art, History, Legend*, by Ignacio Bernal, trans. Willis Barnstone (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), xiv. "From skyscrapers along the Paseo de la Reforma," Barnstone elaborated, "today's visitor can still see the immutable mountains and the extraordinary valley, but the lakes which were so important in ancient history have now disappeared, and chimney smoke now stains the diaphanous air. It is futile to look for the ruins of an Indian temple among the buildings of the metropolis."

[38] Robert Smithson and Paul Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution [1972]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 295.

Displacements, for example. Partially burrowed in red earth, inserted into the sand, or lain atop a bank adjacent to a river—the rectilinear mirrors, somewhat scattered but roughly gridded, sharply contrast with the ostensibly unmanipulated state of their organic environs. The mirrors confront the viewer as so many discrete and quantifiable objects, as man-made geometries that are for the most part layered over the earth, as discontinuous figures whose ground (quite literally, *the* ground) remains comparatively disordered, uncontained, uncountable. To that end, Smithson's Mirror Displacements call to mind a precedent like Hans Arp's *Collage of Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* (1917) (fig. 2.17). To the degree that this iconic Dada work announces the physical discontinuity of its various material components—discrete squares clearly torn from blue and cream paper that were randomly strewn over a materially distinct gray paper ground, roughly aligned, and then pasted in place—Smithson's Yucatán Displacements similarly suggest a collage-like conjunction of materials, of forms, and of the aleatory and the orderly.[39] Like Arp's squares, Smithson's mirrors readily divulge their discontinuity not only from one another but from the ground upon which they lie; and that discontinuity is articulated as a physical cut clearly visible at the seams— separating mirror and earth, the man-made and the natural, the geometrical and the organic, the bounded and the unbounded.

Smithson's Mirror Displacements instantiate another kind of juxtaposition, too. For in addition to the obvious intrusion of geometrical planes and foreign materials into the landscape, the mirrors also splice fragments of reflected light—light whose origins

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[39] For a brief discussion of Arp's collages of this genre, in particular the way in which they effect a tension between the aleatory and the gridded, which was designed to undermine authorship, see T. J. Demos, "Zurich Dada: The Aesthetics of Exile," in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman and Matthew Witkovsky (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 21–22.

lay definitely beyond the profilmic tableau indexed by the camera—into that same tableau, thus guiding our vision paradoxically beyond the enframing bounds of the photograph. That Smithson shot almost all of the Mirror Displacements from a high angle only contributes to this notable porosity of registers: in the second Displacement, for instance, the camera's angle directs our vision decisively and unambiguously downward to the ground, to what lies below the horizon line, that limit brokering the bifurcated separation of sky and earth, above and below; yet the upraised mirrors transgress that limit, their reflections granting access to the sky all the same in the form of effulgent rectangles of white light. In the third and fourth Mirror Displacements, likewise, the reflections deliver not only silvery illumination but also recognizable glimpses of blue sky and clouds. "For brief moments flying butterflies were reflected," Smithson noted of this paradoxical interpenetration of sky and earth. "They seemed to fly through a sky of gravel."[40]

A few of the works exacerbate this sense of optical discontinuity and reversal even further, as if the fabric of the photograph were riven by square portals leading elsewhere. In the seventh and ninth Mirror Displacements, for example, the mirrors are embedded into dense and verdant undergrowth, into impenetrable networks of roots and leaves, yet their reflections handily penetrate the leafy penumbra nonetheless with flashes of brilliance and legible imagery. What is striking about these latter examples is that, in

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[40] Smithson also described the mirrors as "tide pools of sky." Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 122, 123. Robert Hobbs made a similar observation, stating that "They become pools of mirrored reflections in the ground" which "juxtapose earth and ashes with sky." Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 152. In the evocative words of Dennis Wheeler, likewise, these works conjured "the basement of the sky." Robert Smithson and Dennis Wheeler, "Four Conversations Between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson [1969–70]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, by Robert Smithson, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 229.

the absence of clear spatial cues about the mirrors' relationship to their environs—

shadows indicating their insertion into the ground, say, or their support by earthen

shoring—here the physical mirrors have a tendency to deliquesce completely. If we

experience any collage-like discontinuity, then, it is no longer merely formal (the

geometrical versus the organic) nor merely material (the man-made versus the natural)

but also distinctly optical in the reflections' clear violation of the camera's limited

monocular perspective. "The mirror in a sense is both the physical mirror and the

reflection," Smithson explained immediately before his Yucatán trip.[41] Accordingly, and

to varying degrees across all of the Mirror Displacements, our gaze stops at the physical

mirrors or else travels through them via the excerpted glimpses of reflected light and sky

spliced into the earth and undergrowth, in which case the mirrors lead our vision

elsewhere—beyond the enframing limits of the photograph to a realm we logically

understand to relate to the site, a realm that we generally understand is "up," but that

remains excessive and impossible to grasp precisely across the interval of discontinuity.

As Smithson put it, "Who can divulge from what part of the sky the blue color came?"[42]

In addition to the formal and structural logic of the Mirror Displacements, their

photographic conveyance also partook of Smithson's concern with discontinuity, as if it

too bore the traces of Mexico's "incomprehensible" condition. In the account of the trip

offered in "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," for instance, Smithson described

the camera as a "portable tomb," suggesting that each photograph interred its Mirror

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[41] Robert Smithson and Wiliam C. Lipke, "Fragments of a Conversation [1969]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 190. Smithson's interview with Lipke took place in February 1969 and references his work for the *Earth Art* exhibition at Cornell University (February 11–March 16, 1969).

[42] Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 124.

Displacement, "embalming" it as André Bazin may have put it.[43] According to this

metaphor, the photographs preserved each ephemeral tableau in the manner of so many

archaeological artifacts that bore fragmentary testimony to instantaneous moments of

time separated by intervals of hundreds if not thousands of years. Indeed, recalling

Mexico's striking collage of temporalities and histories that Brenner had observed,

Smithson, too, later noted that

> The buried cities of the Yucatan are enormous and heterogeneous time capsules,
> full of lost abstractions, and broken frameworks. There the wilderness and the city
> intermingle, nature spills into the abstract frames, the containing narrative of an
> entire civilization breaks apart to form another kind of order.[44]

In a comment richly evocative of the discontinuous capabilities of montage, Smithson

finished his thought by noting that "A film is capable of picking up the pieces." So too,

one imagines, is a sequence of still photographs. After all, Smithson explained elsewhere

of his excursions and site-specific interventions, "If you take a photograph of [the work],

you arrest the process. […] The process is not continuous, it is discontinuous, at least in

terms of the record of the process."[45] Particularly in the context of "Incidents of Mirror-

Travel in the Yucatan," where they served as so many chronological illustrations of a

trajectory cut through Mexico, these nine photographs that preserve Smithson's Mirror

Displacements therefore function like discontinuous archaeological fragments of that

excursion.

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[43] Smithson, 121. For Bazin's likening of photography to embalming, see André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9–16.

[44] Robert Smithson, "Art Through the Camera's Eye [c. 1971]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 375.

[45] Robert Smithson, "Interview with Paul Toner [1970]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 235.

Smithson deployed the camera to document not only the Mirror Displacements, finally, but also a number of other ephemeral works that he executed over the course of his Yucatán travels—*Overturned Rock #1*, *Third Upside-Down Tree*, and *Hypothetical Continent of Gondwanaland*. And while these works did not involve mirrors to optically breach their containing photographs, they too can be productively understood according to the logic of collage insofar as they initiated discontinuities through analogous procedures of displacement and replacement, subtraction and addition, excerptation and quotation, all of which divulged cut-like interventions into the landscape. To displace a rock and photograph the clearly delineated pit of moist earth testifying to its fresh absence, to negate a tree's natural orientation by planting it upside-down, to gather white limestone rocks into a blobby form corresponding to an ancient supercontinent—to perform any of these gestures is to mark the natural landscape, to intervene into it. Like less pictorial versions of Richard Long's work, these interventions clearly divulge their status as such by way of their seams of discontinuity, which separate ordered from disordered, manipulated from unmanipulated, figure from ground.

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¡Que Viva México!, for its part, would have opened with a prologue exploring another kind of discontinuity, even another kind of reflection. Evoking a period of antiquity when Mayan civilization thrived, the opening sequence was to juxtapose ruins, statues, and pyramids of Chichen Itza with native Yucatecans in the guise of their Mayan forebears. Here a youth sits motionless with knees clasped between his arms, mirroring the pose of the statue next to him. Here a face seen in profile reflects, across the space of

centuries, a carving from another era. Here the features of another facial profile abstractly echo the stepped geometry of the temple El Castillo (fig. 2.18). "The people bear resemblance to the stone images," Eisenstein wrote in one of his scenarios, "for those images represent the faces of their ancestors."[46] Such provocative compositions dare the viewer to seek morphological correspondences between native physiognomies and Mayan visual culture as we toggle back and forth, mirror and reflection.

In keeping with Brenner, Eisenstein understood such juxtapositions to evoke a sense of the eternal, a sense of timelessness, as if "the man of Yucatan today" were "the same man who lived thousands of years ago."[47] While such an attitude partakes in a highly problematic colonialist tradition of denying indigenous peoples a sense of history,[48] claims of transhistorical continuity seem not to be the point in the end, at least not exclusively. For, in addition to invoking highly questionable morphological comparisons between native Yucatecans and statues, the prologue's loose depiction of a burial ritual as a group of men carry a wooden casket through a field of thorny maguey cacti points to the director's larger concerns with Mexico's synthesis of dualities: life and death, past and present, earth and flesh are interwoven in this funeral ceremony in which

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[46] Eisenstein and Alexandrov, "Synopsis for 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" 5.

[47] Eisenstein, "First Outline of 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" 252.

[48] While this opening sequence is ostensibly historically situated like the "novels" that would follow, in this case evoking a period of Mayan antiquity, Eisenstein's explicit conception of the scene as timeless—it was to capture a moment that "might be today," "that might as well be twenty years ago," and that "might be a thousand"—nevertheless manifests the problematic ethnographic mode known as the ethnographic present. This rhetorical present tense so often used to speak of indigenous cultures, artifacts, and documentation—even, or perhaps especially, when they are not strictly speaking contemporary—has the effect of constructing a mythical timelessness that denies indigenous cultures any sense of historical development or change. See James Clifford, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage Paradigm,'" in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 121–141.

"the people seem turned to stone over the grave of the deceased in the same poses, the

same expressions of face, as those portrayed on the ancient stone carvings" (fig. 2.19).[49]

If the prologue configured life and death as a mirror/reflection pair, *¡Que Viva

México!* as a whole was to continue in this dialectical theme's elaboration, addressing

that same dynamic in each of its four "novels." Entitled "Sandunga," for instance, its first

was to be a lush and sensuous tropical romance set in the matriarchal village of

Tehuantepec. Conceived of as a salutation to "the rising sun" and "its irresistible call to

life," this first novel's jungle setting was to be teeming with vitality and fertility as its

narrative followed the aptly named Conceptión in her journey from courtship to

motherhood (fig. 2.20). In contrast to this celebration of life and maternity, Eisenstein

characterized the second novel in terms of "aggressiveness, virility, arrogance and

austerity." Named for the threatening cactus that it featured so prominently, "Maguey"

was to follow a failed revolt of cactus-harvesting peons against their landowning

hacendado overlords that ended in a particularly gruesome scene of execution (fig. 2.21).

Third, "The Fiesta" was to center around a different kind of execution, the bullfight,

juxtaposing the exquisite grace and beauty of the matador's vital dance, his richly

adorned costume, and his amorous sweetheart in the stands with the torturous sadism

endured by a helplessly outnumbered animal. Here, the modern-day corrida offered a

partial sublimation of more ancient rituals of human sacrifice that paradoxically secured

life and good favor (fig. 2.22). Modern sacrifice was to characterize the film's fourth

novel, as well. Taking place during the Mexican Revolution, "Soldadera" was to follow

soldiers' wives (soldaderas) who contributed to the cause by feeding their husbands,

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[49] Eisenstein and Alexandrov, "Synopsis for 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" 5.

tending to their injuries, and mourning the lives lost in a greater movement, as Eisenstein

had written, "Towards Revolution" and "Towards a New Life."[50]

In addition to the film's thematic explorations of Mexico's life/death dialectic, the

film as a whole assumed the structure of mirror and reflection, too. If its somber and

ponderous prologue juxtaposed life and death in its conjuring of ancient Maya burial

rituals, its lively epilogue was to reflect that scene of antiquity, conveying the longevity

of its life/death dynamic in a modern-day Día de los Muertos celebration (fig. 2.23). For

Eisenstein the annual event fully consummated what he had described as "the great

wisdom of Mexico":

> The unity of death and life. The passing of one and the birth of the next one. The
> eternal circle. And the still greater wisdom of Mexico: the *enjoying* of this eternal
> circle. Death Day in Mexico. Day of the greatest fun and merriment. The day
> when Mexico provokes death and makes fun of it—death is but a step to another
> cycle of life—why then fear it![51]

To be sure, fear is hardly what we see in Eisenstein's footage. Instead we find ecstatic

and lively dancing by individuals in skeleton masks—individuals who playfully embrace

their own mortality and thus demonstrate what Brenner had described as a "familiarity

with death" that "is shocking to the European."[52] Taken together, the timeless antiquity of

the Prologue and the modern-day present of the Epilogue concern themselves with

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[50] Eisenstein and Alexandrov, 5, 7, 13. I My synopsis of *¡Que Viva México!* preserves the
structure Eisenstein described in his various scenarios, which arranges the novels in a slightly
different order Alexandrov's 1979 cut. "Soldadera" was the only part of the film for which
Eisenstein did not complete initial photography, hence the absence of figures here.

[51] Eisenstein, "First Outline of 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" 252.

[52] Indeed, Eisenstein's insight above is yet another that seems to have been directly influenced by
Brenner's observations about Mexico. "Ever recurrent in Mexican thought," she elaborates, "is
this concern with the sheer fact of life. Life shifting from one form to another, and all still the
same; movement defined by stops; light endlessly becoming darkness, plants and people of
necessity dying, at a definite fixed point, to be reborn. Hence the constant considering of death."
Brenner, *Idols behind Altars*, 25.

conveying the endurance of this paradoxical "familiarity," mirroring one another across

the span of millennia in a format that Smithson may have described favorably as

enantiomorphic.[53] As with the indeterminate and contradictory fusion of the physical

mirrors and their virtual reflections in Smithson's Mirror Displacements, then, we are

faced in *¡Que Viva México!* with a similar set of paradoxes, as life and death, past and

present, flesh and bone are intricately interwoven in Mexico.

* * *

"That is one of the problems with the ecological thing," Smithson began:

"someone who gives up eating meat because he is afraid that eating it will cut down the

life of the earth; but you have to eat, so that death depends on life and life depends on

death." It was 1970 and he was discussing in a rather round about way *Tar Pool and*

Gravel Pit of 1966, a scale model for an unrealized outdoor project (fig. 2.24). The work

remains privileged amongst Smithson's *oeuvre* for seeming to prefigure, already from

that early date, the types of practices for which the artist would become best known—not

only his nonsites but also his earthwork projects. Indeed, Smithson himself was quick to

note that *Tar Pool* was "the first thing I did with material," clearly meaning the earth,

rocks, and soil with which he had, by the point of this 1970 interview, become

inextricably associated. When it came to his unexpected comment about vegetarianism

and carnivorism, in any event, his point was about the balance of "life-directed" and

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[53] Borrowed from crystallography, the term "enantiomorphism" designates mirrored crystalline structure. It was, for Smithson, a very portable term, which he found compatible with so much of his thought, above all the mirror/reflection dyad. Enantiomorphism, he explained, "refers to two shapes that tend to mirror each other. In other words, the left and right hand could be considered an enantiomorph." Smithson and Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution," 292.

"death-directed." While *Tar Pool* "contained" material—it consisted of a horizontal and shallow square frame filled with gravel that enframed a second square receptacle filled with tar—he felt that the work and its material "could have been scattered." "Scattering and containment are a dichotomy," he continued. "Scattering is vitalistic," oriented towards life. Which could only mean that the containment ultimately manifested in the piece was oriented towards death.[54]

It is not exactly clear what the artist meant when he suggested that *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* "could have been scattered." When it came to this "dichotomy" of containment and scattering, however, the nonsites that he invented in 1968 and that were the most obvious inheritors of this early proposal seemed capable of occupying both sides of that dichotomy at once—the "death-directed" and the "life-directed," the contained and the scattered. In fact they stipulated a logically bifurcated mode of sculpture that mobilized precisely those terms: material contained (nonsite) and material scattered (the externally located "site" to which it pointed).

Smithson debuted his first "true" nonsite at Dwan Gallery in the spring of 1968 (fig. 2.25).[55] *A Non-Site (Indoor Earthwork)* inaugurated all the hallmarks of the format that Smithson would reproduce over the course of the next year: raw material collected from a "site" in the outside world, displaced into the gallery and contained in fabricated geometrical receptacles, whose shape and overall arrangement was derived from a modified map of the location, and all of which was accompanied by said map and a brief

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[54] Smithson, "Interview with Paul Toner," 238.

[55] "Non-Site" and "Nonsite," both capitalized and uncapitalized— Smithson was inconsistent when referring to this body of work, which is rendered according to multiple variations. For the sake of consistency, I have opted to follow the convention largely adopted throughout the literature in using the term "nonsite."

text that reiterated, to varying degrees of exactitude, the location of the original site and method of sampling. In this case what that looked like was thirty trapezoidal, aluminum bins painted a dull, metallic blue and increasing incrementally in height and volume as they radiated concentrically outward from a hexagonal core. Each contained sand sampled from the vicinity of a dirt airstrip in Burlington Country, New Jersey. And accompanying these containers was a black-and-white photostat of a map of the location, over which Smithson had extrapolated a hexagonal grid from the three intersecting landing strips of the airfield, which included a red dot demarcating the location from which the material was gathered and a caption that told us so (fig. 2.26).[56]

Anticipating his Mirror Displacements of the following year and their optical excerptation of light into the photograph from beyond its enframing limits, *A Non-Site* proposed a transgressive displacement of material across conceptual and spatial boundaries—from outside to inside, from exurban periphery to urban center, from a hypothetical vicinity indicated on a map to the here-and-now of the gallery. And like the Mirror Displacements, *A Non-Site* too suggested that these two discontinuous realms might be interwoven somehow, juxtaposed: its map, its caption, its raw material, indeed the format's very *non-* prefix all conjured the positive term, the primary term, the absent term—the *site*—and incorporated it indeterminately into the work in a radical proposition

[56] To elaborate upon the logic of this particular nonsite, Smithson derived the overall formal logic from the three intersecting airstrips of Burlington County's Coyle Field, which formed a six-pointed asterisk shape that the artist excised from the map. From that six-pointed star, Smithson apparently extrapolated a hexagonal logic through the map, extending the vectors of the airfield to thrice bisect the map longitudinally before reiterating its hexagonal structure in faceted lines of latitude that radiated out from the center. The mapnet Smithson imposed over the image is therefore arbitrary from a cartographic point of view—indeed, he rotated the entire map about 45° counter-clockwise so that Highway 72, the thick black line just above center, was horizontal—but corresponded formally with another feature of the map, namely the airstrips. As would be the case for later nonsites, the sculpture's content was therefore literally extracted from the site on the map, and its form materialized as a direct consequence of latent formal characteristics of the map.

in which sculpture would no longer be autonomous and self-contained but relational,

plural, dispersed. "I never thought of isolating my objects in any particular way,"

Smithson explained towards the end of his life:

> Gradually, more and more, I have come to see their relationship to the outside
> world, and finally when I started making the Nonsites, the dialectic became very
> strong. These Nonsites became maps that pointed to sites in the world outside the
> gallery, and a dialectical view began to subsume a purist, abstract tendency.[57]

His invocation of dialectics here is fitting, moreover, for as Smithson made abundantly

clear in his brief 1969 statement "Dialectic of Site and Nonsite," he expressly understood

his nonsites in those very terms, asserting that they activated a range of oppositions. Open

limits and closed limits, subtraction and addition, scattered and contained, edge and

center, even reflection and mirror—such were among the binary pairs that Smithson

inventoried in his statement and that he designed the site/nonsite dialectic to animate.[58]

And while his list did not include the terms of life and death that he associated with *Tar

Pool* (surely by 1968 such language would likely have been too humanist and

anthropocentric for his taste, too closely related to the biological metaphors for art that he

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[57] Robert Smithson and Moira Roth, "Robert Smithson on Duchamp [1973]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 311.

[58] Smithson's brief statement "Dialectic of Site and Nonsite" first appeared in Gerry Schum's 1969 "Land Art" catalogue, which accompanied a televised exhibition of large-scale outdoor artworks organized by his gallery, Fernsehgalerie, in April 1969. Gerry Schum and Ursula Wevers, *Land Art*, 2nd Edition (Hannover: Die Galerie, 1970). Smithson republished this statement as a footnote in his 1972 essay "Spiral Jetty." Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty [1972]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 143–153. While "Dialectic of Site and Nonsite" was the first time Smithson explicitly connected his nonsites to dialectics, it was not the first time that he invoked the term dialectics. Among other places, it appears in "Entropy and the New Monuments" (1966), for instance. Smithson had likewise introduced the term "nonsite" elsewhere, first using it publicly in his essay of September 1968, "A Sedimentation of the Mind": Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects [1968]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 100–113.

wanted to escape), their presence can nevertheless be felt lurking behind this dialectical matrix.[59]

While Smithson first began exploring these dialectical terms in 1966 with *Tar Pool*, one imagines that it would have been somewhat unusual to encounter his first nonsite all the same, particularly given the context of his third solo show at Dwan Gallery in March 1968. On the face of it, works like *Leaning Strata*, *Pointless Vanishing Point*, and *Shift* provided unexpected company given their manifestation of what seemed like a very different set of concerns (fig. 2.27). As I discussed at length in Chapter 1, 1966–67 marked a period during which Smithson wrote extensively on the subject of mannerism— not only the sixteenth-century aesthetic but also a sensibility that he more generally associated with parody, irreverence, theatricality, and excess, and that he therefore strongly identified with the anti-modernist sentiment of his own generation. While Smithson's fixation on mannerism was most clearly evident in his bawdy drawings of the early '60s, my first chapter claimed that his early abstract work of around 1965–68 demonstrated an ongoing interest in and transformation of its terms. *Enantiomorphic Chambers* (1965), for instance, abstractly repeated the quintessentially mannerist gesture of decentering and dispersal in refusing to consolidate the fixed viewing point that the stereoscope-derived apparatus otherwise seemed to invite. Whereas a work like *Alogon #2* (1966) engaged the logic of one-point perspective to produce an exaggerated illusion of recession or protrusion that dizzyingly contradicted its surrounding spatial conditions.

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[59] Smithson's resistance to biological metaphors can be largely attributed to George Kubler, who similarly wanted to get away from such erroneous and misleading frameworks when it came to modeling art's history. Among other things, Kubler felt, such metaphors imposed a set structure of lifespan, birth, maturation, and death that denied historical time its discontinuous event-like structure. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

To that end, the pristine, white, geometrical volumes Smithson showed at his March 1968 Dwan show were similarly legible as parodies not of figuration exactly but of its very logic, its structural conveyance—that is, the artificial system of perspective and its Euclidean model of space. Thus a work like *Leaning Strata* was derived from the orthogonal and transversals of a generic perspectival grid, yet it warped and reified that grid, ordinarily ethereal, into bulging and tumescent geometries that were now not only visible but decisively in the way. *A Non-Site*, on the other hand—relegated to a separate room, not matte white but metallic blue, not solid but filled with dirt, and all the while quietly roiling with its strange and heady dialectics—could seemingly not be more alien to such concerns.

And yet the dialectic was also something like the engine behind the convolutions typical of the mannerist pictorial world. One of Smithson's key sources on the subject, Arnold Hauser's 1965 book *Mannerism* understood the sixteenth-century aesthetic to pose a direct challenge to Renaissance virtues of pictorial continuity and unity in precisely such terms. The Renaissance work, Hauser explained, exemplified "an organic, indivisible, unalterable whole": compositional decisions were subordinated to a single theme or story; the painting aspired to be a window onto the world; its *mise en scène* obediently conformed to our viewpoint; it cohered as a uniform whole.[60] In other words, the Renaissance painting was centered—narratively, compositionally, and optically. Not so for the mannerist canvas, however, which reveled in what Hauser described as "paradox." Unlike the Renaissance painting, its mannerist perversion was "inorganic": "composed of the most varied and heterogeneous elements, all more or less independent

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[60] Hauser, *Mannerism*, 24.

of each other," Hauser explained, "a mannerist work is not so much a picture of reality as a collection of contributions to such a picture."[61] Like collage *avant la lettre*, the mannerist painting flaunted a veritable inventory of displaced and often clashing signs. It did not turn to nature so much as visual culture, indiscriminately sourcing readymade imagery and juxtaposing the fragments with little regard for naturalistic synthesis. If, as Hauser thus put it, a "dialectical principle […] underlies the whole of the mannerist outlook," it was because such paintings were structured in terms of conflict and discontinuity, which in turn expressed "the conflict of life itself and the ambivalence of all human attitudes."[62] Mannerism's collage-like dialectics therefore portended something of the dialectical nature of being, and particularly so during the political turmoil and fragmentation that seized sixteenth-century Italy. To the extent that mannerism, by way of its dialectical engine, could be construed as a kind of collage by other means, then, Smithson's nonsites performed analogous (and analogously dialectical) operations of displacement, sampling, excerptation, and citation. What is a nonsite, after all, if not a form of collage, one which, in becoming fully abstract, forces the issue of dialectics that had been implicit in Smithson's mannerism all along?

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Clement Greenberg had once theorized collage in terms of dialectics, too. It was 1912 when Picasso and Braque first "invented" collage, when they began introducing

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[61] Hauser, 24, 25.

[62] Hauser, 13. In his 1964 book on mannerism, which Smithson also owned, Daniel Rowland described sixteenth-century painting in strikingly similar terms. The "effects upon which part of the impact of Mannerist art depends," he wrote, "are the result of the violent yoking together of apparently unrelated elements." Daniel B. Rowland, *Mannerism: Style and Mood, an Anatomy of Four Works in Three Art Forms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 76.

heterogeneous and discontinuous fragments of newsprint and wallpaper into the

conventionally unified pictorial space of painting. Greenberg understood this sudden

intrusion of foreign matter to help analytical cubism beyond a formal impasse, one that

we recognize now as classically modernist: in endeavoring to *depict* its essential

condition of flatness, the cubist painting risked lapsing into a flatness that was *actual*, that

was *literal*, that was, in a word, no longer art. "Painting had to spell out, rather than

pretend to deny, the physical fact that it was flat," Greenberg explained, "even though at

the same time it had to overcome this proclaimed flatness as an aesthetic fact and

continue to report nature."[63] How could modernist painting acknowledge its ontological

condition, pictorially and optically, without brutishly embodying it?

In response to this impasse, the critic tells us, Braque began experimenting with

trompe-l'oeil and, later, painted typographical elements whose evocations of flatness not

only visually declared the surface as such but also served to differentiate a deeper

pictorial space. Lest we lose ourselves in the illusion of depth and faceted planes in

Braque's 1910 *Still Life with Violin and Pitcher*, for instance, the artist has also included

a *tromp-l'oeil* tack that seems to protrude from the painting and cast an ersatz shadow

over its literal surface (fig. 2.28). "[Braque] discovered that *trompe-l'oeil* could be used

to undeceive as well as to deceive the eye," Greenberg explained of this moment in the

painting. "It could be used, that is, to declare as well as to deny the actual surface."[64] The

artist's *Portuguese* of the following year, on the other hand, incorporated stenciled type,

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[63] Clement Greenberg, "Collage [1959]," in *Art and Culture* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1961), 71. For Greenberg's modernist theory of collage, see also Clement Greenberg, "The Pasted-Paper Revolution [1958]," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. Four: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 61–66.

[64] Greenberg, "Collage [1959]," 72.

however the end result is similarly dialectical: the painting's linear elements and the full spectrum of ochers accompanying them suggest recessing space at the same time that our vision ineluctably collides with the fact of the painting's surface, literally stamped by stenciled numerals and characters (fig. 2.29).

With the invention of collage in 1912, the Cubist canvas only further occupied this quintessentially modernist posture of dialectical suspension: the "corporeal presence" of paper matter simultaneously exacerbated painting's literal two-dimensionality while thrusting its surroundings more securely into illusionistic depth. Thus the perceptual "oscillation" with which Greenberg attributed the technique, the "constant shuttling between surface and depth, in which the depicted flatness is 'infected' by the undepicted."[65] By virtue of this optical sensation of "shuttling," then, by virtue of the eye's unending travel between literal surface and illusory depth as the one is continually negated by the other, collage fulfilled a dialectical operation critical to the modernist project, an operation that, as Greenberg memorably wrote elsewhere, helped "entrench [painting] more firmly in its area of competence."[66]

Like collage, *A Non-Site* invited its own brand of dialectical shuttling—not the optical kind, however; not a metaphorical voyage for the eye between a material presence (i.e., the fact of the painting) and illusory absence (i.e., its pictorial space) which constantly extinguish one another, but, quite literally, shuttling, movement, travel. The work confronted the viewer with the material here-and-now of displaced earth and the palpable absence of the site from which it was extracted—a site that lies elsewhere, a site

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[65] Greenberg, 74.

[66] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting [1960]," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. Four: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85.

that was perhaps not illusory like the faceted objects populating a Cubist *mise en scène* so much as elusory. After all, the physical referent of the work, indeed its literal content, was ostensibly a place, a location. In fact, Smithson conceived of the nonsite as itself a kind of map—a "deep three-dimensional abstract map that points to a specific site."[67] Like ordinary cartographic diagrams, which do not bear any immediate physical likeness to their geographic referents, *A Non-Site* similarly pointed to a destination it did not resemble, in this case by way of a physical trace.[68] Hence, a caption accompanying the hexagonal map of Burlington County, New Jersey, proposed, "Tours between the Nonsite and the site are possible."

Anticipating the Mirror Displacements that would follow, *A Non-Site* thus acted as a kind of mirror, a tear or rip in the continuous space of the gallery, whose "reflection" specified a place located elsewhere, beyond the enframing bounds of its space of exhibition. Unlike the Mirror Displacements, however, we can hypothetically visit that reflection. So perhaps we do. Perhaps we turn away from the sculptural nonsite and travel instead to the site, perhaps we go to "the place where the sand was collected," to the red dot Smithson inscribed onto the map. Perhaps we try to access the work's very "center," to be physically present at the source of the nonsite's scattered and vitalistic content. It is hard to imagine the kind of insight awaiting us there, besides the strange realization that we have ended up not at the center of things so much as the periphery, in the vicinity of

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[67] Smithson and Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution," 295.

[68] As Smithson explained of another nonsite, it "is *abstract*, yet it *represents* an actual site in N.J. (The Pine Barrens Plains). It is by this three dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it." Robert Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites [1968]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 364–365.

an airfield in Burlington County, New Jersey, seemingly farther than ever from the art.

This resulting sense of decentered disorientation is neatly summed up in a series of six

photographs seemingly made from the center of Coyle Field's three intersecting runways,

one pointed down each of its six arms: each view as nondescript as the next, the series

makes it impossible for us to get our bearings and instead performatively enacts a

dizzying spin (fig. 2.30).[69] "This is a map that will take you somewhere," Smithson had

cautioned of his nonsite work, "but when you get there you won't really know where you

are."[70] So turning away once more, perhaps we return to the gallery, to the "work," only

to be reminded why we left in the first place—because the work's contained matter is

dead, inert, whereas its vital "center," its "content," lies somewhere else, outside itself

and outside the gallery. While this hypothetical back-and-forth travel invited by

Smithson's nonsites recalls the continuous process of optical shuttling conjectured by

Greenberg—that is, site and nonsite, like surface and depth, continually negate one

another—the nonsite delivers none of the ontological clarity on which collage, at least for

Greenberg, had been staked. Instead, the touring solicited by *A Non-Site* prioritizes

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[69] Occasionally published, the six photographs in question can be found in Smithson's archive in a folder devoted to the artist's "Pine Barrens" nonsite, a New Jersey region that is sometimes included as part of work's title. For instance, while the checklist from Smithson's third Dwan show in March 1968 refers to his first nonsite as *A Non-Site (Indoor Earthwork)*—a convention I have retained in this chapter—Robert Hobbs calls the same work *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey*, which also happens to be consistent with how the work is categorized in Smithson's archive. Based on that evidence, and combined with more recent aerial photography available of the Coyle Field site, I have determined that these photographs almost certainly document the runways of said airfield. However, as indicated by the red dot included in the map accompanying the work, and as confirmed by another documentary photograph of Smithson in the act of collecting sand for this work, the center of those landing strips where these photographs were made is not where the material was actually sampled. All of these photographic materials can be found in "Non-Site, Pine Barrens, New Jersey, 1968-1969," Box 5 Folder 8, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, Archives of American Art.

[70] Robert Smithson et al., "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson [1968–1969, 1970]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 249.

movement for its own sake, movement articulated as an endless and ultimately pointless back-and-forth automotive journey, a recursive motion of turning away and away again that leaves us dizzy.

If the pointlessness of the nonsites' back-and-forth shuttling appears at odds with modernist collage, that is because it inhabits instead the quintessentially postmodern condition of textuality. In what remains a canonical reading of Smithson's practice in these latter terms, Craig Owens understood the interpenetration between nonsite and site, gallery and periphery, as manifesting a textual logic characterized by ahierarchical plurality, discursivity, and interconnectivity which stood in radical opposition to modernist values of autonomy, authorship, and self-enclosure. The nonsite quite literally staged its own containment, for instance, yet in doing so it implied its contradictory porosity since the material purporting to be "contained" only pointed elsewhere, thus breaching the enframing limits of not only the work itself but also those of the gallery or museum. For Owens the nonsite was not a discrete work, therefore, but something that "propels us outward" by way of its "dialectical relationship between center and circumference."[71] Only exacerbating this condition, moreover, Smithson's nonsites also comprised a range of additional materials—not only the gallery-bound containers of rubble and the exterior sites to which they pointed, but also the cartographic diagrams and short writings that accompanied them—which only further multiplied the work's constitutive plurality and dispersal. Indeed, if art after modernism increasingly explored its temporal axis, for Owens it was because this condition of textuality was necessarily experienced as succession, a trajectory, a path. As Smithson himself wrote, after all, "The

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[71] Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," 41, 40.

range of convergence between Site and Nonsite consists of a course of hazards, a double

path made up of signs, photographs, and maps that belong to both sides of the dialectic at

once."[72] If Owens sensed a paradigm-shifting "eruption of language into the aesthetic

field," therefore, it was not just the literal language of the captions Smithson included but

the "complex web of heterogeneous information" that constituted his nonsites and, in

turn, their "challenge [to] the purity and self sufficiency of the work of art."[73]

Owens's reading of Smithson's nonsites, of course, relied upon the condition of

textuality as theorized by Roland Barthes and most succinctly laid out in his famous

essay "From Work to Text" of 1971. For Barthes, the indeterminate and open condition

of the *text* was distinct from the more traditional and surely modernist notion of the *work*,

the latter designating an entity conceived as static, closed, contained, authored. A *work*

was that into which an author deposited monolithic meaning; a *work* was that which

consequently positioned its author as a final origin and the reader as its destination, its

passive consumer, the decipherer of its meaning. The *text*, however, was plural,

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[72] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 153n1.

[73] Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," 41, 46–7. What secured the nonsites' textuality was also what made them an effective prototype for practices of so-called institutional critique, another framework according to which Smithson's nonsites are commonly understood. The category of institutional critique conventionally specifies practices that questioned the museum's ostensible neutrality in calling attention to its physical, cultural, and economic conditions, in particular the ways in which those conditions determine art's meaning and function. In enacting a textual porosity between the gallery-bound nonsite and some externally located site, Smithson's practice thus seemed to make visible the ways in which the artwork, construed as a singular, autonomous, and monolithic entity, is ordinarily contained by the museum gallery. As Owens's wrote of their "[attempt] to circumvent the frame," the nonsites were a means of "confront[ing] the problem of cultural confinement" insofar as it "set up a dialectical relationship between the gallery and a place outside it. Insofar as they are merely containers [...] the 'Non-Sites' also function as mirrors which reflect their own containment." For a discussion by Owens that positions Smithson's nonsites as a form of institutional critique, see Craig Owens, "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After 'The Death of the Author'?," in *Beyond Recognition*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For a useful summary of postmodernism's "textual turn," including a survey of canonical positions such as Owens's, see Foster's "The Passion of the Sign," in Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

heterogeneous, and citational; it was associative, ahierarchical, and rhizomatic. The *text* stipulated a "field," a "process," a "movement of a discourse," an "activity of production."[74] There would be no final and monolithic meaning, for a text "practises the infinite deferment of the signified."[75] In that sense the text was not something "read" for Barthes so much as actively "played" by a reader-turned-producer of meaning. And given the text's dispersed and plural condition, that reader-turned-producer was involved in a process—fittingly for Smithson's nonsites—more akin to a "passage, an overcrossing," as if text were something through which a "subject strolls."[76]

In presenting sculpture in the literal form of a container that nevertheless transgressed its own limits, that communicated with an externally situated site and that proposed physical travel as an avatar for enacting that network and putting its heterogeneous parts into "play," Smithson's nonsites radically dispersed the formerly discrete work of art and, in so doing, rationally and logically enacted a quintessentially postmodern shift from work to text. "Most sculptors just think about the object," he explained in a 1969 roundtable, "but for me there is no focus on one object so it is the back-and-forth thing."[77] Back-and-forth indeed. For not only did the nonsite propose the physical traversal of space as a figure for metaphorical passage amongst the text's discontinuous and heterogeneous plurality, a figure for what Barthes called the "movement of discourse"; they also denied any sense of a final destination or ultimate

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[74] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 157.

[75] Barthes, 158.

[76] Barthes, 159.

[77] Robert Smithson, "Earth [1969]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 178.

signifier. For, as Owens also pointed out, the nonsites confused priority, ruining "the hierarchy between object and representation."[78] Lawrence Alloway put it similarly, arguing that

> To compare a Site with a Nonsite would seem to confer priority on the Site; by comparison a Nonsite must be secondary or even dysfunctional. […] However, the relation of Nonsite to Site is also like that of language to the world: it is a signifier and the site is that which is signified. It is not the referent but the language system which is in the foreground.[79]

As a "map" the nonsite would presumably remain secondary to the site, as if re-producing it, however it seems just as plausible according to the logic of textuality that the nonsite paradoxically calls into existence the site to begin with, too, as if differentiating what had otherwise been a mere "fringe area" or "backwater" by its very act of reference.[80] As Smithson had written, the various components of a nonsite "belong to both sides of the dialectic at once. Both sides are present and absent at the same time."[81] It is not just that Smithson's nonsites staged a dialectical and collage-like collision between discontinuous entities, then—nonsite and site, contained and uncontained, interior and exterior, center and periphery. More to the point, they posited these relationships as porous and undetermined. "Is the Site a reflection of the Nonsite (mirror)," Smithson mused, "or is it the other way around?"[82]

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[78] Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," 47.

[79] Lawrence Alloway, "Sites/Nonsites," in *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, by Robert Hobbs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 41–42.

[80] Smithson uses these terms often in interviews. See, for example, Smithson and Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution." And Robert Smithson and Gianni Pettena, "Conversation in Salt Lake City [1972]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[81] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 153 n. 1.

[82] Smithson, 153 n. 1.

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We have some sense of what such textual journeys to and from the periphery

looked like, for Smithson wrote a series of "travelogues" between 1966 and 1969, a genre

whose narration of chronological and spatial passage the artist deployed as a figure for

kind of "hazardous" sequentiality and meandering play characteristic of the text. His first

such foray into the genre, "The Crystal Land" (1966) records one particular excursion

Smithson made with Nancy Holt, Donald Judd, and Judd's wife, Julie, to former rock

quarries in Upper Montclair and Great Notch, New Jersey. Where we might expect a

highly intentional and well-planned rock-hounding adventure resulting in the victorious

procurement of exquisite specimens of azurite, copper, hematite, or talc, we learn only of

the tedious banalities of a pointless road trip: Judd and Smithson "chopp[ing]

incessantly" at hunks of quartz; their wives "wander[ing] aimlessly around the quarry

picking up sticks, leaves and odd stones"; a brief stop at Bond's Ice Cream Bar for the

ignoble local delicacy, "Awful-Awfuls"; ephemeral fragments of sound heard over the

car radio; cigarette butts, random printed matter, and other detritus littering the car; the

trip back to New York City through the not-particularly-scenic-sounding "Jersey

Swamps," with its "drive-ins, motels and gas stations," its "smoldering garbage dumps,"

its "smoke stacks of heavy industry."[83] Smithson's second "travelogue," "A Tour of the

Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967), is likewise permeated by a mood of decay

and decrepitude that parodies what we might expect of an essay purporting to be a

sightseeing guide. An unremarkable bridge over the Passaic River, the concrete

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[83] Robert Smithson, "The Crystal Land [1966]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed.
Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 7–9.

infrastructure of a local highway, an oil derrick emerging from a foul river, a row of huge

pipes belching liquid waste, loathsome pits filled with inert heavy machinery, used car

lots and parking lots, a random sandbox—such are the "monuments" to which we are

vicariously treated.[84] This time, moreover, Smithson has also included corresponding

photographs ironically captioned with stately nominations like *The Bridge Monument*

Showing Wooden Sidewalks, *The Great Pipe Monument*, *The Fountain Monument*, and so

on. Both "The Crystal Land" and "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic" deliver a kind

of anti-travelogue or anti-guidebook, then, tourist accounts of dialectical excursions away

from New York City not to other meccas of human cultural achievement but to

anticlimactic relics of human waste and decay.[85]

     If "Crystal Land" and "Passaic" recast textual excursus as physical excursion,

moreover, it is not only because of their sense of duration or their pointless and

meandering sequentiality or their arrival at a series of "monuments" that withhold the

closure and finality of destinations. It is also because they are thoroughly polyvocal and

plural, riven by collaged voices that do little to consolidate a monolithic author nor

deliver the clarity and orientation that come with it. "Smithson's writings," as Owens

wrote, "are indeed texts, dazzling orchestrations of multiple, overlapping voices."[86] In

"The Crystal Land," to that end, Smithson's account lapses into excerpts from Brian H.

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[84] Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 68–74.

[85] Suzaan Boettger helpfully frames Smithson's essay as an inversion of a typical guidebook: "Smithson's contrary act of initating a travel report by repudiating the guidebook genre is typical, both of the broad cultural thrust of the 1960s to counter convention […] and of Smithson's own skepticism of orthodoxy." Suzaan Boettger, "In the Yucatan: Mirroring Presence and Absence," in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Eugenie Tsai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 202.

[86] Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," 46.

Mason's *Trap Rock Minerals of New Jersey*, Frederic Brewster Loomis's *The Field Book of Common Rocks and Minerals*, and fragments of conversation picked up over the radio. "Monuments of Passaic" pursues this logic further as the textual space of narrative is invaded by snippets of the *New York Times*, Brian W. Aldiss's novel *Earthworks*, morsels of overheard dialogue, miscellaneous roadside signage, even a legal disclaimer from Smithson's box of Kodak Verichrome Pan film. Smithson's textual collage may not be quite as nonsensical as Tristan Tzara's Dadaist poetry nor, closer to his own historical moment and literary taste, William Burrough's cut-up novels, passages of which seem to utterly devolve into suppurating senselessness.[87] All the same, each of the voices variously inserted into the text enact a kind of momentary teleportation. Like the refulgent panels of reflected sky in the Mirror Displacements, these excerpts are obviously integrated into the text yet simultaneously remain *hors d'oeuvre*. Discontinuous fragments from elsewhere, they bore minute holes through the narrative that catapult the reader, however briefly, outward and into other contexts.

Smithson's "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan" of two years later continues in this tradition. His party clearly travels to important archaeological sites like

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[87] Smithson's writings allude to Burroughs with some frequency, in particular *Naked Lunch*, *Soft Machine*, and *Nova Express*. While the novelist remains outside the purview of the current discussion, Burroughs's overt and often disturbing imagery of gratuitous eroticism, violence, and scatology resonates deeply with the themes that I will be exploring in the present discussion. *Soft Machine* and *Nova Express*, novels that belonged to the so-called "cut-up trilogy," are of special importance given their explicit deployment of montage. Crediting Tristan Tzara as the first to deploy such a technique, Burroughs defended his so-called "cut up method" for introducing unpredictability, spontaneity, and chance into the space of poetry and literature. More relevant to my purposes here, however, is the eruption of eroticism from this technique and the resulting textual morass through which the reader must wade. William S. Burroughs, "The Cut Up Method," *Yugen*, no. 8 (1962). For Tzara's famous instructions on how "to make a dadaist poem" using scissors, see his "Manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love," included in Tristan Tzara, "Seven Dada Manifestoes [1916–1920]," in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology [1951]*, ed. Robert Motherwell, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 73–98.

Palenque, Bonampak, and Yaxchilan, yet there will be no discussion nor photographic

evidence of scenic destinations heroically reached, no beautifully ruinous temples, no

mention of the achievements of prehistoric Mesoamerican civilization. And, as we have

seen, Smithson's "illustrations" reveal little to vision besides nondescript sites

confusingly riven by reflected light.[88] In short, the essay delivers none of what we expect

of a travelogue and its sense of being centered around monuments, landmarks, and scenic

destinations. Quite to the contrary, it revels in aimless and indifferent travel to "a charred

site" between Uman and Muna, two cities nearly thirty miles apart; a "suburb of Uxmal,

which is to say nowhere"; a location "near Bolonchen de Rejon"; a beach "South of

Campeche, on the way to Champoton"; somewhere "on the outskirts of the ruins of

Palenque"; somewhere else along the Rio Usumacinto in the locality of "what was once

one of the Temples of Yaxchilan"; another place "near Sabancuy." With characteristic

irony, Smithson included a small map of the Yucatán designating the "vicinities" (his

word) of each displacement, but its size and imprecision only underscores the uselessness

of the entire exercise in terms of consolidating the sense of final meaning encoded into

the destination. It does little to clear things up when Smithson's text is variously

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[88] Jennifer Roberts goes into great detail about the essay's logic of obscuring vision. Her comprehensive account of "Incidents of Mirror-Travel" examines it next to its namesake, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, anthropologist John Lloyd Stephens's 1843 account of his own Mexican voyage. For one thing, Stephens's imperialist account, as Roberts explains, offered a discourse of visibility, clarity, discovery: his party's discovery of Aztec and Mayan ruins was analogized throughout in terms of active visual differentiation, reiterated in the rich illustrations of his discoveries, which are set off against the undifferentiated jungle from whence they came. Smithson's essay, on the other hand, is confusing, disorienting, even unseeing, thus replacing Stephens's metaphor of visual clarity with obscurity and vagueness and, as Roberts claims, critiquing its underlying imperialist premises. "In nearly every respect, Smithson's work in Yucatán can be interpreted as an inversion or undoing of Stephens's operations," she writes, "challeng[ing] the paradigms of narrative and progress that had defined Stephens's entire enterprise." Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History*, 96, 97.

interrupted by the voices of Mayan and Aztec deities, absurdly ventriloquized to offer up non sequiturs about travel and wisdom about contemporary art.

If the sense of travel latent in Smithson's site/nonsite dialectic bears any resemblance to his collage-like travelogues, then, it is no wonder that it consolidates none of the ontological clarity conjectured by Greenberg's optical shuttling. Indeed, recounting the initial departure from Mérida toward the horizon, Smithson called into question the very possibility of travel in the first place in a way that accentuates the strangeness of a dialectics whose terms are themselves unstable. If the horizon specifies a "line where sky meets earth," Smithson reasoned, then "One is always crossing the horizon, yet it always remains distant. […] How could one advance on the horizon, if it was already present under the wheels?"[89] Meanwhile, we can easily imagine, as Smithson had written in "The Crystal Land," that "the rearview mirror dislocated the road behind us,"[90] as if any forward travel were simultaneously negated by the backward travel clearly evidenced in the mirror. Enacting what Barthes described as the "dilatory" condition of the text and what Owens called the "labyrinthine, abyssal nature of language," Smithson's imagery here forecloses on the possibility of travel-as-progress, repudiates any sense of passage as the incremental development toward a fixed goal or final signified.[91] Perhaps Smithson's copy of the *Tourist Guide and Directory of Yucatan-Campeche* could help, yet its very

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[89] Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 119. As Smithson wrote elsewhere of this same phenomenon: "A horizon is an impossible point to locate. Even though it is right there in front of you, it is constantly evading your grasp. It is only a mirage that can't be fixed, arrested or stopped, or transferred into an abstract condition, and that is the arrested moment. Those moments constantly change, and are giving way to other moments; so you can get into a kind of vertigo situation." Smithson, "Interview with Paul Toner," 239.

[90] Smithson, "The Crystal Land," 8–9.

[91] Barthes, "From Work to Text," 158. Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," 40.

cover, which depicts the meeting of the native Yucatecans with the Spanish

conquistadors, only amplifies this overwhelming feeling of impasse and promises nothing

but miscommunication: "UY U TAN A KIN PECH," utter the Indians, "listen how they

talk"; to which the Spanish dumbly respond, "YUCATAN CAMPECHE."[92] Clearly we

aren't getting anywhere. Fortunately, the deity Tezcatlipoca intervenes to encourage the

party to ditch the guidebooks and to "travel at random, like the first Mayans" in what

could be a motto for the descent into textuality. The rest of Smithson's essay seems to

make good on Tezcatlipoca's suggestion, drawing us only deeper into a realm of

obscurity and paradox that Smithson and Eisenstein alike associated with Mexico, a

realm of such incongruities as "peaceful wars," "true fictions," "false realities," and

"central points that evade being central." It is easy to feel lost in it all, overcome by

momentary bouts of vertigo and nausea of the sort that Smithson attributed to pictorial

vortex that was the mannerist composition.

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Eisenstein, for his part, did not need the discontinuous compositions of the

sixteenth century nor Cubist *papiers collés* in order to impute a particular sense of

dynamism to painting. For a "dialectic principle of dynamics" animated every artwork, he

explained in a famous essay of 1929. "What comprises the dynamic effect of a painting?"

he asked rhetorically:

> The eye follows the direction of an element in the painting. It retains a visual
> impression, which then collides with the impression derived from following the

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92 Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 120.

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direction of a second element. The conflict of these directions forms the dynamic effect in apprehending the whole.[93]

The aesthetic encounter was, in other words, a process; a spectator had to actively traverse a painting or sculpture, piece it together, survey it and sample it, gather it up into her perception and fit the parts together in a meaningful way—even in the case of the most traditional, most static compositions.[94]

To the degree that the artwork was dynamic, moreover, it only reiterated a more elemental dynamicism belonging to the world, indeed to being itself. For "being," Eisenstein wrote, can only be "a constant evolution from the interaction of two contradictory opposites." Hence, he concluded,

> it is art's task to make manifest the contradictions of Being. To form equitable views by stirring up contradictions within the spectator's mind, and to forge accurate intellectual concepts from the dynamic clash of opposing passions.[95]

In that sense, Eisenstein's view of the world bore a remarkable resemblance to Friedrich Engels's *Dialectics of Nature*, published posthumously in the years directly before Eisenstein's essay. Engels's pseudo-scientific treatise on nature responded to a changing consensus in the natural sciences, one which no longer understood nature—the earth, the solar system, the very cosmos—as a fixed, immutable, and eternal entity. Instead, he wrote, "the earth and the whole solar system appeared as something that had *come into being* in the course of time." As such, he continued, "the whole of nature […] has its

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[93] Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form [1929]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 46, 50.

[94] It bears mentioning here that Eisenstein's theory of the aesthetic experience as unfolding in time anticipates Rosalind Krauss's 1977 *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, written at a time during which she was keenly interested in the filmmaker. Among other things, *Passages* offers a revisionist history of modernism that explores sculpture's repressed temporal axis (often a function of the phenomenological conditions of aesthetic experience) in a way that is very compatible with Eisenstein's own interest in process and the duration of perception

[95] Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," 45, 46.

existence in eternal coming into being and passing away, in ceaseless flux, in unresting motion and change."[96] The continuous movement conjectured by dialectics provided Engels a framework for understanding the mechanism behind nature's fundamental dynamicism. For Eisenstein, that dialectically-secured dynamicism would also be reflected in art—"*For art is always conflict.*"[97]

When it came to rendering this essentially dialectical state of things, however, cinema had access to somewhat different resources from painting and sculpture. Yes, its *mise en scène* would still place objects before the camera into compositional relationships that ought to be dynamic, and, to that end, Eisenstein theorized various modes of what he called "visual counterpoint"—graphic conflict, for example, wherein linear elements are arranged perpendicular to one another, or spatial conflict, which juxtaposes objects in the extreme foreground with those in the background. However, cinema instantiated a flux and dynamicism that was not just implicit in the temporal extension of perception but that was also actualized, literalized, present before our very eyes in the fluid becoming of the cinematic image—a becoming that was, at its very core, dialectical. Describing cinema's quintessential illusion of continuous movement, for instance, Eisenstein wrote that "the incongruence in contour of the first picture—already impressed on the mind—with the subsequently perceived second picture, engenders, in conflict, the feeling of motion."[98]

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[96] Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, ed. and trans. Clemens Dutt (New York: International publishers, 1940), 8, 13. Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* was published in 1927, two years before Eisenstein's "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form." David Rodowick has explored the importance of Engels's book for Eisenstein, in particular for the director's later book *Nonindifferent Nature*, prepared largely towards the end of his life in the 1940s. See David Norman Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

[97] Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," 46. Emphasis original.

[98] Eisenstein, 50.

There would be no "blending"; successive frames would not be seen side-by-side; the mind would not somehow produce the infinite series of intermediary movements separating each pair of absolutely dissimilar frames. Instead Eisenstein understood each new frame to be superimposed upon the one preceding it, unceasingly displacing it, burying it. Cinema's illusion of continuous movement, in other words, was fundamentally built on the discontinuity present at the medium's most molecular level, at its material base, at the interval between distinct and wholly incongruous frames of film. According to this logic, it is not difficult to understand why the director saw cinema's *raison d'être* to consist in reiterating this elemental micro-conflict at each stratum, deploying montage such that this essential dialectic was reflected in the intervals between shots, between scenes, and, during the sound era, between image and sound.[99] Montage, in sum, was tasked with not only expressing the inviolable dialectics of nature and being but also the ontological condition of cinema itself. [100]

Eisenstein's attitude did not always endear him to his peers, it must be said. In fact, his staunch commitment to the dialectical logic of conflict and collision was at odds with prevailing approaches to filmic storytelling in his own milieu. Vsevelod Pudovkin, for instance, famed director of the postrevolutionary classic *Mother* (1926), understood

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[99] On the montage of sound and image, see Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, "A Statement on the Sound-Film by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov [1928]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1949), 257–260.

[100] As I discuss in this dissertation's Introduction, Eisenstein's association of montage with cinematic ontology (even though montage is, somewhat paradoxically, not unique to cinema) can be found reiterated throughout his writings. In a well-known essay written the same year as "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," for instance, Eisenstein asserted that "cinematography is, first and foremost, montage." Sergei Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram [1929]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 28.

editing to fulfill a more naturalistic imperative. Montage had to preserve an event's

essential continuity, as if replicating the observations of an ideally-situated bystander.

Such an observer, Pudovkin explained, may have clearly seen every detail of a given

event, "but to do so he had to turn his head, first left, then right, then upwards,

withersoever his attention was attracted by the interest of observation and the sequence of

the developing scene." Thus, Pudovkin concluded, "the lens of the camera replaces the

eye of the observer," leaving the editor with the task of stitching it all back together,

"guiding the attention of the spectator now to one, now to the other separate element."[101]

Accordingly, Eisenstein summarized Pudovkin's approach to montage as "a *linkage* of

pieces. Into a chain. […] Bricks, arranged in series to *expound* an idea."[102] Such an

approach instrumentalized montage, Eisenstein elaborated, as a "means of *unrolling* an

idea with the help of single shots,"[103] as if subordinating the autonomy of each individual

image to a preexisting narrative idea and imposing that idea, top-down, upon the

constitutive shots. Whereas for Eisenstein cinematic meaning had to be emergent, had to

be a material consequence of its constitutive elements and their dialectical interactions.

"Montage," he wrote, "is an idea that *arises* from the collision of independent shots—

shots even opposite to one another."[104] Not only was Eisenstein tacitly accusing

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[101] Vsevolod Pudovkin, "On Editing," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8. It must be admitted that Pudovkin's theory of editing is not quite so narrow. He also goes on to discuss the use of parallel editing and various other techniques, including Eisenstein's "symbolic" approach, which "introduces an abstract concept into the consciousness of the spectator without use of a title." If I stress his default naturalistic mode, however, it is because Eisenstein does, as well, in differentiating his own approach.

[102] Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," 37.

[103] Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," 49.

[104] Eisenstein, 49. My emphasis.

Pudovkin of a counterrevolutionary and non-materialist approach to cinema, then; he also suggested that his old adversary disavowed the medium's fundamental condition, its very basis in conflict, in repressing cinema's most essential discontinuity. Like Renaissance artists striving for a form of naturalism whose lack of self-consciousness resulted in a disavowal of art's essential artifice and heterogeneity, Pudovkin's commitment to "linkage" betrayed not only cinema but also the conflictual and dynamic nature of Being.

Now, in some sense Eisenstein, too, wanted to "unroll" an idea even if he would not have admitted it. After all, you may recall from Chapter 1, Eisenstein felt that revolutionary art's chief task consisted in the "guiding of the spectator into a desired direction (or desired mood)."[105] Knowing the destination, as it were, in advance, a given film had to orchestrate the viewer's response. And yet at the same time Eisenstein also wanted his cinema to unfold something like a path before the viewer, he wanted meaning, as we have seen, to emerge as a function of each successive inferential leap made on the part of a viewer tasked with surmounting each gap of discontinuity and playing across each open interval. In his denigration of Pudovkin, Eisenstein aligned himself with a mode of cinema he described as "intellectual," one in which meaning would arise, sequentially and in the moment of reception, in and for a viewer who, at some level, had to find her own way. "The strength of montage resides in this," Eisenstein explained,

> that it includes in the creative process the emotions and mind of the spectator. The spectator is compelled to proceed along that selfsame creative road that the author traveled in creating the image. The spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author.[106]

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[105] Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions," 231, 230.

[106] Eisenstein, "Word and Image," 32.

Assisted by the technique of montage and its preservation of some indeterminate openness between parts, in other words, cinema was to be a "road" along which the viewer traveled, a process of dialectical thought recast as a journey for the mind. Indeed, Eisenstein had written quoting Marx, "Not only the result, but the road to it also, is part of truth. The investigation of truth must itself be true, true investigation is unfolded truth, the disjuncted members of which unite in the result."[107] While Eisenstein may have paradoxically known the destination in advance—the desired mood, the sought-after physiological effect—his films also aspired to a condition that bears important affinities with what I have been describing as textual passage. For in respecting the dialectical nature of being itself, cinema had to preserve and heighten discontinuity, it had to produce a montage object through which the viewer could actively travel.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Discontinuity was also central to Georges Bataille's characterization of the world, in particular mankind's default condition within it. "Beings which reproduce themselves are distinct from one another," he explained at the outset of his book *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*,

> and those reproduced are likewise distinct from each other, just as they are distinct from their parents. Each being is distinct from all the others. […] He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity.[108]

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[107] As quoted in Eisenstein, 32.

[108] Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 1986), 12. While I will refer to it by its most commonly-known name, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, Bataille's book first appeared in English in 1962 under the title *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo*. According to the inventory of Smithson's library published compiled by Lori Cavagnaro and published in Ann Reynold's *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, the artist owned a 1969 edition of

Yet Bataille went one step further. For not only did he, like Eisenstein, posit discontinuity as some primary condition of our world; he also imagined that we discontinuous beings ultimately harbor a kind of primeval desire for a state of continuity, a state of primordial dedifferentiation, of sameness, of oneness that precedes and succeeds existence; a state that, in the end, can be consummated only in the annihilation of the discontinuous self in the moment of death. "We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity," Bataille elaborated, "a primal continuity linking us with everything that is."[109] This longing for continuity thus constitutes a base condition of "nostalgia" shared by all mankind.

Of course, insofar as we are dealing with a passage from life to death, from existence to nonexistence, the peculiar "nostalgia" for that primordial state of continuity can only be actualized by violence. After all, Bataille wrote, death is "the most violent thing of all for us."[110] While we may yearn for this lost continuity, then, while we may long to return to a state of oneness, we certainly do not wish to succumb to it, to risk extinguishing the existence on which that nostalgia depends. "Continuity is what we are after," the philosopher explained,

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the book. While Smithson later quotes from *Death and Sensuality* in his response to a questionnaire on politics circulated by *Artforum* editor Philip Leider in June 1970 and published in the September issue, he alludes to Bataille's book as early as late 1969 or early 1970 in his interviews with Dennis Wheeler. See "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum* 9, no. 1 (September 1970): 35–39. And Smithson and Wheeler, "Four Conversations Between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson."

[109] Bataille, *Erotism*, 15.

[110] Bataille, 16.

but generally only if that continuity which the death of discontinuous beings can alone establish is not the victor in the long run. What we desire is to bring into a world founded on discontinuity all the continuity such a world can sustain.[111]

Hence, Bataille landed on a fundamental paradox, an essential dialectic in which mankind finds itself caught: how to safely indulge a repressed desire for self-annihilating continuity? How to vicariously negate existence without forfeiting the very existence required to experience that negation?

Bataille's name for this suspension of life and death, this ephemeral porosity between discontinuity, was eroticism. And, to be sure, the kind of eroticism that first comes to mind does suggest a temporary loss of self, that is, in the moment of sexual ecstasy. For what is intercourse if not "a total blending of two beings, a continuity between two discontinuous creatures"?[112] Such eroticism

> gives free rein to extravagant organs whose blind activity goes on beyond the considered will of the lovers. Their considered will is followed by the animal activity of these swollen organs. They are animated by a violence outside the control of reason, swollen to bursting point and suddenly the heart rejoices to yield to the breaking of the storm.[113]

Sexual ecstasy implies an elimination of barriers, however temporary; a dizzying and vertiginous sense of fusion, of self-erasure; "*I* am losing myself."[114] And yet, insofar as such euphoria shares in this quality of self-annihilation, it also shares in the elemental violence that necessarily brokers the passage from existence to nonexistence. Indeed, for Bataille it turned out that the two things, sex and violence, are closely related in the end, for his term "eroticism" specifies not only the temporary transgression of two

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[111] Bataille, 18–19.

[112] Bataille, 20.

[113] Bataille, 92.

[114] Bataille, 31.

discontinuous beings' boundaries in an act of coupling but also mankind's ineluctable

pull towards more brutal practices—warfare, sacrifice, carnivorism, and other ritualized

encounters with death—however much we may wish to condemn them and dissociate

from them. "In essence," he asserted, "the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence,

of violation."[115] To experience continuity, no matter how vicariously, is to momentarily

violate the boundaries on which our discontinuous and plural existences depend.

Needless to say, Eisenstein did not necessarily share in Bataille's theories of

primordial continuity.[116] He was preoccupied with the idea of a dynamic world and a

dynamic medium, in both cases functions of dialectical interactions of discontinuous

parts. All the same, he harbored an unusual affinity for violence and transgression, as we

know. Recall from Chapter 1, for example, the director's embrace of cinema as an outlet

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[115] Bataille, 16. This antinomy of the sensual and the violent, paradoxically unified in erotic transgression, is consistent with Bataille's larger project of base materialism. As Yve-Alain Bois put it, "Everything splits into two": "There is an elevated use, consecrated by metaphysical idealism and rational humanism, and there is a low use. There are two uses for the mouth (speaking, a noble one, is opposed to spitting, vomiting, or screaming), two uses for de Sade, two uses for temples, two uses of Greece, two uses for 'Extinct America' (we might refer to the spectacular sacrifices by the Aztecs or, on the contrary, to the bureaucratic empire of the Incas where 'everything was planned ahead in an airless existence')." Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 47. For one example in which Bataille explores the low meaning of the sun (blinding, withering, madness-inducing) in contradistinction to its conventional higher meaning (elevation, illumination), see Georges Bataille, "Rotten Sun [1930]," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, vol. 14, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 57–58.

[116] That said, Joan Neuberger points out that Eisenstein did in fact share very similar ideas as promulgated by Sigmund Freud's pupil, Otto Rank. Eisenstein, she explained, "believed that the pure blissful state of 'undifferentiated' experience in the womb is traumatically ruptured by birth and the infant's trembling need to begin differentiating, thinking and reacting to external stimuli. The pre-logical and the erotic are connected, but the desire for sexual ecstasy, far from being the primary drive, is merely one of many efforts to replicate the more primal, earlier, undifferentiated state of prenatal nirvana. For Eisenstein, desire is always about merging and thus eradicating difference, if only temporarily. Desire seeks to replicate the bliss of that transcendent moment of synthesis—*ekstasis*—in sex, in power, in violence and in art." Joan Neuberger, "Strange Circus: Eisenstein's Sex Drawings," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 13, https://doi.org/10.1386/srsc.6.1.5_1.

for his sadistic naughtiness, as a vehicle for indulging an appetite for destruction and perversion. Recall that violence characterized his *oeuvre*'s bloody preoccupations—its massacres, its murderous repressions, its gruesome battles, its putrid *abbatoirs*. Recall that violence, too, offered a metaphor for cinema's very operativity in the service of the revolution—as a weapon, as ammunition, as a tractor "ploughing over the audience's psyche with a class purpose in mind." In fact, given the brutality with which Eisenstein associated his own montage, in many ways the allegations of "mutilation" hurled at *Thunder Over Mexico* and its unofficial, unauthorized montage at the hands of Sol Lesser may strike us as ironic. As Eisenstein explained in one of his more famous essays, the camera "dismembers" a given event or theatrical scene, dissecting it into "'close-up of clutching hands,' 'medium shots of the struggle,' and 'extreme close-up of bulging eyes'" (yes, his choice of scene happens to involve homicide).[117] And eventually these severed fragments are sutured back together through montage. Not in such a way that, as Pudovkin may have wished, preserves the unity and continuity of the profilmic event. Instead, the resulting heterogeneous assemblage advances by way of "monstrous incongruities" enacted over the interval of the cut, such that "an eye [may appear] twice

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[117] Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," 34. Eisenstein reuses the same hypothetical murder scene in another essay from the same year, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," also published in Leyda's *Film Form*, which Robert Smithson owned. He roughly sketches the *découpage* as follows, which gives us a better sense of the overall sequence into which the example shots from "The Cinematographic Principle" might fit:

1. A hand lifts a knife.
2. The eyes of the victim open suddenly.
3. His hands clutch the table.
4. The knife is jerked up.
5. The eyes blink involuntarily.
6. Blood gushes.
7. A mouth shrieks.
8. Something drips onto a shoe…

as large as a man's full figure."[118] At the risk of overstating things, Eisenstein's

descriptions of filmmaking and montage evoke less the *papiers collés* pioneered in Paris

art studios in 1912 than the depraved tropes familiar to us from horror films—torture

chambers, unspeakable surgical procedures, mutilated creatures hideously sutured back

together from surplus parts.[119] If the gaps and intervals constitutive of montage were to

unfold a path down which the viewer traveled, the experience of that travel would be

visceral as much as intellectual, physiologically felt as a series of "certain emotional

shocks."[120]

And yet in that same famous essay Eisenstein also suggested that montage was

"copulative." Famously looking to hieroglyphic forms of writing, he explained that

> the copulation […] of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is to be regarded not
> as their sum, but their product, i.e., as a value of another dimension, another
> degree; each, separately, corresponds to an *object*, to a fact, but their combination
> corresponds to a *concept*.

If the ideograms with which he was so enamored produced concepts through what were

fundamentally montage operations—if, as he wrote, the juxtaposed signs for "dog" and

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[118] Eisenstein, 34. Eisenstein's language here recalls his interest in Japanese visual culture, in particular the sense of montage he attributed to its pictorial tradition. The faces in Sharaku's figures, for instance, are "impossible" in their exaggeration of physiognomic features—eyes spaced unnaturally apart, nose abnormally long, a chin absurdly unrelated to the mouth. Quoting a critic, he writes: "That the artist was unaware that all these proportions are false is, of course, out of the question. It was with a full awareness that he repudiated normalcy, and, while the drawing of the separate features depends on severely concentrated naturalism, their proportions have been subordinated to purely intellectual considerations." Eisenstein, 33.

[119] It is worth noting here that the kind of violence Eisenstein associates with montage has important art historical analogues, as well, particularly in the milieu of Berlin Dada. As Brigid Doherty has argued, artists like George Grosz and John Heartfield, who suffered from neurasthenia and shell shock following their service in the First World War, sought to simulate the "physical and psychical symptoms of shock" through montage. "Montage," she wrote in summary, "is a vehicle for the monteur's traumatophilia; it is a technique for the materialization of traumatic shock." Brigid Doherty, "'See: We Are All Neurasthenics!' Or, The Trauma of Dada Montage," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (Fall 1997).

[120] Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions," 231.

"mouth" carnally united to signify "barking," or "mouth" and "child" rapturously merged as "screaming"—it was also true that those constitutive terms of "dog," "mouth," or "child" temporarily lost their individual sense in a moment of semiotic ecstasy. In that sense the larger "concept "generated from the juxtaposition of "objects" was akin to a love child, "born of the dual mating" of two discontinuous hieroglyphic characters—a new discontinuity, even, that will enter into yet more complex relationships with others.[121] As much as the jarring discontinuities and collisions of dialectical montage might assault the viewer, they simultaneously posited an impassioned coition experienced in the viewer as the birth of an idea, as the euphoric spasm of sudden insight, as the blazing of a new trail leading to uncharted territory.

Montage may doubtlessly have furnished Eisenstein with a device that respected and exacerbated cinema's essential condition of discontinuity, then, however the technique all but spontaneously erupted in language and imagery of the erotic. It is as if Eisenstein, in spite of his acknowledgment and embrace of cinematic discontinuity, nevertheless engaged in a form of eroticism legible as an unconscious attempt to transgress that state of discontinuity, bearing testimony to a yearning for a non-dialectical state of primordial homogeneity and dedifferentiation. As Bataille understood, after all, we do not violate taboos against violence consciously; we are not aware, surely not

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121 Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," 30–32. Indeed, while Eisenstein will eventually forfeit the analogue of filmic montage to hieroglyphic forms of writing, he will not jettison the eroticism implicit in the notion that the juxtaposition of disparate images might "give birth" to cinematic concepts. In his 1929 essay "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," for instance, Eisenstein writes that the juxtaposition of two separate events "giv[es] birth to concepts, to emotions." In his 1938 essay "Word and Image," likewise, he writes that "Piece *A* (derived from the elements of the theme being developed) and piece *B* (derived from the same source) in juxtaposition give birth to the image in which the thematic matter is most clearly embodied." See Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," 58. And Eisenstein, "Word and Image," 11.

proud, of our ineluctable desires for self-erasure. Yet humankind nevertheless routinely

transgresses even the most primary taboos in ways that we agree ought to be forbidden

(i.e., homicide) and in ways that are carefully circumscribed and tacitly condoned by

secular and religious rituals (i.e., carnivorism, wars, bullfights, sacrifice, burial rites, Día

de los Muertos festivities, righteous revolutions, crusades, marriage). "Eroticism shows

the other side of a façade of unimpeachable propriety," Bataille wrote. "Behind the

façade are revealed the feelings, parts of the body and habits we are normally ashamed

of."[122]

* * *

Here is a photograph of Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (fig. 2.31). Taken at some

point in 1931 during his Mexican sojourn, it captures the great revolutionary director of

Strike, *Potemkin*, and *October* straddling a gargantuan cactus that thrusts out from

between his haunches and stands erect like a terrific, bursting phallus. This is surely not

an image of unimpeachable propriety, nor is it what we imagine when we think of

Eisenstein—the archetypal artist-revolutionary, the quintessential theoretician of a

radically functional proletarian cinema, the hardcore propagandist whose films eschewed

the individualist, capitalist drivel promulgated by Hollywood, whose films utterly

rejected the bourgeois conventions of escapist fantasy. The ideological stakes of his work

and his rigorously theorized techniques could not be more serious, more deliberate, more

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[122] Bataille, *Erotism*, 109.

important. And yet, here he is, bestride a phallic cactus somewhere in Mexico, clearly

relishing the odd opportunity for prurient and juvenile hijinks.[123]

Mexico seems to have brought out a particularly naughty and uninhibited side of

Eisenstein. "Gossip had it that Eisenstein visited the reputedly obscene theatres of

Mexico City and complimented the Mexicans on the 'shows,'" his biographer writes.

> He was alleged to have staged clownish performances of old Russian country
> comedies on the open roads, during which he would 'shout his lines broadly and
> be in his best humour, prodding the rear of a patient burro, accustomed to grief
> and indignity, with a phallus-shaped gourd.'[124]

He began drawing again during his 1931 stay in Mexico, too—prolifically,

spontaneously, compulsively. What came out were startling scenes combining graphic, if

cartoonish, sex and violence such that the two became virtually indistinguishable, scenes

that, in spite of their obvious burlesque, nevertheless arouse conflicting libidinal

responses. Here a drooling elephant in the throes of sexual ecstasy is penetrated from

behind by a horny Adam, while God, bearing unholy witness from below, laments that

he'll have to create an Eve for the depraved man (fig. 2.32). Here, in a ruthless indictment

of evangelism, a pair of mission gates are transmogrified into hulking priests with

bulging erections who offer two natives salvation in exchange for fellatio (fig. 2.33).

Here, in a scene from Shakespeare, Lord and Lady Macbeth recline in postcoital bliss

before the decapitated corpse of King Duncan (fig. 2.34). And here a bull sodomizes a

matador busily sodomizing another bull in a chain that continues ad infinitum, as if the

carnal act displaced the endless cycle of bulls goring matadors and matadors delivering

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[123] In what follows, I will be pursuing a reading of *¡Que Viva México!* according to Bataille's erotics. In so doing, I am engaging a small but important body of literature that has similarly traced Bataillean resonances in Eisenstein's work and thought. I refer the reader to my Introduction where I briefly survey exemplars of this literature.

[124] Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 224.

fatal *estocadas* to bulls (fig. 2.35).[125] Eisenstein even devilishly weaponized his drawings

to exact hilarious revenge upon Upton Sinclair in the manner of public embarrassment.

"Suppose also I should tell you that the great artist is a sexual pervert," a bitter Sinclair

wrote afterwards,

> and that he shipped into the United States an enormous mass of unthinkably filthy
> drawings and photographs, the former made on our time and the latter made with
> our money? […] The whole thing was seized by the United States Custom
> authorities, and we very nearly had all our property confiscated and a frightful
> scandal in the newspapers.[126]

Pudovkin put it somewhat more simply. "He makes me feel uncomfortable," Eisenstein's

old antagonist said. "There has always been something perverted, sick about him. He has

an ill mind."[127]

In the context of Eisenstein's Mexico film, the photograph of him bestrode an

enormous cactus has important local resonances, however, for the film's second "novel"

takes its title from a huge and particularly dinosaurian variety of cactus called "maguey"

which the director similarly fills with homoerotic meaning. The main action of the

episode unfolds at a plantation, the Hacienda de Tetlapayac of which Eisenstein had

written so lovingly to Sinclair, devoted to the maguey's cultivation. In contrast to the

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[125] For a comprehensive treatment of Eisenstein's sex drawings, see Neuberger, "Strange Circus." Neuberger sees the huge body of work as neither pornographic nor erotic in the sense that the drawings do not seem to be designed to arouse the viewer or solicit sexual attention. Instead, she understands them as sites for Eisenstein's dialectical thinking, which concerned itself with the unity of oppositions: "sex/violence, humour/pathos, attraction/repulsion." Critically for my purposes here, she asserts that "murder is equated with sexual interpenetration." In addition to Neurberger, see Annette Michelson, "A World Embodied in the Dancing Line," *October* 96 (2001): 3–16, https://doi.org/10.2307/779114. Michelson's essay first appeared in the context of a catalogue from an exhibition devoted to the subject of Eisenstein's drawings: M. Catherine de Zegher, *The Body of the Line: Eisenstein's Drawings* (New York: Drawing Center, 2000). For a comprehensive set of illustrations, see Jean-Claude Marcadé and Galia Ackerman, *S.M. Eisenstein: dessins secrets* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

[126] Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 235.

[127] Seton, 293.

film's sensuous and feminine first novel, "Sandunga," Eisenstein characterized "Maguey" in terms of violent aggression. The narrative follows Sebastian, one of the Hacienda's laborers, whose betrothed is abducted and sexually assaulted by the hacendado's drunken guests. Attempting rescue, Sebastian and his fellow peons lay futile siege upon the fortress-like Tetlapayac only to be pursued back to the maguey fields they work, where a gunfight ensues between the revolting peons and their employer's paramilitary forces. Both sides sustain casualties, however Sebastian and two comrades are easily captured after depleting their stores of ammunition and are consigned to a brutal death. Buried to their necks in the desert sand, the three insurgent peons are torturously trampled to death by horses in a whirlwind of flying hooves (fig. 2.21).

All of this action is befitting of a Hollywood Western, and indeed Sol Lesser's "mutilated" version of the film, *Thunder Over Mexico*, largely exploited the narrative latent in the footage from Tetlapayac. In the context of the film-serape that was *¡Que Viva México!*, however, the "Maguey" chapter was to fulfill a more complicated and dialectical function, displacing the previous novel's luscious and somnolent vision of prelapsarian matriarchal sensuality with a feudal, male-dominated world utterly inhospitable to such amorous and life-giving vitality. But such conflict unfolds internal to this particular novel, too. Before the action begins, Eisenstein shows us the process of cultivating the threatening maguey plant for its sweet nectar, used to produce a traditional fermented libation called pulque, a substance that is responsible for the conflict that will erupt. "With their mouths [Sebastian and his comrades] suck the juice of this cactus plant to make the Indian drink," Eisenstein explains of the opening of the second novel. "White, like milk—a gift of the gods, according to legend and belief, this strongest

intoxicator drowns sorrows, inflames passions and makes pistols fly out of their holsters."[128] To extract the juice, the peons slice open the plant's armored fronds with machetes or else fold them back in upon themselves, manipulating the plant's barbed tips to pierce its own flesh (fig. 2.36). In either case, the trauma makes the plant bleed, its milky sap pooling in its concave base, and the workers then suck the liquid into bladders to be carried back. As it is, this scene of cultivation is striking for its implied cruelty and homoerotic sensuality, as these serrated behemoths are mutilated and then caressed, even fellated, by strapping, semi-nude youths. But particularly next to the photograph of Eisenstein proudly wielding a massive and spiny erection, the erotic/violent dynamics of the maguey-cultivating are impossible to ignore.[129] Like the seduction staged by the film's first novel—one thinks, for instance, of one particularly exoticizing image of a bare-chested woman canoeing through an Edenic, tropical landscape at its start— "Maguey" seems designed to not only intellectualize Mexico's life/death dynamics but to make those dynamics viscerally felt in the lurching swing from titillating innuendo to ruthless execution.

As I have already suggested, this interpenetration of sex and violence, life and death, continues through the remaining two novels of the film, yet in a way that emerges more clearly next to the erotic model furnished by Bataille. Entitled "The Fiesta," the

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[128] Eisenstein and Alexandrov, "Synopsis for 'Que Viva Mexico!,'" 7.

[129] Thomas Waugh discusses another photograph of Eisenstein on the same cactus, connecting it to themes of homoerotic desire found throughout the director's *oeuvre*. Writing about the famous cream separator scene from Eisenstein's *Old and New* (1929), in which the machine "ejaculates" cream over the members of a joyous farm collective, Waugh concludes: "Knowing that Eisenstein saw a phallus in the occasional cactus, it is hard not to see how a long cactus-sucking sequence in which 'milky white' fluid is extracted for a fermented beverage [i.e., in *¡Que Viva México!*] could be a rival to Marfa's cream spray [i.e., in *Old and New*]." Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 136.

third chapter's central bullfight combines beauty and bloodshed, the grace of an elaborate dance and the horror of a modern-day incarnation of ritual sacrifice. Not only does the bloodbath result in the spontaneous ejaculation of cash from enthusiastic fans, moreover; it also results in the matador's successful attainment of his admirer in the stands, as if such violence directly begot erotic desire. Yet more death awaits us in the film's fourth novel, "Soldadera," as the protagonist and her newly born child mourn the loss of her husband to the Mexican Revolution. Once more, death and reproduction are reconciled according to Bataille's erotics: "The death of the one being is correlated with the birth of the other, heralding it and making it possible. Life is always a product of the decomposition of life."[130] Recapitulating the film's major themes and offering a pendent to the somber mood of the prologue's timeless antiquity, finally, the epilogue's Día de los Muertos celebration of the present delivers nothing if not individuals who have safely, theatrically, and ecstatically erased their unique and discontinuous individuality under cover of the ultimate emblem of erotic continuity, the anonymous skull. In its various unexpected collisions of life and death, of sensual seduction and repellant violence, *¡Que Viva México!* thus offers not only an intellectual excursus of Mexico's discontinuous dynamics; it also sought to arouse that sense of contradiction viscerally in a viewer who travels through the film in an experience that alternates between desire and repulsion.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

It was near Palenque that Smithson encountered the goddess Coatlicue. He had just completed his fifth Mirror Displacement, and from its reflections, he wrote, the

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[130] Bataille, *Erotism*, 55.

Serpent Lady emerged, her "twistings and windings […] frozen in the mirrors." Under her watchful eye, he proceeded to produce another kind of displacement, this time photographing a rock, removing it, and photographing the earthen hole that remained (fig. 2.37). The result is more or less what we might expect—a shallow pit where the rock had once been lodged, contours intact and easily discernable in the contrast between the dark, moist soil and its undisturbed, leaf- and twig-strewn surrounds. To view the photographic pairs that resulted from each overturning is therefore to bear obvious witness to a fresh intervention into the site, it is to confront a discontinuity in the earth— quite literally a hole—that is legible in the index of the rock's absence, its dislocation, its collage-like excision. Of course, it will not take long for that freshly uncovered pit to fade into obscurity, for the clear edges separating exposed and unexposed earth to blur, for the "cut" to be reabsorbed into forest floor's former state of continuity and nondifferentiation. But for now, and forever in these photographs, something is missing, something has been removed, something has been cut out.

Coatlicue, for one, seemed to approve of Smithson's gesture of revelation. "Under each rock is an orgy of scale," she volunteered. Smithson agreed:

> Each pit contained miniature earthworks—tracks and traces of insects and other sundry small creatures. In some beetle dung, cobwebs, and nameless slime. In others cocoons, tiny ant nests and raw roots. If an artist could see the world through the eyes of a caterpillar he might be able to make some fascinating art. Each one of these secret dens was also the entrance to the abyss. Dungeons that dropped away from the eyes into a damp cosmos of fungus and mold—an exhibition of clammy solitude.[131]

Surely this imagery speaks to the rather unremarkable dirt and debris we are accustomed to finding under rocks—bugs, excrement, muck, grime. Yet Smithson performed this

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[131] Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 126.

gesture not only "on the outskirts of the ruins of Palenque" but also, he punned, "in the skirts of Coatlicue." And in that context his language also suggestively anthropomorphizes the earth, as if the "dungeons," "pits," "secret dens," "damp cosmos," and "clammy solitude" revealed beneath these overturned rocks were so many bodily orifices. Robert Hobbs, for his part, noted the vaginal imagery deployed by Smithson, but I'm not convinced it need be so limited.[132] Unsolicited voyeurism on his part? Amorous exhibitionism on hers? Like the "jumbled spectrum of greens," the "incoherent mass," and "the "incomprehensible shadows" of the fifth Mirror Displacement, the nature of Smithson's denuding of the Earth goddess remains unsure, occluded in the end by a larger mood of indifference. Yet it is a denuding all the same, and one that infuses the fundamental operations of collage, excision and cutting and displacement, with conflicting libidinal sensations. To that end, Smithson's production of discontinuity, even in this most rudimentary form of displacement, carries with it the taboo desires of which Bataille had written—desires to transgress that condition of discontinuity, to end it once and for all, spoken in the conflicting language of eroticism.

Smithson's larger body of thought shares in the occasional tendency to anthropomorphize the environment in such terms, as if the sorts of interventions that characterize man's larger alteration and shaping of his environment—even through the most elemental procedures of digging, displacing, and relocating material—constituted little more than the artificial production of discontinuity whose secret subtext was ambiguously and ambivalently libidinal. Perhaps most famous is the "Great Pipe

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[132] Given the vaginal imagery Smithson employs, Hobbs writes that "his description suggests that the act of overturning rocks and peering beneath borders on pornography." Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 161.

Monument" that Smithson encountered on his 1967 jaunt through Passaic. "It was as though the pipe was secretly sodomizing some hidden technological orifice," he wrote enigmatically, "causing a monstrous sexual organ (the fountain) to have an orgasm."[133] Recalling his earliest mirror-based projects from the Cayuga Salt Mine in Ithaca, New York, likewise, Smithson noted the mine's vaginal associations, which, he explained, accounted for the taboo prohibiting women from entering.[134] Indeed, as he became increasingly concerned with mining reclamation projects towards the end of his life, Smithson could often be found discussing eroticism as the repressed content of so many human interactions with the earth. "Strip mining actually does sort of suggest lewd sex acts and everything," he lamented in a late interview. "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 psychologically there's a problem there."[135] By that same token, Smithson also felt there was "the possibility of a direct organic manipulation of the land devoid of violence and 'macho' aggression"—that is, in the somewhat more sensuous and procreative cultivation of agriculture.[136] Smithson's habit of anthropomorphizing the environment suggests that humanity's larger relationship to the land is structured by a

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[133] Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," 71.

[134] "Taboo, women aren't allowed in the mine. I did my mirror pieces in Ithaca, women aren't allowed. […] It's a very strong taboo. I read somewhere there is a strong feeling that, in the primitive sense, the tube is like a vagina, there's a kind of like Freudian protectiveness." Smithson and Wheeler, "Four Conversations Between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson," 206.

[135] Robert Smithson and Allison Sky, "Entropy Made Visible [1973]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 307.

[136] "After all, sex isn't all a series of rapes," Smithson explained. "The farmer or engineer who cuts into the land can either cultivate it or devastate it." Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape [1973]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 163, 164.

kind of eroticism, manifest alternatively in violent destruction or carnal ecstasy, as if the contradictory marks we leave on the earth and consequently the production of difference—even in the case of Smithson's comparatively noninvasive *Overturned Rocks*—bear witness to a secret longing for the continuity of oblivion.

Revisited in this light, Smithson's Yucatan Mirror Displacements, too, can be seen writhing with a libidinal vitality that is, as it had been for Bataille and for Eisenstein, the repressed consequence of discontinuity. This body of work stipulates a different kind of displacement, as we have seen, one consisting of flashes of effulgent and gleaming sky spliced into the earth. The Mirror Displacements stage a breach of boundaries, I had written, a transgression of the horizon line that separates above and below, an interpenetration of two discontinuous and mutually exclusive realms. Yet if these works possess an erotic subtext, it is not (or at least not only) in the form of facile metaphors of interpenetration, as if they could be construed as divulging some weird intercourse of sky and earth; nor does it reduce to a sense in which these manmade geometries have, like Smithson in the guise of the cowboy and Eisenstein in the guise of Cortés, violently invaded this land; nor is it limited to the works' obsolescence, as if their installation and dismantling evoked some erotic yearning for continuity, erasure, and death that recollected the ancient ruins that had been similarly "deformed and beaten down" by time. If these works possess an erotic subject, on the contrary, it is because the contradiction that the Displacements instantiate—their interlacing of the profilmic tableau with light and recognizable imagery whose origins lie elsewhere—also produces a kind of visual disorientation that is to varying degrees viscerally experienced as

dizzying, hypnotic, and vertiginous, that elicits, in other words, what Bataille identified as the range of physiological responses to erotic transgression.

Admittedly some of the Mirror Displacements are easy to assimilate, particularly when their cast shadows and uniform brightness renders them so many rectangular panels strewn about the landscape. But in the absence of spatial cues and in the presence of recognizable fragments of imagery, others erupt in ambiguity. In the dark undergrowth of the ninth Mirror Displacement, for example, the comparatively bright mirrors and their leafy, luminous reflections read uncertainly against their surrounding penumbra (fig. 2.16). A similar sensation arises when faced with the seventh Mirror Displacement, in which prismatic forms tangled within the expansive limbs of a tree appear to hover inexplicably, making us wonder what exactly it is we are seeing (fig. 2.14). Particularly in these instances, the faceted and jarring glimpses of elsewhere elicit a perceptual dissonance as we try and fail to reconcile the discontinuous realms. If Mexico was an "alien world" that "couldn't really be comprehended on any rational level," if its condition was plural—at once beautiful and horrific, ancient and modern, extinct and vitally present—here was a structurally analogous body of work that stitched two realms of vision into single photographs, but in such a way that its incomprehensible paradox might be viscerally felt in the dizzying, back-and-forth recursion staged by the mirrors and their easy conquest of human perception.

Beyond Smithson's Yucatán trip, the many series of Mirror Displacements he executed in late 1968 and 1969 more often than not relished in playing up this type of disjunction to even greater and even more dizzying effect. It was in the months before leaving for Mexico that the artist first conceived of the format. In October 1968 he found

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himself in Ithaca, New York, in preparation for Thomas W. Leavitt and Willoughby

Sharp's exhibition *Earth Art*, to be held at Cornell University's Andrew Dickson White

Museum early the following year (February 11–March 16, 1969), and in keeping with the

procedures of the site/nonsite works he had first debuted at the start of that year, he began

to formulate an ambitious, multi-part project involving an underground mine operated by

the nearby Cayuga Rock Salt Company. One component of the project, for instance,

consisted of the displacement of rock salt from the mine to the gallery, thereby

establishing an indeterminate relationship between the Cayuga mine and the University

Museum very much in keeping with the operations of his nonsites. However, Smithson

also temporarily arranged mirrors in the mine and photographed them in situ, and the

resulting images, which he hung in the gallery along with the displaced rock and mirror

installations, betray an artist at pains to carry vision to multiple locales within the space

of a single image (fig. 2.38). Photographed in greater proximity than the Yucatán Mirror

Displacements and thus augmenting access to the reflected space, the Cayuga series

exacerbates the illusion that we are looking through one gravelly realm and into another.

In addition to these subterranean mirror installations, furthermore—and in anticipation,

too, of the succession of the Yucatán Displacements and the sense of travel with which

they were associated—Smithson also set up a "Mirror Trail" in Ithaca consisting of

mirrors installed into the landscape at various intervals along a route connecting the

Andrew Dickson White Art Museum to the Cayuga mine (fig. 2.39). The photographs

that Smithson made documenting these sequential installations, likewise on display at

Earth Art, similarly privilege the jarring reflections produced by the mirrors. Even when

cast shadows obviously divulge the mirrors' identity as such, the clarity of their

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reflections as well as the correspondence of their rectangular frames with the frames of

their containing photographs transform the mirrors into windows that slice through the

profilmic tableau in the manner of a mirage or discomfiting glitch in the fabric of the

image.[137]

Even more than the Cayuga project, however, it was the mirror-based works that

the artist made after his return from Yucatán that compelled the greatest sense of erotic

disorientation. In addition to temporarily siting mirrors in the landscape and then

photographing them—a practice the artist continued on later travels to England,

Germany, and Italy in the fall of 1969—Smithson also produced a number of more

recognizably sculptural works involving mirrors to be installed in galleries. While these

staged a similar interpenetration of actual and virtual space, here we are dealing no longer

with photographic documentation of an ephemeral arrangement of mirrors in the

landscape but with phenomenal experience. In conjunction with the London incarnation

of Harald Szeemann's signal exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*

at the Institute of Contemporary Art (September 28–October 27, 1969), for instance,

Smithson created the paired *Chalk-Mirror Displacement* (fig. 2.40). Each consisted of

eight horizontal mirrors arranged like spokes of a wheel and shored up by rocks—one

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[137] Smithson's Cayuga project is too involved to contend with in further detail here. As always, Robert Hobbs's book remains a useful source for documenting the project at a relatively early point. Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*. For a catalogue of the show, see *Earth Art: Jan Dibbets, Hans Haacke, Neil Jenney, Richard Long, David Medalla, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, Günther Uecker* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, 1970). While mirrors had been a part of Smithson's "mature" practice from very early on with a work like *The Eliminator* (1964), his Cayuga project is notable for being the first time that the artist temporary sited mirrors outdoors, a practice he was to continue throughout 1969—not only the *Mirror Shore* made on Sanibel Island, Florida, and his works in the Yucatán, but also a series of Displacements made on a trip to Europe from fall of that year.

was made in situ at a chalk quarry in York, the other appeared as part of *Attitudes* in London. Because the material behind each mirror is identical to the material before it and reflected in it—because, in other words, the view that each mirror reflects so closely corresponds to what that which each obscures—the mirrors themselves almost vanish as if they were transparent panes of glass. But even as the mirrors threaten to deliquesce, we nevertheless always sense the seams, the subtle discontinuities, the rifts separating reflected space from actual space that contribute to a dizzying interplay between the two. A similar phenomenon occurs in *Nonsite (Essen Soil and Mirrors)* (1969), a work Smithson made shortly thereafter for a group show in Düsseldorf, Germany, consisting of four vertically-propped mirrors that intersect at right angles and that are supported by rocks and soil (fig. 2.41). Approached obliquely, the arrangement of mirrors effectively grants visual access to only one quadrant of the earthen mound at a time, however the reflections (and reflections of reflections) virtually reconstruct those aspects of the mound that the mirrors obstruct. Once again, the impression given is one of transparency: the mirrors seem almost to melt away, yet the illusion is undermined by varying degrees of discontinuity that occur at the seams.[138] In not only juxtaposing the mirror and its reflection; in not only using a reflection to splice some optical elsewhere into the tableau before us, but in also confusing the very mirror/reflection relationship to begin with, which is to say the distinction between actual and illusory space, these works reproduce in the viewer a syndrome consistent with erotic experience, above all the dizzying and vertiginous threat of utter disorientation.

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[138] Smithson seems to have introduced this genre of mirrored work at the *Earth Art* show of February 1969. Among his installation, for instance, was a square made up of four rectangular mirrors propped up vertically by material from the Cayuga salt mine. He later remade this work as *Rocks and Mirror Square II* (1969/1971).

One final work merits discussion here. At one point on his Mexican itinerary, Smithson constructed an "earth-map" of Gondwanaland (fig. 2.42), a gesture designed to conjure the presence of a supercontinent that existed hundreds of millions of years ago. As a cartographic document, it was useless: built from white limestone arranged into a blobby and imprecise form that very roughly approximated the contours of the prehistoric landmass, *Hypothetical Continent of Gondwanaland* bore no functional relationship to its geographical reference. Like Smithson's nonsites, its only vector of connection was its material—white limestone of the type that was formed during the Carboniferous period to which Gondwanaland belonged. In invoking that ancient geological era, however, Smithson's "earth-map" staged yet another disorienting discontinuity. "Reconstructing a land mass that existed 350 to 305 million years ago on a terrain once controlled by sundry Mayan gods," he explained, "caused a collision in time that left one with a sense of timelessness."[139] Merging multiple distinct temporalities, separated by unimaginably vast gulfs of time and yet all co-present in one location, Smithson's *Hypothetical Content* posited a collage of not only materials, in other words, but also temporal coordinates, and the breached boundaries of those coordinates converged in the present to provoke an experience of contradictory "timelessness." Standing before it, perhaps Smithson felt like Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, who had become "unstuck in time" and who thus experienced his life as a relentless and dizzyingly nonlinear montage over which he had no control. Or perhaps he felt like Ad Reinhardt who had written, as Smithson quoted several years before, that "The present is the future of the past, and the past of the future." For here seemed to be the scenario, as Smithson

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[139] Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 121.

continued in his own words, in which "The future criss-crosses the past as an

unobtainable present. Time vanishes into a perpetual sameness."[140]

        If I am suggesting that this disorienting sense of "timelessness" that Smithson's

"collision in time" evoked ought to be read as erotic, finally, it is in part because erotic

imagery had long served Smithson as an avatar for precisely this paradoxical traversal of

huge intervals of time. Take his photocollage *Untitled (The Time Travelers)* of 1964, for

example (fig. 2.43). Flanked by male nudes whose physiques and poses are framed by

gridded contours, the work's central image is a promotional film still from *The Time*

Travelers, released that same year. In it, three scientists inadvertently open up a portal to

the world 107 years in the future (the enframed image we see at the center of Smithson's

collage). To the astonishment of the scientists, but surely not to anyone familiar with

Smithson's own entropic mindset ("The Future travels *backwards*," he wrote[141]), they

find that this "future" in fact resembles the distant past. "The campus like that in 100

years?" one incredulous scientist exclaims. "It couldn't be." Another, dumbfounded,

agrees: "It looks almost prehistoric." Only, as they find out soon enough, this

paradoxically prehistoric future is replete not with violent Neanderthals but barbarian

mutants, survivors of an intervening nuclear apocalypse. If the supplemental pair of nude

gentlemen tells us anything in their capacity of cartouche figures—pathetic guides who,

as framing devices, reside both inside and outside the work and who contextualize our

gaze[142]—perhaps it is that the interpenetration of 1964 and 2071 that we are witnessing is

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[140] Robert Smithson, "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space [1966]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 34.

[141] Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 123.

[142] In likening these collaged nudes to "figures of the frame," I have in mind Louis Marin's work on frames and their various devices. For Marin, the act of representation has two components: the

akin to the kind of dizzying and abyssal disorientation that is the marker of erotic

transgression. Indeed, between them the vexed scientists themselves exhibit the range of

erotically correct response to the scenario, racked by legitimate horror about what could

happen to them should they traverse this gulf of time and simultaneously ecstatic about

the possibility of leaving themselves behind and merging with the future.[143]

In many ways Smithson could not have selected a better film, for erotic oblivion

will be the fate of these three travelers, who in the end become lost in time. Once the

three firmly set their feet in the wasteland of 2071, their portal spontaneously collapses,

trapping them in the future. Fortunately they discover a secret subterranean enclave of

what remains of human civilization, and, after managing to rebuild their time-travel

device with help from scientists of the future, they return to 1964. But something is not

quite right. They have gone back slightly too far, where (when?) they encounter their

former selves just before opening the time rift that will lead them precisely back to where

they are now—that is, where they were—that is, where they will be. For they have,

unwittingly, initiated a time loop. By way of demonstration, the film itself spontaneously

commences its own recursive loop, playing back the action between the scientists'

first reflexive ("to present oneself") and the second transitive ("to represent something").
Supplemental framing figures such as the homoerotic nudes in *Time Travelers* fulfill the former
function, reiterating the frame's deictic function in "pointing out," in "aplify[ing] the gesture of
pointing." And to that end they become "commentators" on the work, "signify[ing] to the viewer
the pathic (pathetic) modality of the gaze." This final point is of especial pertinence here since the
modality of the gaze signaled to us in Smithson's case is undeniably and unambiguously erotic.
Enframing the scene of time travel before us, in other words, these figures instruct us to view it as
libidinally charged. For Marin's discussion, see Louis Marin, "The Frame of Representation and
Some of Its Figures," in *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford
University Press, 2001), 352–372.

[143] In addition to *Untitled (Time Travelers)*, a lengthier discussion of Smithson's unexpected
combination of erotic imagery and ideas of time travel—either to distant futures or distant pasts—
would have to include other photocollages like *Untitled (Big Fish)* (c. 1961–63) and *Untitled
(Venus with Reptiles)* (1963); drawings like *Bellini Dead Christ Supported by Angels* (1963); and
assemblage sculptures like *Honeymoon Machine* (1964).

departure and their return in rapid motion, and then once more even faster. Eventually, we presume, it will be a blur of continuity, a flickering vortex in which these scientist heroes are doomed to oblivion. To travel in time, then—whether fantastically in the realm of a mediocre science-fiction movie like *The Time Travelers*, by the less technical means of geological juxtaposition that Smithson effected in his *Hypothetical Map of Gondwanaland*, or simply in touring a "paradoxical" land such as Mexico—suggests not the production of knowledge so much as its erotic loss. As Smithson once described the phenomenon, "Space Age and Stone Age attitudes overlap to form the Zero-Zone."[144] In its heterogeneity, Mexico seemed to offer Smithson the very incarnation of this Zero-Zone, a term which could also be used to describe the vertiginous effects of the work he produced there.

* * *

Like Smithson after him, Eisenstein carved a trajectory through Mexico over the course of his year-long sojourn, making an invisible line that would connect Mexico City, Acapulco, and Oaxaca; Yaxchilan, Tehuantepec, and San Blas. But line-making was important for him in another way, as well. For it was in Mexico, as we know, that Eisenstein again began to draw. The drawn line, he later wrote, was "dynamic movement; a process; a path"; it was fluid and sensuous, inscribing a bodily movement in space and time from which figures seemed to spontaneously materialize.[145] He likened it to a dance

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[144] Smithson, "Interstellar Flit," undated typescript (c. 1961–63). As quoted in: Robert A. Sobieszek, *Robert Smithson, Photo Works / Robert A. Sobieszek.* (Los Angeles, Calif. : Albuquerque, N.M.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 19.

[145] Eisenstein, *Volume IV: Beyond the Stars, The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, 576.

in that sense, as if the choreographed movement of the hand and fingers were indexed in the flexuous line left in their wake. Although perhaps choreography is not the best term, since the dance of Eisenstein's line was no waltz nor Hungarian *czardas*, dances which were constrained and rule-bound like drawing from a model. No, Eisenstein preferred the autonomous and improvisatory foxtrot, which anticipated the "free run of line" in his drawings and the emergent quality of the imagery that resulted.[146] Yet what kind of dance, precisely, produces images like the ones we have seen—drawings in which graphic violence and graphic sex, mutilation and penetration, abject horror and orgasmic ecstasy, all intermingle and fuse indifferently?

Decades later, Smithson's Mexican itinerary described its own kind of line, its own kind of trajectory through space. And while he surely would never have likened his journey to a dance, this was nevertheless travel for its own sake—an aimless meandering in the spirit, perhaps, of what Eisenstein had described as "dynamic movement; a process; a path." On the advice to travel at random, after all, Smithson's trip lacked destination and structure. And like Eisenstein's draftsmanship, which eschewed a model in favor of the "free run of line," Smithson too impatiently tossed aside guidebooks as if to forego any predetermined itinerary set to accomplish predetermined ends. Accordingly his 1969 journey recalled an earlier excursion to Mexico, one undertaken by a nineteen-year-old Smithson in 1957. Almost certainly in emulation of the road-tripping Beats, he had made his way to Mexico thumbing rides that year; he saw ancient pyramids outside of the capitol, sites of human sacrifice that he later remembered for the palpable sense of vertigo they induced; he was even briefly jailed for vagrancy in Mexicali in an adventure

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[146] Eisenstein, 586.

befitting of *On the Road,* which appeared that same year.[147] Some twelve years later, a figure like Jack Kerouac had surely become only a distant referent, yet Smithson's "random" travel still retained something of the jazzy improvisations that were the Beats' journeys, too. Of course, if Eisenstein's line left in its wake transgressive visions of explicit sex and violence that blurred the line between the two, Smithson's line of travel ostensibly left little but the "memory traces" of sited artworks and modest interventions into the landscape that were if not immediately dismantled then quickly reabsorbed into the landscape.

Still, Smithson associated his journey with various forms of erotic transgression. Echoing the suggestive anthropomorphizing of the landscape in his account of *Overturned Rock*, he likened the very act of moving across space to an act of ritual mutilation. "Through the windshield the road stabbed the horizon, causing it to bleed a sunny incandescence," Smithson wrote of the drive out of Mérida at the start of the journey:

> One couldn't help feeling that this was a ride on a knife covered with solar blood. As it cut into the horizon a disruption took place. The tranquil drive became a sacrifice of matter that led to a discontinuous state of being, a world of quiet delirium. Just sitting there brought one into the world of a terrestrial victim. This

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[147] Smithson alludes to his hitchhiking travels around the United States and Mexico in multiple interviews, often dating the travels roughly to 1956–58, or when he was "about nineteen." See in particular Smithson and Cummings, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution." A timeline of Smithson's life published in Robert Hobbs's 1981 book on the artist offers greater detail, dating Smithson's first trip to Mexico to 1957 and including the fact of the artist's brief incarceration. Alan Moore et al., "Chronology," in *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, by Robert Hobbs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 231–243. Smithson elaborates on his memories of the temples in an interview that took place not long after his second trip to Mexico. "If you climb the pyramids of Mexico," he explains, "what went on there was sacrifice, and terror. You get vertigo looking down those stairs. They didn't have a concept of love, only pleasure and pain—the two interweaving, that is all there was. There was no goddess of love, or Judeo-Christian heritage to relate to. Sacrifice was a renewal; when they made the sacrifice, people internally did not feel disgust and nausea, they were gratified by sacrifice." Smithson, "Interview with Paul Toner," 241.

peaceful war between the elements is ever present in Mexico—an echo, perhaps, of the Aztec and Mayan human sacrifices.[148]

Smithson's description transforms the innocuous vector of travel into a sacrificial instrument such that the act of passing through space becomes a slice, a severing, a bloody dismemberment. This is no surgical cut, moreover—precise, deliberate, and functional, like passage from A to B—but somewhat more impassioned and gratuitous in its "random" aimlessness. Like Eisenstein's dancing line, Smithson's line of travel therefore spontaneously bodied forth its own brand of violent, libidinal imagery, even if the precise identity of the sacrificial victim and the nature of the trauma inflicted remained unclear. For the mutilation that describes his passage through the Yucatán was ultimately harmless, and even as his Mirror Displacements enacted a similarly traumatic slicing in their optical opening up of the earth, their very ephemerality was the opposite of violent. Unlike the strip mines aggressively cut into the earth leaving gaping wounds and indelible scars, Smithson's vector of travel and the Mirror Displacements alike were loathe to leave such an impact, opting instead to politely vanish almost as soon as they appeared.[149]

Now, Smithson's travel very often did involve actual transgression. He was known to scale the occasional fence, for example, and breach the occasional boundary (fig. 2.44). "Actually we just drove out and ignored the 'No Trespassing' signs," he explained of one such excursion near Vancouver International Airport in late 1969.

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[148] Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," 120.

[149] While her discussion is brief, Ann Reynolds makes an effort to connect Smithson's occasional trespassing to his interest in erotic imagery, as well, suggesting that the sites he chose and the imagery to which he was drawn at an earlier moment in his career both assume the structure of transgression of cultural taboo. See Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, 205–215.

"Once you get out into these areas there is always no trespassing… taboo, totem taboo."[150] That he understood such signs and physical barricades expressly in terms of taboo suggests that his own transgressions of such limits not only contravened legal distinctions between public and private but also mirrored Bataille's erotic structure of sacrifice as "ritual violation of a taboo."[151] Yet these more explicit instances of travel as transgression only gesture to the ways in which all travel involves a violation of boundaries in the form of passage, even when it does not involve a breach of physical or legal obstacles. For one travels not amidst a vast continuity of sameness but, as we say, from *place to place*, a common phrasing that speaks to passage between locales with distinct identities and spatial coordinates. Like the figure of the conquistador and like the Western hero alike, travel meant a breach of boundaries—from old world to new, from the mythical elsewhere of the West to an outpost of civilization, from one place to another. Travel meant an encounter with difference. Even when Smithson traveled "at random"—which is to say traveling not from origin to destination so much as simply traveling—even then his sited works and their documentation produced those signature discontinuities insofar as they indexed discrete moments and places. "If you take a photograph of it," Smithson had explained of his ephemeral installations, "you arrest the process, or it is a momentary stop in the process."[152] If each temporary efflorescence of art marked a successive site, in other words, travel was what happened between them and what put them into play.

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[150] Smithson and Wheeler, "Four Conversations Between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson," 206.

[151] Bataille, *Erotism*, 109.

[152] Smithson, "Interview with Paul Toner," 235.

And, as we have seen, so much of Smithson's work relied on a collage-like logic of discontinuity to begin with, reiterating the sense of fragmented discontinuity that travel alone was capable of surmounting. Travel was that which breached the gallery's boundaries in putting the contained nonsite in communication with the external site from which it was excerpted, held at bay across a gulf of discontinuity; travel is what our eyes were forced to do in attempting to gather up the collage-like plurality of perspectives and the crystalline fragmentation of light that characterized the Mirror Displacements. To travel from place to place, literally or hypothetically, meant a transgression of boundaries, a surmounting of discontinuity, a putting-into-play of various parts. As a consequence, the discrete and autonomous art object privileged by modernism no longer obtained. Instead, and in keeping with the postmodernism canonically attributed to Smithson's work, we travel amidst the various discontinuous components of the artwork reimagined as a "course of hazards," which is to say a text.

And yet if travel is to be not only the traversal of discontinuity but also erotic—if vehicular passage is to be a sacrificial slice, if the dislocation of a rock is to be a denuding, if descending into the earth is to be circluded[153]—it is because the breach of boundaries it implies, like the more ominous model of colonial conquest with which I began, threatens the integrity of the discontinuous, threatens the identities of transgressed and transgressor alike. If travel is to be erotic, in other words, it is because it induces

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[153] I borrow the term "circlusion" from artist and gender theorist Bini Adamczak, who invokes it to mean the antonym of penetration—that is, the act of sexual envelopment and absorption—and thus impute to this latter dynamic the active and empowering agency usually reserved for phallocentric language. I find the term particularly apt in Smithson's case, since it implies an appropriate shift in power away from the penetrating agent and towards the enclosing agent. Bini Adamczak, "On 'Circlusion,'" *Mask Magazine*, July 18, 2016, http://www.maskmagazine.com/the-mommy-issue/sex/circlusion.

erasure, simultaneously destructive and procreative, as discontinuous entities are put into play and are brought, however provisionally, into continuity. And if travel is to be erotic, it means too that the kind of breach of boundaries that it enacts ought to reproduce the range of physiological responses that are the hallmarks of erotic experience and that attend those momentary feelings of erasure elicited in ritualized encounters with the void—dizziness, disorientation, and vertigo, but also ecstasy, pleasure, and bliss. While I do not want to overstate things, to travel between mirror and reflection in Smithson's work is more often than not to become lost in a paradoxical and excessive tableau that cannot be reduced to monocular stasis; and to travel vicariously with Smithson through the Yucatán is to be similarly disoriented amidst the polyvocal world of "Incidents of Mirror-Travel," an essay that, in Robert Hobbs's estimation, is pervaded by "the feeling of loss, displacement, and incomprehension."[154] For travel to be erotic, in the end, is to impute its libidinal and visceral consequences to the textuality attributed to Smithson's postmodernism. For to the degree that the text must be traversed, its component parts transgressed, it too may reproduce the symptoms of erotic transgression.

In many ways what I am suggesting here is not entirely new or novel. In addition to theorizing the text, after all, Barthes also linked its traversal to pleasure. The efficacy of the text depended on gaps, breaks, discontinuities, and its pleasure was a function of the reader's play across those gaps. "Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes*?" Barthes asked famously. "In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no 'erogenous zones.'" Instead, he continued, "it is intermittence […] which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing

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[154] Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 153.

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(trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve)."[155] As he wrote elsewhere in the context of photography, "the erotic photograph […] does not make the sexual organs into a central object; it may very well not show them at all; it takes the spectator *outside* its frame, and it is there that I animate this photograph and that it animates me."[156] The pleasure of the text, in other words, consists precisely in what *is not* imaged, pictured, represented. Gaps, absences, lacunae—these are where the reader can find space to move, to play, to dance. And these too are what differentiate the various component parts of the text and that the reader transgresses in her passage. "Drifting" or else aimlessly "cruising" through the text, to use Barthes's terms, not according to narrative or hierarchy or order but according to pleasure, desire, and perversion, the reader is displaced, dislocated, disoriented in her absorption into the object. "Lost in this tissue—this texture—the subject unmakes himself," Barthes wrote, "like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web."[157] Hence "the asocial character of bliss," he elaborated elsewhere. "*Everything* is lost, integrally."[158]

Nevertheless, the libidinal subtext of textuality remains repressed in prevailing accounts of Smithson's postmodernism, which all too often restricts textuality to a logical device. As it was for Owens, textuality furnished a framework for articulating the work's radical decentering, its distributed nature, its plurality; it offered a language for describing the duration of the static artwork reimagined as successive; and in that sense it also articulated a harsh rebuke of modernist values of autonomy and discrete self-

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[155] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 9–10.

[156] My emphasis. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 59.

[157] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 64.

[158] Barthes, 39.

sufficiency and auto-referentiality and presentness. The dialectical expansion from work to text underway in the 1960s may indeed have involved a rational critique of modernist autonomy, authorship, and originality, may indeed have required a more active model of consumption, but, I am suggesting, it also brought with it a sense of loss, visceral and libidinal, that was the consequence of textual passage and the interpenetration of discontinuous parts that it entailed. If we become lost amidst Smithson's work, if we experience momentary dizziness or even nausea amidst its recursive pulse, if we get stuck wondering about whether the site is a reflection of the nonsite or vice versa, it is because at stake in the textuality of Smithson's work is a momentary glimpse into the loss of knowledge, a glimpse into the void or the "Zero-Zone" where the distinction between mirror and reflection is not only unclear but no longer matters. Smithson's term for this ultimately was entropy—the tendency of everything toward stasis and energy drain, the fizzling out of the universe, the reversion to the mean, a tendency toward terminal nondifferentiation and sameness. Lost in the Yucatán, we sense that such loss is not only horrifying but also ecstatic and rapturous, which suggests that the entropic condition to which the text delivers us may be our ultimate erotic desideratum.

Chapter 3

Devolution from Above: Sculpture and Cinema, Montaged

Part I: From Old to New…

> Greetings and congratulations on their victory to the workers and executive personnel of the giant Red Banner Tractor Works, the first in the U.S.S.R. The 50,000 tractors which you are to produce for our country every year will be 50,000 projectiles shattering the old bourgeois world and clearing the way for the new, socialist order in the countryside.
>
> My best wishes for the successful fulfilment of your programme.
> —J. Stalin, June 17, 1930[1]

It is summer on the outskirts of an unnamed village in the rural Soviet Union—harvesting season. A phalanx of scythe-wielding peasants approaches a bountiful field of grain that sways gently in the breeze (fig. 3.1). They advance towards it and through it, their curved blades sweeping back and forth in wide, deliberate arcs that fell row after row of the flowering crop. They are working together, which is notable since it was not long ago that these particular villagers, enticed by the promise of individualism, each thinking he could accomplish more alone, were working very much against one another indeed. Despite their new collective identity, however, there will still be room for some sporting competition: Zharov, a particularly obstinate and hearty fellow, flaunts his strength and races ahead of his peers, only to be pursued by an ambitious youth looking to outdo him. Picking up their scythes, the others temporarily pause to cheer the adversaries on. To the spectators' delight, and to Zharov's dismay, the youth manages to

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[1] J. V. Stalin, "Tractor Works, Stalingrad [1930]," Marxist Internet Archive, 2008, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1930/06/17.htm. Originally republished in J. V. Stalin, "Tractor Works, Stalingrad [1930]," in *Works*, vol. Vol. 12, April 1929 – June 1930 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 241.

catch up, but the glory of their contest is short lived. Zharov holds a cupped hand to his ear. What is that sound? A grasshopper seen in close-up suggests a buzzing noise of insectile origin, but sudden glimpses of metallic teeth and gnashing blades indicate another, less organic source. The rhythmic montage accelerates in tandem with the menacing apparatus, teeth and blades whirring to life with activity. They belong to a tractor, which easily cuts through the field of grain, leaving the sweating adversaries dumbfounded. "The machine outdid us both," Zharov and his challenger lament. "The machine!"

This scene comes from Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein's fourth feature, *Old and New* (also known as *The General Line*). Begun in 1926, interrupted by *October*, resumed in 1928, and finally completed in 1929, *Old and New* dramatizes the contemporaneous transition from the "backwards" vestiges of the agrarian, pre-revolutionary past to its modernized, mechanized, and, above all else, collectivized future.[2] Unlike *Strike*, *Potemkin*, and *October*, in which Eisenstein had eschewed individual protagonists (remnants, he thought, of the bourgeois cinema) in favor of proletarian masses, *Old and*

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[2] Taking as its subject the forced collectivization of Soviet agriculture under the Communist Party, Eisenstein's fourth completed film was begun in 1926 as his third major project, following *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin* (both released 1925). However, the project was interrupted almost as soon as it entered production when Eisenstein was ordered by Sovkino, the State production and distribution entity, to initiate production of a film commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Revolution—what would be released, a year later than planned, as *October* (1928). After this one-year-long hiatus, production on *The General Line* resumed in spring 1928, and the film was all but complete by spring 1929. When Josef Stalin expressed dissatisfaction with the film's ending, however, Eisenstein and his crew were ordered back into production. Evidently the result was still not to the Party's liking, and consequently the project's name was ultimately changed from *The General Line* to *Old and New* in order to dissociate it from Party policy, which, as James Goodwin points out, remained undecided until November 1929, just after the film's October release. Jay Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 262–269. See also James Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 102. Throughout the present chapter, I rely upon the English-language subtitles included in the 2011 Flicker Alley release of *Old and New*.

New follows a single heroine, the non-actor Marfa Lapkina, who had fulfilled

Eisenstein's essential requirement for the role—she could "milk cows, plough, guide a

tractor."[3] Her filmic persona handily puts these skills on display as she undertakes to

unite her divided peasant community into a form of agricultural collective known as a

kolkhoz. When we are first introduced to her village, its inhabitants live in repugnant

destitution: grim, horribly leaking, dilapidated single-room dwellings that are cramped

and unsanitary, smoke-filled and insect-infested, shared by humans and animals alike and

exuding an almost palpable stench (fig. 3.2). Once Marfa succeeds in collectivizing her

fellow farmers—no easy task given their headstrong commitment to the old ways—she

introduces shared assets like milk separators to their midst that gradually improve

conditions, morale, and productivity at the *kolkhoz*. Furthering her investment in

prolonged and sustainable dairy production, she next brokers the purchase of a bull

named Fomka from a pristine and orderly State Farm sporting unornamented white walls

and right angles clearly coded as aesthetically modern and meant to embody the "new"

industrialized agricultural utopia. Upon Fomka's arrival, a freshly bathed and adorned

community partakes in some of that newness, gleefully celebrating with a mock wedding

that unites the bull and his bovine mate in farcical matrimony (fig. 3.3). In dramatic

contrast to the squalid misery of the "old" ways, the very gratuitousness of such a

ceremony portends the joyful quality of life commensurate with the mechanized and

collectivized socialist future.

      But Marfa has her sights set even higher. "We must expand the farm," she appeals

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[3] As quoted in Pearl Attasheva, "A Soviet Film Star: Martha Lapkina," *Close Up* IV, no. 2
(February 1929): 49. Lapkina's forename has been transliterated into English as both Marfa and
Martha. Throughout this chapter, I defer to the more commonly found spelling of "Marfa."

to her *kolkhoz* early on in the film. "We must work the land together with a tractor." Even

Zharov, as we have seen, her most stubborn and reluctant comrade ("What do we need a

tractor for?" he objects from the beginning, "I'm a machine unto myself! Look at my

arms!"), is eventually persuaded once he witnesses the tractor's power first-hand.

Fortunately for them, such a machine will belong to their destiny by film's end thanks to

Marfa's sustained efforts, enabling the *kolkhoz* to break from its "backward" ways once

and for all and to assert its independence from its idle, monstrously obese, and

exploitative kulak landlords.[4] Indeed, as *Old and New* cuts between hard-working

factories and tractors that rapidly self-assemble and multiply through stop-motion

animation during its culminating passages, and as intertitles spur the activity on with their

relentless chant of "More iron! More steel! More machines!," we understand Marfa's

acquisition to belong to the destiny of Soviet agriculture at large. Amidst this symphonic

choreography of tractors, we witness feat after mechanized feat at the *kolkhoz*: tractors

effortlessly pulling daisy-chained wagons up steep inclines; tractors smashing through

divisive wooden fences demarcating former property lines in a gesture of revolutionary

reconsolidation; tractors that join together in forming a great spiral of tilled earth that

evidences the sheer speed and efficiency of multiplied mechanically-assisted labor (fig.

3.4). "Forward!" the intertitles read, as this company of soil-tilling tractors circles

expansively outward as if never to stop. "Onward to socialism!"

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[4] Kulak was the name given to prosperous peasants. Rural capitalists, kulaks were largely seen as class enemies of the revolution, their presence clearly deleterious to the Bolshevik project of building socialism. By the end of the 1920s and in concert with Stalin's first five-year plan, kulaks throughout the countryside paid the price in the form of mass deportations and persecution. Throughout this chapter I rely chiefly on Sheila Fitzpatrick's account, an excellent primer on post-Revolutionary Soviet history, including this period of the later 1920s: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 4 edition (Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<center>* * *</center>

Some four decades after the release of *Old and New* and its utopian vision of
tractors spiraling outwards across the earth, gallery-goers in New York would have had a
different opportunity to watch tractors drive in a spiral, and what they saw would be very
new indeed. It was autumn 1970, and Robert Smithson was opening his fourth solo show
at Dwan Gallery. On view were photographs and a film documenting *Spiral Jetty*, the
massive, iconic earthwork executed by the artist in April of that year.[5] With the help of a
"Traxcavator" loader and several dump trucks, a five-man crew moved some 6,650 tons
of basalt rocks and dirt into Utah's Great Salt Lake to form a fifteen-foot-wide and 1,500-
foot-long earthen pathway coiling out into the lake's shallow waters (fig. 3.5).[6] Needless
to say, this Traxcavator was hardly cultivating the land in a gesture of mass social
transformation like the machines in *Old and New*. In fact, if jetties ordinary fulfilled
certain functional requirements as breakwaters or barriers, Smithson's jetty could
scarcely be said to serve any purpose whatsoever. Neither agriculture nor infrastructure,
the *Spiral Jetty* was merely sculpture. But sculpture of a new sort, surely—at a new scale,
made with new materials and tools, situated in new environs, and conveyed to urban

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[5] Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* show opened at Dwan Gallery on October 31 and ran through
November 25. The sister show at Ace Gallery in Los Angeles, Smithson's first at the latter
institution, ran slightly later, opening in November and closing December 12. For a chronology of
Smithson's exhibition history, see Alan Moore et al., "Chronology," in *Robert Smithson:
Sculpture*, by Robert Hobbs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 231–243.

[6] Smithson offers his own account of the *Jetty*'s construction in Robert Smithson, "The Spiral
Jetty [1972]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University
of California Press, 1996), 143–153. For more on the circumstances leading up to construction
and obstacles faced by the crew, see Bob Phillips, "Building the Jetty," in *Robert Smithson:
Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Karen J. Kelly (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 2005), 185–198.

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audiences by way of film and photography. A transformation from an old aesthetic regime to a new one was very much underway.[7]

Smithson's generation was particularly interested in adopting heavy machinery and working the earth in the service of articulating this newness. There were early cases, such as the happening-like event imagined by Walter De Maria in 1960 where formally-attired spectators would watch a "parade of steamshovels and bulldozers […] making wonderful pushes of dirt all around the yard," a gesture redolent of neo-dadaist desires to *épater la bourgeoisie*.[8] But it was not until later in the decade that aesthetic activity began to aspire more directly to scales and procedures specific to the tractor. In 1967 artists like Claes Oldenburg and Michael Heizer were digging by hand, proposing excavated negative space as among sculpture's resources.[9] That same year Smithson imputed "esthetic potential" to the sorts of things heavy machinery alone was uniquely capable of making: "pavements, holes, trenches, mounds, heaps, paths, ditches, roads, terraces, etc." What he proposed was sculpture of a very different scale, sculpture recast as a "City of Ice" or a "City of Sand," sculpture that was no longer "conditioned by architectural

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[7] As with this dissertation's previous chapters, this one will be focusing primarily on one of Eisenstein's films, in this case *Old and New*, as an interlocutor for Smithson's work. While my discussion does not hinge on Smithson's access to this particular film, it is important to note that the artist would have had ample opportunity to view it during his lifetime—both directly through screenings and indirectly through books he owned. For example, it was featured at the Museum of Modern Art's unprecedented "huge Soviet film show" of autumn 1969. In terms of indirect access, this chapter, as with previous chapters, focuses on resources which Smithson owned, such as Marie Seton's biography of filmmaker and Eisenstein's collection of writings, *Film Form*.

[8] The text of De Maria's "Art Yard" was anthologized in: La Monte Young, ed., *An Anthology of Chance Operations* (New York, N.Y.: La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, 1963). While manifesting a different sensibility, another early exemplar of a work that anticipated tractors was Robert Morris's 1966 *Model and Cross-Section for a Project in Earth and Sod*, a proposed environmental sculpture whose scale implied the need for a vehicular caliber of tool.

[9] I have in mind Oldenburg's *The Hole* (also known as *Placid Civic Monument*), executed on October 1, 1968, and Heizer's *North*.

details." "Instead of using a paintbrush to make his art," Smithson wrote presciently, "Robert Morris would like to use a bulldozer."[10]

In 1968, artists like Heizer and De Maria only deepened these pathways of aesthetic inquiry into site, scale, and material, executing their first monumental works in the California and Nevada deserts.[11] Once again it was Smithson who intuited the industrial and mechanized aspirations of this tendency. "Most of the better artists prefer processes that have not been idealized, or differentiated into 'objective' meaning," he wrote in September of that year:

> Common shovels, awkward looking excavating devices, what Michael Heizer calls "dumb tools," picks, pitchforks, the machine used by suburban contractors, grim tractors that have the clumsiness of armored dinosaurs, and plows that simply push dirt around. Machines like Benjamin Holt's steam tractor (invented in 1885)—"It crawls over mud like a caterpillar." Digging engines and other crawlers that can travel over rough terrain and steep grades. Drills and explosives that can produce shafts and earthquakes. Geometrical trenches could be dug with the help of the "ripper"—steel toothed rakes mounted on tractors.[12]

If Smithson offered an early theorization of this new sensibility, Dwan Gallery's *Earthworks* show of the following month provided the stage for its formal gallery debut,

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[10] Robert Smithson, "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). This essay expressed some of the artist's revelations from his tenure as artist-consultant for Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton and its Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport in 1966, an experience that encouraged his own revelations about sculpture that was designed to be seen from above, from a distance, and at great speeds. Such work, he surmised, would be immobile, flat, and horizontal, situated in the landscape, and of a size that, we can only imagine, would involve the very same implements used for airport building. The artist articulates similar themes in Robert Smithson, "Aerial Art [1969]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[11] Early in the year, Heizer and De Maria executed monumental works in the California desert, albeit using ordinary vehicles and hand-held tools—De Maria's *Mile Long Drawing* (also known as *Two Parallel Lines*), for example, or Heizer's *Circular Surface Drawing*. During the summer, Heizer returned to the desert, this time in Nevada, to execute the similarly monumental series *Nine Nevada Depressions*.

[12] Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects [1968]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 101.

showcasing both photographic documentation of large-scale, remotely-sited sculptures like Heizer's as well as work that quite literally brought earth into the exhibition space. Gesturing towards the inevitable extension of such work, Dwan's *Artforum* advertisement for the show consisted of a close-up black-and-white photograph of the dirt, deeply impacted by the tread marks of earthmoving machines (fig. 3.6).

It was in 1969 that the rugged and hulking metal wish-objects of the previous years became actual tools for artists. In March Heizer directed a wrecking ball to be dropped onto the asphalt outside the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland, leaving a crater for Harold Szeemann's seminal exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*. In the summer Richard Serra began a residency with Kaiser Steel's Fontana division as part of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Art and Technology program, where he executed his *Skullcracker Series*, using an H-shaped overhead magnetic crane to erect some twenty ephemeral structures from huge 100-ton slabs of hot-rolled steel.[13] In October Smithson directed a dump truck in Rome to release asphalt down the side of a rock quarry (*Asphalt Rundown*) and, the following month, a cement mixing truck to do much the same thing at a Chicago dump (*Concrete Pour*). Heizer, for his part, deployed earthmovers for the first time in *Triple Landscape* and *Five Conic Displacements* of that year, but the real event was his commencement of *Double Negative*, a monumental slice

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[13] Maurice Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967-1971* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1971). Richard Serra, it is worth noting, had been engaging heavy industry for several years. His famous *Verb List* of 1967–68 inventoried new sculptural operations that in many cases seemed imported from industrial contexts—rolling, creasing, folding, mixing, spilling, supporting, suspending—which matched his predilection for equally industrial materials. His use of vulcanized rubber dates to 1966 with works like his hanging *Belts* and leaning *Troughs*, among others. He introduced lead rolls and piping in 1968 and, also that year, executed *Splashing* using molten lead. His adoption of steel would wait until 1969, coinciding with his Art and Technology residency. For more on Serra's early work, see David Frankel, ed., *Richard Serra: Early Work*, First edition. (New York, NY: Steidl, 2013).

carved through a Nevada mesa with the aid of dynamite and bulldozers.[14] Such was the cohort that Smithson's *Jetty* would soon be joining.[15]

What made these sculptural practices new, of course, was not merely their novel deployment of tractors in lieu of paintbrushes, nor their equally novel concerns with scale, remote environments, and earthen materials, all of which virtually compelled the use of heavy equipment. What made these sculptural practices new was that they articulated a change of aesthetic regime: a break with modernism, a rupture, a revolutionary push forward and beyond. This was sculpture that necessitated the invention of new categories—categories with prefixes like *post-* and *neo-*, which seemed to signal extension, succession, and graduation. Indeed, what made these sculptural practices new was that they could no longer even be assimilated to the historicized category of sculpture to begin with.

In a 1979 account of postmodernism that remains dominant over forty years later, Rosalind Krauss argued that such tractor-built works marked the termination of the category of sculpture and that they occupied instead sculpture's "expanded field." If modernism's relentless pursuit of medium specificity led to a kind of logical impasse

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[14] Also this year Heizer used heavy machinery to create *Displaced/Replaced* commissioned by Robert Scull which involved the moving huge rocks. Germano Celant, *Michael Heizer*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 1997), 534.

[15] The pre-history of tractors as aesthetic tools is of course more expansive than the brief account I have given. While it largely coincides with the development of land art and so-called postmodernism more generally, such a history is reducible to neither. The twentieth century, after all, is rife with aesthetic overtures to the machine and heavy industry. Minimalist sculptors, for instance, famously worked with industrial fabricators and materials that ensured the erasure of the artist's hand. And for decades before, American sculptors like David Smith had operated under the guise of blowtorch-wielding laborers, even if the resulting sculptures were devoid of proletarian value. For a summary account of the use of tractors as aesthetic tools in the 1960s, as seen in the context of the larger cultural history of tractors after World War II, see Francesca Russello Ammon, "Bulldozers as Paintbrushes: Earthworks and Building Cuts in Conceptual Art," in *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016, 2016).

such that sculpture could no longer be identified positively in terms of what it was but only negatively in terms of what it was not—that is, neither landscape nor architecture—Krauss thought that more recent practices, *post*-modern practices, articulated the logical expansions of this primary opposition in such a way that exceeded modernist strictures of mediumhood and, in doing so, evidenced a "historical rupture." Lying at the logical juncture of "not-landscape" and "not-architecture," for instance, "sculpture" became merely one aesthetic option amidst a wider theoretical terrain that, Krauss hypostasized, now included "site-construction" (at the juncture of landscape and architecture), "axiomatic structures" (at the juncture of architecture and non-architecture), and, like the collapse of site and nonsite in the bulldozed behemoth that was *Spiral Jetty*, "marked sites" (at the juncture of landscape and not-landscape) (fig. 3.7).[16] "[W]ithin the situation of postmodernism," the critic summarized, "practice is not defined in relation to a given medium—sculpture—but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium […] might be used."[17] And while Krauss did not invoke the tractor directly, its ubiquity during this period was nevertheless fitting given the monumental terms of landscape and architecture that defined this expanded field,

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[16] In designating *Spiral Jetty* both landscape and not-landscape, Krauss's account anticipated later claims for Smithson's earthwork as both site and nonsite collapsed into one. As Michael Holte has written, for instance, "the Earthwork is, in essence, already a non-site of basalt boulders and mud removed from Rozel Point and placed directly back into the site in the form of an involutionary spiral." Michael Ned Holte, "Shooting the Archaeozoic (on Robert Smithson)," *Frieze*, no. 88 (February 2005): 80. Holte's claim reiterates similar claims made by Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe (who described *Spiral Jetty* in terms of "the collapse into each other of the site and nonsite, landscape and frame") and Ann Reynolds (who wrote likewise that "site and nonsite collapse into the vertiginous patterning of a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown"). See Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and John Johnston, "Gravity's Rainbow and the Spiral Jetty," *October* 1 (1976): 74, https://doi.org/10.2307/778508. And Ann Reynolds, "Reproducing Nature: The Museum of Natural History as Nonsite," *October* 45 (1988): 109, https://doi.org/10.2307/779047.

[17] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field [1979]," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 288.

disciplines, after all, that relied upon heavy machinery for the manipulation of earth and construction upon it.[18]

Perhaps the spiral of tilled earth at the end of *Old and New* was not so different from *Spiral Jetty*, then—in the first instance, a revolutionary ploughing-over of the old feudal ways, and implicitly the capitalist order from whence they came; and in the second, a "revolutionary" ploughing-over of modernist mediumhood. If, in either case, tractors ploughed over the old, it was in the utopian service of opening up new realms, new possibilities, new worlds. And while the adoption of the tractor in Smithson's milieu did not mean collectivization exactly, the inclusivity and capaciousness of the field it opened up—"any medium," Krauss had written, "might be used"—also coincided with unprecedented forms of interdisciplinary collaboration consistent with a larger post-medium ethos.[19] As they had for Marfa, tractors provided artists of the late 1960s and

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[18] While I am focusing here on sculpture's "expanded field," Krauss's was of course not the only account of postmodernism to implicate tractor use. Craig Owens's "allegorical" model of postmodernism, for instance, positioned earthworks as palimpsest-like texts that not only occupied but also read their chosen sites, thus initiating an "eruption of language into the aesthetic field" and a transformation of "the visual field into a textual one." For Owens postmodern strategies of allegory not only violated the supposed hermetic interior of the modernist artwork in performing the erasure and reinscription of meaning; they also forced upon modernist presentness the entirely incompatible sense of temporal succession that belonged to discourse. Others have argued that the impulse toward site specificity alone was enough to initiate a break with modernism in countermanding the notion of autonomy. Insisting on its contingent status with respect to place, the site-specific work refused the peripatetic mobility of sculpture that purported to transcend the real. For Owens's "allegorical" model, particularly in relation to earthworks like Smithson's, see Craig Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," in *Beyond Recognition*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 40–51. For a genealogy of site specificity that begins with its break from modernist notions of autonomy, see Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity." Douglas Crimp similarly positions site-specific practice as challenging modernism in Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 17.

[19] If "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" posited the expansion of that medium beyond recognition, Krauss later elaborated on this postmodern relinquishing of mediumhood in what she described as the "postmedium condition." See, for example, Rosalind E. Krauss, *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000). See also Rosalind Krauss, "'...And Then Turn Away?' An Essay on James Coleman," *October* 81

early '70s merely one tool in the service of articulating this newness, and the earth they worked merely one material. Still, they helped sculpture make its revolutionary push beyond the old bounds of medium, they helped usher the formerly autonomous work of art out from the spaceless space of the gallery and into the real where aesthetic values of timelessness and stasis were turned on their head, displaced by new concerns with ephemerality and becoming.

* * *

Throughout Soviet Russia of the 1920s, tractors were of paramount importance in achieving revolutionary Party objectives, modernization and industrialization above all, which were understood to be urgent in the State project of "building socialism." Early on Vladimir Lenin had aligned Bolshevism with these objectives, and in the wake of his death in 1924 and the struggle for succession that ensued, Josef Stalin positioned himself as the rightful inheritor of Lenin's legacy in this respect.[20] As early as 1925, for example, Stalin wrote that the current task was not only "to push forward the *re-equipment* of our state industry and to expand it further *on a new technical basis*" but also "to draw the vast masses of the peasantry into the co-operatives and to *implant a co-operative communal life in the countryside.*"[21] With the inauguration of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan (1929–

(Summer 1997): 5–33. Like Krauss, Douglas Crimp also addressed postmodern art fundamentally in terms of this kind of medium agnosticism. See, for example, Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 75–88.

[20] For more on modernization and collectivization as critical objectives for "building socialism," see Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, especially 112–116 and 131–142.

[21] Emphasis original. J. V. Stalin, "October, Lenin and the Prospects of Our Development [1925]," Marxists Internet Archive, 2008, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/11/07.htm. Initially republished in J. V. Stalin, "October, Lenin and the Prospects of Our Development [1925]," in *Works*, vol. Vol.

32), his "revolution from above," these twin drives rigidified into State policy and were aggressively pursued.[22] "We are advancing full steam ahead along the path of industrialization—to socialism, leaving behind the age-old 'Russian' backwardness," Stalin wrote in an optimistic early assessment of his modernization effort. And this was to say nothing of his plan's agricultural achievements:

> [W]e have succeeded in *turning* the main mass of the peasantry away from the old, *capitalist* path of development—which benefits only a small group of the rich, the capitalists, while the vast majority of the peasants are doomed to ruin and utter poverty—to the new, *socialist* path of development, which ousts the rich and the capitalists, and re-equips the middle and poor peasants along new lines, equipping them with modern implements, with tractors and agricultural machinery, so as to enable them to climb out of poverty and enslavement to the kulaks on to the high road of co-operative, collective cultivation of the land.[23]

As a modern implement capable of empowering peasant farmers, the tractor was uniquely poised at the nexus of these dual imperatives to industrialize and collectivize, emerging as perhaps the key avatar of the future.

Old and New was not alone in capturing the energetic drives toward

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7, 1925 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954). Penned for the occasion of the eighth anniversary of the Revolution, Stalin's essay invokes the words of Lenin throughout in support of his dual objectives of industrialization and agricultural collectivization. As such, Sheila Fitzpatrick explains, this essay saw Stalin "staking out his place in history as Lenin's successor: he was to be Stalin the Industrializer." See Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 115–116.

[22] Party officials understood agricultural and industrial problems to be deeply interconnected, for the State required grain exports to subsidize imported machinery. As Fitzpatrick explains, "Unreliable grain procurements jeopardized plans for large-scale grain export to balance the import of foreign machinery. Higher grain prices would reduce the funds available for industrial expansion, and perhaps make it impossible to fulfil the First Five-Year Plan." Particularly at the end of 1927, anti-kulak sentiment and the desire to collectivize became increasingly urgent, as kulaks hoarded grain in response to the low prices the State had set. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 125–126.

[23] Emphasis original. J. V. Stalin, "A Year of Great Change: On the Occasion of the Twelfth Anniversary of the October Revolution [1929]," Marxist Internet Archive, 2008, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1929/11/03.htm. Originally republished in J. V. Stalin, "A Year of Great Change: On the Occasion of the Twelfth Anniversary of the October Revolution [1929]," in *Works*, vol. Vol. 12, April 1929 – June 1930 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 124–141.

collectivization and industrialization that animated policy debates of the 1920s before

contracting into the official Party line with Stalin's bureaucratic "revolution." Particularly

at the end of the decade, tractors featured prominently among the *topoi* of Soviet cinema,

where they inevitably exhibited a similarly utopian valence. Alexander Dovzhenko's

Earth (1930), for one, followed another cohort of peasants, for whom a tractor was

similarly pivotal in their efforts to collectivize. For another, Dziga Vertov's *Enthusiasm*

(1931) partook of the same zeal in a less theatrical vein, devoting one section to

documenting the industrial Donbass region and its steady production of tractors and other

agricultural machinery. Even a decade before, an inkling of the mechanized future of

agriculture could be sensed in several 1922 "issues" of Vertov's "newsreel magazine"

Kino-Pravda, which documented salvaged tanks repurposed as tractors and engaged in

leveling an airfield (fig. 3.8). As with *Old and New*, these kinds of representations of

tractors were never self-congratulatory, never premature celebration; instead there was a

very real sense that witnessing a tractor on screen could have transformative pedagogical

consequences, could radicalize audiences. "Conversations, shouts, questions," Vertov

wrote in 1926. "A real tractor, which these viewers know of only from hearsay, has

plowed over a few acres in a matter of minutes, before their very eyes."[24] It was as if

Soviet audiences, having beheld the power of such machinery through the evidentiary

capacity of cinema, might newly aspire to themselves one day wield it like the collectives

at the center of such narratives and thus participate in the push forward toward the

socialist utopia.

  Unlike its contemporaries, however, *Old and New* not only represented the tractor

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[24] Dziga Vertov, "Kino-Eye [1926]," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette
Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), 61.

as a critical avatar for the industrial and collective faces of the socialist future; it also *was* a tractor—or aspired to be like one, in any case. Cinema, Eisenstein wrote in 1925, "is first and foremost a tractor ploughing over the audience's psyche with a class purpose in mind."[25] A few years later he elaborated:

> If montage is to be compared with something, then a phalanx of montage pieces, of shots, should be compared to the series of explosions of an internal combustion engine, driving forward its automobile or tractor: for, similarly, the dynamics of montage serve as impulses driving forward the total film.[26]

Like a tractor, the film would propel itself forward, each discontinuous cut akin to the back-and-forth thrust of piston, one of a long series of tiny explosions that, together, produced an unstoppable advance; and, like a tractor, the film would consequently cultivate the minds of its viewership with an ideology commensurate with the socialist future.

At least, such was among cinema's potential. More often than not, Eisenstein well knew, the movies and tractors both served counterrevolutionary ends, propping up only bourgeois ideology and capitalist production. Reflecting toward the end of his life upon his early enthusiasm for decidedly non-revolutionary Hollywood adventure films like *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), for example, Eisenstein explained that

> Just as it was the possibilities in a tractor to make collective cultivation of the fields a reality, it was the boundless temperament and tempo of these amazing (and amazingly useless!) works from an unknown country [i.e., Hollywood cinema] that led us to muse on the possibilities of a profound, intelligent, class-

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[25] Sergei Eisenstein, "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form [1925]," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemona, Udine, Italy: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 127. Emphasis removed.

[26] Sergei Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram [1929]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 38.

directed use of this wonderful tool.[27]

It was not just the tractor, then, but the tractor redirected toward utopian ends that served as a model for what a truly revolutionary cinema might be like. For, like the tractor, cinema had an urgent social role to fulfill: it would no longer be idle entertainment as it had been in the West but had to aspire to be an industrialized agent of transformation from the old to the new, preparing the minds of the proletariat for a communal ideology in the manner of tractors cultivating the earth.

And what would a tractor cinema look like, exactly? Perhaps it would look something like the well-known photographs of Eisenstein cutting *October* (fig. 3.9). Shirtsleeves rolled up and surrounded by various instruments and tools, the montageur here thus inspects a filmstrip with the same intensity of purpose as the tractor driver at the culmination of *Old and New* inspecting the engine of his stalled tractor (fig. 3.10). Both men, it seems, have gone to work professionally attired in suits and ties. Indeed, in celebration of the newly-acquired machine, the driver in *Old and New* is absurdly dressed in full formalwear, including bib and detachable cuffs. But the tractor driver's pointless costume is the first thing to be unceremoniously removed and repurposed for the work of fixing the engine. And while Eisenstein has not fully sacrificed his impractical bourgeois clothing for the sake of the task at hand, surely he has shed extraneous layers so that he can get to work on an aesthetic composition reimagined as industrial assembly. In fact, Eisenstein had borrowed the very word "montage" from an industrial context: "denoting the assembling of machinery, pipes, machine tools," he wrote, the very word clearly held great promise for a man who had self-identified as a "young engineer […] bent on

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[27] Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today [1944]," in *Film Form*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1949), 204.

finding a scientific approach to the secrets and mysteries of art,"[28] for a man who understood art as not "impressionistic 'creativity' but cold-blooded and calculated construction" designed to "[control] the emotions of the viewer."[29] Here, in any case, Eisenstein holds strips of assembled celluloid aloft, but we can imagine that the montageur will soon replace the film onto the spools at his editing station, winding them to life just as the tractor driver in *Old and New* winds up his engine, pumping the pistons, coaxing the great machine to sputter forth with new vitality.

Of course, for cinema to be a tractor meant somewhat more than a wishful reimagining of montageur as mechanic, as if filmmaking were as engineered as a combustion engine and editing decisions as objective and functional as mechanical work. It also meant that, as a consequence of this labor, the film would propel itself forward, unfolding an intellectual line of inquiry as it went. As we witnessed Eisenstein castigate Vsevelod Pudovkin in Chapter 2, cinema was not a means of "*unrolling* an idea with the help of single shots"; montage was no mere molding of filmic material into a given form to passively represent a predetermined notion, it was no "means of description."[30] Instead, Eisenstein's conflictual model of montage meant that the idea would "arise" from the material according to the dialectic, that it would emerge with each successive thrust of the piston and consequently with the activity of inference on the part of the spectator as she bridged each successive interval of discontinuity. "You have to create an

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[28] Sergei Eisenstein, *Notes of a Film Director*, Arts Library (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publ. House, 1946), 17, 16.

[29] Sergei Eisenstein, "Sergei Eisenstein's Reply to Oleg Voinov's Article [1927]," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemona, Udine, Italy: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 143.

[30] Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form [1929]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 49, 48.

emotional breakthrough," Eisenstein explained, although just as often this breakthrough would be intellectual. "Advance a premise, strengthen your premise, add something, turn your camera away to something that seems of secondary importance and then suddenly plunge the viewer back into the very heart of the theme, higher, higher, higher."[31]

Consider the famous montage sequence from *October* entitled "For God and Country." Beginning with images of Christ and the cupolas of cathedrals, the sequence soon introduces a series of statues representing other deities incompatible with the Christian God, and these jarring conjunctions, effected through montage, produce a fundamental paradox: the Christian God can exist only if these other gods are false; but if those other gods are false, then the Christian God has deceived us in such a way that violates the all-benevolence attributed to Him. The result, as Nöel Carroll argued in a 1973 issue of *Artforum*, is a logical "disproof of God's existence."[32] Moreover, cinema's montage engine would not only guide the viewer along a cognitive sequence of induction; as we saw in Chapter 2, it did so in such a way that disclosed itself to the viewer. "The strength of montage resides in this," Eisenstein had explained,

> that it includes in the creative process the emotions and mind of the spectator. The spectator is compelled to proceed along that selfsame creative road that the author traveled in creating the image. The spectator not only sees the represented

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[31] Eisenstein, "Sergei Eisenstein's Reply to Oleg Voinov's Article," 143.

[32] As Carroll elaborates, the sequence begins by establishing, through its opening shots, the notion of an all-benevolent Christian God, before juxtaposing this postulate with images evoking other religions. "These gods are also related to creeds," Carroll explains, "but creeds that are incompatible with Christianity." And from this fundamental paradox arises a proof of God's nonexistence: "The first premise of the argument stated a standard concept of God—'There is a God such that God is all-benevolent.' But a contradiction has resulted from the addition of a set of empirically true premises to this original premise. The contradiction can only be resolved by the admission that without the addition of further premises, the argument implies that the Christian God does not exist. Moreover, if all-benevolence is regarded as a necessary characteristic of any god, no god exists." Noël Carroll, "For God and Country," *Artforum* XI, no. 5 (January 1973): 59.

elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author.[33]

The outcome of Eisenstein's tractor cinema therefore would be an informed, cognitively active spectator, a spectator tasked with making conceptual inferences between discontinuous shots, herself involved in the process, engaged in the act of reasoning, judging the veracity of each element of the proof. For the psyche to be "ploughed over with class purpose in mind" could never mean a revolution from above; *October*, in this case, would not blindly indoctrinate its audience as to God's nonexistence. Instead, the film arrived there as a consequence of its internal motor, laying bear its proof, its processes, its mechanisms in the visible (and often jarringly palpable) cut separating one shot from the next.[34] Like the agricultural metaphor to which it aspired, Eisenstein's engineered tractor cinema undertook an act of cultivation, which would yield the fruiting of a revolutionary ideology that matured and ripened by its own volition.

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Like the expanding spiral of tilled earth at the close of *Old and New*, Smithson's spiraling earthwork—that "marked site" that was both landscape and not-landscape, site and nonsite—made its debut vicariously, by proxy, cinematically. When the artist's fourth solo show at Dwan Gallery opened on October 31, 1970, visitors would have confronted not *Spiral Jetty*, the faraway earthwork, but *Spiral Jetty*, a 16mm film. As if to dissociate himself from the original impetus behind it, Smithson later attributed the idea

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[33] Eisenstein, "Word and Image," 32.

[34] On this latter point, Carroll explains: "The importance of the shot chain is not only thematic ('God does not exist'), but pedagogic in that the editing structure encourages and directs the worker audience to reason through an exercise of analysis." Carroll, "For God and Country," 57.

to his West Coast gallery, recalling that "a cameraman was sent by the Ace Gallery in Los Angeles to film the process"[35]—surely an important consideration for a work that, given its remoteness and vulnerability to physical deterioration, to say nothing of the transitory nature of its "process," few might realistically hope to see. And this is more or less what early audiences felt they saw: a document of the earthwork and the "process" of its construction. According to one reviewer, for example, the film was the sculpture's "parergon," gesturing to its condition of belatedness, secondariness, and externality *vis-à-vis* the physical *Jetty*'s priority. For another it was the "purest possible documentary," which is to say an indexical registration of the earthwork. Almost all, however, agreed that the film was *about* or *of* the *Jetty*; like a tolerable surrogate, it was a "medium for telling about" its construction.[36]

To be sure, the "process" to which Smithson alluded is one of the things we will see in this "documentary." The *Spiral Jetty* film has a tripartite structure, the middle third of which showcases its share of grunting and gurgling tractors making the "wonderful pushes of dirt" Walter De Maria had imagined a decade before.[37] We witness Smithson

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[35] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 147.

[36] Reviewing Smithson's Dwan show in *Artnews*, John Ashbery described it as consisting of "a color movie about the spiral jetty" and suggested that Smithson used film "as a medium for telling about his experiment"—thus the film's "parergonal" status vis-à-vis the sculpture. John Ashbery, "Reviews and Previews," *Artnews* 69, no. 8 (December 1970). Similarly, Henry Gerrit's *Art International* pan of the show not only emphasized the way in which the movie was "of" the sculpture and its construction but also claimed that it needlessly detracted from the sculpture's "sublime ridiculouslness." Gerrit Henry, "New York Letter," *Art International* 15, no. 1 (January 20, 1971). Writing in *Arts Magazine*, Willis Domingo made even stronger claims of the film's indexicality, claiming it to be a "pure documentary" and "literally a contour" of the sculpture: "The closest possible comparison that can be made is to the image left of a sculptor's hand after it has been pressed into blank clay." Willis Domingo, "Gallery Reviews, Robert Smithson," *Arts Magazine* 45, no. 3 (January 1971).

[37] In addition to the film's "documentary" moments such as this, its loosely chronological structure surely contributed to audiences' senses that it was a documentary. Most often divided into three sections—a convention that I see no reason to break with here—the film's first part, as

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wading through the Great Salt Lake's shallow waters—a portrait of the artist in

sculpture's expanded field, perhaps, staking out the path of the future *Jetty* with a level of

care and precision that astounded the small team of contractors and equipment operators

he had put together (fig. 3.11). We get some sense, too, of the repetitive and incremental

nature of the jetty's construction, of how complicated a feat of coordination and

engineering it must have been in spite of the outward simplicity of pushing around dirt:

loaders depositing masses of rock into dump trucks; dump trucks reversing along the

length of the jetty and evacuating their earthen cargo into piles; loaders crawling back

towards the fresh heaps of dirt and stone to shove them forward according to the staked

path, extending the dike a few feet more. Dump trucks' capacities are substantial, but the

process of constructing a jetty some 1,500 feet in length and consisting of nearly 7,000

tons of material must have been a painstakingly slow process, one which required

hundreds of trips at least, each growing incrementally longer with the jetty's own

crystalline expansion.[38]

Smithson's film conveys not only the *Jetty*'s construction, moreover, but also the

finished sculpture, which it depicts across the array of sweeping and swooping aerial

shots that comprise its final third (fig. 3.12). This inventory of vantages—overhead or

oblique, proximate or distant—contributes to a sense of the work's phenomenological

variability, imparting, too, something of its scale, its site, its ambition. This is what the

expanded field of sculpture must have looked like: a "marked site" that was both

I will discuss later, evokes the site's discovery and preparatory research into it, the second
conveys the *Jetty*'s construction, and the final third comprises largely aerial surveys of the
completed work.

[38] In a highly illuminating account of the *Jetty*'s construction, contractor Bob Phillips goes into
great detail about the equipment used, the construction process, and the various pitfalls
experienced along the way. See footnote 6 above.

landscape and not-landscape, an entity so expansive that it could be physically entered, that could only be captured in its entirety at altitude and sequentially from multiple angles. In fact, in some ways the privileged viewpoint obtained from the helicopter only underscored the work's inaccessibility, its unavailability to ordinary human vision, as if the only means of adequately containing the work were from the air. And even then the work refused to be fully immobilized, as evidenced by the sheer quantity of footage it generated. In its final third, then, Smithson's film readily offered itself as a kind of proxy for the sculptural *Jetty*, delivering to urban audiences not only the temporally remote processes of the earthwork's construction, forever lost to time, but also the physically remote entity itself from the omniscient vantage of a helicopter.

And yet some of the film's early commentators also sensed that a more complicated relationship between the film and earthwork was unfolding at Smithson's show. While critic Joseph Masheck admitted in his *Artforum* review that the film was "about the making of the *Spiral Jetty*" and that it "informatively gives us a sense of what the magnificent sculpture, difficult of access, is like," for example, he also acknowledged the film's specifically "cinematographic strengths": "The film is also good *qua* film. There is a particularly skillful sense of visual and visual-verbal analogy."[39] Likewise, John Ashbery's assertion in *Artnews* that the film was the sculpture's "parergon" provocatively anticipated Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist conception of the essential supplement—the parergon, that is, as a framing device that exists outside the work, that

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[39] Joseph Masheck, "New York: Robert Smithson, Dwan Gallery," *Artforum* 9, no. 5 (January 1971).

remains definitively *hors d'oeuvre*, but that paradoxically constitutes it at such.[40] Perhaps

William Wilson's *Los Angeles Times* review was most prescient of all, however,

comprehending that the film was "not a film about art" but "the art itself": "Not

documentary, it is rather a piece of visual poetry. Rocks fall slow motion from a dump

truck like an avalanche. The maw of a steam shovel is like some incredible dinosaur.

Photos of maps feel like stratospheric views of the earth."[41] While the tendency to reduce

Smithson's film to the status of mere documentary still occasionally dogs it to this day,

Wilson's account in particular prefigured more nuanced understandings that position the

film as a continuation of Smithson's dispersal of sculpture, exemplified above all in Craig

Owens's elaboration of postmodern textuality. "Like the nonsite, the *Jetty* is not a

discrete work, but one link in a chain of signifiers which summon and refer to one

another in a dizzying spiral," Owens wrote in 1979. "For where else does the *Jetty* exist

except in the film which Smithson made, the narrative he published, the photographs

which accompany that narrative, and the various maps, diagrams, drawings, etc., he made

about it?"[42]

 For the *Spiral Jetty*'s filmic mediation to be not secondary to the earthwork in the

manner of a copy but integral to, even constitutive of it, is consistent with the broader

terms of advanced art practice during the late 1960s and '70s and part of what secured

those practices' revolutionary newness. As Miwon Kwon and Philipp Kaiser pointed out,

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[40] Derrida's best-known elaboration of his theory of the "parergon" is Jacques Derrida, "Parergon," in *The Truth In Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). First appearing in 1974, the theory definitively postdates Ashbery's assertion that Smithson's film bore a parergonal relationship to the sculpture it purported to document. See footnote 36 above.

[41] William Wilson, "West L.A.," *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1970, sec. Part IV.

[42] Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," 47.

for example, filmic and photographic representation belonged to land art's "structural condition." Land art was as much a media practice as a sculptural one, they explained. After all, "media-genic," tractor-made works like *Spiral Jetty* existed well beyond the conventional spaces of exhibition, to say nothing of major art world hubs; and, subject to weathering and erosion, they were not exactly in a position to be maintained for posterity. As such, documentation provided a critical vehicle of proliferation, preservation, and above all saleability for works that otherwise staked themselves on a refusal of those values. "Rather than being supplemental or secondary, then, the production, distribution, and circulation of images and information about a work 'out there' is defining of that work's existence," Kwon and Kaiser summarized. "This is not to say that mediation fully eclipses 'the work' but rather that the identity or meaning of 'the work' cannot be fully realized without it."[43]

Developing adjacent to the discourse of land art, moreover, was the emergence of so-called process art—aesthetic practices, that is, that privileged the ephemeral and often performative procedures of manipulating matter over the objects that resulted—and, like land art, this sensibility too summoned film and photography, similarly absorbing mediation as part of its structural condition. While no tractors were involved (nor Smithson, it must be said), the Whitney Museum of American Art showcased this aesthetic attitude in its signal 1969 *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* exhibition, which consisted largely of ephemeral installations constructed in situ. "For many of these artists, the implications of time indicate a new attitude toward the creation of non-precious objects," exhibition co-organizer Marcia Tucker wrote.

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[43] Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon, "Ends of the Earth and Back," in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012), 27.

> Some works come into being at the moment of their execution in a specific
> location and cease to exist when they are removed from that environment. The
> relationship of work to location becomes one in which the artist also dictates the
> temporal duration of the piece.[44]

Consistent with Tucker's language of ephemerality and duration, the exhibition's

catalogue tellingly comprised quasi-filmic sequences of still photographs made by Bob

Fiore, and these not only documented processes of construction and installation but also,

by virtue of their sequentiality, indexed these activities' temporal dimensions (fig. 3.13).

In place of the resulting "work," in other words, which was never shown, the catalogue's

illustrations implicitly redefined the work as its absent process.[45] All of which is to say

that while *Spiral Jetty* is more often subsumed to the category of land art, the film's

emphasis on "process," in Smithson's own words, aligns the project with this latter

sensibility, too, reminding us that the *Jetty* is doubly removed—remote not only spatially

as object or "marked site" but also temporally as a long-gone performative process. And

in that sense this generation's embrace of filmic and photographic documentation was

consistent, as well, with its larger bulldozing of modernism since, in both cases,

mediation contributed to a larger refusal of anything like a final, discrete, locatable art

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[44] James K Monte and Marcia Tucker, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969), 37–38.

[45] Appearing in the April 1968 issue of *Artforum*, Robert Morris's essay "Anti-Form" first gave a name and a vocabulary to this materiological orientation toward process: rather than subjecting aesthetic material to pre-determined compositional ends, Morris revalued the working of matter itself, prioritizing aesthetic processes that acknowledged "the inherent tendencies and properties of that matter." He pointed to aesthetic tools and practices that expressed a "sympathy with matter" insofar as they "[acknowledge] the inherent tendencies and properties of that matter." Robert Morris, "Anti Form [1968]," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 43. *Anti-Illusion*, as I suggest above, consolidated this the sensibility early on: compositional relationships in these works "do not evolve from a preconception of order which the artist is trying to express," Marcia Tucker wrote, "but from the activity of making work and from the dictates of the materials used." Monte and Tucker, *Anti-Illusion*, 27.

object.[46]

Outside the discourses of land art and process art and their structural dependence upon media, however, Smithson had already arrived at a sophisticated, dialectical understanding of the interplay between artwork and document that confused any simple sense of priority. To the extent that his film brought the physically and temporally remote *Spiral Jetty* to urban art galleries, after all, it only reiterated the logic of his nonsites, pioneered two years prior. "The [nonsite] container is the limit that exists within the room after I return from the outer fringe," he had explained in a 1969 interview.

> There is a dialectic between inner and outer, closed and open, center and peripheral. It just goes on constantly permuting itself into this endless doubling, so that you have the nonsite functioning as a mirror and the site functioning as a reflection. Existence becomes a doubtful thing. You are presented with a nonworld, or what I call a nonsite.[47]

Smithson conceived film and photography in similarly dialectical terms. Like our encounter with a nonsite, which paradoxically preceded the site from which it was extracted, the purportedly secondary photograph—likewise containing, enframing,

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[46] In her account of an "indexical" postmodernism, for instance, Rosalind Krauss suggested that photography, both as a medium and a logic, offered artists a means of "short-circuiting" style, forfeiting the autographic gesture privileged by modernist discourse in favor of "the overwhelming physical presence of the original object, fixed in this trace of the case." She cites the "pervasiveness of the photograph as a means of representation" with respect to earthworks in particular, which "depend on documentation." Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1 [1977]," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 196–209. In their account of the artwork's "dematerialization," as another example, Lucy Lippard and John Chandler suggest that the proliferation of photography and film deprioritizes the artwork's traditional object-form, insisting instead on its conceptual nature and/or its temporal and performative dimensions. Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968). One could also invoke Craig Owens here, as well. As I discussed at length in Chapter 2, Owens positioned film and photography as contributing to the postmodern artwork's textual dispersal, heterogeneity, and plurality. See, for instance, Owens, "Earthwords [1979]."

[47] Robert Smithson and Patricia Norvell, "Fragments of an Interview with P. A. [Patsy] Norvell [1969]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 193.

excerpting its referent—seemed paradoxically to call into existence its more primary

referent. "Perhaps ever since the invention of the photograph," Smithson elaborated in

that same interview, "we have seen the world through photographs and not the other way

around."[48] In that sense, the *Spiral Jetty* film, like Smithson's nonsites, became the

vehicle of the earthwork's displacement—from Rozel Point, Utah to New York, to Los

Angeles, or to anywhere else for that matter. Writing presciently in 1968 of the kind of

heavy machinery that would come to preoccupy his generation, Smithson had admiringly

described "the dipper of the giant mining power shovel," which "is 25 feet high and digs

140 cu. yds. (250 tons) in one bite"[49]; surely his *Spiral Jetty* film functioned as its own

kind of dipper, as if it might contain all of the earthwork's 6,650 tons of material, the

scattered vastness of its site, the lengthy process of earthmoving and orchestration of

machinery, all of this, in one bite, within the rectangular bounds of a movie screen.[50]

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[48] Smithson and Norvell, 193. Elizabeth Childs's important early account of Smithson's cinema practice usefully explores the correspondences between the artist's nonsite practice and his photography. "Within the system of this non-site," she explains of his Cayuga Salt Mine project from the signal 1969 *Earth Art* show at Cornell University, "photographs provided one further level of containment and reflection of the site, parallel in their rectangular shape and function to the 'containers' of the mirrors." Elizabeth C. Childs, "Robert Smithson and Film: The Spiral Jetty Reconsidered," *Arts Magazine* 56, no. 2 (October 1981): 73.

[49] Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," 101.

[50] In claiming that Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film reiterates the logic of his nonsites, I am following a precedent set by several other scholars. Cited above, Elizabeth Childs's 1981 account of Smithson's filmmaking practice provides an early example, in which she argues that "the dialectic in the film between the site and its record was posed originally by the site/non-sites." See note 48 above. In more recent accounts, which remain the most rigorous analyses of Smithson's *Jetty* film we currently have, both Andrew Uroskie and George Baker explore this logic further. In his Deleuzian account of the film, for example—in particular its direct figuration of temporality, or what Deleuze conjectured as the "time-image"—Uroskie understands the film as "the earthwork's crucial 'non-site.'" In doing so, he draws important correspondences between the film and geological layering—montage, that is, as akin to stratification. Andrew V. Uroskie, "La Jetée En Spirale: Robert Smithson's Stratigraphic Cinema," *Grey Room*, no. 19 (2005): 72–73. Baker likewise argues that the "film proposes a radical transformation and intensification of the logic of the Nonsite" by virtue of its diagrammatic connectivity, positioning cinematic montage as a means of animating or performing that connectivity. George Baker, "The Cinema

The film reiterated the logic of the nonsite in another way, too. For it not only

performed the earthwork's cinematic displacement but also, in doing so, instantiated a

condition of textuality that had been central to the nonsites' operativity. As I discussed at

length in Chapter 2, Craig Owens understood the nonsite to "[propel] us outward" by way

of the externally sampled material as well as the maps and texts proliferating beside it.

The nonsite was not a single, discrete *work*, in other words; it was a plural, dispersed, and

fragmentary *text*, a "course of hazards," as Smithson had put it, "made up of signs,

photographs, and maps."[51] And the nonsite's discontinuous nature meant we had to

navigate through and amongst its various gaps and lacunae, that we had to find our way.

Hence Smithson's gravitation to the figure of travel, which I had argued furnished the

artist an important avatar for textual passage. "There is a <u>distance</u> between the site and

the <u>Non-Site</u>," he wrote in a 1968 questionnaire about his work. "If a spectator […] wants

to 'participate,' he will have to travel to the original site in New Jersey (a map is provided

for such an occasion)."[52]

For instance, to examine the many storyboards, or what Smithson termed "movie

treatments," that proliferated during preparation for his *Spiral Jetty* film is to witness the

earthwork's textual dispersal across a variety of discontinuous fragments in a format that

belongs uniquely to cinema. Even "single" shots, such as the famous sequence of the

Model," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, ed. Lynne Cooke and
Karen J. Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 79.

[51] For Owens's discussion of the nonsites' textuality, see Owens, "Earthwords [1979]," 41, 40.
For Smithson's description of the nonsites as a "course of hazards," see Smithson, "The Spiral
Jetty," 153n1.

[52] Smithson's description here comes from a questionnaire circulated in advance of *Directions 1:
Options*, a group exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Center (June 22–August 18, 1968), which was
to include his first nonsite, *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey*. Robert Smithson, "'Directions
'68: Options' Questionnaire," 1968, Box 5 Folder 7, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers,
American Archives of Art.

artist awkwardly running the length of the completed Jetty, shatter into multiple pieces—

eighteen distinct frames, in this case—reminding us that cinema is an ineluctably

dynamic and fluid entity that cannot be reduced to any single, monolithic image in the

first place (fig 3.14). His most complete movie treatment (complete insofar as it

encompasses the entirety of the film and not just individual scenes or sequences) remains

particularly instructive since it quite literally incorporates collaged elements, as well,

whose presence only further emphasizes the extent to which this film—any film, really—

is synthetic and fragmentary, a provisional assemblage of disparate sights and sounds and

signs that have been ordered to facilitate the viewer's passage through (fig. 3.15).[53] And

this last point reminds us, too, that such textual passage, as Owens also wrote, implies

succession and duration. Smithson's gravitation to narrative forms like his "travelogues"

acknowledge that the type of textual dispersal enacted by the nonsites corresponds with a

temporal sequence, for which physical voyage became the privileged metaphor. Cinema,

by way of its ordering of discontinuous fragments experienced in time, would even more

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[53] My "textual" reading of Smithson's movie treatments here is related to the "diagrammatic"
reading provided by George Baker. For Baker, Smithson's entire *oeuvre* bears the traces of an
intense engagement with the avant-garde tactic of the diagram, which is to say a logic of
connectivity, relationality, and flux inherited from Dada. As such, Baker thus sees the artist's
engagement with cinema as a radicalization of this longstanding diagrammatic concerns. "By
1970," Baker explains, "cinema comes in every way for Smithson to take up the structural
operation of the diagram, pushing its power further, transcending its 'morphology,' we could say,
for a formal *process* now able to be realized cinematically. For cinema, as put in place in *Spiral
Jetty*, can be seen, like the diagram, to exist as a force of sheer vectorization. It makes palpable,
via montage, the techniques of linkage and connection that remain only potential images of such
in conventional diagrammatic forms." The movie treatments are of especial importance here for
Baker since they diagram the "immense web of connectedness" characteristic of not only cinema
but Smithson's entire practice. Indeed, he writes, they "diagram the diagrammatic structure of the
film." As we will see, however, Baker also sees the *Spiral Jetty* project as staging the
diagrammatic interconnectivity of mediums—film and sculpture, in this case—present throughout
the various correspondences and analogies set up between the two: the fluidity of water and
stability of earth as avatars for film and sculpture, for instance, or the spiraling *Jetty* and the
spiraling reels of 16mm film. This question of mediumhood is this chapter's horizon and will be
discussed in greater depth later. Baker, "The Cinema Model," 92, 82, 108.

palpably figure the durational axis of the text. If Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film was tractor-

like in some way, then—if it participated in a bulldozing of modernism as had his

earthwork—it was not only due to its gargantuan displacement of the sculptural *Jetty*

from Utah to art world epicenters in confirmation of the fact that the formally discrete art

object was now multiple; it was also because, like Eisenstein's tractor cinema, it sought

to enact a sense of passage through that multiplicity.

It is fitting that Smithson selected for the final shot of his film an image of the

flatbed editing station where it was made, complete with Moviola and disorderly arrays

of split reels and spools and hanging clippings of 16mm film (fig. 3.16). If, for

Eisenstein, cinema had been a tractor and montage its engine, here was something like

the assembly line where both were put together, here was where Smithson together with

co-montageurs Bob Fiore and Barbara Jarvis would crank the mighty bulldozer to life.

Eisenstein once wrote in his characteristically revolutionary rhetoric that cinema's "task

is not the piling up of facts but working out the audience's attitude to particular facts and

events."[54] By virtue of its linear orchestration of filmic material, in other words, cinema

could not present a chaotic inventory of fragments but instead had to wend a route

through it, plough a path, guide its spectator. Smithson, likewise, remembered that his

> movie began as a set of disconnections, a bramble of stabilized fragments taken
> from things obscure and fluid, ingredients trapped in a succession of frames, a
> stream of viscosities both still and moving. And the movie editor, bending over
> such a chaos of 'takes' resembles a paleontologist sorting out glimpses of a world
> not yet together, a land that has yet to come to completion, a span of time
> unfinished, a spaceless limbo on some spiral reels.[55]

Smithson's film would thus bushwhack its way through the "bramble," smooth over the

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[54] Eisenstein, "Sergei Eisenstein's Reply to Oleg Voinov's Article," 142.

[55] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 150.

"piling up of facts," and guide its viewer forward through a textual terrain along its freshly ploughed path like the tractor that slowly extended his *Jetty* into the Great Salt Lake.

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Among the ephemeral projects Smithson had created in Mexico during his April 1969 road trip was *Hypothetical Continent of Gondwanaland*. Approximating the shape of the eponymous supercontinent, this "earth map," as the artist termed it, consisted of ancient white limestone rocks meant to index Gondwanaland's epoch from hundreds of millions of years ago. It functioned less as a map to a location (after all, the place in Yucatán where Smithson assembled the work once belonged to Gondwanaland) than as a map to a time—to the Carboniferous period, to be precise, during which the supercontinent had existed and during which limestone of this kind had been formed. As I argued in Chapter 2, Smithson understood this montage of distinct temporal coordinates separated by inconceivably huge intervals of time to provoke an abyssal sense of disorientation—"a collision in time that left one with a sense of timelessness,"[56] he had written, as if the improbable coincidence of past and present at one physical location threatened to destabilize that location's identity and consequently one's own sense of bearing. At some fundamental level, too, the temporal collision performed by Smithson's "earth map" acknowledged that "place" was never a fixed and static quantity but underwent radical geological transformations over the course of millions of years, reminding us that the Mexico of the present, while occupying the same place as

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[56] Robert Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 121.

Gondwanaland, has utterly ceased to exist as its former self. Smithson therefore understood this site, any site, to be dynamic—in the midst of imperceptibly slow dialectical flux that became visible, indeed palpable, only indirectly and across discontinuities that testified to the nauseating, even sublime enormity of that change.

Towards the end of his life, Smithson made a similar set of observations about Frederick Law Olmsted's design for New York's Central Park. "Imagine yourself in Central Park one million years ago," the artist began.

> You would be standing on a vast ice sheet, a 4,000-mile glacial wall, as much as 2,000 feet thick. Alone on the vast glacier, you would not sense its slow crushing, scraping, ripping movement as it advanced south, leaving great masses of rock debris in its wake. Under the frozen depths, where the carousel now stands you would not notice the effect on the bedrock as the glacier dragged itself along.[57]

The process of geological transformation was—well, quite literally it was glacial. Yet to stand in present-day Central Park, a place devoid of glaciers but everywhere bearing their geological scars, had the capacity to provoke a "collision in time" analogous to Smithson's "earth map." What Smithson appreciated so much about Olmsted's design for Central Park was that the landscape architect admitted rather than excluded this dialectic that belonged fundamentally to nature. "A park can no longer be seen as 'a thing-in-itself,'" he explained, "but rather as a process of ongoing relationships existing in a physical region." Rejecting the former idealist position in favor of the latter dialectical one, the artist continued, Olmsted's parks "are never finished; they remain carriers of the

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[57] Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape [1973]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 157. Originally published in the February 1973 issue of *Artforum*, Smithson's essay was in many ways a review of, or at least a response to, the Whitney Museum of American Art's exhibition *Frederick Law Olmsted's New York* and its catalogue. See Elizabeth Barlow, *Frederick Law Olmsted's New York* (New York: Praeger, in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1972).

unexpected and of contradiction."[58] Olmsted never conceived Central Park as some

eternal and unchanging Eden, in other words, some metaphysical exemplar of idealized

nature that was to remain isolated from mankind and industry, that aspired to static

perfection. Smithson associated such idealism with "modern day ecologists with a

metaphysical turn of mind [who] still see the operations of industry as Satan's work."[59]

Instead, the park would embrace the process of change that was the inevitable

consequence of its actual condition, namely a "dialectic between the sylvan and the

industrial."[60] For that reason Smithson wryly nominated Olmsted "America's first

'earthwork artist.'"[61]

If the discontinuity staged by remnants of the geological past provided one index

of the landscape's ongoing dialectic—white limestone in Mexico pointing to its

Carboniferous past, for instance, or Central Park as the traumatic disfiguration of a

glacier's slow-motion "crushing, scraping, ripping movement"—another was

photography, for photography furnished a special kind of vision that likewise facilitated

the apprehension of a dialectic ordinarily too continuous and slow to be directly

witnessed. Take two photographs such as these, Smithson suggested in his Olmsted essay

(fig. 3.17). Separated by an interval of some 110 years, they ostensibly document one

location in Central Park—the Vista Rock Tunnel—yet their absolute dissimilarity, the

irreducibility of one to the next, calls into question the very possibility that such a place

could have a fixed and stable identity. Instead, the photographs, in their capacity as

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[58] Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape," 160.

[59] Smithson, 161.

[60] Smithson, 162.

[61] Smithson, 164.

excerpts from pasts irretrievable, bear witness to the site's vicissitudinous flux. Invoking

not Eisenstein here but his old antagonist Dziga Vertov, Smithson elaborated that

> the documentary power of the photograph discloses a succession of changing land masses within the park's limits. The notion of the park as a static entity is questioned by the camera's eye. The portfolio [of photographs displayed at the Whitney and published in the exhibition catalogue] brings to mind Dziga Vertov's documentary montages, and suggests that certain still photographs are related to the dialectics of film.[62]

To that end, Smithson was not speaking of photographs so much as film stills, imagining

that these two photographs had been plucked from "a hypothetical film by Vertov on the

building process of Central Park," suggesting that the fluid transformation belonging to

cinema might be a model for the dialectical landscape and that it is only in excerpting

distinct episodes from that flux and comparing them that we confront the extent of this

transformation. "In the [older] photograph there is no evidence of the trees that would in

the future screen the sunken roadway from the park proper," the artist concluded. "The

photograph has the rawness of an instant out of the continuous growth and construction

of the park, and indicates a break in continuity that serves to reinforce a sense of

transformation."[63] A site may therefore have a fixed set of coordinates, a lengthy

numerical sequence indicating latitude and longitude, but to think site dialectically meant

reckoning with its various temporal layers; it meant conceiving of site as latently

cinematic, in other words—even "paracinematic," to invoke Jonathan Walley's term.[64] In

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[62] Smithson, 160.

[63] Smithson, 160.

[64] As I briefly discuss in this dissertation's Introduction, Walley's notion of "paracinema" responded to practices of late 1960s and '70s that sought "cinematic qualities or effects in nonfilmic materials." For Walley such practices emerged out of a rejection against medium specificity, for they suggested that what was "essential" to cinema in fact lay beyond its physical materials, apparatus, and support—that is, its "medium." It is worth reiterating here, too, that Eisenstein was for Walley an important figure in the genealogy of paracinema, for he similarly

fact, "layering" is the correct term here, for "each sequential element," Eisenstein had

written, "is perceived not *next* to the other, but on *top* of the other."[65] Cinema was a kind

of palimpsest of temporalities, then, experienced as superimposition. And the same went

for site, which Smithson understood as a stratigraphic collage of incompatible

temporalities that successively collide and displace one another like so many jump cuts,

like so many stills excerpted from a movie. Like a film, we can give a site a single,

monolithic name or unique coordinates, but seeing it as equally fixed would be

tantamount to reducing a film to its final frame.

The Rozel Point that Smithson encountered in April 1970 was in many ways no

different than the Yucatán through which he meandered the year before and the Central

Park he admired in the years after. For it, too, bore the dialectical scars of time's passage.

"My own experience," Smithson later explained of his site selection, "is that the best sites

for 'earth art' are sites that have been disrupted by industry, reckless urbanization, or

nature's own devastation. For instance, *The Spiral Jetty* is built in a dead sea."[66] Indeed,

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understood montage to be "the central, defining property of cinema" while at the same time
viewing that most essential filmmaking technique as "a basic cultural principle" that was "by no
means limited to the medium of film." Jonathan Walley, "The Material of Film and the Idea of
Cinema: Contrasting Practices in Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film," *October* 103 (2003):
15–30.

[65] Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," 49. While neither cites Eisenstein directly,
both George Baker's and Andrew Uroskie's scholarship on Smithson have been instrumental to
my thinking here, for both make much of the analogy of cinema to geological sedimentation that,
as I will discuss shortly, is clearly at stake in Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film. Describing the many
analogies between Smithson's filmic and sculptural *Jetty*s, for instance, Baker suggests that his
film, like the earthwork, "proceeds by way of dumping," thus linking the logic of cinema to that
of sedimentation: "frame follows frame in an endless succession that is also an endless burial of
image falling upon image." Uroskie's work likewise departs from a similar observation, namely
that Smithson's film and the site that it depicts are structured according to "an analogous layering
or stratification of time." See Baker, "The Cinema Model," 83. And Uroskie, "La Jetée En
Spirale," 55.

[66] Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape," 165.

the Great Salt Lake *was* a dead sea, or a dead lake, anyway. His gravitation to this saline

remnant of the ancient Lake Bonneville recalled his Mexican sojourn in that sense, for as

the artist no doubt knew, Mexico City occupies the site where the huge Lake Texcoco

had resided until relatively recent history. (This latter lake was a victim of "industry" and

"reckless urbanization" more so than "nature's own devastation," but Smithson liked to

remind us that humans and their activity are part of nature, too.[67]) Smithson's language of

a "dead sea" also calls to mind the science-fiction narratives with which he was so

enamored and which indulged in similarly apocalyptic transformations—J. G. Ballard's

"Deep End," perhaps, a fable set in the distant future where the remains of humanity live

on the desiccated and dust-choked floors of the former oceans and where the great

Atlantic has been reduced to a marshy "lake" that is really more of a repulsive, muddy

pond. Ballard's "Lake Atlantic," too, must have been on Smithson's mind when he

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[67] As Willis Barnstone put it in his introduction to Ignacio Bernal's *Mexico Before Cortez: Art, History, Legend*, a book that Smithson owned, Lake Texcoco and surrounding bodies of water "both produced a great civilization and swallowed it up afterward, and today they continue to cause the modern city to sink in its own mud. These marvelous lakes on whose banks the first man appeared in Mesoamerica, lakes that formed the water and earth on which an entire ancient world flourished thanks to their fertile, irrigated shores, lakes among whose islands one would become famous with time—Tenochtitlán—these lakes are the creators and destroyers of the people they created. Generously, they gave everything to man, only to reclaim all from him later in the quagmire. Now they are dry, yet take their revenge on the city which annihilated them by making it into a ship that is slowly sinking." Anticipating the comparison of Lake Bonneville to the Great Salt Lake that Smithson will make explicit in his *Spiral Jetty* film, moreover, Barnstone includes a diagram showing the entropic progress of Lake Texcoco over several stages. Willis Barnstone, "Introduction," in *Mexico before Cortez: Art, History, Legend*, by Ignacio Bernal, trans. Willis Barnstone (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), 5. Smithson's view that people are part of nature, and their cultivation of the land "natural," is a theme that runs throughout his thought. In a 1972 interview, for instance, he asserted that "we have to develop a dialectic of nature that includes man." Two years before, likewise, he wrote that "The dinosaurs lived and died and ice ages have come and gone. It might be quite natural that Lake Erie is filling up with green slime. It might just be another stage." See Robert Smithson and Gianni Pettena, "Conversation in Salt Lake City [1972]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 298. And Robert Smithson, "Interview with Paul Toner [1970]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 237.

discovered Rozel Point, a site adjacent to a prehistoric lake victimized by climactic change, a readymade "earth map" whose anomalous peculiarity readily conjured former versions of itself.

The Great Salt Lake was not the only index of past temporalities at Rozel Point, however. Smithson also admired the "countless bits of wreckage" strewn about the site: "old piers," "two dilapidated shacks," "a tired group of rigs," "pumps coated with black stickiness rusted in the corrosive salt air," and "a hut mounted on pilings." These "incoherent structures," as Smithson called them, were like manmade strata of sedimentation, so many "fragments of junk and waste [that] transported one into a world of modern prehistory."[68] Some items perhaps years old, others perhaps decades—like the saline lake, they conjured lost temporalities all co-present and coextensive. Smithson thus saw them as akin to the stacked strata of geological history, a vast inventory of pasts all improbably collapsed upon one another and testifying to the ineluctable march of the dialectic. Like the photographs Smithson invoked of Central Park, in other words, each article of disused detritus bore an indexical relation to its distinct temporality, and together they induced an awareness of the site's extinct, abandoned, and wholly heterogeneous usages. In that respect, Rozel Point's "wreckage" recalled the artist's experience of archaeological sites in Mexico as "enormous and heterogeneous time capsules, full of lost abstractions, and broken frameworks" where "the wilderness and the city intermingle." Smithson surely found these "buried cities" incoherent in their own way, bearing fragmentary testimony to all manner of incompatible temporalities. And yet,

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[68] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 145–6.

he concluded, "a film is capable of picking up the pieces."[69]

At Rozel Point, Smithson would deploy cinema to do just that. If the middle and last thirds of his *Spiral Jetty* film purported to document the process of the earthwork's construction and the completed *Jetty*, respectively, its first part would address Rozel Point, "picking up the pieces," as it were, in a rich montage of the site's various resonances—historical, geological, and paleontological as well as mythical and discursive. To that end, each of the six evocative and radically discontinuous vignettes that comprise this first part conjure various episodes in the site's past that, together, portray it as a heterogeneous entity dispersed across a variety of temporal coordinates. Further thematizing the irregular and discontinuous passage of time indexed at the site and performed by this first part of the film, moreover, each of these vignettes is accompanied by an asynchronous soundtrack of rhythmic (and arrhythmic) ticks, clicks, blips, and hums of clocks, metronomes, Geiger Counters, and electronic drones; and each is connected by an intermediary shot of forward or backward automotive transit along a dirt road, once again nominating travel as an avatar for the sequential mode of passage invited by the Barthesian text. The dialectical landscape and the cinematic text, the cinematic text and the dialectical landscape—such is the correspondence that the film begins to unfold.

The opening vignette of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film proposes that we begin at the very beginning. We find ourselves staring into the sun, an overexposed orb of white-hot light set starkly against an icy, black void (fig. 3.18). It is an image that not only evokes a sense of primordial origins—the sun, that is, as Earth's main energy source and thus the

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[69] Robert Smithson, "Art Through the Camera's Eye [c. 1971]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 375.

engine behind our planet's multi-billion-year history of geological and ecological transformation—but also, in the capacity of a kind of overture, introduces the logic of montage that will recur throughout the film. For it is an image whose proliferating compositional binaries are pregnant with the dialectic: figure and ground, white star and inky vacuum, light and its negation, heat and its absence—the boundaries between these terms could not be clearer even as they are tentatively breached by molten solar flares curling outward from the sun's edge and lapping at the void. Moreover, this image is accompanied by the sound of a hospital ventilator, whose rhythmic in-out, in-out sonically reiterates these bifurcations. Like the boundary-transgressing solar flares, the ventilator enacts a palpable sense of porosity, as if this physiological reflex of respiration constituted an analogous transgression of the boundary separating body from world— interior and exterior breached by atmosphere. Of course, if image and soundtrack independently arouse a sense of dialectical interpenetration, their asynchronous collision before us—combustive sun merging with labored, mechanically-assisted breath—only stages a further breach, in this case of sound and image which transfigures the sun, anthropomorphizing it into some terrible cosmic organism on the brink of exhaustion.[70] This is the sound of life, after all, but life mechanically assisted and artificially sustained. A primordial vision of life-giving genesis, then, as well as an apocalyptic image of solar finality, the film's ambiguous inaugural moments suggest that our home star is itself a

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[70] I note here that Eisenstein understood the divergence of sound and image to be a special case of montage. Writing in 1928, he presciently viewed the innovation of synchronous sound as a threat to the art of cinema insofar as it would most certainly be deployed in the service of cinematic naturalism. The technology held great promise, the director felt, but, like montage, it had to introduce further conflict. As such he called for a model not of adhesion but juxtaposition, what he described as a "contrapuntal use of sound." Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, "A Statement on the Sound-Film by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov [1928]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1949), 257–260.

dialectical engine caught in an ongoing process of fusion, a nuclear montage of hydrogen atoms, merging, transforming into helium, and releasing tremendous quantities of energy all the while. And it is our engine, too, our source of heat and light and energy—at least for now, the sound of the ventilator reminds us. For the pistons of this engine will not pump forever, its energy output no more static and permanent than Olmsted's Central Park.

To the extent that the five vignettes that follow will offer a cursory tour through the earth's geological past, this dialectical vision of our living and dying sun is a fitting place to begin, for it is fundamentally the sun's atomic dialectic that has fueled the transformation of a site like Rozel Point. After the first of several automotive interludes, for example, the film delivers us to the cracked surface of desiccated mud, an image that gestures obliquely to early stages of planetary history (fig. 3.19). Torn scraps of paper bearing maps and information flutter down onto the mud floor accompanied by the sound of a rapidly ticking clock and Smithson's voice reading from a textbook that compares Earth's history to a book missing "many of the pages and some of the pieces of each page." Conjuring the accelerated passage of millions or perhaps billions of years of history indexed across fragmentary mineral evidence, the vignette reiterates that Smithson's sense of geological temporality is structured according to the discontinuous logic of montage. A second automotive interlude delivers us to our next destination: a diagram superimposing the Great Salt Lake on the gargantuan Lake Bonneville, its former identity up until about 14,000 years ago (fig. 3.20). The sound of a slowly-ticking metronome elicits a sense of this transformation's lethargic pace, while Smithson's voice, meanwhile, tells of a mythical whirlpool purported to have connected the Great Salt Lake

to the Pacific Ocean. Particularly when dealing with fragmentary evidence and "missing pages," our inferences about entities like the Great Salt Lake, it seems, have not always been scientifically correct. No sooner has that thought crossed our mind, however, than another rapid car journey deposits us before a series of books stacked on a mirror like so many geological strata, their titles speaking of dinosaurs, nebulae, geology, and labyrinths (fig. 3.21). Reading the title of one of the books, "The Lost World," Smithson's voice offers a fitting caption for this sedimentation of discourse and the temporally remote "lost world" it seeks variously to locate. At the same time, the arrhythmic clicking of a Geiger counter reiterates the sense in which that "lost world" is recorded geologically at irregular and discontinuous intervals. Traveling once more along the dirt road, we disembark now at the American Museum of Natural History's Hall of Late Dinosaurs and thus to the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods of about 66–200 million years ago (fig. 3.22). The sound of slow, reverberating ticking summons the inconceivable duration of tens of millions of years indexed in this Hall, as does Smithson's voice, which, reading from Samuel Beckett, only confirms that "Nothing has ever changed since I have been here." One last car trip brings us to a series of maps that offer a fitting culmination to the preceding sequence in progressively zeroing in on the Rozel Point of the present—a set of coordinates, that is, configured not only as cartographic but temporal (fig. 3.23). The first depicts the geography of the world roughly contemporaneous with the dinosaurian denizens of the previous vignette, a period featuring ancient supercontinents, both real and imagined, with names like Atlantis, Europa-Angara, Australis, and Gondwanaland overlaid atop the continents we know today. "I needed a map," the artist later reflected, "that would show the prehistoric

world as coextensive with the world I existed in."[71] From this cartographic montage of both space and time, we move to more detailed and more current maps—survey maps and road maps that bring us incrementally closer to the site where Smithson's earthwork will be built, while the artist's voice meanwhile describes the shape and bounds of that site as stipulated on the lease agreement.[72]

This was what "picking up the pieces" looked like, then—cinematic montage deployed to tentatively order a site understood to be plural and incomprehensible just like the "enormous and heterogeneous time capsules" that Smithson had found in Mexico. In recognition of the device responsible for facilitating our traversal of vast gulfs of time elided with each discontinuous cut, Smithson later reflected that "the movieola becomes a 'time machine.'"[73] Lest this sense of time travel be lost on the audience, the automotive interludes separating each episode propose physical travel as a metaphor for the act of suturing and cognitive inference that montage asks of us. "Unlikely places and things were stuck between sections of film that show a stretch of dirt road rushing to and from the actual site in Utah," Smithson later wrote of this device. "A road that goes forward and backward between things and places"—and, we might also add, times—"that are elsewhere."[74] The panorama of tempos that accompany all of this, moreover—the (ar)rhythmic soundscape of rapidly ticking clocks, erratic Geiger Counter clicks, idly reverberating metronomes, electronic hums and drones—only reiterates the unusual

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[71] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 151.

[72] For a full transcription of the *Spiral Jetty* film, including a bibliography of the artist's sources, see Hikmet Sidney Loe, *The Spiral Jetty Encyclo: Exploring Robert Smithson's Earthwork through Time and Place* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2017), 23–25.

[73] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 150.

[74] Smithson, 151–152.

plasticity of cinematic time, its vulnerability to warping and dilation and contraction. In the same way that geological strata irregularly index a give site's transformation, in other words, these rhythms suggest that cinematic time is not always smooth and continuous but unfolds sporadically across gaps and chasms and lapses. At stake in *Spiral Jetty*'s first part, then, is nothing less than an analogy of cinema and site: in its capacities as time machine and automotive transport, cinema provides an avatar for site understood as dialectical.[75]

While this series of vignettes may lack the intellectual clarity of Eisenstein's "For God and Country" sequence and the neat precision of its cognitive statement on God's nonexistence, then, it nevertheless seemed to be tractor-like in its own way, ploughing a somewhat messy path forward through the bramble of hundreds of millions of years of planetary history to a coordinate not only in space but in time. It was, Smithson later wrote, a means of "get[ting] to the Spiral Jetty from New York City" via various prehistoric detours—"Pleistocene faunas, glacial uplifts, living fossils, and other prehistoric wonders."[76] The first part of the film is like a cinematic core sample in that respect, giving us access to "the lost world" of earth's history not as a comprehensive and continuously-unfolding story but according to the montage logic of geology and its incomplete record of information. To the extent that the middle third of the film conveys

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[75] My reading of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* here owes much to Andrew Uroskie's "stratigraphic" discussion of the film. Uroskie is ultimately involved in attributing Deleuze's sense of the "time-image" (a distinctively postwar cinematic mode in which temporality no longer emerges indirectly as the subordinate of action and narrative progress but is figured forth directly and for its own sake) to Smithson's practice and, by extension, postminimalism. However, he also argues that the film's temporal structure, particularly its first part, "might be said to mirror the phenomenological experience of the earthwork itself." Like Rozel Point, the earthwork "is constituted by an analogous layering or stratification of time," which is reiterated in the film. Uroskie, "La Jetée En Spirale."

[76] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 150.

the process of the *Spiral Jetty*'s construction, then, the first part situates that process, suggesting that the activity of bulldozing that we are soon to witness will be only the latest manipulation of Rozel Point, only the most recent stage of this site's dialectical and quasi-cinematic transformation.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Perhaps there was something to Smithson's unprompted invocation of Vertov. For when it came to the filmic manipulation of time, it was Vertov who investigated and exploited the medium's full range of temporal plasticity, who gleefully orchestrated the cinematic warping, distortion, and manipulation of time. In a famous scene from his first feature, *Kino-Eye* (1924), for instance, we find a peasant woman meandering through the local market in search of meat. Using reverse motion, Vertov suddenly propels us backward through time, down a chain of causality that reveals the meat's origins: from hanging racks of beef we proceed to a carcass in the process of being eerily de-eviscerated, from there to a slain bull magically restored to life. "Kino Eye moves time backwards," one intertitle reads, alluding to Vertov's central notion that the movie camera, or "Kino-Eye," had access to an objective and non-anthropomorphic mode of perception, which laid bare a level of truth unconditioned by human subjectivity. As he wrote in his characteristically militant prose,

> Kino-eye is understood as "that which the eye doesn't see,"
> as the microscope and telescope of time,
> as the negative of time,
> as the possibility of seeing without limits and distances,
> as the remote control of movie cameras,
> as tele-eye,
> as X-ray eye,

as "life caught unawares," etc., etc.[77]

From slaughterhouse to stockyards, from stockyards to grazing lands, we follow the

radical (etymologically, *of or to the root*) path of this particular commodity.[78] Vertov's

Kino-Eye will soon accomplish the same feat for a loaf of bread, as baked loaves are

placed back into the oven, removed as doughy balls, kneaded by hand, placed back into

an industrial mixer, and transformed finally from batter into raw ingredients.[79] In both

[77] Dziga Vertov, "The Birth of Kino-Eye [1924]," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), 41. As Vertov implies here, he felt cinema's mechanical and indifferent vision granted access to the world as we ordinarily cannot see it, to "life caught unawares." Aided by its specific access to other modes of temporality, this special instrument of observation could also augment that access through slow motion or time lapse. To that end, Vertov had already by the early 1920s decreed the "emancipation of the camera […] of subordination to the imperfections and shortsightedness of the human eye." In addition to "The Birth of Kino-Eye," see Dziga Vertov, "Kinoks: A Revolution [1923]," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), 11–21. Vertov's attitude bears some resemblance to other ideas about film and photography that were current, for example László Moholy-Nagy's contemporaneous *Painting, Photography, Film* (1925), which similarly privileged the camera's mechanical, objective, and non-anthropomorphic view of the world as "no longer tied to the narrow limits of our eye." See László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film [1925]*, ed. Lars Müller, trans. Jillian DeMair and Katrin Schamun, First English edition., Bauhausbücher 8 (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2019). Annette Michelson discusses the parallels between Vertov and Moholy-Nagy (and the divergences, too, chief among them the absence of class-consciousness from the latter artist's approach) in Annette Michelson, "Introduction," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), especially xli–xlvi.

[78] For Michelson's description of this sequence, see Annette Michelson, "The Man with the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* X, no. 7 (March 1972): 65. I will make more of the etymology of "radical" later; for now, I want to acknowledge that this resonance was first brought to my attention in Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," *October* 70 (October 1, 1994): 5–32, https://doi.org/10.2307/779051.

[79] While Vertov's postwar reception in the United States was somewhat more limited than Eisenstein's, by the late 1960s films like *Kino-Eye* and, as I will be discussing shortly, *Man with the Movie Camera* would have been widely available for a cinematically-inclined artist like Smithson. The Museum of Modern Art's "huge Soviet film show" of September–November 1969, for instance, featured *Man with the Movie Camera* and several other Vertov films, including *Kino-Pravda* (a newsreel film journal with twenty-three issues made between 1922–1925, most often shown in highly abridged form) and *Enthusiasm* (1931). *Man with the Movie Camera* and *Kino-Pravda* were reprised at the Museum the following summer as part the exhibition "Photo Eye of the 20s." After its December 1970 opening, moreover, Anthology Film

cases we witness hours-, days-, months-, even years-long processes in a matter of minutes in a form of vision that belongs uniquely to the cinema.

These sorts of cinematic magic tricks, as Vertov scholar Yuri Tsivian explains, were not merely magic tricks, for they served an important pedagogical function—teaching Vertov's audience something about how things were made through the specifically cinematic device of reverse-motion. They provided a "Marxist object lesson," Tsivian elaborates, demonstrating that the "nature of meat, as of any commodity (Marxism teaches us), is defined not by qualities inherent in the end-product, but by the character of the labour involved in its production."[80] The lesson does not end there, however. For among the scenes that intervene between these two reverse-motion sequences is one that depicts a street magician, an artificer, an illusionist, whose very presence seems to say something about the cinematic modalities of magic we have thus far witnessed. We are akin to the children delighting in the magician's spectacle, the film seems to be suggesting, and yet in doing so it also provokes a self-conscious awareness of that fact. Which is to say that Vertov is delivering a "Marxist object lesson" not only about commodities but also, it would seem, about cinema and *its* illusions.

Such was Annette Michelson's reading of Vertov's technical virtuosity as deployed in this film, which she felt operated a dialectic between filmic illusionism and its apparatus that came fully to fruition in *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929). For Vertov's magnum opus was a city symphony film that taught its viewers about the mechanisms and processes and techniques behind its very construction, a film about

Archives regularly screened *Man with the Movie Camera* and *Kino-Eye* (along with many other Vertov films) as part of its Essential Cinema program.

[80] Yuri Tsivian, "Dziga Vertov and His Time," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian (Gemona, Udine: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 11.

filmic observation that made visible the act of observation itself. A dynamic image of a

train's undercarriage zooming overhead and an image of camera and crew positioning the

camera between railroad ties; the passengers of horse-drawn carriages and automobiles

passing rapidly through the city and the precariously balanced cameraman on an adjacent

vehicle getting the shot; the fluidly transforming filmic image abruptly halted and the

film editor carefully manipulating celluloid at a flatbed station and orchestrating its

motion—while not necessarily occurring in direct succession, such cause-and-effect and

effect-and-cause sequences were among the ways that *Man with the Movie Camera*

revealed itself to its viewer (figs. 3.24–3.26). Like Vertov's manipulation of temporality,

these kinds of techniques, Michelson argued, enacted a "maieutic" dialectic between the

filmmaker's roles as magician and as epistemologist, between, that is, superstructural

illusion and material base, in both orchestrating and revealing his cinematic apparatus. As

a result, the critic memorably wrote elsewhere, the viewer had to sustain a "*contraposto*

[*sic*] of the mind," simultaneously absorbed by the cinematic illusion and repelled from it

by the revelation of its very physicality. Film could not just be a dream, she thought; it

had to be a "dream for waking minds," it had to disclose the "terms and dynamics of

cinematic illusionism."[81] Like Eisenstein's tractor cinema, such techniques encouraged a

certain kind of cognitive activity on the part of the spectator, in this case disclosing to her

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[81] I borrow these memorable turns of phrase not from Michelson's essay on Vertov, but from
another key essay from the period, which addresses a similar dialectic in Stanley Kubrick's *2001:
A Space Odyssey*. Her 1969 account of *2001*, discussed at length in this dissertation's
Introduction, points to the exportability of such principles of radical filmmaking, for she clearly
attributed Kubrick's science-fiction epic with the same self-reflexive strategies that she found in
the films of Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, using almost identical language to describe its cognitive
effects. See Annette Michelson, "Bodies in Space: Film as 'Carnal Knowledge,'" *Artforum* VII,
no. 6 (February 1969): 53–64. For more on the self-reflexive didactics of Vertov's cinema, in
particular his materialist concern with connecting cause and effect, see Tsivian, "Dziga Vertov
and His Time."

not an argument and the process of its reasoning (again, something like "God does not exist") but a more self-reflexive and critical insight into the very nature and functioning of cinema.

In fact, Eisenstein's tractor cinema, too, manipulated cinematic temporality to enact a similarly self-reflexive breach of illusionistic naturalism. In *Old and New* alone, one thinks of the rapid aging of Fomka the bull, from calf to hulking maturity, through a kind of stop-motion animation conveying successive states of the beast's development (fig. 3.27). At another point in the film, the *kolkhoz*'s money magically multiples through the same technique, similarly rupturing the continuous flow of time in order to demonstrate the fruits of Marfa's efforts (fig. 3.28). And when Marfa and a comrade go to the city to demand the tractor they were promised, its fast-motion rendering underscores the efficaciousness of their furious appeal, which spurs idle company bureaucrats into frantic action and precipitates the equally rapid assembly of a new tractor before our very eyes. Conversely, Eisenstein deployed montage to dilate time, as well. At the momentous unveiling of Marfa's cream separator, for instance, her sole ally whips the heavy tarpaulin cover from the machine in a gesture repeated in triplicate. When, moments later, that same man tosses the tarpaulin aside, the film once again triples the gesture. And at the end of the film, as the *kolkhoz*'s tractor jolts into action, its backfiring ignition repeats three times, too, as does the tripled rearing of horses spooked by the sound.

Even more famous than these instances from *Old and New* is Eisenstein's Lifting of the Bridge sequence from *October*. After its troops fire upon protesting Bolsheviks, the Provisional Government orders St. Petersburg's bridges raised in an effort to hinder

further demonstrations. Littered with corpses—a woman lying face down, hair strewn

from one leaf of the drawbridge to the next; a downed horse, still attached to the carriage

it had been pulling—the leaves of the bridge part and rise, indifferent to the victims

draped over the interval between them, sending them careening off (fig. 3.29). As the

leaves of the bridge part and rise, however, we witness the action from multiple angles,

dilating the moment and giving it more awful emphasis. "Opening the bridge, Eisenstein

opens, as well, a vast wedge of time within the flow or progress of action," Michelson

wrote.[82] The sequence "invent[s], in its radically disjunctive force, another kind of

cinematic time."[83] And in doing so, in interrupting the continuous unfolding of time,

October also forces precisely the kind of self-reflexive "maieusis" that Michelson had

attributed to Vertov's cinema. For the effect of the sequence, she continued, is that it

"solicit[s] a particular kind of attention," which involves "the making of inferences as to

spatial and temporal order, adjustments of perception. And the inferences, the

adjustments thus solicited reinforce the visibility of things, make for a particular kind of

clarity."[84] Once again, the montage engine of Eisenstein's tractor cinema not only

ploughs a certain path but directs attention to the tractor itself and the very act of

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[82] Annette Michelson, "Camera Lucida Camera Obscura," *Artforum* XI, no. 5 (January 1973): 34.

[83] Michelson, "Bodies in Space: Film as 'Carnal Knowledge,'" 61.

[84] Michelson, "Camera Lucida Camera Obscura," 34. Michelson returns to *October*'s Lifting of the Bridge throughout her long scholarly engagement with Eisenstein's cinema. In what is perhaps her most succinct summation of the cognitive consequences of the sequence, she wrote that "*October* had been Eisenstein's most elaborate and sophisticated effort in the direction of the radically maieutic cinema. […] Its spatio-temporal distensions and syntheses had, as in the celebrated sequence of The Lifting of the Bridge, reordered action in a multiplicity of aspects and positions thus altering the temporal flow of the event and of its surrounding narrative structure. The result was a declared disjunction of constituents, soliciting a new quality of attention and eliciting inferences as to the spatial and temporal relations. Perception of the disjunction within the distended moment and fragmented space, had to be cognitively resynthesized by the spectator into the order of an event." Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading 'Capital,'" *October* 2 (1976): 30, https://doi.org/10.2307/778417.

ploughing by virtue of its ellipses and recursions. Ultimately, of course, Eisenstein's film

is doing the ploughing, but here, in moments like these, the spectator is invited to

participate vicariously and can relish in the sense that she is driving even when daddy is

working the pedals.

The kind of cognitive activity that Michelson associated with both Eisenstein and

Vertov, in particular with their self-reflexive manipulation of cinematic time, belonged to

what she had described as film's "radical aspiration," a decisive conception first sketched

in a 1966 essay that largely defined her scholarly project for the next decade. As I

discussed at length in this dissertation's introduction, this "radical aspiration" spoke to a

revolutionary energy that animated both cultural and political spheres at once and that,

the critic wrote, "achieved a moment of consummation in the Russian film of the 1920's

and early 1930's."[85] While Michelson did not elaborate on the concrete mechanisms of

this "radical aspiration" in her 1966 essay, her subsequent scholarship on Vertov and

Eisenstein published in the pages of *Artforum* in the early 1970s confirmed that this

"consummation" of formal and political aspiration had everything to do with the jarringly

palpable interval constitutive of cinematic montage. For montage both brought the

disparate together and held them apart; montage meant both the construction of illusion

and its destruction; montage was the work of the editor as both magician and

epistemologist. And it was the very presence of that interval that sustained and made

palpable this dialectic unfolding constantly between the cinematic illusionism and its

apparatus, that encouraged a stance of critical detachment, that cultivated a "contrapposto

of the mind." If montage was the engine driving forth Eisenstein's tractor cinema, then, it

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[85] Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," 1970, 413. Originally published as Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," Fall 1966.

was also what for Michelson secured its radical aspiration as a functional art that would not indoctrinate the viewer with revolutionary ideology but would empower her, dialectically and materially, with the knowledge necessary to bring into being the socialist utopia of the future.[86]

Part II: …And Back Again

The only thing worse than a peasant's deplorable hovel, it would seem, is half a hovel. What could be more backwards, more retrograde, more pointless? And yet half a hovel is the fate of one particular family mired in the old ways at the start of Eisenstein's *Old and New*. Two brothers, lured by false hopes of individualism, decide to go their own ways. Naturally, they must divide their belongings, hovel included, so they set to sawing it in two (fig. 3.30) It is a devastating sequence of images as we witness this house coming needlessly apart while family members look on, their hollow expressions registering the futility of it all. For the two brothers, the architectural carnage is only temporary, what they surely view as a necessary inconvenience on the road to far greater prospects. But we see what the distraught onlookers see: a stupid, three-walled carcass of a home and its former other half, now a miserable pile of debris on a cart. "This is how

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[86] Dating to the later 1960s and 1970s, Michelson's notion of the "radical aspiration," particularly the condition of maieutic self-reflexivity in the Soviet cinema, bore an important affinity to a body of discourse known as apparatus theory with which it was contemporaneous. Jean-Louis Baudry's 1970s work on cinema, for instance, sought to interrogate the ideological effects not of a given film (i.e., content) but the very cinematic apparatus—an assemblage of layers including camera and projector that mediate and transform the profilmic event before its reception in a movie theater. In evaluating the films that necessarily relied on this apparatus, the question for Baudry, as it was for Michelson, was whether those films attempted to disclose that apparatus: "[I]s the work made evident, does consumption of the product bring about a 'knowledge effect' [Althusser], or is the work concealed?" Significantly, Baudry also invokes Vertov as responding to this imperative. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus [1970]," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen, trans. Alan Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 287.

households are driven into poverty," an intertitle confirms, anxious that we haven't missed the point. The surrounding lands begin to spontaneously subdivide as ramshackle wooden fences appear, cordoning off individual tracts of earth and making painfully clear that what is at stake is not one particular instance of a cloven abode but the diminished returns, on a grand scale, of the capitalist inspiration to work against one another. Marfa is the only one who understands this as she embarks on her mission of collectivizing her village and acquiring a tractor, putting an end once and for all to such petty individualism.

It was one thing for Smithson to instruct tractors to push a spiral of earth into the Great Salt Lake in the spirit of aesthetic newness; it was quite another when, only a few months before, he deployed such tools to actively destroy a wooden structure—not to divide a house exactly, but to ruin it all the same. It was January 1970 and Smithson had spent a week at Ohio's Kent State University as an artist-in-residence. He was to complete a mud pour there to cap off his stay, a work that would have fit neatly with *Asphalt Rundown*, *Concrete Pour*, and *Glue Pour* executed in the months before. It was too cold for mud, however, so he proposed burying a building instead. A woodshed on campus was selected, a backhoe was rented, and some twenty cartloads of dirt were dumped upon it until its center beam cracked under the weight of the earth (fig. 3.31).[87] As if this were not enough, when Smithson bequeathed the "finished" work to Kent State on January 22, he included ironic instructions for the work's "maintenance" that stipulated it be allowed to fall only further into ruination and decay:

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[87] For a comprehensive account of the execution of *Partially Buried Woodshed*, as well as a discussion of its afterlife in the months and years that followed, see Dorothy Shinn, *Robert Smithson's Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1990.

> Nothing should be altered in this area. Scattered wood and earth shoving should remain in place. Everything in the shed is part of the art and should not be removed. The entire work of art is subject to weathering and should be considered part of the work. The value of this work is $10,000.00. The work should be considered permanent and be maintained by the Art Department according to the above specifications.[88]

Over the years that would follow, the work would endure its share of "weathering" indeed: vandalism, arson, and the run-of-the-mill decay of a wooden structure whose "maintenance" consisted in leaving it be, and by 1984 the building had more or less vanished but for its concrete foundation.[89] Needless to say, *Partially Buried Woodshed* was not an impoverished hovel, gratuitously halved. However, the work's resulting decrepitude and pointless ruination was equally gratuitous, forming a tractor-made image less of utopian newness than of devolution toward the old.

In Smithson's case, of course, an embrace of "weathering" belonged to the work's bulldozing of modernism, too. After all, the site-specific *Partially Buried Woodshed* was no more autonomous from space than from time: unlike the quasi-sacred and transcendent condition of presentness Michael Fried accorded the modernist artwork, Smithson's ruined structure would be vulnerable to the vicissitudes of actuality, articulated more deeply with each passing day. And the language of dialectics towards which the artist had gravitated during the late 1960s along with the innovation of his nonsites provided a model for his distinct posture of anti-modernism. "Art as a distinct

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[88] Robert Smithson, "Bequest of 'Partially Buried Wood Shed' to Kent State University," January 22, 1970, Box 5 Folder 21, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, American Archives of Art.

[89] Shinn notes that *Partially Buried Woodshed* was part of various curricula at Kent State in the early 1980s, which resulted in a robust photographic record of the structure through 1983 that, in turn, testifies to the fact that, by that point, "the cracked center beam had already fallen down, and the sides were beginning to cave in." That the work's disappearance was noticed in February 1984 lead her to posit that its remains must have been "carted away by University groundskeepers during routine maintenance" sometime shortly before, hence her guess of January 1984. Shinn, *Robert Smithson's Partially Buried Woodshed*, 8.

thing is not supposed to be affected by anything other than itself," Smithson wrote in an

unpublished 1971 essay fittingly titled "Art and Dialectics." "Critical boundaries tend to

isolate the art object into a metaphysical void, independent from external relationships

such as land, labor, and class."[90] Dialectics, however, suggested "on-going development."

The artwork, he wrote,

> could be swept away like an isolated sea shell on a beach, then the ocean would
> make itself known. Dialectics could be viewed as the relationship between the
> shell and the ocean. Art critics and artists have for a long time considered the shell
> without the context of the ocean.[91]

Recalling his dialectical conception of site and landscape, in other words, Smithson

understood the artwork, too, to be not timeless and transcendent but ephemeral, in

process, and in flux, mired in the space of the real and susceptible to the ravages of time

like everything else. The postmodern newness of Smithson's work therefore was not

limited to its exploration of sculpture's "expanded field" nor its filmic dispersal. Like the

dialectical landscapes Smithson encountered in Mexico, Central Park, and Rozel Point, a

work like *Partially Buried Woodshed* refused the value of timelessness.

And yet Smithson's dialectics seemed to have a peculiar consequence, or at least

vector of travel, which he designated with the term entropy—a reversion to the mean,

energy drain, decay, "evolution in reverse."[92] "I am convinced," he once wrote, "that the

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[90] Robert Smithson, "Art and Dialectics [1971]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 370.

[91] Smithson, 371.

[92] Smithson borrowed the definition of entropy as "evolution in reverse" from Wylie Sypher. See Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments [1966]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 15.

future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past."[93] And, to be sure, the

implication of the artist's seashell-and-ocean metaphor is not just that the two comprise a

tidal dialogue but that the ocean's relentless ebbing and flowing will eat away at the

nacreous object, perhaps pounding it to smithereens and reducing it to indeterminate

grains of sand. Nor is the ocean all that safe, as Mexico's vanished Lake Texcoco and the

"dead sea" that is the Great Salt Lake have already made clear—huge bodies of water

whose disappearance or else diminishment testify to the relentless progress of the

dialectic. Rather than create timeless artworks that pretended to be invulnerable to the

dialectical processes of the world, Smithson wanted to "collaborat[e] with entropy."[94] To

that end, he likened *Partially Buried Woodshed* to the entirely natural kind of destruction

wrought upon human civilization by, for instance, geological phenomena, citing a

volcanic eruption outside Iceland that submerged an entire community in black ash.[95] It

was as if his deployment of the tractor at Kent State only initiated the entropic process

that was already the abandoned woodshed's inevitable fate.[96]

In its aggressive pursuit of entropy, *Partially Buried Woodshed* represented a

ploughing-over of not only modernism but the more recent legacy of minimalism, too. As

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[93] Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 74.

[94] Grégoire Müller and Robert Smithson, ..."...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, Is a Cruel Master [1971]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 256.

[95] Robert Smithson and Allison Sky, "Entropy Made Visible [1973]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 305.

[96] To that end, the central beam's cracking was essential for Smithson insofar as it announced the commencement of the *Woodshed*'s entropic decay. See, for instance, Shinn, *Robert Smithson's Partially Buried Woodshed*. Or John Fitzgerald O'Hara, "Kent State/May 4 and Postwar Memory," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2006): 301–28.

early as 1966, Smithson understood minimalism to be asserting a new monumentality:

"Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments," he wrote,

> the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made
> of natural materials, such as marble, granite, or other kinds of rock, the new
> monuments are made of artificial materials, plastic, chrome, and electric light.
> They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages.[97]

Even as minimalism's slick, industrially fabricated, monolithic boxes insinuated

themselves into the actual space of the gallery, in other words, forcing the viewer to

contend with them not optically as ethereal compositions but bodily as physical objects,

the very futurism of their materials and their methods of construction disavowed their

actual vulnerability to the real they purported to enter. It is for this reason that Smithson

was so enamored with the "putrid finesse" of Paul Thek's work, which filled hollow

minimalist volumes with slabs of meat and severed limbs, as if these were its insides, its

secret content, thus juxtaposing forward-looking form with grisly reminders of the primal

past (fig. 3.32). For example, Smithson praised Thek's work for being

> made out of simulated hunks of torn flesh. Bloody meat in the shape of a birthday
> cake is contained under a pyramidal chrome framework—it has stainless steel
> candies in it. Tubes for drinking 'blood cocktails' are inserted into some of his
> painful objects.[98]

What the clinical minimalist box was *really* about, such work seemed to say, was an

erotic yearning not for timelessness but, following Bataille, for gruesome devolution.

Thek's work intuited precisely what minimalism continued to repress—that these

monuments against the ages, against immutability, seemed to harbor a deep anxiety about

the future. Like Thek's "sadistic geometries," then, groping both forwards and backwards

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[97] Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," 11.

[98] Smithson, 16.

at once, *Partially Buried Woodshed* indulged a similar longing for destruction.[99] If the future resembles anything at all, it seemed to say, it will be what *Partially Buried Woodshed*'s future resembled.

Or, for that matter, the *Spiral Jetty*'s. An earthen coil insinuated into an ancient lake on the verge (geologically speaking) of total vaporization, Smithson's *Jetty* quite literally embodied the seashell/ocean dialectic. How fitting that not long after its completion, the "ocean" got the better of the *Jetty*, at least for a time, submerging it beneath the water and enveloping it entirely—the first act in a slow-motion drama of submersion and reappearance that has characterized the earthwork's first half-century of existence.[100] Snapshots generated over that same period of time likewise testify to the *Jetty*'s dialectical histrionics in providing clear evidence of its flux and transformation (fig. 3.33). Bone dry or else covered by snow or salt crystals, waters pink or else clear, fully submerged beneath the water's surface or else fully exposed—the spiraling entity that emerges through such a discontinuous inventory is an entity that refuses to remain stable. Like the "hypothetical film by Vertov" and like historical photographs of Central Park, in other words, such photographic evidence discloses processes that otherwise escape human perception, readily bearing witness to the *Spiral Jetty* as the dialectical

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[99] Smithson discusses Thek's work in "Entropy and the New Monuments," as well as the work of other artists, such as Robert Morris, whose work he felt similarly mixed "time states" in a way that confuses future and past.

[100] Fitting, perhaps, but not necessarily to the artist's liking. After water levels rose above the level of the *Jetty* in 1972, Robert Hobbs reports out that Smithson wished he had build the piece higher, "thus indicating his intention to keep weathering and change within strictly defined limits." Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 196–7.

entity it is.[101]

The earthwork not only opens up a secret dialectic with its watery surrounds, the seashell to the Great Salt Lake's ocean; it also communicates this condition by way of its spiraling form, which evokes the helical shape of the dialectic. While the spiral was a richly polysemous form for Smithson, the artist's notes for the project in fact include a dutiful transcription from Vladimir Nabokov's memoir that directly implicates the dialectic among its referents:

> If we consider the simplest spiral, three stages may be distinguished in it, corresponding to those of the triad: We can call 'thetic' the small curve or arc that initiates the convolution centrally; 'antithetic' the larger arc that faces the first in the process of continuing it; and 'synthetic' the still ampler arc that continues the second while following the first along the outer side.[102]

Nabokov continued (although Smithson's excerpt did not), writing that "The spiral is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free." The two-dimensional circle does not progress, in other words, but repeats itself serially, endlessly, dumbly. Extend that convolution forward as if through time, however—allow it to uncoil and unwind—and we have a sense of causality, progress, succession. "Twirl follows twirl, and every synthesis is the thesis of the next series."[103] It is not serial sameness, then, but spiraling succession, sequentiality, and development to which photographs of the *Jetty* bear ready witness.

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[101] I have in mind here the supplemental snapshots populating a 2005 publication devoted to the *Spiral Jetty*. The conceit behind the editorial decision here is ostensibly to provide a photographic inventory that testifies to the *Jetty* not as a static and fixed entity but as a work with almost infinite manifestations. Lynne Cooke and Karen J. Kelly, eds., *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[102] Robert Smithson, "Notebook V," c. 1960s 1973, Box 3 Folder 65, Robert Smithson and Nancy Hot Papers, American Archives of Art.

[103] Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, Rev. ed. (New York: Putnam, 1966), 275.

Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film would not let us forget these dialectical aspirations, in any case—particularly the film's second part, which makes palpable the ineluctably entropic thrust of the dialectic at the moment of the *Spiral Jetty*'s construction. After all "construction" is surely a generous descriptor for a process that looks and feels much closer to destruction as the film relentlessly cuts between quiet images of the Great Salt Lake's gentle, pinkish waters and muscular, cacophonous shots of heavy machinery moving tons of basalt and earth into the lake, huge rocks tumbling in slow motion accompanied by painful gurgling and spewing and grunting engine noises, whose very exaggeration evokes utter ruination. Like a piston pumping back and forth, the jarring collision of earth and water, clamor and silence, not only powers the film forward but also makes its turbulent passage physiologically felt. Given the artist's erotic preoccupations, moreover, it is impossible not to see this discordant earth-water dialectic without thinking of the two distinct materials, separated by the boundary that is the coastline, as erotically merging in some way. Recalling the desirous solar flares from the opening shot of Smithson's film, it is as if the phallic coil of earth were unfurling its way into the lake's waters, arc after arc, twirl after twirl, their discontinuous separation breached in the form of weird, geological circlusion.[104] True to Bataille's erotics, however, this gesture of sexual merging appears as merely a symptom of a more violent drive towards entropic continuity. For the consequence of this particular earth-water dialectic ultimately seemed to be mud, a formless and indeterminate substance if ever

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[104] I invoke Bini Adamczak's term "circlusion" in Chapter 2. Adamczak understands the term as the antonym of penetration, thus imputing the agency ordinarily reserved for the act of genital penetration to that of genital envelopment and absorption. As I had suggested, the term is fitting in Smithson's case since his work is clearly erotic but not necessarily phallocentric—at least, this is a possibility I want to hold open. Bini Adamczak, "On 'Circlusion,'" *Mask Magazine*, July 18, 2016, http://www.maskmagazine.com/the-mommy-issue/sex/circlusion.

there was one. "My equation is as clear as mud," Smithson admitted, "a muddy spiral."[105]

And, to that end, we cannot forget the artist's entropic *coup de grâce*, "completing" the

work by violently "ripping" it using a tractor mounted with huge steel claws and restoring

a roughness to its surface (fig. 3.34).

Ripping the jetty, cracking the beam—it was the tractor that initiated these

entropic processes. For Smithson tractors were therefore not only the builders of new

monuments but active destroyers of old ones. "With such equipment construction takes

on the look of destruction," the artist wrote in 1968. "[P]erhaps that's why certain

architects hate bulldozers and steam shovels. They seem to turn the terrain into

unfinished cities of organized wreckage."[106] It is fitting, too, that the artist not only

associated such machines with destruction but also throughout his writings

metaphorically linked them with extinct and obsolete creatures. In "A Tour of the

Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," for instance, the artist observed of one wasted

construction site that, "Since it was Saturday, many machines were not working, and this

caused them to resemble prehistoric creatures trapped in the mud, or, better, extinct

machines—mechanical dinosaurs stripped of their skin."[107] As we have already seen, he

likewise imagined "grim tractors that have the clumsiness of armored dinosaurs" and the

zoomorphized "dipper of the giant mining power shovel" whose ghastly, metallic maw

that could swallow "140 cu. yds. (250 tons) in one bite," imagery that positions heavy

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[105] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 150.The muddy consequences of Smithson's film were first brought to my attention in Baker, "The Cinema Model." If Baker sees mud as the end product of Smithson's renewal of the dada diagram, I am proposing that it lie at the terminus of his tractor-like montage.

[106] Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," 101.

[107] Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," 71.

machinery less as our comradely saviors than as our merciless destroyers.[108] In the *Spiral Jetty* film Smithson makes this point by cutting between the earthmoving equipment and dinosaurian creatures, thus associating the technology of industry with extinction, mass die-out, and predation in a brief montage sequence that is classically Eisensteinian. However, nowhere is the tractor's ignoble lowering more succinctly illustrated than the 1972 photocollage *King Kong Meets the Gem of Egypt*, where we are meant to see the correspondence between King Kong's robotic imposter, Mechani-Kong, amidst a destroyed metropolis and the even bigger power shovel surrounded by a wasted landscape of its own making (fig. 3.35). Such is the valence that the tractor accumulates in Smithson's *oeuvre*: not only the avatar of utopian transformation that it clearly was in *Old and New*, it also had to be a harbinger of annihilation, mercilessly ploughing the earth into nondifferentiation.

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On April 30, 1970, little more than three months after the execution of *Partially Buried Woodshed*, President Nixon announced the U.S. invasion of Cambodia. The United States had been mired in Vietnam publicly for six years, privately for much longer than that, but it was only after the Tet Offensive of January 1968, which made clear to the American public that things were not going as well as perhaps they had thought, that public opinion about America's presence in Southeast Asia began to shift.[109] In 1968 and

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[108] Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," 101.

[109] War historian Larry Addington described 1968 as the war's "turning point" due in particular to the siege of Khe Sanh and the Tet Offensive, which "would destroy any lingering confidence the American public might have had that President Johnson had acceptable solutions to the

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in the immediate wake of the Tet Offensive, there was Eddie Adams's iconic photograph

of a South Vietnamese Brigadier General brutally executing a suspected Viet Cong

fighter in the streets of Saigon; there was Walter Cronkite's discouraging assessment on

February 27 that the war had reached a "stalemate"; there were the record number of

protests on college campuses in the winter and spring; there was Lyndon Johnson's

March 31 announcement that he would not seek reelection. After Richard Nixon's

inauguration in 1969, U.S. troop levels in Vietnam reached their highest; in June, *Life*

published the photographs of one week's causalities; anti-war protests and actions, which

had begun as early as 1964, reached a fever pitch on October 15 with the Moratorium to

End the War in Vietnam, in which millions participated in cities across the country,

prompting Nixon to appeal to the "silent majority" for support; and in November, the

American public learned for the first time of the My Lai massacre from the previous year

and its subsequent cover-up. Like a rapidly accelerated montage sequence, this brief

inventory of discontinuous events bears witness to a deteriorating political situation in

this country. When in April 1970 Nixon announced the expansion of the U.S. war in

Vietnam with a ground invasion of Cambodia, therefore, he signaled only further

escalation of a situation that was growing increasingly unpopular.[110]

What transpired next on the campus of Ohio's Kent State University was the very

stuff of revolution, the sort of event that catalyzes radical consciousness. After several

days of protests on and around the campus in response to Nixon's expansion of the war,

conflict in Vietnam." For more on these signal events, see Larry H. Addington, *America's War in Vietnam: A Short Narrative History* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000), 113–119.

[110] For a brief synopsis of the Vietnam War, including these years, see Addington, *America's War in Vietnam*. For a history of the anti-war movement during these years, see Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 217–274.

the Ohio Army National Guard was called in, and on Monday, May 4, an unsanctioned demonstration ended with four deaths and nine injuries after some of the seventy-seven guardsmen fired upon student protestors. It was the caliber of state-sponsored tragedy that occurred throughout Eisenstein's films, the kind of fulcrum point that triggered revolutionary activity: *Strike*'s famous denouement, where the military ruthlessly mows down fleeing strikers; *October*'s depiction of the July Days of 1917, when Provisional Government troops fire upon Bolsheviks demonstrating along Nevsky Prospect, which precipitated the famous Lifting of the Bridge; *Potemkin*'s celebrated Odessa Steps sequence, when a Cossack regiment obliterates citizens of Odessa standing in solidarity with the film's eponymous and mutinous battleship in what seems to be, thanks to the time-dilating effects of montage, eternal slaughter. But after Kent the revolution never came.

Yet for a time it seemed as if it might. The event did give rise to revolutionary aspirations, which enveloped Smithson's recently completed *Woodshed*. In the wake of the shootings at Kent State, someone painted "MAY 4 KENT 70" on the artist's decrepit structure, as if claiming the entropic work as a kind of monument, or perhaps counter-monument, to the massacre (fig. 3.36). The graffiti seemed to recognize that Smithson's gesture of destroying a building bore a dark but unknown affinity with the apocalyptic atmosphere of the late 1960s, with its assassinations, its violence, and its protests, to say nothing of the carnage that took place in the *Woodshed*'s very proximity. *Artforum* editor Philip Leider called *Partially Buried Woodshed* the most political artwork since Picasso's *Guernica*.[111] Nancy Holt saw the work as "intrinsically political." Even Smithson felt it

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[111] Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 191.

was prophetic.[112] "Obviously, the students, or whoever did that graffiti […] recognized the parallel," Holt elaborated, encapsulating the strange link between *Woodshed* and the massacre. "Piling the earth until the center beam cracked, as though the whole government, the whole country were cracking. Really, we had a revolution then. It was the end of one society and the beginning of the next."[113]

Holt's sentiment has become something of a trope in discussions about *Woodshed*: the cracking of the structure's beam, so critical to Smithson, not only seemed to demarcate the woodshed's passage from disused outbuilding to entropic artwork but also anticipated a larger societal upheaval. In the same way that the cracking of the beam catalyzed the process of entropy, so the logic went, the metaphorical "cracking" signified by the events of May 4 similarly catalyzed sociopolitical transformation.[114] As it had in Eisenstein's film's, violence might give way dialectically to revolutionary

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[112] As quoted in Hobbs, 191.

[113] As quoted in Shinn, *Robert Smithson's Partially Buried Woodshed*, 5.

[114] While the linkage between Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* and the shootings at Kent State are widely acknowledged, most commentators are content to point to this metaphorical parallel between the cracking of the structure's center beam and the figurative "cracking" of a country increasingly wrought with violence and opposition. See, for example, Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*. See also Ron Horning, "In Time: Earthworks, Photodocuments, and Robert Smithson's Buried Shed," *Aperture*, no. 106 (1987): 74–77. In her exhaustive chronological account of the work, Dorothy Shinn similarly relies on the trope linking the cracking of the beam and the country: Shinn, *Robert Smithson's Partially Buried Woodshed*. One notable exception is John Fitzgerald O'Hara's more recent discussion of *Woodshed* as an anti-monument. Rather than taking for granted the affinity between the woodshed's cracked beam and the country's fracturing politics, O'Hara views the artwork as uncannily capturing Kent State's own complicated relationship to the memorialization of May 4, particularly given the fact that *Woodshed* is not officially recognized by the University as a memorial to the event at all. Invoking James Young's notion of the *Gegen-Denkmal*, O'Hara frames the work's non-recognition as securing its status of an anti- or counter-monument. "Unlike traditional monuments, which aim to prevent forgetting and to imbue events with a certain kind of historical immutability," he writes, "*Partially Buried Woodshed* was constructed to accomplish, as it were, its own nullification; the work's goal was ultimately to leave a space where a monument once stood, to signify absence not presence, transformation not fixity, forgetting not remembering." As such, the work "offer[ed] a prescient vision of forgetting implicit in ensuing institutional mediations of the sites and signs of May 4." O'Hara, "Kent State/May 4 and Postwar Memory."

transformation. It was as if, in burying a building, Smithson had not only bulldozed modernism but also an old social order from which something new might be built; it was as if the artist no longer aspired towards a radicalism but actualized it, operationalized it; it was as if *Partially Buried Woodshed* might augur or even provoke a larger political shift.

In fact the "crack" that occurred at Kent State did seem to have a catalyzing effect, at least for the editor of *Artforum*. Clearly distraught by the events culminating in May 4, Philip Leider entered acute crisis about contemporary art's relationship to politics, its efficacy, its utility. Little more than a month after Kent, he circulated a letter to a variety of prominent artists, Smithson included, inviting them to participate in a symposium devoted to what he judged to be the increasingly urgent question of art and politics. Given the "deepening political crisis in America," Leider asked artists to reflect upon their work's "relations to direct political actions":

> Many [artists] feel that the political implications of their work constitute the most profound political action they can take. Others, not denying this, continue to feel the need for an immediate, direct political commitment. Still others feel that their work is devoid of political meaning and that their political lives are unrelated to their art. What is your position regarding the kinds of political action that should be taken by artists?[115]

Compiled and published in the September 1970 issue under the title "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," the results largely encompassed the spectrum of possibility sketched out by Leider—direct engagement on one end, autonomy on the other. In her response, for instance, Jo Baer wrote that "the time for political action by artists is now

[115] Robert Smithson's boilerplate letter from Philip Leider inviting him to participate in this "symposium" is dated June 15, 1970. See Philip Leider to Robert Smithson, "Letter from Philip Leider to Robert Smithson Soliciting a Response for His 'Artist and Politics' Symposium," June 15, 1970, Box 1 Folder 24, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, American Archives of Art. Leider reiterated this language in his brief introduction to the published responses of his questionnaire: "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum* 9, no. 1 (September 1970): 35.

and I believe action should be taken in the art world and in the world at large." Irving

Petlin, in a similar vein, favored boycotts and strikes of sources of patronage that bore

ties to his shameful government and institutions of power. Whereas someone like Walter

Darby Bannard, at the other end of the spectrum, argued that "political activity and art-

making have never mixed to art's advantage, and my guess is that most artists are better

off out of politics." Donald Judd fell into the latter camp, too, advocating for active

citizenship but not political art: "An activity"—he meant art-making—"shouldn't be used

for a foreign purpose."[116]

Even as this debate left art's specific role in politics unresolved, the responses

took for granted a hopeful aspiration to progressive transformation, took for granted that,

with art or without it, the "deepening political crisis in America" indeed could and should

be transcended. But Smithson's contribution declined to partake of such idealism.

Refusing the spectrum of options laid out by Leider and reiterated by the symposium's

other participants, it stood apart for its peculiar manifestation of cynicism, doubling down

on the entropic logic that had motivated *Woodshed*, to articulate more fully the anti-

idealist and anti-humanist attitude embedded in such work. Politics, he suggested, was

not in fact some definite and bounded thing with which an artist (or her art) ought or

ought not to engage. Instead, the "politics" of Smithson's response emerged as an

amorphous, labyrinthine, and inescapable "system that now controls the world on every

level," a centrifugal, swirling morass that "throws the blood of atrocities onto those

working for peace" ensuring that none of us could claim innocence or righteousness.

Elaborating upon the nature of this impasse, he wrote that

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[116] "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 35–37.

> Conscience-stricken, the artist wants to stop the massive hurricane of carnage, to separate the liberating revolution from the repressive war machine. Of course, he sides with the revolution, then he discovers that real revolution means violence too.[117]

Thus the very idea of "direct political action"—an impossible "matter of trying to pick poison out of a boiling stew" in Smithson's telling—looked increasingly naïve, contradictory, and repressive, as if fighting for ideals necessarily entailed denying the ways in which the very act of fighting contradicted those ideals. To that end, Smithson's text offered an implicit riposte to the statements preceding it: Judd's participation in marches and local political groups, Petlin's boycotts, Carl Andre's declaration that "Silence is assent"—the hopeful aspiration animating such sentiments looked increasingly self-important and almost comically quixotic in the face of the sheer magnitude and rhizomatic complexity of the political system as imagined by Smithson.

Smithson did not directly invoke the events of May 4 in his response. He didn't have to. Even without the photograph of *Partially Buried Woodshed* published alongside his contribution, the Kent State massacre only too readily volunteered itself as precisely that scenario in which politics "throws the blood of atrocities onto those working for peace" (fig. 3.37). Somewhat less obliquely, Smithson also invoked "student and police riots," which he likened to accidental "ceremonial sacrifices." "Politics thrives on cruel sacrifices," Smithson asserted. "Perhaps, at the bottom, artists like anybody else yearn for that unbearable situation that politics leads to: the threat of pain, the horror of annihilation, that would end in calm and peace."[118] We scarcely need Smithson's subsequent invocation of Bataille in order to sense the artist's internalization of the

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[117] "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 39.

[118] "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 39.

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Bataillean erotic, as if such gruesome and violent affairs as those comprising the "deepening political crisis" that Leider described only expressed our secret and ineluctable pull toward violent self-annihilation, our aspiration not for utopia but for a primordial state of continuity that both precedes and succeeds existence. If *Partially Buried Woodshed* was to be a harbinger of the Kent State shooting, perhaps it was only to the degree that its surrender to entropic oblivion offered an avatar for erotic desire—an architectural sacrifice, perhaps, eerily anticipating a horrific event that the artist could only see as an unwitting and secularized form of sacrificial mutilation.

It is telling that Smithson's assertion of the sacrificial character of student and police riots at Kent coincided with a brief discussion of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the 1954 novel in which humankind's basest, most terrible, most self-destructive instincts emerge as inevitable, easily overpowering idealistic civility, rationality, and hopefulness. Like the rapidly deteriorating and genuinely frightening situation in *Lord of the Flies*, the political circumstances as described by Smithson did not seem to be advancing and progressing towards some revolutionary pinnacle of perfection, human achievement, and peace. And if the cracking beam of his *Woodshed* augured a larger revolutionary crack, as Holt thought it did, perhaps it was not the kind that had a utopian conclusion. Revolution also means a turning back, after all; and like *Partially Buried Woodshed*, the post-Kent political situation Smithson described seemed oriented ultimately towards entropic collapse and cataclysmic annihilation.

It was during this time—in the months after the Kent State shooting, in the months that Smithson had in hand Leider's "Artist and Politics" questionnaire, in the months that the entire country seemed on the verge of revolution or else collapse—that

Smithson along with Bob Fiore and Barbara Jarvis was editing his *Spiral Jetty* film. When Eisenstein was in the cutting room, he had looked like an engine mechanic; he was a man at work, shirtsleeves rolled up, engaged in an act of assembly whose product, like the tractor to which it aspired, would cultivate not fields but minds, would help in the utopian project of building socialism. This was what cinema's radical aspiration looked like, the radical aspiration personified. But when Smithson reflected upon his film's assembly during the summer months of 1970, his memory of montage turned out to have a very different valence. "Everything about movies and moviemaking is archaic and crude," he recollected. "Fiore pulled lengths of film out of the movieola with the grace of a Neanderthal pulling intestines from a slaughtered mammoth."[119] If filmmaking was to be tractor-like, it was only to the extent that the path ploughed by Smithson's tractors did not progress forward so much as regress backward. Earthmoving tools morphed into extinct reptiles, construction sites into wrecked wastelands, and montage assembly into bloody evisceration—all in the course of a dialectic whose ultimate destination, Smithson knew, was not futuristic utopia but primordial oblivion.

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As had Nabokov, Lenin too understood the dialectic to take the shape of a spiral. A "doctrine of development" applicable to the accumulation of knowledge and the progress of history, Lenin wrote, the dialectic stipulated

> a development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis ("the negation of the negation"), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; "breaks in continuity"

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[119] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 150.

[…][120]

Like Nabokov's telling, there would be no circular repetition, only progress, even

evolution, as each discontinuous curve of the spiral advanced higher upwards. To that

end Lenin gave a shape to the dialectical stages of historical development conceived by

Marx—history, that is, as an ongoing process of class struggle. For the dialectical march

of history, Marx thought, moved through definite stages toward the dual emergence of

the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in a prefiguration of what was only the newest

iteration of class struggle. Where the spiral would twist from here seemed to him to be all

but foreordained: "[T]he modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of

development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange," he

and Engels's wrote in "The Communist Manifesto." In turn "what the bourgeoisie […]

produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are

equally inevitable."[121]

    If such a history were given physical form, if it were given a monument, perhaps

it would have looked something like Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*

(1919–20), which assumed the triumphant form of an upright spiral (fig. 3.38). As an

image of dynamic, dialectical transformation, the sculpture lends itself to a model for

world history that would not only travel forward but also would develop upwards, higher,

higher, higher, towards a pinnacle, an inevitable apex that was the socialist utopia.

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[120] "Lenin's Karl Marx: II: The Marxist Doctrine," accessed March 21, 2018, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/granat/ch02.htm. Similarly, Lenin elaborated elsewhere, "Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral." "On the Question of Dialectics," accessed March 21, 2018, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/misc/x02.htm.

[121] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 475, 483.

Quoting Goethe, Eisenstein once wrote that "Architecture is frozen music," but such would not be the case for Tatlin's tower, which longed to actualize the dialectic's dynamicism in three glazed cores that revolved to the beat of the cosmos.[122] It was as if the utopian socialist future were grounded not only in the course of history and class struggle but also in the very movement of our planet around the sun. Of course, the tower's kineticism was a token kineticism in that sense, too, for the spiral's dynamicism was ultimately rigidified and permanently fixed in the monument's helical armature. The dialectic meant dynamicism, yes, but the ultimate destination of that dialectic was not exactly up for debate.

Not long after Tatlin gave the world his spiraling monument to the revolution, Marcel Duchamp, in a very different place and in the context of a very different aesthetic discourse, also found himself thinking about spirals. First explored in 1923 (*Disks Bearing Spirals*), the forms that would later be branded as his *Rotoreliefs* (1935) and sold in editions made their cinematic debut in *Anémic cinéma* (1925–26) in all their whirling glory (fig. 3.39). These were a far cry indeed from Tatlin's tower, standing heroic and erect. In fact, they were not erect at all—or, at least, not always. For once Duchamp's spirals were set into motion, they began not only to illusionistically protrude but also to recede.[123] For Rosalind Krauss, the throbbing and pulsing illusionism of Duchamp's

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[122] Completing one revolution per year, the cube at the bottom of Tatlin's Tower would be for "legislative purposes"; revolving once per month was a pyramidal space above for housing administration; and at the structure's apex, a cylinder containing a bureau of information would make one revolution per day. See Nikolai Punin's contemporaneous description of the tower in Larissa A. Zhadova, ed., *Tatlin* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 344–7. For Eisenstein's Goethe quote, see: Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," 48.

[123] While Duchamp's edition of 500 printed *Rotoreliefs* date to 1935, he had been exploring an interest in the volumetric illusions produced by otherwise two-dimensional forms for almost two decades in the form largely of stereoscopy and spirals. Key works belonging to this particular theme include: *Handmade Stereopticon Slide* (1918–19), *Rotary Glass Plates* (1920),

various *Rotorelief* patterns like *Chinese Lantern* and *Corolla* belonged to the artist's

proto-Bataillean project of situating vision in not only a body but a body given over to

libidinous desire:

> [T]heir turning produced an unstable kind of volume, appearing at certain
> moments to project forward but at others to recede, setting up the feeling of a
> thrusting motion. And further, the seemingly nonobjective pattern they bore, their
> quality of being a sort of decorative machine part—abstracted from gears or
> flywheels—was constantly dissolving into the experience of animate objects, or
> more precisely, part-objects. For the "Chinese Lantern" suggests a breast with
> slightly trembling nipple; the "Corolla" an eye staring outward. And both, in their
> reverse condition as concave rather than convex, produce a fairly explicit sexual
> reading.[124]

Revolving as they do in *Anémic cinéma*, the *Rotoreliefs* thus coax from a purely optical

realm a repressed corporeality; they "throb" with "erotic suggestiveness" in

illusionistically bulging towards us and recessing away; they contest Greenbergian

modernism long before its emergence and rigidification into dogma insofar as they re-

ground the ethereal realm of vision in the libidinal.[125] But a destination? These spirals did

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Stereoscopic Photographs of the 'Rotary Glass Plates' (1920), *Disks Bearing Spirals* (1923), *Rotary Demisphere* (1925), and *Anémic cinéma* (1925–26). In addition, the *Rotoreliefs* were published as the covers for various magazines, including *The Little Review* (Spring 1925). Arturo Schwarz's catalogue raisonné is an indispensable resource in inventorying the various iterations of Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs* project and the artist's related concerns: Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 3rd rev. and expanded ed., 2 vols. (New York: Delano Greenridge Editions, 1997). These projects, moreover, belong to a broader interest on the artist's part in the collapse and expansion of dimensionality, which is to say the passage back and forth between two-, three-, and even four-dimensions. The subject of dimensionality as it relates to Duchamp's concerns with illusionism is explored in detail in Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[124] Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 96.

[125] Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 135. Krauss's eroticized reading of Duchamp is explored most fully in *The Optical Unconscious* and is reprised in *Formless: A User's Guide*. This discussion belongs to a larger project of producing a counter-narrative to Greenbergian modernism and, particularly in its dogmatic extension by Michael Fried, the quasi-religious connotations of its commitments to the ethereal realm of opticality as well as to autonomy and the transcendence of profane space and time. Throughout his oeuvre, Duchamp conflates "viewer" and "voyeur" such that we are

not seem to be moving definitively anywhere.

Like Duchamp, Smithson, too, set his spiral into motion. Following the claustrophobic close-ups and cacophonous construction that largely characterized the middle portion of the *Spiral Jetty* film, we finally get a glimpse of the freshly-ripped *Jetty* in its totality in the film's final third, finally get a sense of what was accomplished (fig. 3.12). Shot from a helicopter, this last portion of the film begins by tracking the spiral's counterclockwise path, following its curved route as the vehicle gradually ascends into the air and then, reversing its spin, descends back into the earthwork's center. The *Jetty* is not exactly bulging and throbbing with the explicit illusionism of Duchamp's film, but as it grows and shrinks in size it nevertheless gestures towards an analogous condition of ambiguity and disorientation.

As the grunting of the ripper gives way to the helicopter's whirring drone, for example, the first spiraling ascent and descent is accompanied by Smithson's voice describing the view as he makes his way in a circle around twenty points of the compass. "From the center of the *Spiral Jetty*," the artist's speaks,

> North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks water
> North by Easy—Mud, salts crystals, rocks water
> Northeast by North—Mud, salts crystals, rocks water
> Northeast by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks water[126]

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constantly reminded that vision is situated not only in a body but one given over to carnal desire. Annette Michelson made similar observations of *Anémic cinéma*, noting not only "its illusionist power" but also the "aggressively sexual intimation of thrust and recession generated by the images [which] is confirmed by the obscene humor and partial obscurity of these punning intertitles." Annette Michelson, "'Anemic Cinema': Reflections on an Emblematic Work," *Artforum* XIII, no. 2 (October 1973): 65. To that end, Krauss's and Michelson's Duchamp is at odds with "cerebral" readings of the artist. Henderson's inquiry into Duchamp's intersections with historical developments in mathematics and science is a prime example of this latter approach. See note 123 above.

[126] While I am quoting here from Smithson's film, the artist reiterated this part of the voiceover in his "Spiral Jetty" essay, whose punctuation I adopt here. Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 149.

And so on, until we end up, sixteen points later and by way of the terminally identical vantage at "North by West," back where we started. Ordinarily used as a tool for orienteering and way finding, the compass here seems much closer to the *Spiral Jetty* with which it has become associated, unable to provide a bearing when each direction is identical to the last. In that sense, this sequence recalls, too, Smithson's 1968 excursion to Coyle Field in Burlington Country, NJ, where he gathered sand for his first nonsite. As I briefly discussed in Chapter 2, a series of six photographs apparently made during this trip suggest that at one point Smithson stood at the center of these three intersecting landing strips and proceeded to slowly revolve, photographing each of the six dirt spokes extending outward one by one, the result being a panorama of nondescript sameness. Likewise the *Spiral Jetty* film here sends us into a spin around the points of compass in which every direction is the same as the last and the next, and the ensuing disorientation is redoubled in the helicopter's own spiraling motion.

Soon thereafter Smithson erratically and pointlessly runs the *Jetty*'s length to its center with the helicopter in mock pursuit, underscoring this motif of confused enclosure (fig. 3.40). The *Jetty* offers a path to nowhere, a path to a dead end, and Smithson's paranoid and fitful escape only emphasizes that path's sense of labyrinthine entrapment. As the helicopter ascends once more, abandoning the artist to the *Jetty*'s dumb cul-de-sac of a center, it permits us further aerial views of the work in its entirety, setting the *Jetty* into spins and inviting a dizzying chain of associations that recalls the chain of part objects Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs* had suggested to Krauss—recessing vortexes like whirlpools and cyclones as well as protruding ziggurats, claustrophobic contractions and vertiginous expansions, all of which and more belonged to the spiral's rich polysemy for

Smithson.[127] Closer to water level, the helicopter maneuvers the sun's reflection through the water while tilting the two-dimensional spiral into depth conjuring the centrifugal expansion of spiral-shaped galaxies like our own. Reciting from John Taine's science-fiction story "The Time Stream," Smithson's voice confirms this galactic sensibility, describing what we see before us as a "gigantic sun" which is in fact "not a single star, but millions upon millions of them, […] a vast spiral nebula of innumerable suns." Once again, our senses deceive us, as a proximate star turns out to be a vast assemblage of distant galaxies. "Large scale becomes small. Small scale becomes large," Smithson had written of the disorientating interplay staged by nonsite and site, containment and dispersal, presence and absence. "A point on a map expands to the size of the land mass. A landmass contracts into a point."[128] Unlike Tatlin's pyramidal and upright spiral, then, and unlike the forward-moving spiral extrapolated from Nabokov's account of the dialectic, Smithson's spiral remained flat and ambiguous, as if possessing the kinetic potential, like Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs*, to move in a variety of ways: not only up, like Tatlin's tower, but down, like a whirlpool; not only forward, like the coiling advance of history, but backward, like a time warp; not only expanding like the Fibonacci sequence but contracting like the walls of a claustrophobic maze.

It was perhaps because of the two-dimensional spiral's disorienting ambiguity that the shape was, in the end, an emblem of madness itself. Smithson's notebooks, for

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[127] Smithson's notebooks offer important insight into the breadth of the spiral's polysemy for the artist. As if corresponding to the twenty points of compass in the film, one notebook seemingly devoted to the *Spiral Jetty* project includes excerpts from twenty diverse sources linking the shape to the architecture of ancient Peru, hurricanes, crystal growth, labyrinths, paranoia, nebulae, and more. Many, but not all, of these allusions find some expression in the film. See Smithson, "Notebook V."

[128] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 153 n. 1.

example, reference Gustave Flaubert's unrealized novel, *La Spirale*, which "was to describe a state of permanent somnambulism of a hallucinated madman," as well as Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable*, whose protagonist becomes "embroiled in a kind of invented spiral, […] which, instead of widening more and more, grew narrower and narrower."[129] Ultimately, however, the film seems desirous of inflicting this condition of disorienting madness upon its audience. As the helicopter persists in its strafing and spinning over the *Jetty*, its dive-bombing and encircling, the pilot continues to maneuver the sun's reflection through the luminous water between the *Jetty*'s dark, earthen arms. At length the sun's reflection makes its way to the *Jetty*'s center, repeatedly obliterating the image in blinding white light like so many tiny solar explosions. Quoting from a recent *Rolling Stone* article on Charles Manson, who was on trial during the summer of 1970 for the series of murders he incited the summer before, the artist's voice carries us from spiral to sun to homicidal madness: "He leads us to the steps of the jail's main entrance, pivots, and again locks his gaze into the sun," the article explained of one of Manson's accomplices, Clem. "'Spirals,' he whispers. 'Spirals coming away. Circles curling out of the sun.'"[130] Fittingly, Smithson's invocation of sun-induced madness is followed by a medical definition of sunstroke, as if the film aspired to subject its viewer to that obliterating malady. "In more severe cases, there may be intense headache, aversion to light, vomiting, and delirium," Smithson calmly diagnoses our plight. "Recovery may be slow in severe cases, and for a long period subsequently there may be loss of memory." Bataille once wrote that "the sun is the most dazzling form of the

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[129] Smithson's notebooks attribute the quotation about Flaubert's *La Spirale* to Victor Brombert's *The Novels of Flaubert*. Smithson, "Notebook V."

[130] For the full article from which Smithson quotes, see David Dalton and David Felton, "Charles Manson: The Incredible Story of the Most Dangerous Man Alive," *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 1970.

ideal," before quickly disclaiming that "even the ideal carries within itself something of the deformities of which it is the exasperated antithesis": not only did the sun occupy the pinnacle of the sky as that elevated source of light and illumination and clarity; it was also blinding, withering, violently corrosive, driving us into fugue states and bouts of self-mutilation.[131] During *Spiral Jetty*'s final moments we, too, seem to be on the verge of losing the earthwork altogether as the sun impinges upon the fidelity of the filmic image, threatening to induce a maddening cinematic amnesia—the loss of clarity, the loss of vision, the loss of knowledge, the loss of the image. Like Smithson, staggering down this earthen pathway to end up at a "center" recoded as utter dead end, we, too, at the very moment of witnessing the completed *Jetty*, have reached an impasse whose result bears the unmistakable physiological hallmarks of erotic transgression.

If mannerism had in the early and mid-1960s provided Smithson a model for repellant subject matter and compositional heterogeneity that sent our gaze in a nausea-inducing spiral throughout the image (the "labyrinthine escarpments" of Michelangelo's tombs, for instance, where "Panels follow panels into an inconceivable infinity of relationships"); and if his dispersed nonsites and Mirror Displacements of 1968–69 hypothetically proposed the dizzying back-and-forth of actual travel rather than optical travel (the nonsite is a "map that will take you somewhere," he had written, "but when

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[131] These citations are borrowed from Georges Bataille, "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, vol. 14, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 66. Images of the sun in its "double tendency" recur throughout Bataille's writings, including Georges Bataille, "Rotten Sun [1930]," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, vol. 14, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 57–58. In the latter essay, Bataille explains that the sun is "the most *elevated* conception," yet if "one obstinately focuses on it, a certain madness is implied, and the notion changes meaning because it is no longer production that appears in light, but refuse or combustion, adequately expressed by the horror emanating from a brilliant arc lamp."

you get there you won't really know where you are"); here, in its capacity to make palpable duration and succession, cinema seemed to offer Smithson a new instrument of reimagining the artwork as a disorienting path, as a "road that goes forward and backward between things and places that are elsewhere."[132] In ploughing a cognitive path that we are obliged to follow, in other words, cinema promised to actualize the latent sense of convoluted travel that was the optical consequence of mannerism's pictorial heterogeneity and the hypothetical consequence of the nonsites' textual dispersal. And if that cinematic path had a destination, Smithson described it with an image of solar oblivion before leading us, over the interval of one final elliptical cut, back to the film's primordial condition of non-existence at the editing room where it was built.

* * *

Around the same time that Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* made its filmic debut in the autumn of 1970, Annette Michelson was working on a special issue of *Artforum*. Published in September 1971 and devoted entirely to film, the issue was ostensibly devised to introduce *Artforum*'s readership to a body of aesthetic activity that, for Michelson, remained stubbornly invisible within mainstream art discourse. As the critic put it in her foreword, she hoped "to evoke […] the urgency of recognition for an achievement whose importance will eventually be seen as comparable to that of American painting in the 1950s and onwards."[133] To that end, the issue included a range

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[132] For Smithson's Michelangelo quote, see Robert Smithson, "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture [1966–67]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 346–7.

[133] Annette Michelson, Peter Gidal, and Jonas Mekas, "Foreword in Three Letters," *Artforum* 10, no. 1 (September 1971): 9.

of essays devoted to the promotion of an experimental and radically independent

filmmaking tradition that had fluoresced in this country, particularly during recent years,

and whose key representatives included Hollis Frampton, Joyce Wieland, Paul Sharits,

Ken Jacobs, Michael Snow, and George Landow.

But the special film issue of *Artforum* was to be more significant even than that,

for in addition to promoting this independent filmmaking tradition it also provided

Michelson an important opportunity to argue for the renewal of what she had, in 1966,

diagnosed as film's radical aspiration. It is true that the coarticulation of radical politics

and radical form that Michelson associated with Soviet cinema had begun to fade by the

early 1930s. The emergence of synchronized sound at the end of the 1920s as well as the

more general industrialization of filmmaking meant that cinema increasingly operated

according to an uncritical and retrograde naturalism. In the Soviet Union, meanwhile, the

revolutionary energy that had animated radical aesthetic and political innovation both had

begun to rigidify into Stalin's contradictory "revolution from above." "Film and the

Radical Aspiration" is therefore marked by an unmistakable tone of mourning for the

premature demise of what could have been. And yet Michelson nevertheless felt she was

witnessing a resurgence and transformation of this aspiration in her own time and in her

own cultural context, evident in the proliferation of a rigorously independent filmmaking

tradition that eschewed the industrial model, that abandoned cinematic naturalism and

absorptive narrative, that sublimated revolutionary energy into formal invention that

challenged industrial cinema's more entrenched ideological habits. These were practices,

in short, that renewed the cognitive and self-reflexive thrust that had been central to

Soviet cinema. Implicitly surveying the current manifestations of this radical aspiration,

therefore, Michelson's *Artforum* issue amounted to nothing less than a secret manifesto proclaiming the deeply political lineage of this work. It is fitting, then, that the special film issue was published under the imprimatur of Vertov's all-seeing Kino-Eye, which hovered watchfully just about the masthead (fig. 3.41). For Kino-Eye meant a critical sense of sight with which cinema was endowed, it meant cinema's ability to defamiliarize the world, to lay it bare such that it would cultivate the curious and conscious spectator commensurate with the socialist future. Given Vertov's resolute commitment to a self-reflexive, cognitive, and above all operative cinema, the icon of his Kino-Eye was, for Michelson, a blazon for the radical aspiration.

As a film that indulged in a strange geological articulation of cinematic temporality, that associated the spiraling *Jetty* that was its ostensible subject with the spiraling reels of film, that seemed to plough itself messily forward through discontinuous strata of time to arrive at Rozel Point—Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* must have made an impression on Michelson, must have seemed to partake of the radical aspiration's renewal, if only because in March 1971 she invited him to contribute an essay for her special issue of *Artforum*.[134] She could not have wished for more. For the

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[134] Amidst the ranks of veteran filmmakers like Frampton, Sharits, Wieland, and Snow, Michelson's special film issue also included statements by Smithson and Richard Serra, artists who had themselves begun to move into film. "My emphasis was on those people who were giving their lives to making films, not to the artists who, at that time, were beginning to turn to film," Michelson explained. "But there were two other artists who seemed to me to be of fundamental importance, and whom I asked for texts for that issue." Her choices of Richard Serra and Smithson not only signaled their affiliation with cinema's radical aspiration but also asserted that this aspiration was, like so many of the advanced aesthetic practices of the time, medium- or at least discipline-agnostic. Serra, for his part, contributed brief synopses for two recent films— *Frame* (1969) and *Color Aid* (1971)—as well as a slightly lengthier typescript for another film project, *Paul Revere* (1971). His concern seemed to have been primarily descriptive: the verbal conveyance of three projects to a wider audience through the vehicle of *Artforum*. It was very different in that sense from Smithson's contribution, which, as we will see, was closer to a treatise on the nature and terms of cinematic illusionism. Annette Michelson, Richard Serra, and Clara Weyergraf, "The Films of Richard Serra: An Interview," *October* 10 (1979): 81,

essay she received by the July editorial deadline, the artist's most condensed and cogent

meditation on the medium of film to date, amounted to nothing less than a statement on

the nature and terms of cinematic illusionism, thus stepping directly into the central

polemic that defined Michelson's radical aspiration (fig. 3.42).

Entitled "A Cinematic Atopia" and illustrated with stills from his *Spiral Jetty*

film, Smithson's piece explored the dialectical tension between the illusory projected

image ("the sites in films are not to be located or trusted," he wrote[135]) and the here-and-

now of its material base, its apparatus, its site and conditions of reception. At the movie

theater, for example, "one forgets where one is sitting," he explained in a matter-of-fact

acknowledgement of cinema's essentially fallacious condition vis-à-vis reality:

> The outside world fades as the eyes probe the screen. Does it matter what film one
> is watching? Perhaps. One thing all films have in common is the power to take
> perception elsewhere.[136]

Indeed, he elaborated, "the longer we look through a camera or watch a projected image

the remoter the world becomes."[137] Over the course of the rest of the essay, however,

Smithson went on to present a range of invented scenarios where that quintessentially

cinematic, reality-defeating elsewhere begins to break down, unwind, unravel, begins to

lapse dialectically into its material conveyance. Like Vertov's and Eisenstein's films, in

other words, these limit scenarios operated a dialectic between cinematic illusion and its

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https://doi.org/10.2307/778630. For Michelson's March 1971 letter to Smithson soliciting his participating, see Annette Michelson to Robert Smithson, "[Letter from Annette Michelson to Robert Smithson Inviting Him to Participate in Her Special Film Issue]," March 29, 1971, Box 1 Folder 24, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, American Archives of Art.

[135] Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia [1971]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 141. For Smithson's original essay, see Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," *Artforum* 10, no. 1 (September 1971): 53–55.

[136] Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," 1996, 138.

[137] Smithson, 141.

disclosure, cultivating a posture of cognitive *contrapposto* that must have attracted Michelson, that must have reminded her of those moments, for instance, when *Man with the Movie Camera* grinds to a halt and discloses its materiality. Smithson designated this limit point, this in-between zone, "atopia"—a non-place, a borderland, a limbo-like interval separating the fraudulent and absorptive projected image from the fact of its very physical support.

Once outside the soporific grip of the movie theater, for instance, we intuit the cinematic elsewhere in which we have just been absorbed *as* elsewhere: in what Smithson suggested is the atopian space of memory, images from films we have seen blur together such that an avant-garde film ("a pure film of light") and a Hollywood genre movie ("a dim landscape of countless westerns") merge indeterminately amongst a "wilderness of elsewheres" that would seem to be distinct from the immediacy of the real.[138] Likewise Smithson nominated the "awkwardness of amateur snapshots" as emblematic of this atopia, a modality of photograph one can imagine similarly eliciting a mental *contrapposto*. The illusion is never quite pulled off in such photographs, after all, whose technical imperfections split our attention between the image's indexical conjuring of its referent and its simultaneous inscription of the conditions of its own making. Or there was Smithson's description of this "atopia" as "a landscape of rejected film clips," an image which evokes the dispersal of the cutting room floor, that space where cinema's fluidly transforming elsewheres unwind into mere strips of celluloid.[139] Like the magician, the montageur amidst that "landscape" occupies a privileged position of mastery with respect to her legerdemain, capable of interrupting the process of credulous

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[138] Smithson, 138.

[139] Smithson, 139.

absorption and reminding us that this non-naturalistic mode of discontinuous temporality belongs distinctly to cinema.

Even more emblematic of Smithson's "cinematic atopia" was his concept for a movie theater, a subterranean cinema whose sole program would be a film that documented the site's own excavation. "What I would like to do is build a cinema in a cave or an abandoned mine," he explained, "and film the process of its construction. That film would be the only film shown in the cave."[140] Combining the environmental terms of "expanded" sculpture (perhaps Krauss would have designated such an underground locale a "site-construction" along with Mary Miss's excavated spaces[141]) with the virtual portal provided by cinema, Smithson's proposal seemed to think montage beyond cinema, seemed to think it in an expanded sense as that which might occur between a film and its projection site. For insofar as the cinematic elsewhere and the here-and-now of its sculptural site of reception paradoxically convened in this speluncar realm, the hypothetical scenario exacerbated the disjunction between the two, such that the film's elsewhere, an excavation documentary, would necessarily throw us back upon the here-and-now of its site of projection and, conversely, the actuality of our subterranean locale would propel us back towards the illusory image telling of its creation. As we toggle back and forth between here and elsewhere; as we turn away from the present of our viewing situation to the past conveyed in the film and vice-versa; as our attention to the one is

[140] Smithson, 142.

[141] Mary Miss's *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* (1978) is one of the works Krauss includes in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" to illustrate a type of expanded sculptural practice she designated "site-construction" (both landscape and architecture). In re-invoking that work here, I have in mind here what Miss called the "underground courtyard," one of the dispersed work's many elements, which also includes "three tower-like structures" and "two semi-circular mounds." Mary Miss, "1977–1978: Perimeters, Pavilions, Decoys," accessed May 31, 2020, http://marymiss.com/projects/perimeterspavilionsdecoys/.

ruptured by the other, such a scenario would seem to encourage the cognitive movement

of inference belonging centrally to the radical aspiration and reserved above all for the

technique of montage.

It is evident that Smithson was thinking about this "atopian" collision of filmic

illusion and sculptural actuality in connection with *Spiral Jetty*, which was itself, of

course, legible as both sculpture, however "expanded," and film.[142] For one thing,

Smithson accompanied "A Cinematic Atopia" with a storyboard-like grid of out-of-order

stills from his film, which seemed to enact its *découpage* and occupy the atopian

condition he was at pains to describe: Like the film still theorized by Roland Barthes,

whose "third meaning" exerts a counter-narrative and repellent force, allowing us to

witness its otherwise hidden artifice,[143] the stills excerpted from *Spiral Jetty* evoke the

"rejected film clips" of an editing table, that locale where filmic illusion is stopped and

started. Smithson's grid evokes the storyboard, too—a textual format that, as I have

briefly discussed, invites the viewer to share in yet another version of the magician-

epistemologist dialectic. If Eisenstein's films desired that the viewer participate

vicariously in the driving of his tractor, even when the path it was to plough was foregone

and pre-orchestrated, this storyboard-like grid tentatively positions us as the montageur

faced with a film during its primordial stages. Indeed, here, in the incoherent and

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[142] In positioning "A Cinematic Atopia" in direct continuity with Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* project, I am once again following the model of George Baker, who argued that the essay "presents the literal continuation of the *Spiral Jetty* film" to the extent that it evidences the artist's radicalization of his engagement with the diagram. "As an extension of the diagram," Baker wrote, "the film produced an endless succession of linkages and analogies, vectors and continuities, which Smithson now attempts to map in 'A Cinematic Atopia.'" Baker, "The Cinema Model," 104.

[143] I discuss Barthes's theory of the film still in Chapter 1. See Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 53–68.

seemingly random sequence of images, is the scenario that must have also confronted Smithson when he first embarked on his film's assembly, faced with a "set of disconnections, a bramble of stabilized fragments taken from things obscure and fluid, ingredients trapped in a succession of frames, a stream of viscosities both still and moving." Gesturing to both storyboard and cutting-room floor, in other words, Smithson's grid holds in editorial abeyance the illusory elsewhere of each frame and its material here-and-now as we, in the vicarious place of montageur, are invited to construct the illusion, to experiment with the best route to guide the tractor forth.

In that sense, Smithson's film stills stage the quintessentially postmodern reader-to-writer shift. Undermining the monolithic authority of the film as work—a receptacle of fixed meaning, as I discussed at length in Chapter 2, implanted by the author and transmitted to the reader—the inventory of stills insists instead on its status as text—open, indeterminate, non-hierarchical, and put into play by a passive reader transformed into an active producer of meaning.[144] As do many strategies canonically associated with postmodernism, moreover, this one has a rich avant-garde pedigree not strictly filmic. One thinks, for instance, of Aleksandr Rodchenko's 1925 model for a workers' club, in particular its "Lenin Corner," a "portrait" of the recently deceased leader that was not monolithic and fixed in any conventional sense of the portrait but that took the form of an archive. It was, therefore, a profusion of unordered photographs and documents that, as

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[144] The *locus classicus* of this emancipatory "reader-to-writer" shift is Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author [1968]," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 142–48. See, too, Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author? [1969]," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984 (New York: New Press, 1998), 205–222. To the extent that he views Smithson's grid of stills as inhabiting a larger "diagrammatic" condition of open and indeterminate relationality, George Baker's discussion of Smithson's essay is consistent with this kind of attribution of textual postmodernism to the artist. Baker, "The Cinema Model."

Leah Dickerman wrote, encouraged "the individual [to] construct his or her own active interpretation."[145] The same would be true of Smithson's grid of stills. Mirroring the image of the editing apparatus that closes his film, these stills evidence a film both coming together and coming apart.[146]

This grid of stills was not the only evidence that Smithson was envisioning the "atopian" confrontation of filmic illusion and sculptural actuality in connection to his *Spiral Jetty* project. In August of 1971, presumably not long after submitting his manuscript of "A Cinematic Atopia" to Michelson, Smithson traveled back to Utah, as he did a number of times after *Jetty*'s completion. This time, however, he also began drafting various schemes for a subterranean movie theater to be placed in the earthwork's vicinity, quite obviously corresponding with the atopian cinema cavern he had only just invented (figs. 3.43–3.45). While there are some discrepancies amongst Smithson's sketches, they suggest that the viewer would ascend a short, squarish mound before descending into the underground cinematheque through a steel hatch. From the spiral staircase that would convey the viewer downwards to the salt-encrusted rocks surrounding her everywhere, the very passage required of this space closely corresponded to the form and material of the nearby *Jetty*. His notes make clear that the screen, moreover, would have been hewn into the "raw rock wall," a rectangle at odds with its

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[145] Leah Dickerman, "The Propagandizing of Things," in *Aleksandr Rodchenko*, ed. Magdalena Dabrowski, Leah Dickerman, and Peter Galassi (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 78.

[146] Baker has also suggested that Smithson's grid of stills performs the film's reordering—indeed, that it even invites the viewer to partake of that reordering and to inhabit vicariously the role of the montageur. According to the diagrammatic logic he persuasively attributes to Smithson's entire practice, Baker suggests that the grid extends the diagrammatic horizons of the film yet further: it embodies the "principle of perpetual reorganization," Baker writes, and thus results in something like the reader-to-writer shift I have described: "Rather than producing the effect of a lack of order, Smithson's 'freeing' of the film frame offers instead the proliferating field of orders that his 'Cinematic Atopia' essay describes." Baker, "The Cinema Model," 105.

irregular, earthen surrounds. Recalling his Cayuga Salt Mine Mirror Displacements from early 1969, whose rectilinear portals drew our vision through the impenetrable rock and to an illusory reflected space, the rectangle of the screen similarly conveyed vision "elsewhere," in this case to an earthwork in close enough proximity to be seen in person immediately before or after.

On one of his sketches Smithson described this subterranean screening room a "museum concerning Spiral Jetty near Golden State Monument," a fitting designation since such a site positioned the *Spiral Jetty* film as a historical, cultural, or even geological artifact. For the artist understood museums as anachronistic assemblages of various past temporalities indexed in the artifacts they inexplicably consolidate. "Most museums are just containers of fragments […] of the past," he explained in a comment that richly recalls the "incoherence" he attributed to Rozel Point and the "heterogeneous time capsules" that were archaeological sites. "You have this kind of residue, breaking off from a past situation."[147] Situating his "museum" underground, moreover, Smithson's gesture of entombment also analogizes the *Jetty*'s filmic pastness to the geological antiquity indexed across buried sedimentary strata. Which is to say that his subterranean environment reimagines the museological act of delving into the fragments of history as a physical descent into the earth's own stratified past in an echo of the first part of his film.

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[147] Smithson, "Interview with Paul Toner," 240. Similarly, Smithson described museums and parks as "graveyards above the ground—congealed memories of the past that act as a pretext for reality." Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement [1972]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 156. For an earlier example of Smithson's reckoning with museums as anachronistic, see Robert Smithson, "Some Void Thoughts on Museums [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 41–42.

In that sense our montage-like passage from surface to depth, from earthwork to its filmic artifact, would correspond with a kind of time travel from present to past.

Dispersing the film spatially amongst a grid like so many discarded film clips, entombing it in an underground environment: both of the *Spiral Jetty* film's atopian fates enacted critical aesthetic operations that had come to define sculpture's "expanded field." In addition to the process-oriented and horizontally distributed "scatter pieces" made in the late 1960s by artists such as Barry Le Va, Richard Serra, and Carl Andre, Smithson's nonsites had performed sculpture's dispersal and fragmentation such that the formerly monolithic and singular sculptural object became plural, multiple, expansive. By virtue of its dispersal, such work resisted any easy assimilation to vision as a static and centered image, demanding instead physical or else optical ambulation amidst an open and diffuse field that only anticipated Smithson's atopian "landscape of rejected film clips."[148] Likewise his subterranean cinematheque is also legible according to the idiom of "expanded" sculpture: entombed like so much sediment where it transforms into a geological artifact, Smithson's film would be encountered less as an ethereal projection than as a site, a place, indeed a time. If the "marked site" that was Smithson's earthwork at Rozel Point seemed to be "paracinematic," then—durational, dialectical, quite literally absorptive in the sense that we can physically enter it even while it shepherds us along a narrow and predefined path—these atopian scenarios enacted the inverse operation: subjecting the film to physical dispersal and siting, operations belonging to the domain of sculpture, Smithson's grid and museum alike seemed to undermine the path it had

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[148] Following Anton Ehrenzweig, this phenomenon has been described as a "dedifferentiating" of vision. For a canonical summary of this position as it relates to postminimalism, see Hal Foster et al., "1969," in *Art Since 1900* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 534–537.

ploughed and restore it to the "bramble" that was the indeterminate situation of sculpture in the expanded field.

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The atopian scenarios Smithson imagined for his film coincided with the emergence of film installation in the late 1960s and '70s, a discourse that provides important insight for what it might mean to subject cinema to the operations of sculpture, to "install" and "site" it. According to Chrissie Iles, for instance, film and video installation practices offered a means of critiquing cinema's dematerialized image. As artists deployed the projected image as a resource for sculptural environments, and as they produced what she described as a "hybrid of white cube and black box," their work revealed cinema's apparatus and material support, subjecting the medium to the kind of phenomenological delectation and scrutiny canonically attributed to minimalism. "Building on Minimalism's phenomenological approach," Iles elaborated,

> the darkened gallery's space invites participation, movement, the sharing of multiple viewpoints, the dismantling of the single frontal screen, and an analytical, distanced form of viewing. The spectator's attention turns from the illusion on the screen to the surrounding space, and to the physical mechanisms and properties of the moving image: the projector beam as a sculptural form, the transparency and illusionism of the cinema screen the internal structure of the film frame, the camera as an extension of the body's own mental and ocular recording system, the seriality of the slide sequence, and the interlocking structure of multiple video images.[149]

Confronting such works, in other words, we are like the emancipated denizens from Plato's Allegory of the Cave, once immobilized captives of deception who had confused

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[149] Chrissie Iles, "Between the Still and the Moving Image," in *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art : Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 33.

the projections of world with the world itself, now unshackled and free to investigate the apparatus that had sustained our former illusions. Needless to say, this is the operation that Eisenstein associated with a tractor-like and dialectical cinema, too—montage above all, which would not only drive forth the film, ploughing its path, but also make the film's very engine available to the viewer by way of its constant self-disclosure. Iles's model thus corresponds closely to the self-reflexive and self-critical "maieusis" that Michelson had attributed to the radical aspiration, suggesting that the postminimal conjunction of film and sculpture extended, even radicalized, the very principle of cinematic montage, that it imported the logic of discontinuity to actual space where we are invited to toggle back and forth between the illusory elsewhere of the projected image and its sculptural apparatus. "In this dimly lit space," Iles continued in a comment that could easily apply to Smithson's cinema cavern, "we are invited to look not merely at the screen, but beyond it, to the walls onto which it is projected, and to the relationships set up between one image and the next."[150]

If Iles understood film and sculpture to come together according to the deconstructive and self-revelatory imperative of montage—sculpture, that is, as a strategic refuge from which to indict the projected illusion as such—for George Baker such crossings of mediums also produced radical new continuities, thus exploiting the inverse capacity of montage. Writing about his "solid light" films of the 1970s, Baker argued that Anthony McCall had pushed cinema to such a point of self-referential abstraction that it paradoxically accumulated the volumetric and environmental characteristics of sculpture. In distilling cinema to a beam of light transforming in time,

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[150] Iles, 34–35.

for example, a work like *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) revealed a porosity between film and sculpture, a correspondence between the two mediums (fig. 3.46). Whereas Richard Serra's hand films of 1968 witnessed this transformation from the other side: in pushing sculpture's postminimal revelation of duration and temporality to the point that it privileged sheer process over any final object—Serra's hurling of molten lead in *Splashing* (1968) remains exemplary here—"sculpture" emerged as an entity more properly filmic in a work like *Hand Catching Lead* (1968) (fig. 3.47). For that reason Benjamin Buchloh designated this body of Serra's work "sculptural film," arguing that cinema offered Serra a way of directly figuring sculptural process *as* process, sculptural duration *as* duration, and all without the baggage of a resultant sculptural object.[151] In McCall's and Serra's cases, then, cinema and sculpture moved away from one another only to unexpectedly correspond, like a Mobius strip whose ends were folded through the third dimension to meet. As Baker put it, both artists demonstrated that medium has "a porous limit, a boundary that can be crossed in myriad ways."[152] And while Baker did not

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[151] Benjamin Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film in the Work of Richard Serra [1978]," in *Richard Serra*, ed. Hal Foster, October Files 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 1–19.

[152] George Baker, "Film beyond Its Limits," *Grey Room*, no. 25 (2006): 103. It is worth noting that Baker's account of a medium that, at its limits, begins to "communicate" and "correspond" to other mediums anticipates what Pavle Levi was to describe in the context of the historical avant-garde as "cinema by other means"—practices, in Levi's words, that "posit[ed] cinema as a system of relations directly inspired by the workings of the film apparatus, but evoked through the material and technological properties of the originally non-filmic media." In that sense, Levi's account recalls Jonathan Walley's designation "paracinema" (see note 64 above), but for the fact that paracinema is staked on a rejection of medium specificity rather than its intensification. See Pavle Levi, "Cinema by Other Means," *October* 131 (2010): 51–68. In Baker's "diagrammatic" account of Smithson, moreover—which, critically, sees his sculptural *Jetty* and filmic *Jetty* as staging a diagrammatic relationality modeled on cinema—makes clear that he views the crossing of mediums in Smithson's work, too, as enacting this radical communication of forms. As Baker put it, "each object can only be seen in light of the other, each one linked to or physically continuous with the other." Baker, "The Cinema Model," 108. Andrew Uroskie's work on Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film is relevant here, as well, for Uroskie similarly points to a correspondence between the earthwork and film, suggesting that "the ways in which [the film's

explicitly invoke "montage," this essentially cinematic operation models what he described as a "suturing" of difference to overcome the binary distinctions that structure our experience of cinema and sculpture alike—subject and object, dark theater and illuminated screen, here and elsewhere, absorption in space and absorption in spectacle. For film and sculpture to "communicate" is for them to form a "radical continuity," a dialectical synthesis opening up new, fertile ground for aesthetic inquiry no longer constrained by the hierarchical categories of medium.

At the risk of oversimplifying their nuanced accounts of the postminimal crossing of film and sculpture, Baker and Iles each prioritize one feature of montage's double aspect, one side if its magician-epistemologist dialectic: continuity and discontinuity, construction and deconstruction, suturing together and cleaving apart, the tractor that clears the way for the socialist utopia and the disclosure of its engine. Smithson's "cinematic atopia," for its part, seemed to want to do both things. After all, it specified that liminal non-place where filmic illusion sputters to a halt, disintegrating into a sculptural condition, as well as where the dispersed and sited material of cinema also winds back to life, propelling us elsewhere once again. "The disjunction operating between reality and film drives one into a sense of cosmic rupture," he wrote in a later essay that recapitulates the themes of "A Cinematic Atopia." "Adrift amid scraps of film, one is unable to infuse into them any meaning, they seem worn-out, ossified views, degraded and pointless, yet they are powerful enough to hurl one into a lucid vertigo."[153] And in fact, as both sculpture and film, the entire *Spiral Jetty* project operates this very

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rich temporal] structure might be said to mirror the phenomenal experience of the earthwork itself." Uroskie, "La Jetée En Spirale."

[153] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," 152.

dynamic. The earthwork, as we have seen, implies that sculptural passage is like the path

ploughed by cinema: sequential, durational, and dynamic, possessing an "end" but not a

"center" as we spiral ever inward until the point we must "rewind." Likewise, the textual

openness canonically ascribed to postminimal sculpture models the film's potential

connectivity, as if the film were merely one path through the quasi-sculptural bramble of

footage: particularly after its *découpage* in Smithson's grid of stills, the *Spiral Jetty* film

forfeits its linear order ("There is nothing more tentative than an established order,"

Smithson wrote[154]) and resumes its primordial condition of disarticulated bramble. The

film's final images of metaphorical sunstroke-induced amnesia followed by the moviola

similarly manifest a desire to erase the film's passage and to start it anew, to plough

another path. Whereas its entombment in an underground museum treats the film as a

geological relic. Film and sculpture, temporal extension and spatial extension, sequential

order and undifferentiated dispersal—these pairs, like mirror and reflection, like site and

nonsite, seem to exchange places in Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* project.

* * *

Art history once had a destination, once assumed a form not dissimilar from

Tatlin's spiraling *Monument*. Greenbergian modernism was notoriously teleological, as

painting followed the imperative of medium specificity, as it aspired to perfect the

dialectic between literal flatness and virtual depth. This was a spiral that culminated not

in the Third International but in the bull's-eye of a Kenneth Noland or the diaphanous

veil of a Jules Olitski. Yet even in the wake of modernist teleology—especially in the

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[154] Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," 1996, 140.

wake of modernist teleology—art history still understood itself as a narrative of dialectical progress, of advancement, of development. Perhaps there was no longer any predetermined destination, but certainly there was a thrust, an orientation, a movement forward from old to new.

In his later historiographical accounts of postmodernism, for example, Hal Foster clearly understood this category as a furthering of aesthetic discourse. Postmodernism, he argued, describes "less a break with modernism than an advance in a dialectic in which modernism is re-formed."[155] Part of this dialectic involved a negation of modernism by recourse to historical modes—figuration, narrative, past styles. Not all returns are created equal, however. Art history would not tolerate the non-dialectical circle Nabokov invoked, doomed to endless and pointless repetition. The good return, the art historically correct return, was, for Foster, "poststructuralist": The work of the so-called Pictures Generation, for instance, invoked figuration and representation ultimately in order to critique them, enacting the Barthesian shift from work to text. If such postmodernism retrieved past techniques, in other words, it was, as Lenin had written, to "[repeat] them in a different way, on a higher level," to continue the dialectical charge forward in a spiraling advance of knowledge and discourse. Whereas the "bad" postmodernism, the neoconservative sort embodied in the architecture of Robert Venturi and Michael Graves and the painting of Julian Schnabel, manifested a condition of pastiche: it stipulated a return to representation and figuration that was only a return—an uncritical and eclectic historicism that cherry-picked styles and recast them as mere ornamentation, utterly divorced from history. This latter mode of retrieval lost the dialectical momentum

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[155] Foster, "Re: Post [1982]," 200.

forward, collapsing back into the mere repetition of the circle, or worse, even regressing completely.[156]

Another category that absorbed Smithson's generation early on was the so-called "neo-avant-garde," which stipulated a similarly historicist impulse—in this case the return to an originary avant-garde moment—that could be either good (dialectical-critical) or bad (regressive-complacent). In contrast to Peter Bürger's account, which had asserted that any neo-avant-garde was definitionally regressive and cynical, doomed to repeat the historical avant-garde's failure to negate the institution of art, Benjamin Buchloh and Foster offered more aspirational accounts. While both critics supplied plenty of examples of artists in the 1950s and '60s whose work invoked techniques and procedures from historical avant-gardes like Dada and Constructivism only to void them of their more radical, collective, and anti-aesthetic imperatives,[157] Foster in particular held out hope for a return to avant-garde precedent that was fully dialectical, that was *neo*, that would advance art discourse and further knowledge. Understanding such returns

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[156] Douglas Crimp addressed a similar dynamic in terms of the postmodern technique of appropriation, seeking to differentiate a good, critical form and a bad, historicist one. Douglas Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation," in *Image Scavengers: Photography* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1982), 27–34. For Crimp, Rauschenberg's work offers one of the first signs of this postmodern sensibility, reintroducing representation to the pictorial space of painting, but in a way that ultimately critiques representation, the institution of art, and the museum. Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins [1980]," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983).

[157] In the context of Constructivism, both Foster and Buchloh are critical of artists like David Smith, John Chamberlain, and Anthony Caro, whose personae superficially invoked the proletarian artist-worker archetype inherited from Constructivism. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 10 (1983): 277–95, https://doi.org/10.2307/4104341. See also Hal Foster, "Some Uses and Abuses of Russian Constructivism," in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914–1932*, ed. Richard Andrews and Milena Kalinovska (Seattle, Wash.: Henry Art Gallery, 1990), 241–253. For Buchloh, Yves Klein represents a particularly egregious example of a cynical and disingenuous neo-avant-garde return, in this case to the monochrome, which voids its radicality in ultimately shoring up reactionary notions of authorship. Benjamin Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time," *October*, no. 37 (Summer 1986).

in terms of the psychoanalytic model of *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, Foster suggested that artists of Smithson's generation were engaged with a belated recognition of the trauma of the historical avant-garde that allowed it to be cognized for the first time. Doing so made available new methods of criticality oriented no longer toward the institution of art but to art's institutions.[158]

These models of art history that emerged in tandem with and in response to Smithson's work and that of his generation maintained a strong sense of what Michelson had, in 1966, named the radical aspiration. For whether we are dealing with a "poststructuralist" postmodernism or a "critical" neo-avant-garde, the good, dialectical kind of formal innovation was understood to be radical and even revolutionary—not in the literal sense of the transfer of power to an oppressed class but in the sense of interrogating the ideological frameworks and structures within which the artwork circulated, provoking a kind of cognition about the museum, say, or the regimes of idealism or humanism or representation that have animated so much aesthetic discourse over the course of the twentieth century. The radical aspiration was tractor-like in that sense, desiring to demolish modernism and to cultivate a future for art with cognitive and critical horizons. While Michelson had been writing specifically about cinema when she first proposed this notion of a "radical aspiration," then, her project in many ways came to define a much larger wish to preserve for advanced aesthetic practices of the 1960s and 1970s a cognitive and pedagogical imperative. And if Smithson's generation shared such an aspiration, it was because it sought aesthetic transformation so comprehensive, so thorough, so intense that it penetrated below the surface, that was radical in the sense that

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[158] Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?"

it went *to the root*, to the plant's deep infrastructural channels and rhizomatic

superhighways upon which its superficial superstructural expression depended. Like the

negative movement that preceded dialectical synthesis, and like revolution's nullifying

"turn back"—indeed, like the tractor that ploughed the field in order to cultivate it—to be

radical meant, before anything else, a movement downward and backwards.

Any yet Smithson's concern with entropy, of course, prioritized a movement that

was ultimately regressive, terminally regressive—"evolution in reverse" was how he

described it.[159] For Smithson, as we have seen, true revolution meant not utopia but

cataclysmic violence; a dialectical outlook meant that "in the ultimate future the whole

universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness."[160] If

Smithson's work aspired to anything, that aspiration was to a large extent less radical

than radicle in its unequivocal embrace of entropy. Such an aspiration is consistent, too,

with his *Spiral Jetty* film, which ended on a note of confusion, disorientation, madness,

and amnesia. If, for Eisenstein, cinema had been a tractor that ploughed over the

audience's psyche, fertilizing it with class purpose, in Smithson's case it seemed merely

to plough—not the Gem of Egypt in its guise of the heroic excavator and builder of

modernity but Mechani-Kong wreaking havoc upon it.

Smithson's various atopian scenarios elicited similarly "radicle" erasures, too.

Perhaps the grid of film stills accompanying his essay, for example, suggested that a new

film lay dormant in this grid, that the brambles and disconnections might be re-ordered,

as if the reader turned writer, in the active position of editorial mastery, might sort it all

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[159] Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," 15.

[160] Smithson, 15, 11. As Smithson elaborated in a 1973 interview, entropy specifies a "condition that's irreversible, it's a condition that's moving towards a gradual equilibrium." Smithson and Sky, "Entropy Made Visible," 301.

out, might construct the film anew as Rodchenko had wanted users of his Workers' Club

to actively construct their own Lenin. And yet the very possibility of proliferating *Spiral

Jetty* films would seem to only further devastate the one we know, diluting its meaning

like a field that was ploughed and reploughed to the point of barrenness. The very

thought summons Smithson's most famous example of entropy:

> Picture in your mind's eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on one
> side and white sand on the other. We take a child and have him run hundreds of
> times clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn grey; after
> that we have him run anti-clockwise, but the result will not be a restoration of the
> original division but a greater degree of greyness and an increase of entropy.[161]

How many times can a film be cut and re-cut before it passes irretrievably into a blur of

grey? Likewise, Smithson's "Cinematic Atopia" imagined a hypothetical "ultimate film

viewer," a troglodytic and repulsive personage whose entire perceptual world is limited

to cinema. For such a film viewer, mediated experience *is* experience, and memory,

subsequently, memory consisting exclusively of filmic elsewheres. It is hard to imagine

the ultimate film viewer differentiating between his here-and-now and an elsewhere,

much less even caring. "He would not even be watching a film, but rather experiencing

blurs of many shades," Smithson hypostasized of this creature. "Between blurs he might

even fall asleep, but that wouldn't matter."[162] For Michelson, art had to be a dream for

waking minds, but here, in Smithson's atopia, the distinction between consciousness and

unconsciousness *wouldn't matter*.

In the end, "atopia" is a fitting name for such a blurry locale. Smithson's

neologism evokes a kind of non-place, a grey realm between ethereal illusion and

material fact, but not the kind of non-place that was supposed to be the consequence of

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[161] Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," 74.

[162] Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," 1996, 142.

Eisenstein's tractor-like cognitive cinema, not utopia. For if utopia designated a non-place (the prefix *ou* + *topos*), it was only insofar as that non-place was also a good place (the prefix *eu* + *topos*)—a non-place, in other words, with some sense of orientation, if only moral.[163] Atopia is another story. Its prefix functions much more like the *a* prefix of "amoral": not the negation of morality (i.e., immorality, or evil) but a condition of absence, of non-relation with respect to morality, no longer oriented by any moral compass, regardless of the direction in which one wishes to follow it. To be amoral is, on some level, to be lost—not exactly between the poles of morality and immorality but somehow without them. In fact, amorality is, in some sense, what lands one in limbo, a figure that Smithson regularly invokes as an analogue for his cinematic atopia. For limbo specifies a destination for those sorry souls who die in original sin but before having had a chance to be saved. Sinful, they are denied entrance to heaven; excluded from redemption, they do not deserve hell. Neither good nor bad, they end up in limbo, an atopia if ever there was one. Atopia thus signifies not the wished-for non-place of perfection that is the negation of our imperfect world, but a non-place beyond or without relation. "To be sure it is a neglected place, if we can even call it a 'place,'" Smithson wrote of this limbo where cinematic illusionism and sculptural materiality met. "If there was ever a film festival in limbo it would be called 'Oblivion.'"[164]

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[163] The term "utopia" was coined by Sir Thomas More's 1516 book of the same name. He derived the neologism from Greek to capture a fundamental paradox about his fictional island of Utopia—it was both a "good place" (signaled by the Greek prefix *eu*, or good) and "no place" at all (the Greek prefix *ou*, or not). Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Clarence H. Miller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 142, fn. 5.

[164] Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," 1996, 139.

In the spirit of Smithson's more tuberous and downwardly-mobile sense of radicalism, the atopian conjunction of mediums at stake in his *Spiral Jetty* project takes us back, elliptically, to the root of this entire dissertation project. For in addition to the cognitive and expansive postmodern models for medium montage—filmic sculpture and sculptural film and the merging of white cube with black box—it is mannerism that furnishes, that has furnished, an alternative and perhaps truly radical prototype for the blurring of mediums. Of course, such blurring was among the reasons sixteenth-century art had been so loathed in the first place, so disparaged, so despised; why it had been dismissed as backward, as if forfeiting all the forward progress made by the Renaissance that had preceded it. Heinrich Wölfflin, for one, viewed mannerism's definitional confusion in terms of a lamentable "dissolution of forms" that led only to "travesty," "contradiction," and "atrocious overcrowding." The problem with painters imitating sculpture, he wrote, was that they were "blindly rejecting all the riches of their own art and beggaring themselves in the process."[165] While Wylie Sypher was somewhat less critical of mannerism, he too noted its "degeneracy" and its "freakish" confusion of mediums.[166] "Michaelangelo [*sic*] never seems to have decided whether architecture is, or is not, simply a background for sculpture," Sypher wrote, "an uncertainty revealed fully in the Medici Chapel, where his architectural plan seems to be a framework for some shocking feats in sculpture and for niches some of which, by a breakdown of logic, are

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[165] Heinrich Wölfflin, *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, trans. Peter and Linda Murray (London: Phaidon, 1952), 202, 203.

[166] Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature, 1400-1700* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), 107, 100.

left vacant."[167] Further anticipating Smithson, the "confusion" of mediums in this case operated according to a logic of inversion:

> The relations of column to wall are reversed, since the columns, being set within niches, stand not before, but *within* or even *behind*, the wall. Ungainly brackets on the *surface* of the wall 'support' the *inset* doubled columns, whose weight does not bear directly on these absurd brackets, which nevertheless receive full plastic emphasis.[168]

Sculptural ornamentation thus imitated architectural elements and vice versa, displacing the kind of structural and hierarchical clarity to which the Renaissance had aspired with deceptive illusion and confusion.

Imitation, confusion, illusion: These were also bad terms for Greenberg, of course, in his ambitious early theorizations of modernism. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) and "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940) both positioned the modernist avant-garde's self-reflexive medium specificity as salutary, as evidence of art's ongoing recovery from its mannerist hangover. The imitation of one medium by another was a "mistake," he wrote, an attempt to "escape from the problems of the medium of one art by taking refuge in the effects of another."[169] Echoing Wölfflin and Sypher, the result was "a confusion of the arts," a "denial of each medium's nature," indeed a "conceal[ing]" of medium. "In other words," Greenberg summarized, "the artist must have gained such power over his material as to annihilate it seemingly in favor of *illusion*."[170] Consequently, "all emphasis is taken away from the medium and transferred

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[167] Sypher, 123.

[168] Sypher, 124.

[169] Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon [1940]," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. One: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 26.

[170] Greenberg, 23, 24.

to subject matter."[171] Greenberg's origin story of the modernist avant-garde, then, consists of painting's gradual emancipation from other, more dominant mediums—in this case literature and narrative.

For Greenberg the modernist imperative to clarify such pernicious confusion was a matter of grave political urgency. For being specific to a given medium was what secured art's autonomy, its separateness, what protected it from its transformation into kitsch—for Greenberg an instrument of mass culture and a vehicle for the proliferation of hegemonic ideology. The stakes could not be higher for a critic writing at a moment when fascist regimes had reached their terrifying apogee in Europe, a moment when visual culture was vulnerable, being made to serve propagandistic purposes of the State, reiterating and reproducing its ideology. Such was the function of kitsch: to "ingratiate" and "flatter" the masses with uncritical and inauthentic culture. Whereas the modernist avant-garde, in its pursuit of self-reflexive purity, had the potential to resist this tendency. Art's autonomy secured its capacity to be critical, protected it from becoming an instrument of the State, indeed ensured its disobedience with respect to mass culture. "[T]he arts lie safe now," he wrote, "each within its 'legitimate' boundaries, and free trade has been replaced by autarchy."[172]

Greenberg's last claim here is striking—not so much for its predictable disparaging of laissez-faire, free trade capitalism, however, than for its suggestion that medium might be autocratic. As he wrote in equally ambivalent terms, "the arts [...] have been *hunted* back to their mediums." Similarly, "the history of avant-garde painting is

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[171] Greenberg, 25.

[172] Greenberg, 32.

that of a progressive *surrender* to the resistance of its medium."[173] To be modern, in other words, meant in some sense to obey the medium's autocratic reign; it meant to be hunted, to surrender, to submit. Promising liberation, any "confusion" of the arts was ultimately complicit with and vulnerable to ideological instrumentalization. What art really needed to resist totalitarianism was, paradoxically, hierarchy, power, and centrality.

Mannerism offered an alternative model for politics, a kind of strategic degeneracy and tactical parody of a worldview in which utopia could no longer be sustained.[174] Like Smithson's milieu, sixteenth-century Europe was beset by political turmoil. "The evidences are everywhere," Sypher wrote. "In the growth of the Reformation, the blood baths of Saint Bartholomew and the Thirty Years' War, the disciplines enforced by the Council of Trent, and the equivocal policies of the Jesuit order."[175] In that context, mannerism's committed anti-naturalism and high artifice offered a cruel rebuttal to the ideals of idealism and humanism that had underwritten the Renaissance worldview. For one medium to imitate another was not to cave to the demands of kitsch and mass culture, then, but to act knowingly in bad faith. Mannerism was hellish, secular, and carnal just like us; it offered a strategic refuge or retreat not *from*

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[173] My emphasis. Greenberg, 32, 24.

[174] There is a rich literature on parody and postmodernism to which I would like to allude here. For a useful summary of the rejection of parody by theorists like Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton as a legitimate critical strategy, see Linda Hutcheon, "The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History," *Cultural Critique*, no. 5 (Winter –87 1986): 179–207. Hutcheon's revaluation of parody significantly depends on its self-consciousness, which is to say that its imitations and historicity are not naive but deliberate. "Parody has perhaps come to be a privileged mode of formal self-reflexivity because its paradoxical incorporation of the past into its very structures often points to these ideological contexts somewhat more obviously, more didactically, than other forms," she writes. "Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak TO a discourse from WITHIN it, but without being totally recuperated by it."

[175] Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature, 1400-1700*, 100.

the old but, radically, *to* it. If Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* thus imagined a sculpture becoming

film and a film becoming sculpture; if the two entities seemed to lapse into one another;

if the project's avatars were solar amnesia and homicidal madness and disorientation, I

want to suggest that it was to occupy a position of regression. The *Spiral Jetty* did not

move upward nor even forward but backward, to the mannerist precedent, to the entropic

re-mixing and re-integration of mediums that modernism had sought to purge.

"Mannerism," Sypher wrote,

> is experiment with many techniques of disproportion and disturbed balance; with zigzag, spiral, shuttling motion; with space like a vortex or alley; with oblique or mobile points of view and strange—even abnormal—perspectives that yield approximations rather than certainties.[176]

In my mind, this is as useful a summary of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* as any—a project that

"degenerates," a project whose forms "are only 'relatively clear,'" a project unfolding at

a historical moment of "malaise and distrust." "*Optimism is shaken.*"[177]

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[176] Sypher, 116–17.

[177] Sypher, 107, 100, 102.

Conclusion

Robert Smithson, Underground

> "Begin at the beginning," the King said, very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop."
> Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

> This sense of extreme past and future has its partial origin with the Museum of Natural History; there the "cave-man" and the "space-man" may be seen under one roof.
> Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments"[1]

I began this dissertation with Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and I end with it, as well—not with Annette Michelson's essay, this time, but with the 1968 film itself. Hal, the spaceship *Discovery*'s artificially intelligent computer overlord, has murdered several members of the crew, whom it felt threatened its survival. The one remaining astronaut, our space-man protagonist Dr. David Bowman, resolves to deactivate Hal after having to force his way back into the spaceship through an airlock. Awash in red light, he accesses the mainframe, ejecting unit after unit of memory, while Hal begs him to stop, his computational capacity diminishing in real time (fig. 4.1).

> Stop.
> Stop, will you?
> Stop, Dave.
> Will you stop, Dave?
> Stop, Dave.
> I'm afraid.
> I'm afraid, Dave.
> Dave.
> My mind is going.
> I can feel it.
> I can feel it.
> My mind is going.

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[1] Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments [1966]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 15.

> There is no question about it.
> I can feel it.
> I can feel it.
> I can feel it.
> I'm a...fraid.

At this point, Hal regresses to his computer infancy, to his bootstrap initialization,
reciting his default introductory message, which includes a sung rendition of "Daisy
Bell." Heartbreakingly, this song seems to be all that is left of Hal's withered, eroded
mind. And even that is fast disappearing, for Dave continues ejecting unit after unit of the
supercomputer's memory, causing Hal's voice to increasingly slow and drop in timbre,
causing the lyrics to slur, to lose their sense, their legibility. In Hal's final aphasic
moments, we witness something like the rapid onset of amnesia and the loss of identity it
entails.

The scene of Hal's entropic unraveling prefigures the film's subsequent
denouement. Determined to complete his mission, Dr. Bowman departs the spaceship
Discovery in a pod to investigate the reappearance of the film's famous black monolith.
En route, he gets sucked into a wormhole, a polychromatic and prismatic chasm, a
passage between light-streaked planes. It is a trip that deposits him inexplicably in a non-
space both futuristic and antique, illuminated gridded flooring juxtaposed with
neoclassical décor (fig. 4.2). Over a series of elliptical cuts, Dr. Bowmen watches himself
age, becomes his aged self, and then dies only to be apparently reborn as some cosmic
fetus (fig. 4.3). The strange scene recalls the four-dimensional perception of the
extraterrestrial Tralfamadorians from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, published in
1969, the year after *2001*'s release. "The most important thing I learned on
Tralfamadore," abductee-narrator Billy Pilgrim relates,

was that when a person dies he only *appears* to die. He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral. All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just that way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever.[2]

In many ways the unusual co-presence of past and future that characterizes the elliptical end of *A Space Odyssey* can be seen as precisely this kind of reconfigured temporality, one in which Dr. Bowman's rapid and discontinuous aging and his involuntary rebirth might all coexist in this disconcerting and disorienting non-space.

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Smithson is not known to have admired *2001*, whose production, as sci-fi epics go, would surely have been too slick for his taste in any case. But Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland* was another matter, and in it we find ourselves facing a different kind of portal leading to a different kind of elsewhere. As we well know, our young, somnolent protagonist ventures not through a wormhole but down a rabbit hole in pursuit of a remarkable pocket watch-toting hare only to be delivered, on the other side, to the fantastic world of Wonderland. Here, as in *2001*, passage through a tunnel coincides with not just a change of place but a more totalizing change of state. And while there is some porosity in both cases—in *2001*, for example, the monolith persists on both sides of the wormhole, whereas in *Alice* it is the White Rabbit who exists in both realms—these tunnels instantiate a hard cut. Or, perhaps better, they are figures for a kind of in-between

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[2] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children's Crusade* (New York: Delta, 1969), 23.

zone, an interval, a realm of passage and connectivity between the real and the unreal, a place and a non-place, one time and another.

Alice's example is appropriate in Smithson's case for another reason, too, for subterranean tunnels had an important role to play in the artist's practice, particularly when they led to mines or caves. In fact, their sporadic appearance in Smithson's life corresponds to similar changes of state in his practice, marking key moments of transformation and in-betweenness. In October 1968, for instance, Smithson's tour of the Cayuga Rock Salt Company's mine in Ithaca, New York coincided with the radicalization of his nonsite practices in the form of his first Mirror Displacements, a format he would go on to elaborate throughout 1969. Initially, the project he was developing for Thomas W. Leavitt and Willoughby Sharp's *Earth Art* at Cornell University (February 11–March 16, 1969) was to be continuous with the nonsites he had inaugurated earlier that year: Smithson planned to displace ore and earthen material from the Cayuga mine to the gallery, thus establishing a concrete connection, a dialectic, between the gallery (nonsite) and nearby subterranean cave (site). At some point, however, he decided instead to use mirrors—not only in the gallery, where they were embedded in or else propped up by piles of displaced material from the mine, but also in the mine, where he installed them and photographed them in situ in anticipation of his Yucatán Mirror Displacements of a few months later. "As you can see," he explained while in Ithaca completing this project, "the interior of the Museum somehow mirrors the site and I'm actually going to use mirrors. Most sculptors just think about the object, but for me there is no focus on one object so it is the back-and-forth thing."[3] In that sense the

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[3] Robert Smithson, "Earth [1969]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 178.

mirrors helped convey, even literalize, a condition that belonged to the nonsites, as well, entities that Smithson conceived as multiple and paradoxical. Like site and nonsite, in other words, mirror and reflection formed an integrated whole while nevertheless occupying opposing sides of a binary. If therefore the nonsites of 1968 had contested the notion of sculpture as object-like and monolithic in reimagining it as plural and dispersed; and if, echoing the optical convolutions characteristic of mannerist pictorial space, they had consequently nominated physical, back-and-forth travel between nonsite and site as an avatar for its endless relational dynamicism; the Mirror Displacements of 1969, I argued in Chapter 2, operationalized this confusion and disorientation that was the result of such pointless shuttling, blurring the line between the illusory, virtual space of the reflection and the actual space of the physical mirror in a viscerally dizzying *mise-en-abîme* of mutual containment.[4]

A year later Smithson was underground again, this time in Vancouver's Britannia Copper Mines. It was around December 1969 or January 1970 when the artist descended. He was in Vancouver not only in preparation for Lucy Lippard's exhibition *955,000* (Vancouver Art Gallery, January 14 – February 8, 1970), for which he would execute *Glue Pour*, but also to supervise plans for the construction of his *Island of Broken Glass*,

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[4] Smithson's Cayuga project exacerbated the vertiginous consequences of this dialectic in its programmatic inversions: the cave had physically contained the mirrors, whose rectilinear geometries paradoxically "enframed" the subterranean locale in turn—in other words, they contained the container. Whereas the gallery contained the small sprawls of earthen material displaced from the cave, which, in turn, "framed" the mirrors—supporting them physically, propping them up. "There's an element of shoring and supporting and pressures," Smithson explained of this dynamic in the *Earth Art* show. "The material becomes the container. In other non-sites, the container was rigid, the material amorphous. In this case, the container is amorphous, the mirror is the rigid thing. It's a variation on the theme of the dialectic of the site/non-site." Robert Smithson and Wiliam C. Lipke, "Fragments of a Conversation [1969]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 190.

an ambitious and unrealized project slated for February, which was to consist of some

one hundred tons of glass dumped on the small Miami Islet, pulverized by a crowbar-

wielding Smithson, and then left to erode back into sand.[5] This was a moment, therefore,

when the artist was reimagining his work in increasingly environmental and entropic

terms, for both *Glue Pour* and *Island of Broken Glass* were nothing if not monuments to

ruination and decay, projects that made palpable the ongoing dialectic between man and

nature that interested him so much. The Britannia Copper Mine, in any case, was the

destination of one of many excursions he undertook while in Vancouver. Something

about it spoke to the artist's burgeoning cinematic sense, inspiring an unrealized film and

a number of ideas for speluncar cinematheques. "What I would like to do is build a

cinema in a cave or an abandoned mine, and film the process of its construction,"

Smithson wrote in the concluding remarks of his 1971 essay "A Cinematic Atopia,"

which I quote here in full:

> The film would be the only film shown in the cave. The projection booth would
> be made out of crude timbers, the screen carved out of a rock wall and painted
> white, the seats could be boulders. It would be a truly "underground" cinema.
> This would mean visiting many caves and mines. Once when I was in Vancouver,
> I visited Britannia Copper Mines with a cameraman intending to make a film, but
> the project dissolved. The tunnels in the mine were grim and wet. I remember a
> horizontal tunnel that bored into the side of a mountain. When one was at the end
> of the tunnel inside the mine, and looked back at the entrance, only a pinpoint of
> light was visible. One shot I had in mind was to move slowly from the interior of

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[5] As Robert Hobbs explained, "The resulting glass mound would shimmer like emeralds on the
dull rock. In a few months the sharper edges of glass would be smoothed down, and in a few
centuries the entire glass heap would become sand." Unsurprisingly, *Island of Broken Glass* was
aborted due to environmental concerns. In true repressive form, it turned out that while human
beings routinely devastate their environment, the notion of an artist enacting such destruction so
overtly, so gratuitously, so pointlessly was more than the locals could take. "Many people, it
seems, have regarded the constant pollution of waterways by industrial and human waste and the
ravaging of undeveloped areas by strip mining as necessary evils of a populous and highly
technologized world," Hobbs wrote perceptively. "But these same people could not understand
why someone would willingly, with no objective of monetary gain, create a ruin." Robert Hobbs,
Robert Smithson: Sculpture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 186.

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the tunnel towards the entrance and end outside. In the Cayuga Rock Salt Mine under Lake Cayuga in New York State I did manage to get some still shots of mirrors stuck in salt piles, but no film. Yet another ill-fated project involved the American Cement Mines in California—I wanted to film the demolition of a disused cavern. Nothing was done.[6]

If Smithson's 1968 descent in the Cayuga Rock Salt Mine had provided the impetus to revise his practice in terms of mirrors, his underground passage of a year later led to cinema. Which is fitting, since the two things, mirrors and movies, had much to do with one another. "As everybody knows," he had written years earlier, "the mirror is a symbol of illusion, as immaterial as a projected film."[7] And like the mirror, for Smithson a method of containing a "scattered" environmental situation, cinema too proposed itself as a kind of container—a container, however, capable of enveloping a situation that was scattered not only spatially but also temporally. Or as Smithson himself put it, "The simple rectangle of the movie screen contains the flux."[8]

The extended excerpt from Smithson's "Cinematic Atopia" above, however, is striking for another reason. Given his tendency to erotically anthropomorphize the environment, for instance, the passage he imagined from the dark bowels of the earth to the "pinpoint of light" through this "grim and wet" tunnel evokes the a passage, too, along a birth canal, as if we would be delivered from the depths of the earth in this hypothetical film as we are delivered from the womb—to light, to life, to existence. Such an image is consistent with the artist's other metaphorical associations of mine shafts and undergrounds with bodily orifices. After all, as he had explained in an interview during

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[6] Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia [1971]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 142.

[7] Robert Smithson, "Ultramoderne," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 64.

[8] Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," 141.

his time in Vancouver, "women aren't allowed" in the mines. "It's a very strong taboo. I read somewhere there is a strong feeling that, in the primitive sense, the tube is like a vagina, there's a kind of Freudian protectiveness."[9] And in fact the cave corresponds with all the major topoi of this dissertation as laid out across its three chapters. For in addition to coinciding with bodily orifices, passage into which was akin to penetration or else circlusion (Chapter 2), caves and mines were also avatars of both Hell (Chapter 1) and movie theaters (Chapter 3). As Nancy Holt recalled, for instance, "some of the mines were especially Dante-esque, like some great infernal underground."[10] Thus the tracking shot from depth to surface Smithson imagined reads as not only birth but also merciful salvation from the underworld or, perhaps more accurately, the malicious journey undertaken by Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Likewise, such speluncar realms reminded Smithson of movie theaters, inspiring him to imagine entombing his *Spiral Jetty* film in a projection room below ground. Like eternal damnation in a hellish inferno and like the sense of erotic self-erasure experienced in the throes of sexual ecstasy, the movie theater, Roland Barthes had written in the most affectionate of terms, is a place where "*everything* is lost"[11]—including, it would seem in Smithson's case, the hard distinctions

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[9] Robert Smithson and Dennis Wheeler, "Four Conversations Between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson [1969–70]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, by Robert Smithson, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 206.

[10] Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, 184. The analogy of caves to hell is worth pursuing further, particularly for the ways in which it connects Smithson's slightly earlier concerns with mannerism's hellishness to his interest in erotic transgression. In that context, Suzaan Boettger's essay on "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," which she views as an "analogy to hell," is particularly interesting to note. In it, for example, she argues for various "parallels between Smithson's choice of a fire-scarred site for the first of his nine Mirror Displacements and the nine terraced circles that Dante descends" in the *Inferno*. Suzaan Boettger, "In the Yucatan: Mirroring Presence and Absence," in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Eugenie Tsai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

between film and sculpture, illusion and reality.

<center>* * *</center>

In addition to the hellish infernos characteristic of mannerist anti-naturalism and

artifice, the bodily orifices consistent with an erotic reimagining of travel, and the dark

movie theaters where sculptural environment and ethereal projected illusion intermingle,

the subterranean cavern models one final figure predominant throughout Smithson's

thought: the museum. In his drawing *The Museum of the Void*, the mine shaft-like

entrance to this exhibition space plausibly reads as the gates of hell, orifice, and cinema

marquee alike, destinations marked by inky darkness (fig. 4.4). And indeed, as I briefly

discussed in Chapter 3, the museum too was a place not of clarity but loss. Like the

archaeological sites the artist encountered in Mexico—"enormous and heterogeneous

time capsules," he wrote—he confronted museums as miscellaneous brambles of

geographies and temporalities all improbably collapsed into one place. "Anachronisms

hang and protrude from every angle," he wrote in an essay conventionally seen as a

pendent to the drawing. "Blind and senseless, one continues wandering around the

remnants of Europe."[12] As the artist put it in the epigraph above, likewise, at the museum

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[11] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 39.

[12] Robert Smithson, "Some Void Thoughts on Museums [1967]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 41–42. In both the 1979 collection of Smithson's writings edited by Nancy Holt and the more ubiquitous 1996 publication edited by Jack Flam, Smithson's *The Museum of the Void* accompanies his essay "Some Void Thoughts on Museums" in the manner of an illustration. However, his sketch did not appear in the essay's original publication in *Arts Magazine* (February 1967). As Ann Reynolds explains, Sol LeWitt, who designed the collection of Smithson's writings, made the decision to include it. Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 247–248 n. 59.

"the 'cave-man' and the 'space-man' may be seen under one roof." Like Smithson's earth map *Hypothetical Continent of Gondwanaland* (1969), which had spliced the geological remnants of the Carboniferous period together with the more recent remnants of Pre-Columbian civilizations nearby, surely such "a collision in time left one with a sense of the timeless"—not in the idealist sense of the eternal, the heavenly, and the universal, however, but in a sense of disorientation that corresponds more closely to the "atopia" he described in 1971.[13]

Ann Reynolds described Smithson's *Museum of the Void* and his essay "Some Void Thoughts on Museums" as consistent with the artist's longer-standing critique of vision, suggesting that the artist "equates looking at the museum's historical anachronisms [...] with perceptual difficulty."[14] What may be missing from her account are the physiological consequences of the kind of involuntary time travel with which we are tasked at a museum. "Billy blinked in 1965, traveled in time to 1958," Vonnegut wrote in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. "Billy blinked in 1958, traveled in time to 1961."[15] At the museum, we are in many ways not unlike Billy Pilgrim, helpless to the violent, quasi-filmic montage to which his life is subject and which one imagines to do little to consolidate any stable sense of identity or orientation. "Billy sat up in bed. He had no idea what year it was or what planet he was on."[16] Such, I have been arguing, is what the montage model in Smithson's hands has become: montage as a technology—hellish or erotic or tractor-like—for becoming lost, disoriented, amnesiac.

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[13] Robert Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 121.

[14] Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, 45.

[15] Vonnegut, Jr., *Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children's Crusade*, 39.

[16] Vonnegut, Jr., 118.

Smithson imputed this kind of nonchronological temporality to his own work, too. If the Tralfamadorians could see time as a vast panoramic landscape, Smithson preferred the more diagrammatic prototype offered by cartography. In his drawing *A Surd View for an Afternoon* (1970), his recent practice appears not as a chronological development but as coextensive, distributed spatially across the radiating lines and concentric rings of an azimuthal map projection such that, for instance, his *Alogon* of 1966 and his Gondwanaland earth map of three years later are made to intersect (fig. 4.5). Indeed, it is this type of logic that authorized the artist to retroactively claim *Gyrostasis* (1968) as an "abstract three dimensional map that points to the SPIRAL JETTY, 1970 in the Great Salt Lake, Utah."[17] Such anachronistic confusion is possible only in caves and undergrounds, I want to suggest—in "Zero-Zones" where "the spaceman meets the brontosaurus in a Jurassic swamp on Mars."[18] These locales would challenge vision, yes, but they would also be deeply erotic, which is to say experienced viscerally as a kind of loss at once ecstatic and obliterating. A figure for hell, for orificial penetration and circlusion, for the cinematheque's suspension of actuality and illusion, for the cataclysmic timelessness of the museum—the subterranean cavern, in the end, seems to be the ultimate figure for Smithson's radical aspiration, his descent to the root, into the earth, in pursuit not of clarity but erasure and degeneration.

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I framed this dissertation as a dialectical progression. Mannerism, I suggested,

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[17] Robert Smithson, "Gyrostasis [1970]," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 136.

[18] Smithson, "Interstellar Flit," undated typescript (c. 1961–63). As quoted in: Sobieszek, *Robert Smithson, Photo Works / Robert A. Sobieszek.*, 19.

modeled for Smithson a method of compositional montage and discontinuity that unfolded internally within pictorial space, between its heterogeneous parts, and in infernal defiance of any imperative to naturalism. Smithson's nonsites and mirror displacements externalized that logic of fragmentation, reconfiguring the formerly monolithic and centered artwork as physically or else optically dispersed, discontinuous, and textual, its passage explicitly conceived in terms of a form of travel whose consequences were erotic, which is to say that they instantiated a sense of loss both nauseating and ecstatic. And with Smithson's move into cinema, his practice seemed to undergo yet a further stage of dialectical transformation as the sculptural text and the filmic text converged, blurred, and imitated one another in what the artist designated a "cinematic atopia," a non-place in which distinctions and categories of all kinds had been bulldozed into a madness-inducing state of amnesiac degeneration. As with Eisenstein's theory of dialectical montage, in which the collision of two discontinuous elements over the interval of a cut might "be regarded not as their sum, but as their product, i.e., as a value of another dimension, another degree,"[19] Smithson's practice, I suggested, developed according to a similar series of state-changes and transformations and expansions—from drawing and collage to sculpture to cinema, from two dimensions to three dimensions to four. My project's very structure, then, in some ways threatens to impute a teleology to the artist's aesthetic development, or at least a linear genealogical sequence in defiance of the schematic and anachronistic rendering that the artist offered of his own work in *A Surd View*. If not upwards, his practice appears in this dissertation's structure as forwardly and outwardly mobile in correspondence with the discourse of

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[19] Sergei Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram [1929]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 30.

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postminimalism that has canonically absorbed it, a discourse given over to its own language of dialectical progression, advancement, expansion. Like the radical aspiration that Michelson theorized and which, I have argued, demands to be seen as a context for Smithson's own work, in the present of the 1960s and '70s we are facing a recurrence of the avant-garde past that looks forward to the future, to the unknown, to what could be.

Even so, Smithson's practice has turned out to be radical in another way, too. For the linear trajectory and dialectical expansion that describes this dissertation's progression from one chapter to the next also accumulates in entropy as it proceeds. The overall vector of travel, in other words, moves not upward, outward, and forward, but downwards toward an every-increasing sense of loss, disorientation, and muddiness. If Smithson's dialectical development forms a spiral, that spiral appears less like his vertical *Spiral Hill* (1971) and less like the forward progression in a drawing such as *Coil* (1973) than like a vortex or a hurricane or the abyssal madness registered in the compulsive repetition and compulsive expansion of a pair of drawings from 1970 (figs. 4.6–4.9). Indeed, more fitting than the image of a ziggurat-like monument or progressing coil would be, too, the earthen whirlpools of carnage that were the open-pit mines that consumed the artist in the final years of his life as he increasingly dedicated himself to mining reclamation projects (fig. 4.10). Like Smithson's most famous illustration of entropy, this dissertation runs its dialectical circles through the half-black-half-white sandbox, revolution after revolution, until its contents pass irreversibly into gray. If Smithson's' work was "radical," then, perhaps it was in its tuberous descent and rhizomorphic dispersal. Film and sculpture come together in the end less to form a new expanded realm of aesthetic practice than to degenerate towards a pre-modernist

condition in which artistic mediums, in their confusion, aspired to do little more than imitate one another. In her 1991 exhibition *Robert Smithson Unearthed*, Eugenie Tsai excavated forgotten drawings, collages, and writings, adopting a title for the project that metaphorically suggests a bringing to light, an act of disinterment that clarifies and illuminates the unknown, that orders it and makes it an object of vision, cognition, knowledge. To thus "unearth" Smithson's work is particularly and punningly fitting, too, for an artist so deeply concerned with geology and mineralogy. In some senses, however, this dissertation has worked towards the opposite impulse—to re-earth Smithson's work, as it were, to inter it, radically, in the underground that seems to be the ultimate destination of his work.

In its spiraling descent, then, this dissertation has suggested not only that Smithson's work partakes of what Michelson had called the radical aspiration—that is, that it revives the Soviet avant-garde precedent and ought to be seen as deepening that legacy—but also that it fundamentally shifts what that radical aspiration might mean. For Smithson's rehabilitation of Eisenstein and dialectical montage throughout his practice makes visible a very different story about the afterlife of the Soviet avant-garde. Smithson's "radical aspiration" suggests that the Soviet avant-garde did not disappear, that its communitarian radicality was not repressed, suppressed, and institutionally obfuscated until the 1962 appearance of Camilla Gray's *The Great Experiment*, at which point it became available to artists of the minimalist generation as an instrument with which to push art dialectically forward once more, past modernism. Instead, Smithson's "radical aspiration" suggests that that Soviet avant-garde precedent was there all along, lurking in underground sites, in dark film archives and cave-like cinematheques and

ephemeral movie screenings where Eisenstein and his comrades were consumed and assimilated as much for their films' utopian and political commitments as for their evident subversions and perversions. This darker, more radical and root-like earthiness was particularly present in the case of Eisenstein's films, which were drawn all along to subject matter whose paradoxical fixations on the carnal and the violent are legible according to Georges Bataille's terms of eroticism.

Of course, for Eisenstein it was not just the subject matter that was erotic but also cinema's very operativity. From the very beginning, after all, cinema had to aspire to what Eisenstein had called the "attraction," that which seduced the viewer and also repulsed her, in both cases appealing a carnal desire that must be understood as erotic. Hence, on the one hand, Eisenstein's fixations on various depraved forms of popular culture: "Schooling for the *montageur* can be found in the cinema, and chiefly in the music-hall and circus," he wrote, "which invariably (substantially speaking) puts on a good show."[20] Likewise, he wrote in glowing terms of a Hollywood production such as *The Mark of Zorro* that it was

> captivating and attracting, in its own way engaging the attention of young and future film-makers exactly as the young and future engineers of the time were

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[20] Sergei Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions [1923]," in *The Film Sense*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 233. In an essay written a decade later, the filmmaker expressed a very similar sentiment in recollecting the early motivations for montage:

> I think that first and foremost we must give credit to the basic principles of the circus and the music-hall—for which I had a passionate love since childhood. Under the influence of the French comedians, and of Chaplin (of whom we had only heard), and the first news of the fox-trot and jazz, this love thrived.

> The music-hall element was obviously needed at the time for the emergence of a 'montage' form of thought. Harlequin's parti-colored costume grew and spread, first over the structure of the program, and finally into the method of the whole production.

Sergei Eisenstein, "Through Theater to Cinema [1934]," in *Film Form*, by Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 12.

attracted by the specimens of engineering techniques unknown to us, sent from that same unknown, distant land across the ocean.[21]

On the other hand, however, the "attraction" equally held the capacity for repulsion. Hence Eisenstein's fixations with the more gruesome and repulsive occurrences—"where an eye is gouged out an arm or leg amputated before the very eyes of the audience," for example, or "real fighting, bodies crashing to the ring floor, panting, the shine of sweat on torsos, and finally, the unforgettable smacking of gloves against taught skin and strained muscles."[22] The uncensored immediacy of such scenarios, he thought, would inspire an inversely visceral reaction.

For the Soviet avant-garde to have gone underground, in the end, means that it was hellish and corrupt, secular and disobedient as had been the Satan of Anatole France's *Revolt of the Angels*. For this anti-hero's rebellion consisted not in taking over Heaven and instantiating a new order but corrupting it from below, tempting God's creations with their own repressed carnality:

> "Comrades," said the great archangel, "no—we will not conquer the heavens. Enough to have the power. War engenders war, and victory defeat.
>
> "God, conquered, will become Satan; Satan, conquering, will become God. May the fates spare me this terrible lot; I love the Hell which formed my genius. I love the Earth where I have done some good, if it be possible to do any good in this fearful world where beings live but by rapine. Now, thanks to us, the god of old is dispossessed of his terrestrial empire, and every thinking being on this globe disdains him or knows him not."[23]

For the Soviet avant-garde to have gone underground, then, is for it to have gnawed away at the idealism and humanism underwriting modernist dogma all along: it is to witness

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[21] Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today [1944]," in *Film Form*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1949), 203.

[22] Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions," 231. Eisenstein, "Through Theater to Cinema," 7.

[23] Anatole France, *The Revolt of the Angels*, trans. Wilfrid Jackson (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1914), book XXXV.

montage inspiring the lapsarian fall of mediums back into a state of "confusion," to see it corrupting the rarefied realm of vision and resituating it in a body given over to carnal desires. And to recuperate the radical and increasingly radicle legacy of the Soviet avant-garde from within Smithson's work is to see anew—or, perhaps better, *feel* anew—a practice that devolves and degenerates. To go underground means to go to hell, and to like it. It means to peer beneath rocks in perverse pursuit of the earth's orifices, a microscopic erotic gesture that corresponds to the eroticism that has always structured our interactions with the earth. It means to go to the movies, that physical void where illusion is experienced, where the world disappears, where we become lost not only in the fabric of the cinematic text but also in the nether place of the theater and amidst the interstices of illusion and actuality. To go underground means to endure a kind of voluntary, repulsive blindness, to root around amidst the dirt in a strategic evasion of power.

We are back once again with Marx's figure of the old mole about which Bataille made so much, the archetype for underground and subversive activity of all kinds, and a fittingly radical terminus for this project. The discourse of postmodernism that has canonically absorbed Smithson's work, that has triumphed dialectically over modernism and advanced art discourse further, is structured in terms that Bataille would have seen as eagle-like. To engage in a critique of modernism and its fallacious idealism is to be like "the eagle's hooked beak, which cuts all that enters into competition with it and cannot be cut." And to vanquish modernism in a feat of such "revolutionary idealism tends to make of the revolution an eagle above eagles, a *supereagle* striking down authoritarian

imperialism."[24] Whether or not it intended to, in other words, the discourse of

postmodernism and the literature on Smithson has displaced one aesthetic regime with

another. However, Bataille also proposed a base alternative to this aquiline avatar of

idealism: the old mole, a creature associated with "the terrifying darkness of tombs or

caves" and who models a revolution that "hollows out chambers in a decomposed soil

repugnant to the delicate nose of the utopians."[25] He described the mole's good work as a

"geological uprising," but in fact, following Smithson, it may be more akin to a

geological "sinking into an awareness of global squalor and futility."[26] For among other

things, the old mole will not, indeed cannot, "triumph," will not and cannot create a new

fixity, a new hegemony. Like Bataille's dictionary that "no longer gives the meanings of

words, but their tasks,"[27] the mole specifies more of an operation, a writhing corruption

that undoes and unravels. And in that sense, it is clear that the work of the Soviet avant-

garde, of its most radical aspirations, is not yet finished. Nor, one hopes, will it ever be so

long as it continues its rhizomorphic underground spread in cave-like cinematheques and

living rooms alike.

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[24] Georges Bataille, "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix 'Sur' in the Words 'Surhomme' and 'Surrealist' [1929–30?]," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, vol. 14, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 34.

[25] Bataille, 35.

[26] "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum* 9, no. 1 (September 1970): 134.

[27] Georges Bataille, "Formless [1929]," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, vol. 14, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 31.

Figures

FIGURE 0.1. Ivan's banquet. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible,* Part II, released 1958.

FIGURE 0.2. Ivan expertly plumbs Vladimir for secrets. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, released 1958.
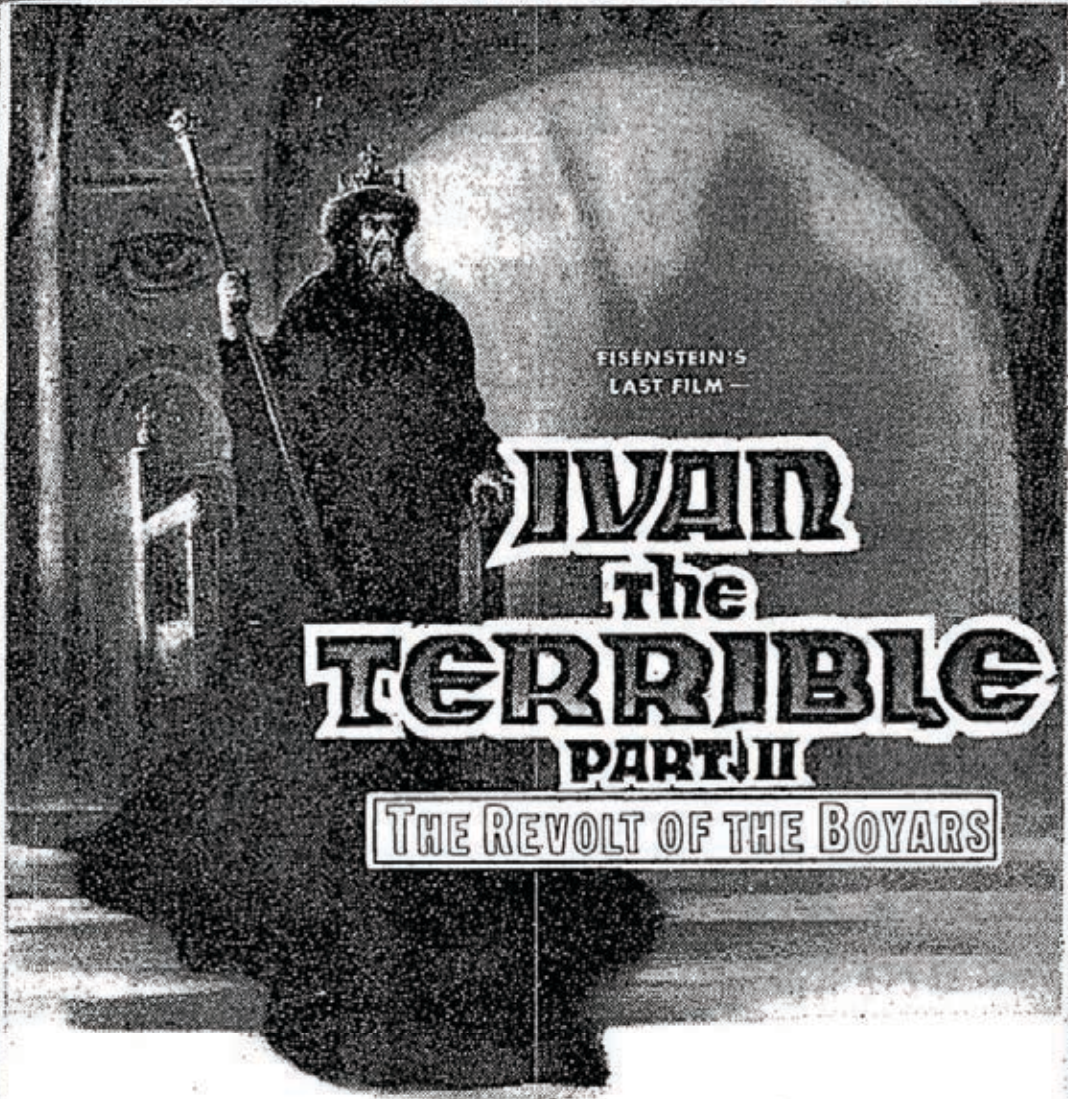
FIGURE 0.3. Ivan's mock coronation of Vladimir. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, released 1958.

FIGURE 0.4. Vladimir, in the Tsar's regalia, leads the assembly to the cathedral, where he is murdered. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, released 1958.

FIGURE 0.5. Advertisement promoting the New York City premier of *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, in 1959, as printed in the *New York Times* on November 24, 1959.

FIGURE 0.6. Selection of advertisements promoting screenings of *Ivan the Terrible*, Parts I and II, at the Bleecker Street Cinema. From the *New York Times*, February 16, 1964; March 10, 1965; September 13, 1965; and December 8, 1965 (*from left-to-right and top-to-bottom*).

FIGURE 0.7. Robert Smithson's typescript for "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman, or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema," c. 1967. Accessed in the Archives of American Art, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, Box 3, Folder 4.

FIGURE 0.8. *Artforum* masthead featuring Dziga Vertov's Kino-Eye, September 1971.
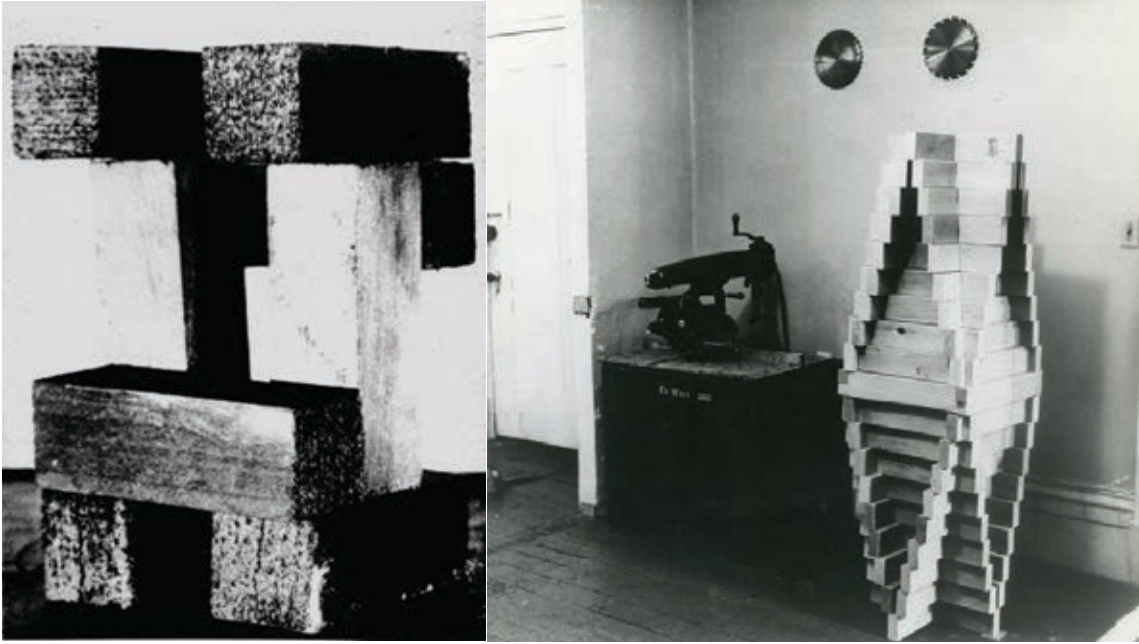
FIGURE 0.9. Aleksandr Rodchenko, *No. 17*, 1921 (*left*) and Carl Andre, *Pyramid*, 1959 (photo by Hollis Frampton) (*right*)
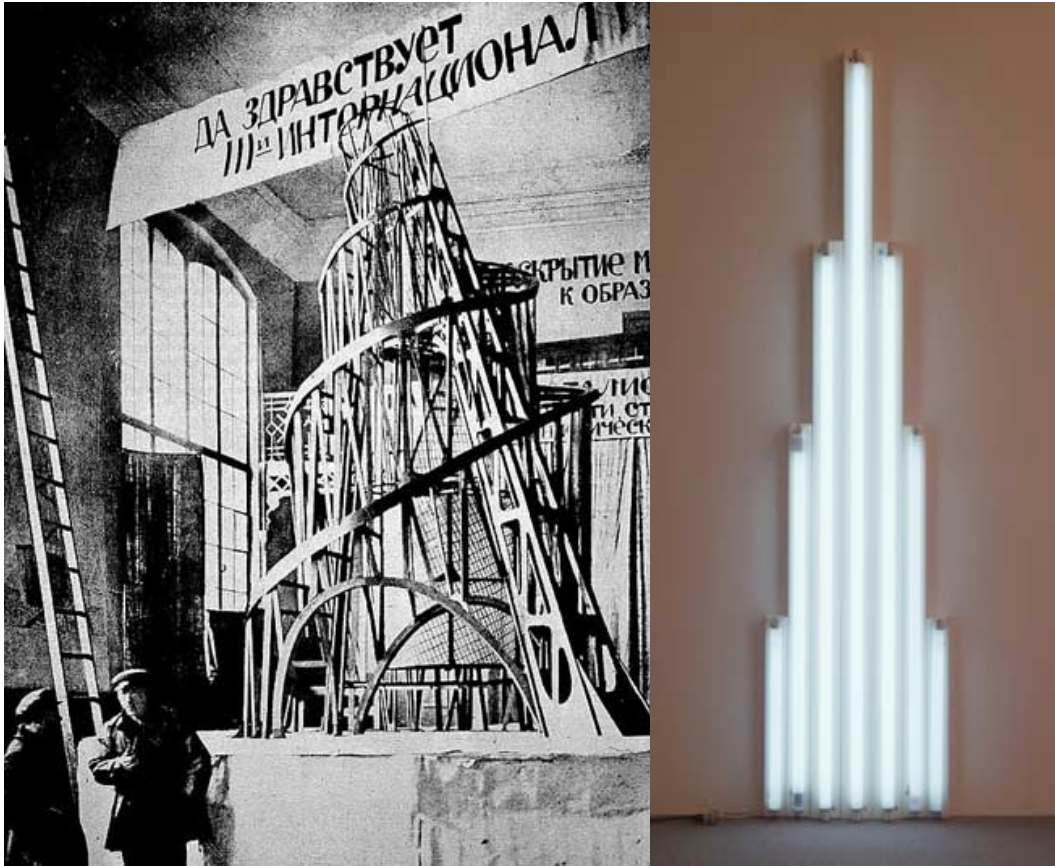
FIGURE 0.10. Vladimir Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International*, 1919–20 (*left*) and Dan Flavin, *"Monument" 1 for V. Tatlin*, 1964 (*right*)
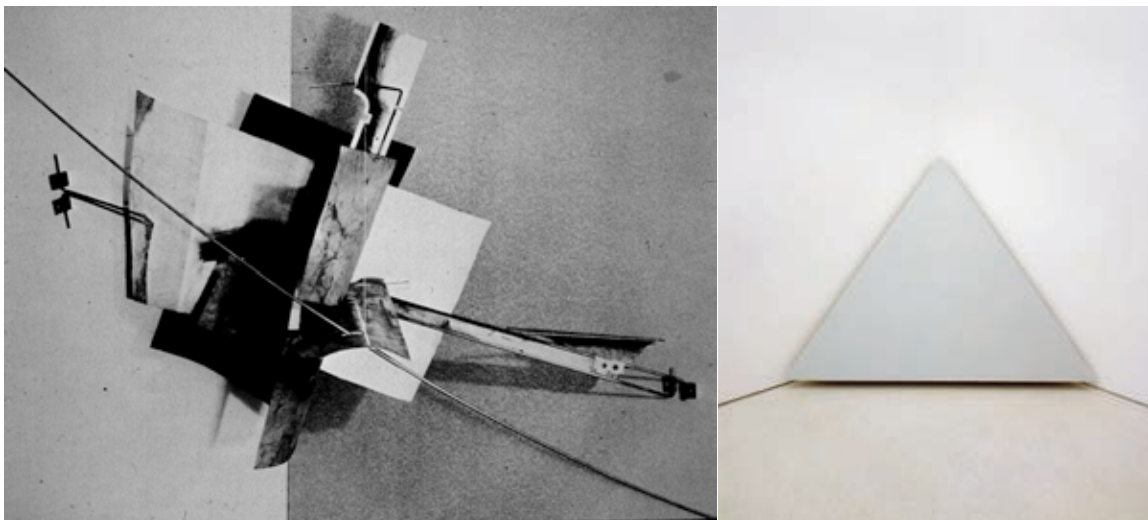
FIGURE 0.11. Vladimir Tatlin, *Corner Counter-Relief*, 1915 (*left*) and Robert Morris, *Untitled (Corner Piece)*, 1964 (*right*)

FIGURE 1.1. Ivan returns to Moscow and confronts the traitorous Boyars. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, released 1958.

FIGURE 1.2. The "fiery furnace" performance. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, released 1958.

FIGURE 1.3. Tsar Eisenstein during the filming of *October*, 1927.

FIGURE 1.4. A child celebrates the Bolsheviks' seizure of the Winter Palace. From Sergei Eisenstein, *October*, 1928.

FIGURE 1.5. Denouement montage that metaphorically links massacre to slaughter.
From Sergei Eisenstein, *Strike*, 1925.

FIGURE 1.6. The coronation sequence from *Ivan the Terrible*, Part I, 1945, that Roland Barthes analyzes.

FIGURE 1.7. Parmigianino, *Madonna of the Long Neck*, 1534–40.

FIGURE 1.8. Michelangelo, *Last Judgment*, 1534–41.

FIGURE 1.9. Robert Smithson, *Conversion*, 1961.

FIGURE 1.10. Robert Smithson, *Untitled (Second Stage Injector)*, 1963.

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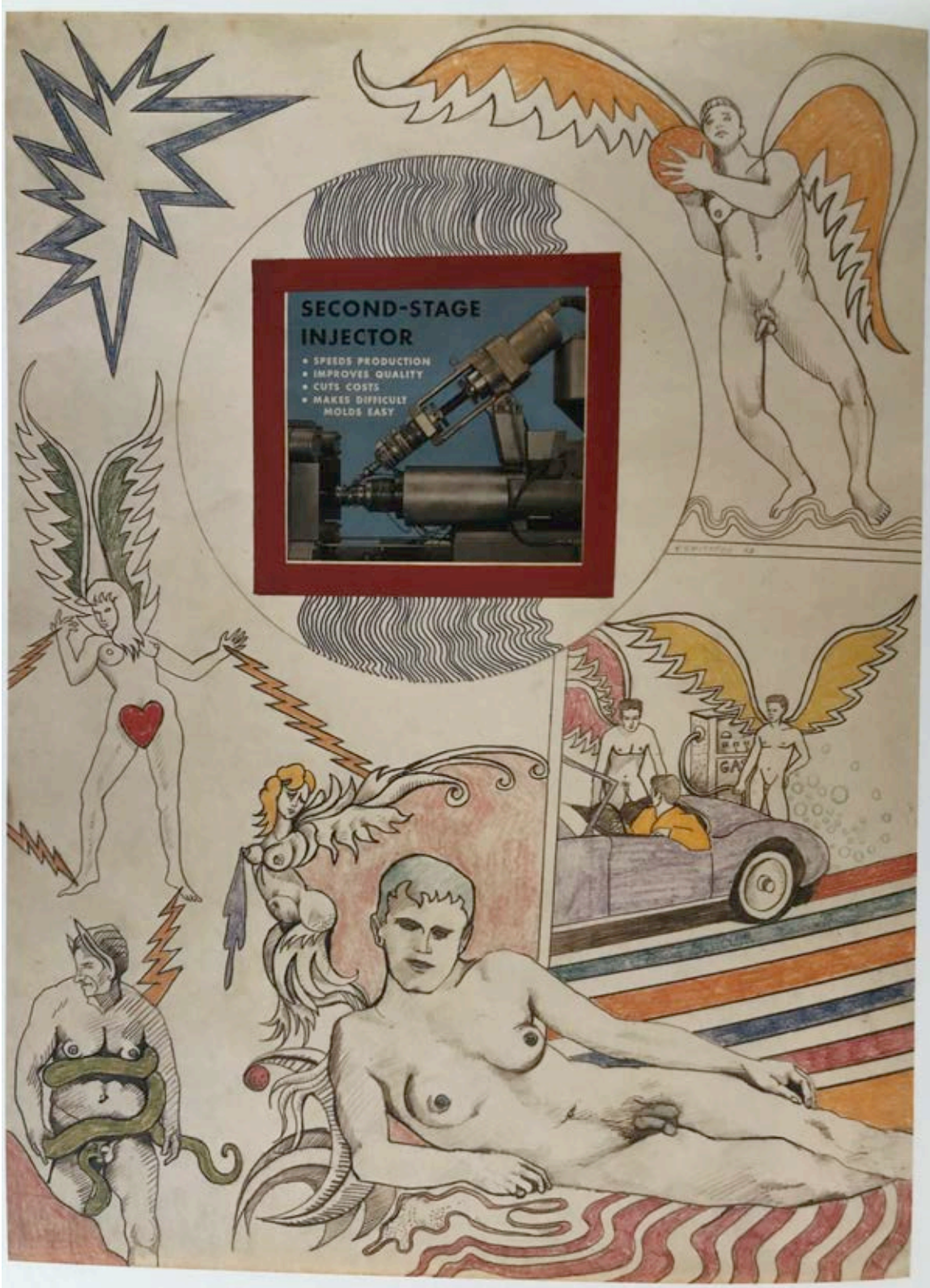
FIGURE 1.11. Smithson, *Untitled (Pink Linoleum Center)*, 1964.

FIGURE 1.12. Jack Smith, *Flaming Creatures*, 1962–63.
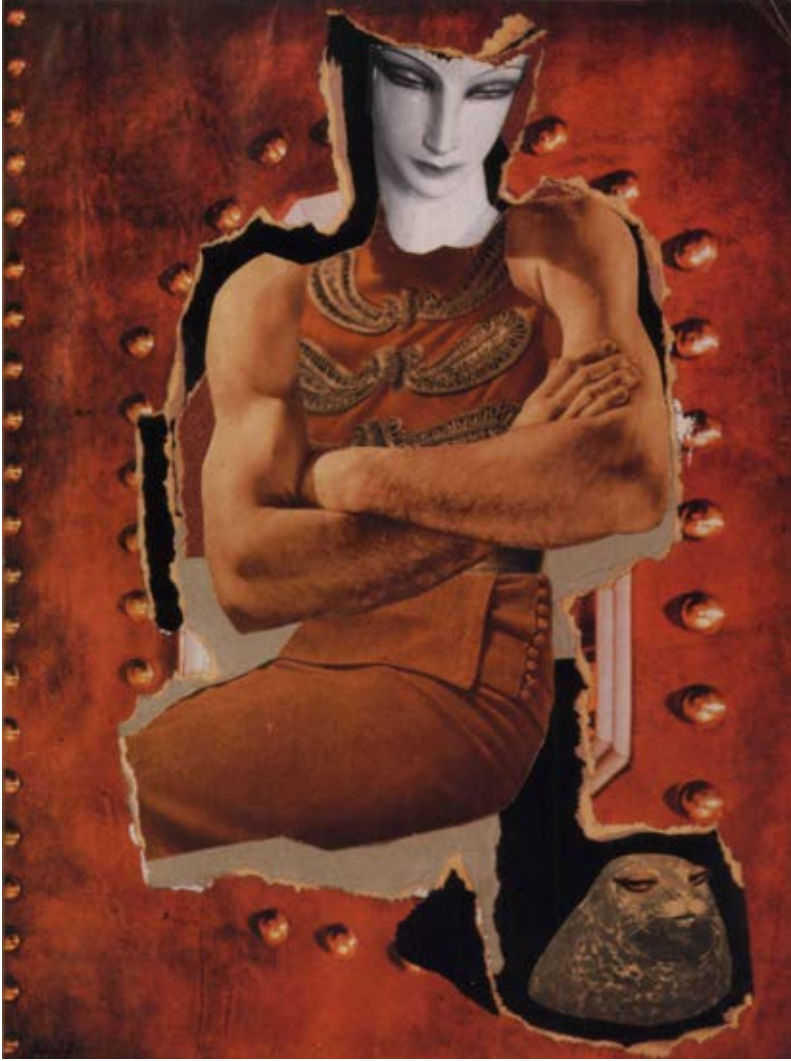
FIGURE 1.13. Hannah Höch, *Dompteuse*, c. 1930.

FIGURE 1.14. Robert Smithson, *Four-Sided Vortex*, 1965.

FIGURE 1.15. Robert Smithson, *Mirror/Vortex*, 1965.
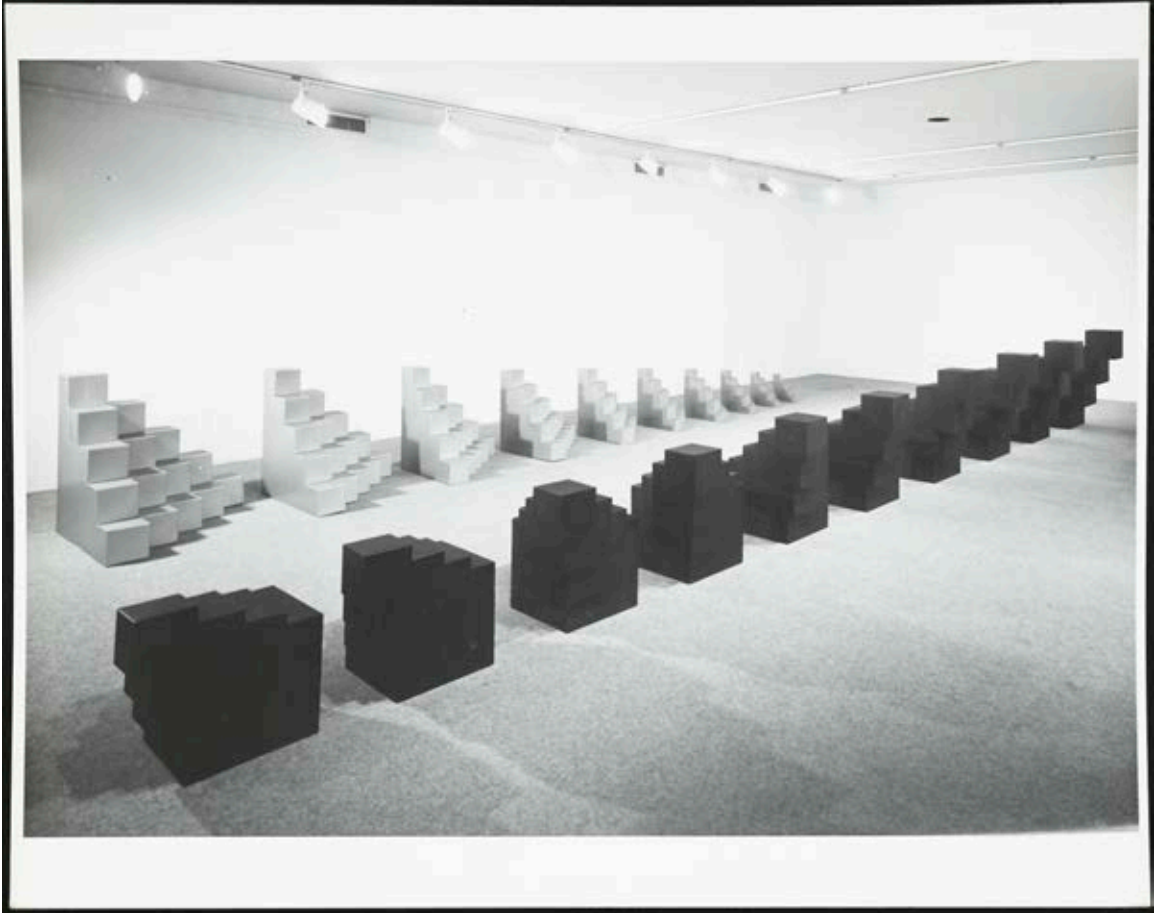
FIGURE 1.16. Robert Smithson, *Alogon #2*, 1966 (rear) and *Plunge*, 1966 (foreground). Installation view, Dwan Gallery, December 1966.
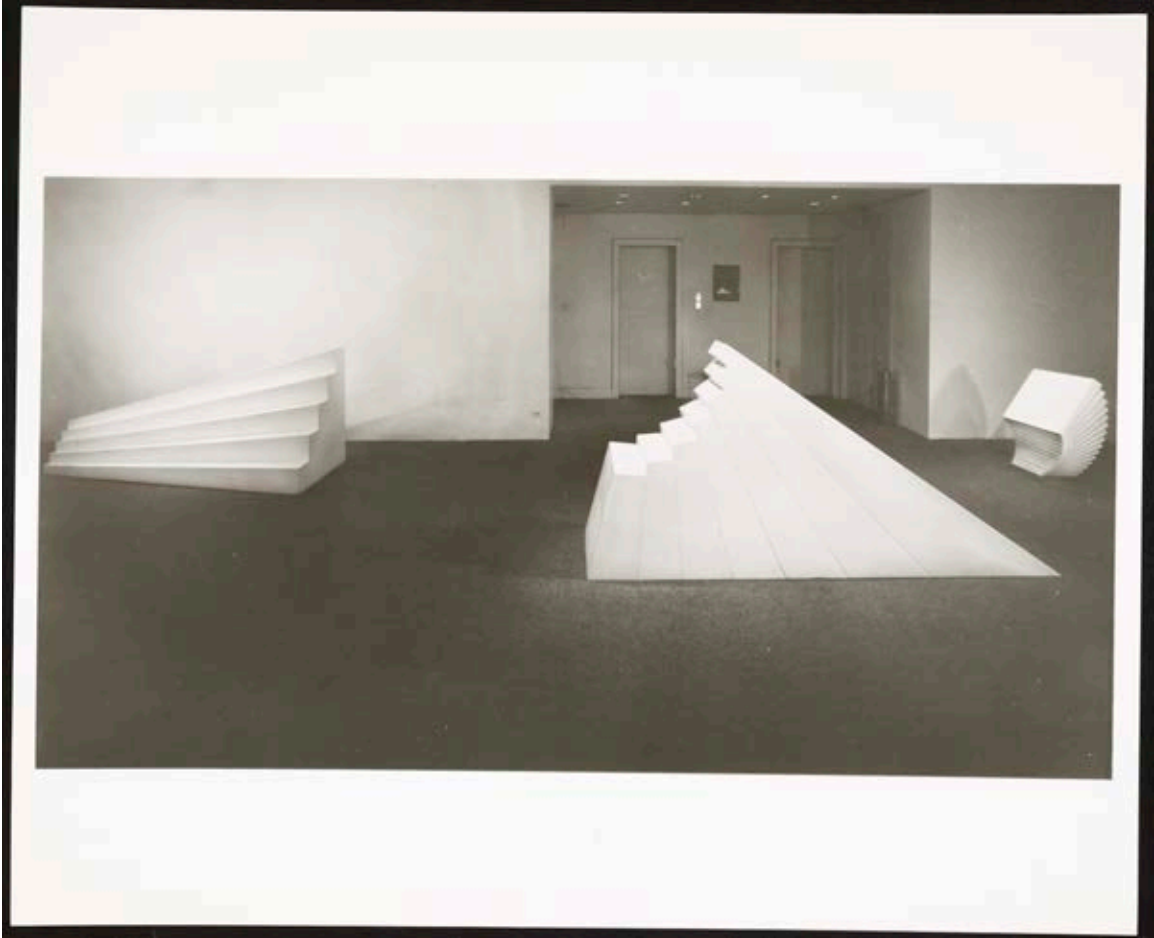
FIGURE 1.17. Robert Smithson, *Pointless Vanishing Point*, 1968 (*left*), *Leaning Strata*, 1968 (*center*), and *Shift*, 1968 (*right*). Installation view, Dwan Gallery, March 1968.
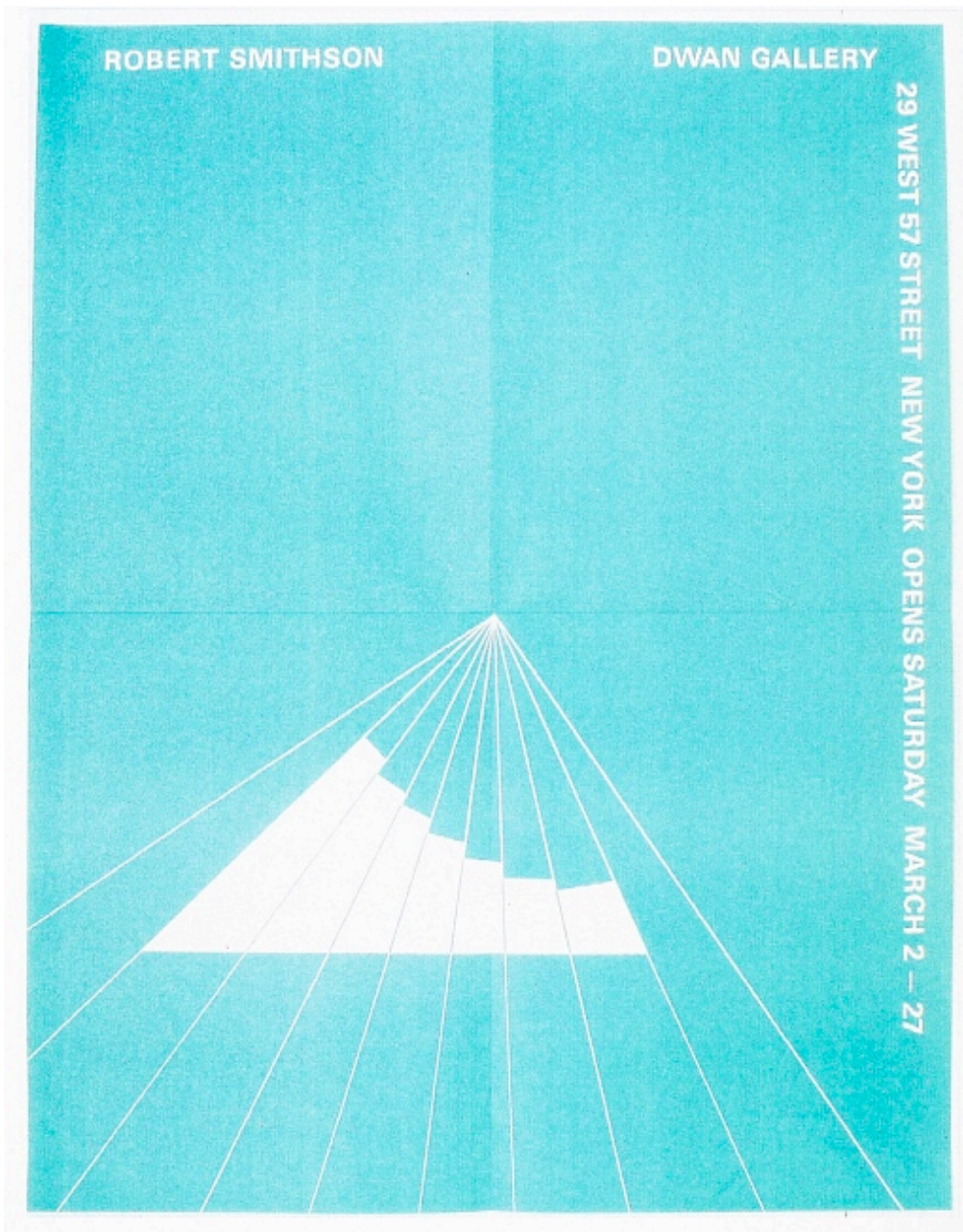
FIGURE 1.18. Exhibition poster for Smithson's second solo show at Dwan Gallery, 1968.

FIGURE 2.1. Roberto Montenegro, *Reconstrucción* (detail), 1930–31.

FIGURE 2.2. Roberto Montenegro, *Reconstrucción*, 1930–31.

FIGURE 2.3. Diego Rivera, *History of Mexico* (detail), 1929–35: Cortés battling Aztec warriors.

FIGURE 2.4. Diego Rivera, *History of Mexico* (detail), 1929–35: Aztecs subduing their revolting slaves.

FIGURE 2.5. Diego Rivera, *History of Mexico* (detail), 1929–35: Cortés and La
Malinche.
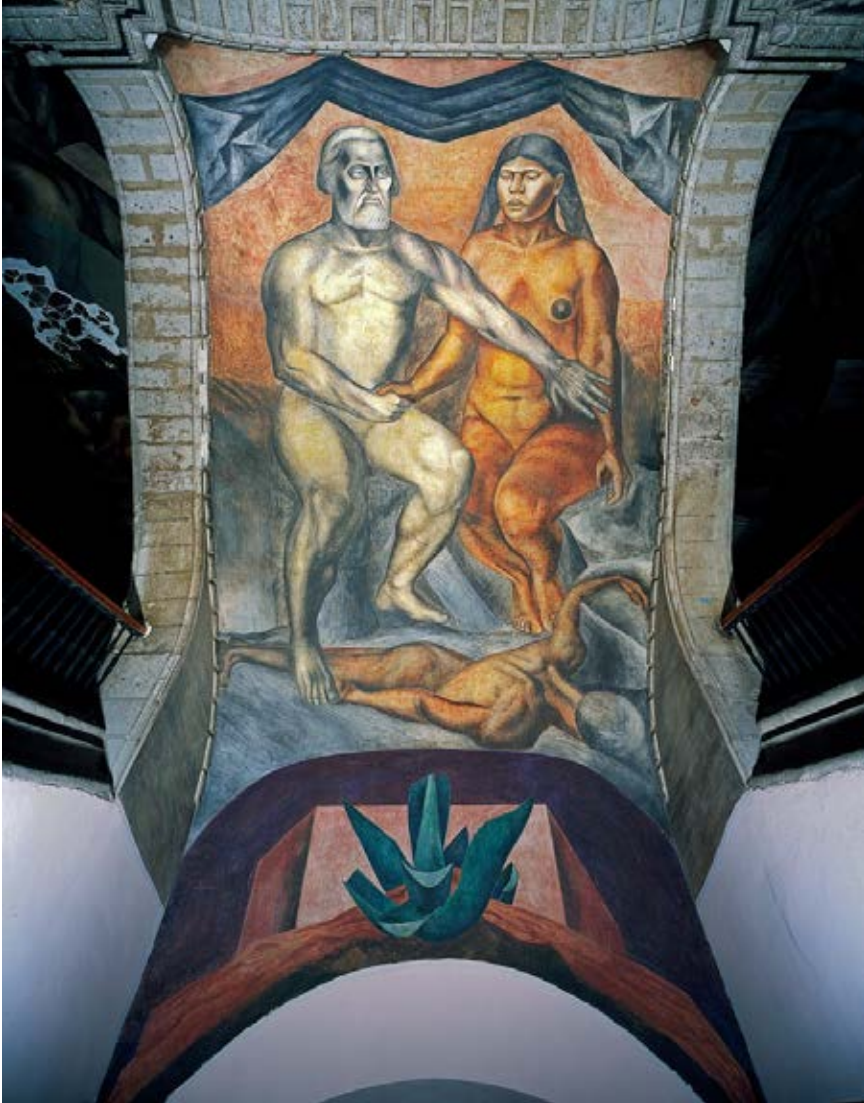
FIGURE 2.6. José Clemente Orozco, *Cortés and La Malinche*, 1924–26.
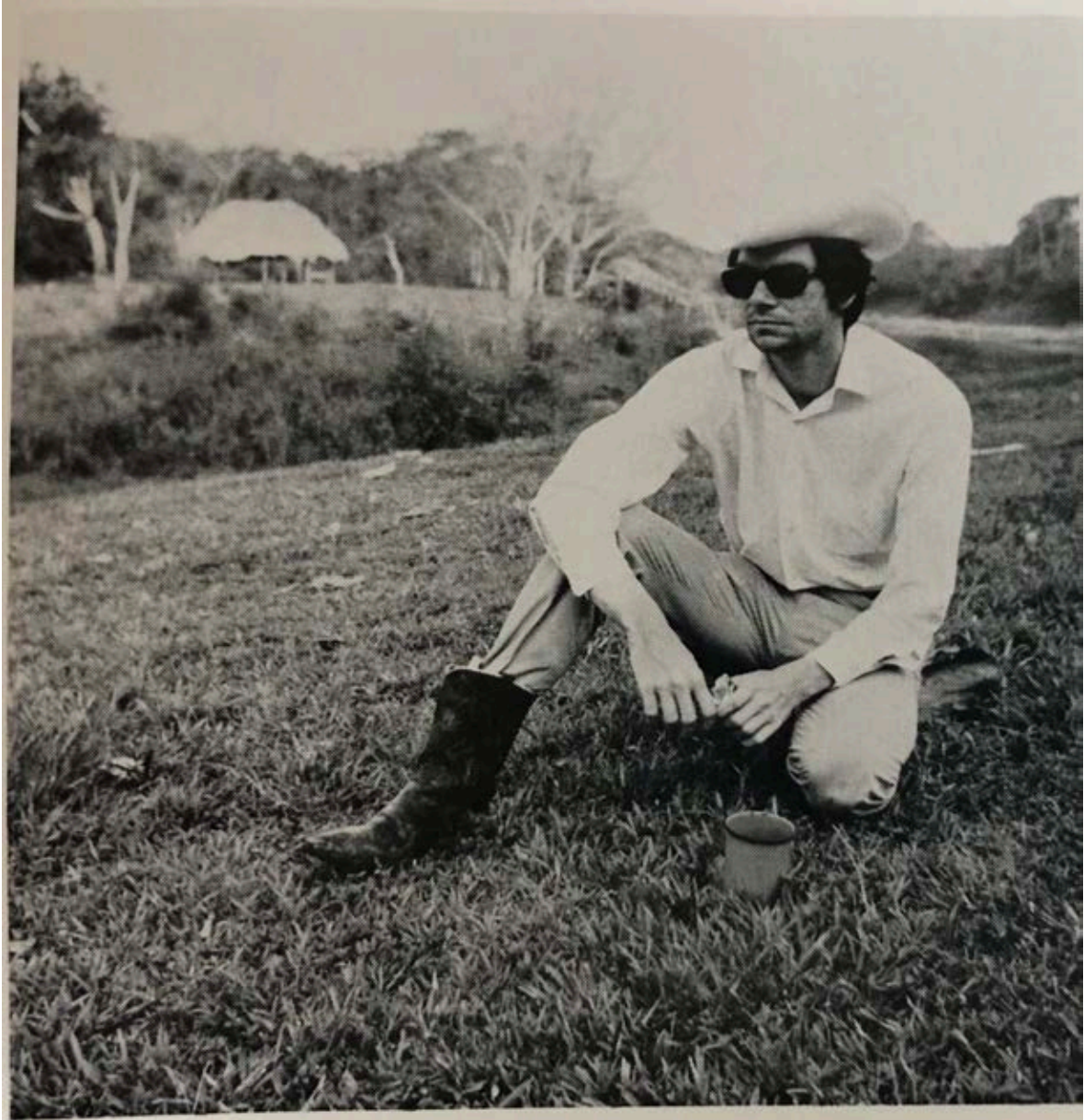
FIGURE 2.7. Nancy Holt, photograph of Smithson in Agua Azul, Mexico, 1969.

FIGURES 2.8. and 2.9. Robert Smithson, *First Mirror Displacement* (*left*), and *Second Mirror Displacement* (*right*), 1969.

FIGURE 2.10 and 2.11. Robert Smithson, *Third Mirror Displacement* (*left*), and *Fourth Mirror Displacement* (*right*), 1969.

FIGURES 2.12 and 2.13. Robert Smithson, *Fifth Mirror Displacement* (*left*), and *Sixth Mirror Displacement* (*right*), 1969.

FIGURES 2.14 and 2.15. Robert Smithson, *Seventh Mirror Displacement* (*left*) and *Eighth Mirror Displacement* (*right*), 1969.

FIGURE 2.16. Robert Smithson, *Ninth Mirror Displacement*, 1969

FIGURE 2.17. Hans Arp, *Collage with Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, 1917.

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FIGURE 2.18. Sergei Eisenstein, stills from the "Prologue" of *¡Que Viva México!*

FIGURE 2.19. Sergei Eisenstein, stills from the "Prologue" of *¡Que Viva México!*

FIGURE 2.20. Sergei Eisenstein, stills from the "Sandunga" episode of *¡Que Viva México!*
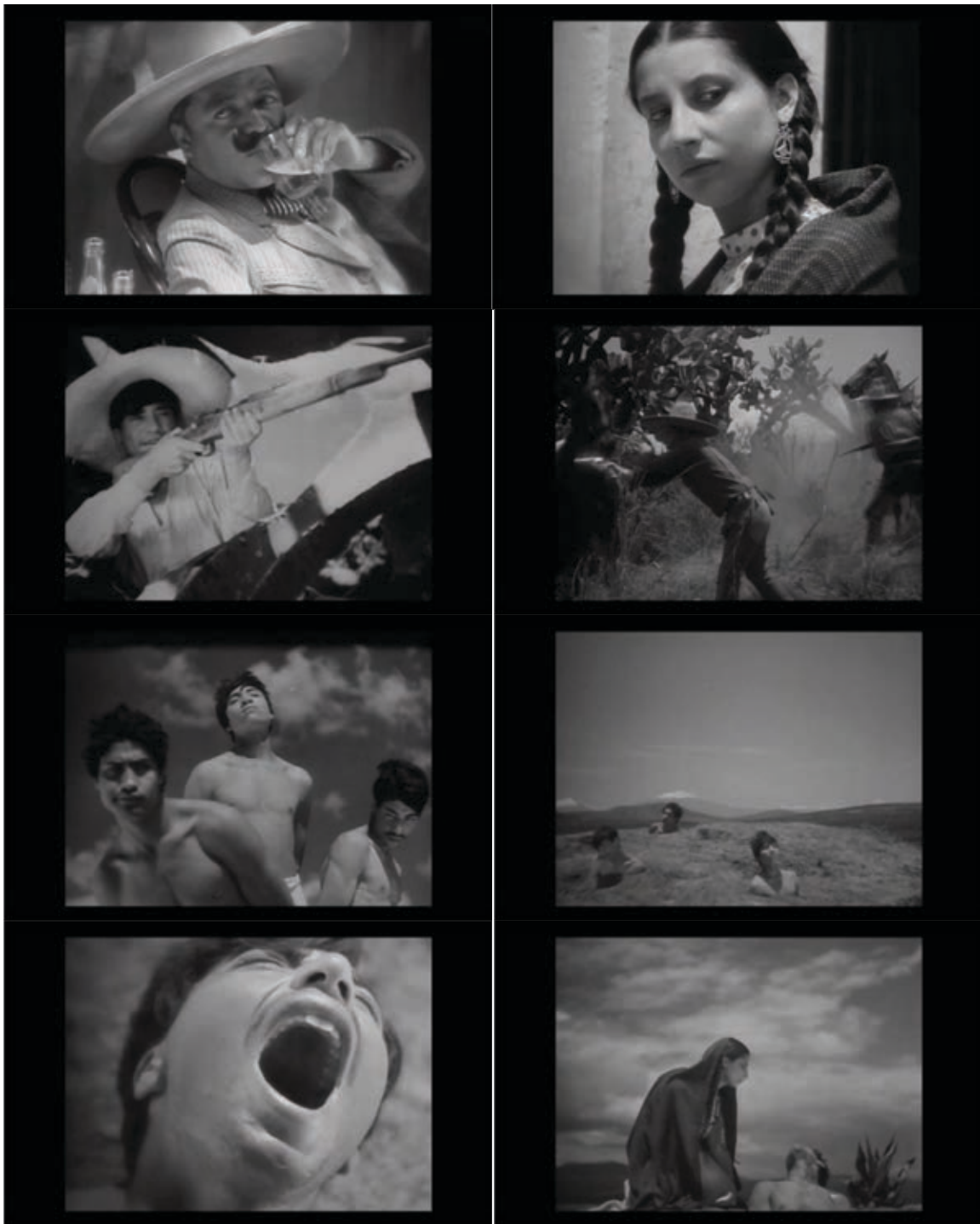
FIGURE 2.21. Sergei Eisenstein, stills from the "Maguey" episode of *¡Que Viva México!*

FIGURE 2.22. Sergei Eisenstein, stills from the "Fiesta" episode of *¡Que Viva México!*
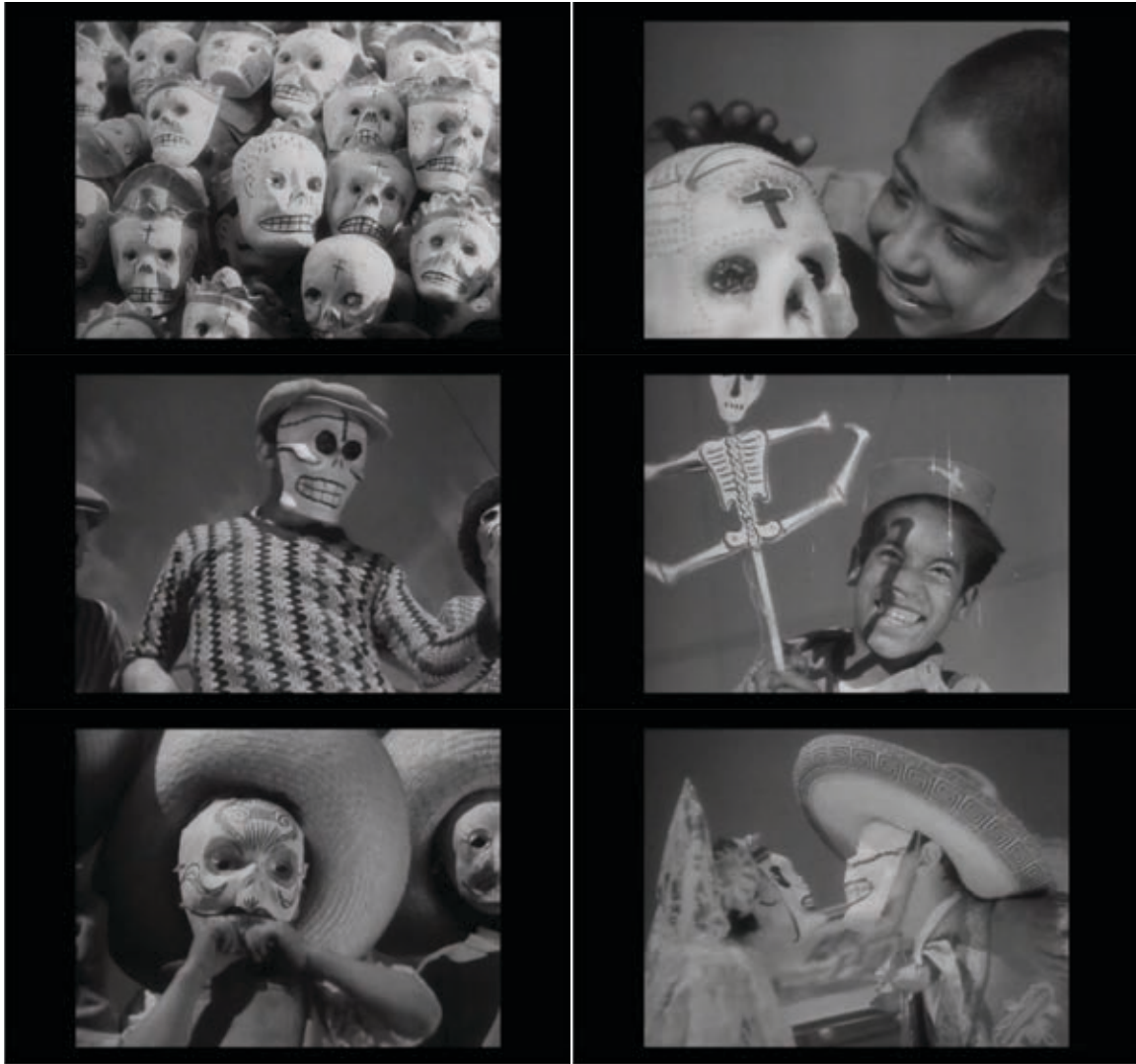
FIGURE 2.23. Sergei Eisenstein, stills from the "Epilogue" of *¡Que Viva México!*

FIGURE 2.24. Robert Smithson, *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* (model; destroyed), 1966.
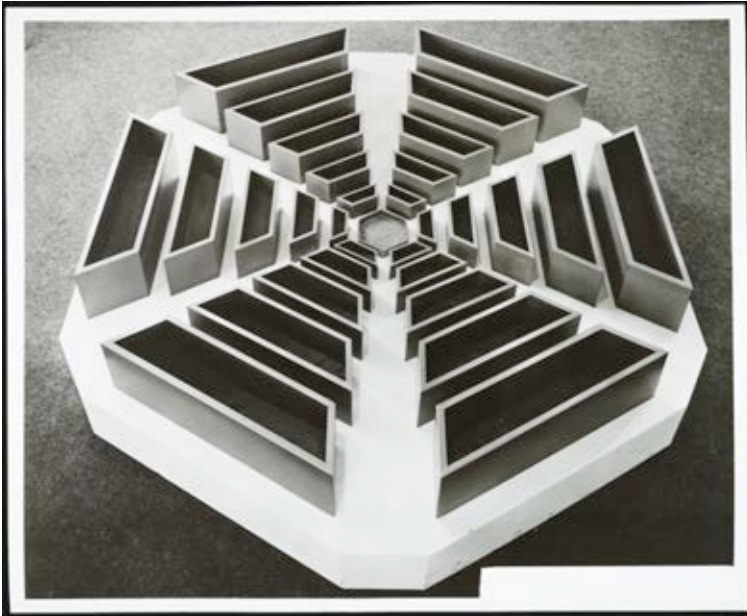
FIGURE 2.25. Robert Smithson, *A Non-Site (Indoor Earthwork)*, 1968.
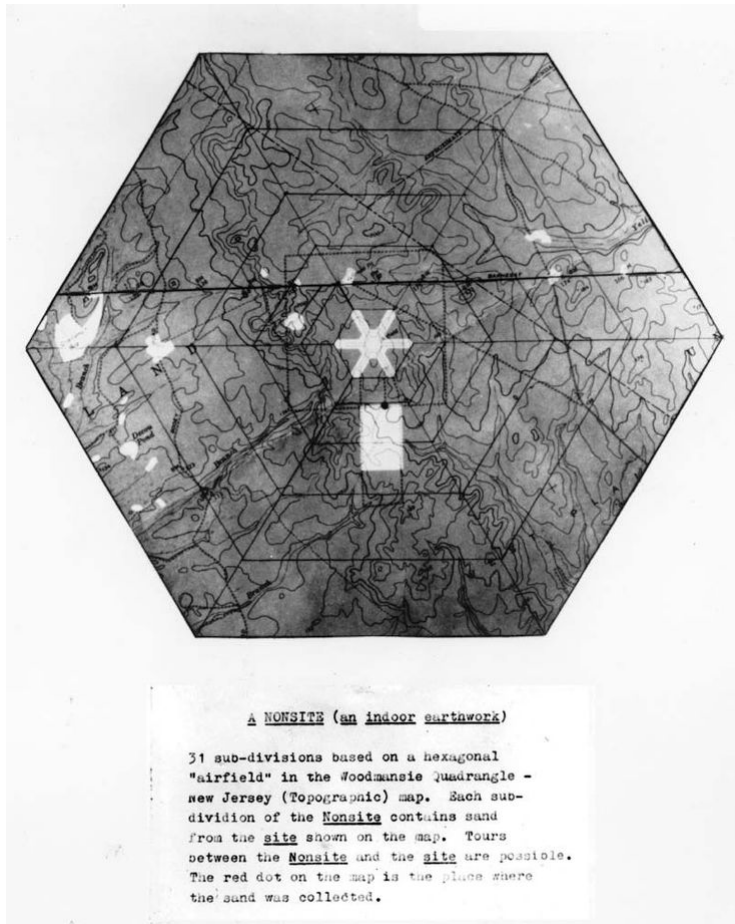
FIGURE 2.26. Robert Smithson, *A Non-Site (Indoor Earthwork)* (detail), 1968.

FIGURE 2.27. Smithson's second solo show at Dwan Gallery, 1968: *Sinistral Spiral*, 1968 (*left*); *Leaning Strata*, 1968 (*center*); *Gyrostatis*, 1968 (*right)*.

FIGURES 2.28. and 2.29. Georges Braque, *Still Life with Violin and Pitcher*, 1910 (*left*) and Georges Braque, *Portuguese*, 1911 (*right*)

FIGURE 2.30. Robert Smithson, photographs of Coyle Field (presumed), ca. 1968, in "Non-Site, Pine Barrens, New Jersey, 1968-1969," Box 5 Folder 8, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, Archives of American Art.

FIGURE 2.31. Eisenstein atop a phallic cactus, c. 1931.

FIGURE 2.32. Sergei Eisenstein, *Fallait bien lui faire une Ève… il me fendait tous les elephants!*, 1931.

FIGURE 2.33. Sergei Eisenstein, *Portrait pour mission indienne*, 1931.

FIGURE 2.34. Sergei Eisenstein, Drawing no. 9 from the cycle *Murder of King Duncan*, 1931.

FIGURE 2.35. Sergei Eisenstein, *Una alternativea muy complicada*, 1931.

FIGURE 2.36. Sergei Eisenstein, stills from the "Maguey" episode of *¡Que Viva México!*

FIGURE 2.37. Robert Smithson, *Overturned Rock #1*, 1969.
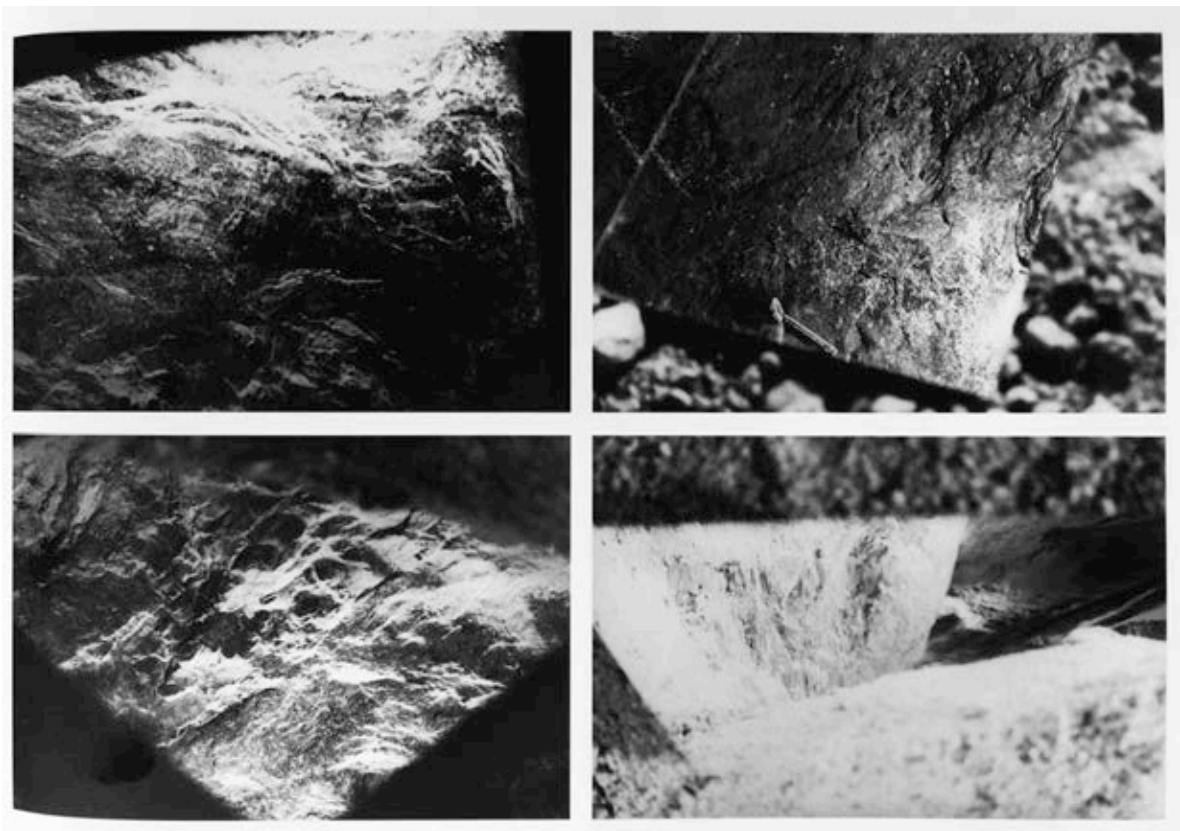
FIGURE 2.38. Robert Smithson, photographs from Cayuga Salt Mine Project, 1968–69.

FIGURE 2.39. Robert Smithson, *Ithaca Mirror Trail, Ithaca, New York*, 1969.

FIGURE 2.40. Robert Smithson, *Chalk Mirror Displacement,* constructed at the Oxted chalkpit quarry, Surrey and photographed by the artist (*above*), 1969.

FIGURE 2.41. Robert Smithson, *Nonsite (Essen Soil and Mirrors)*, 1969.

FIGURE 2.42. Robert Smithson, *Hypothetical Continent of Gondwanaland*, 1969.
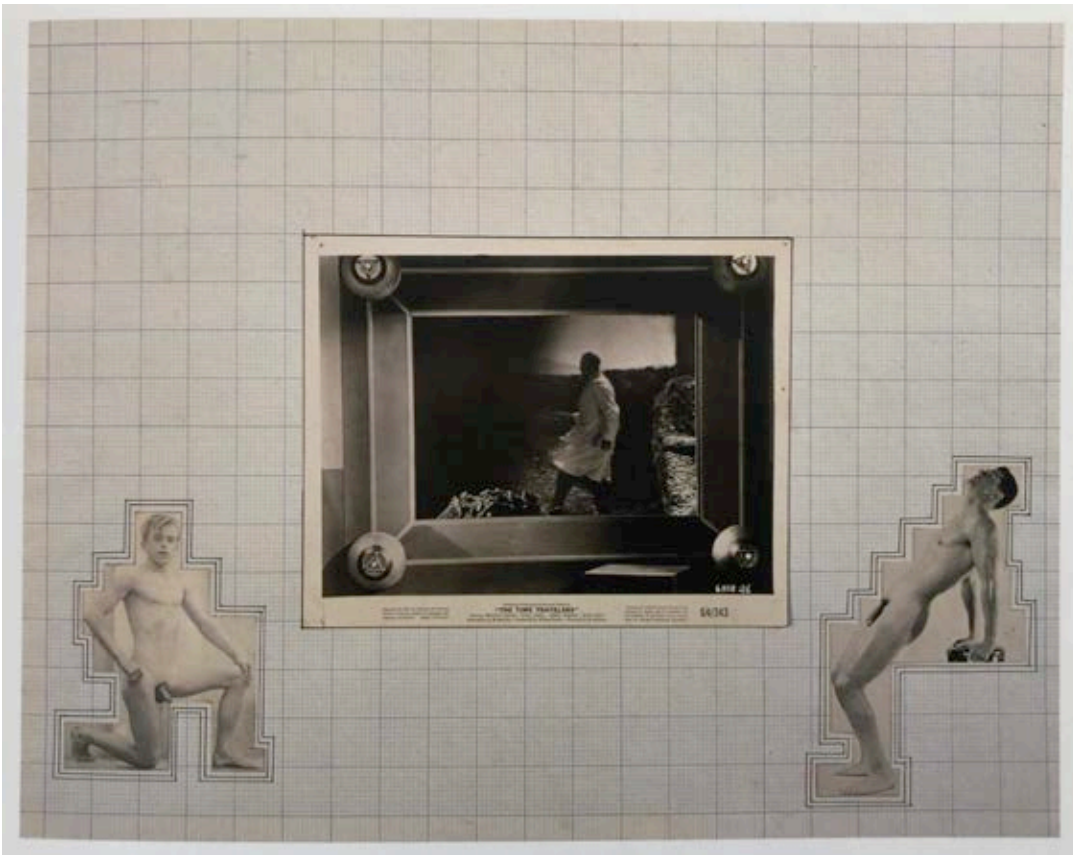
FIGURE 2.43. Robert Smithson, *Untitled (The Time Travelers)*, 1964.

FIGURE 2.44. Nancy Holt, *Robert Smithson and Robert Morris Climbing Fence at Great Notch Quarry, New Jersey*, 1966.
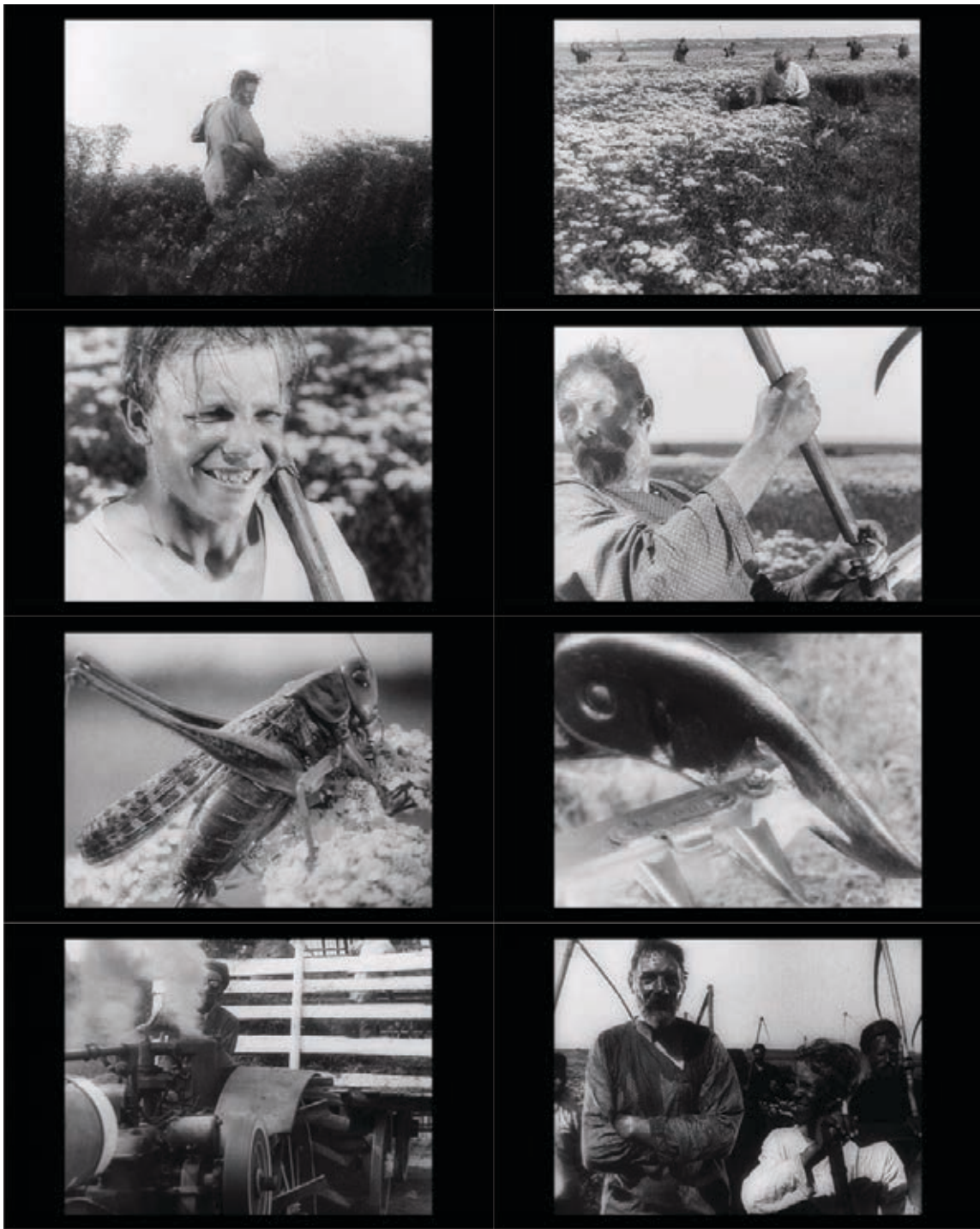
FIGURE 3.1. Peasants bested by a tractor. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.
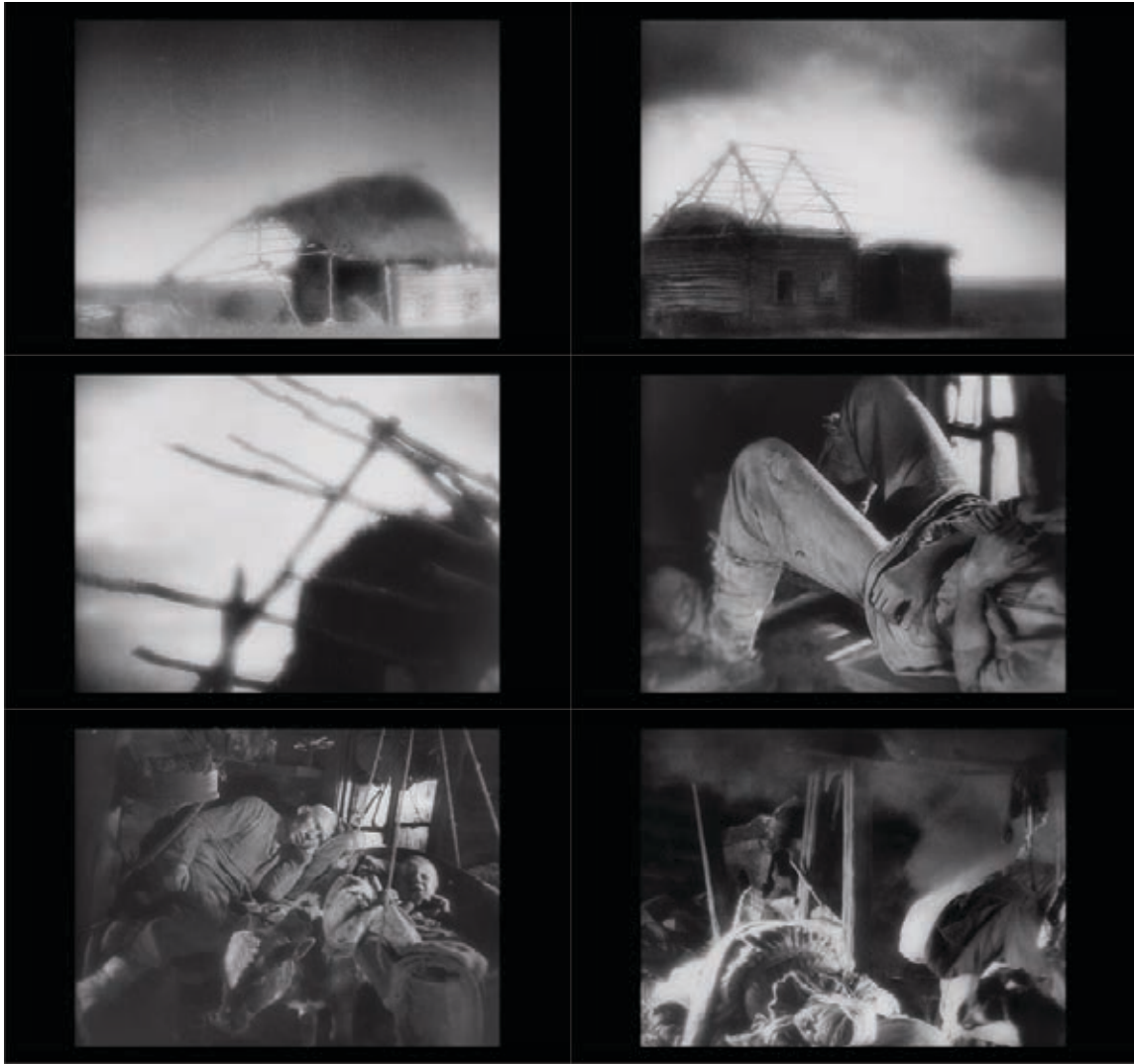
FIGURE 3.2. The squalid misery of the "old." From Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.3. Bovine wedding. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.4. A finale of spiraling tractors. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.5. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.6. *Artforum* advertisement for "Earth Works" at Dwan Gallery, October 1968.
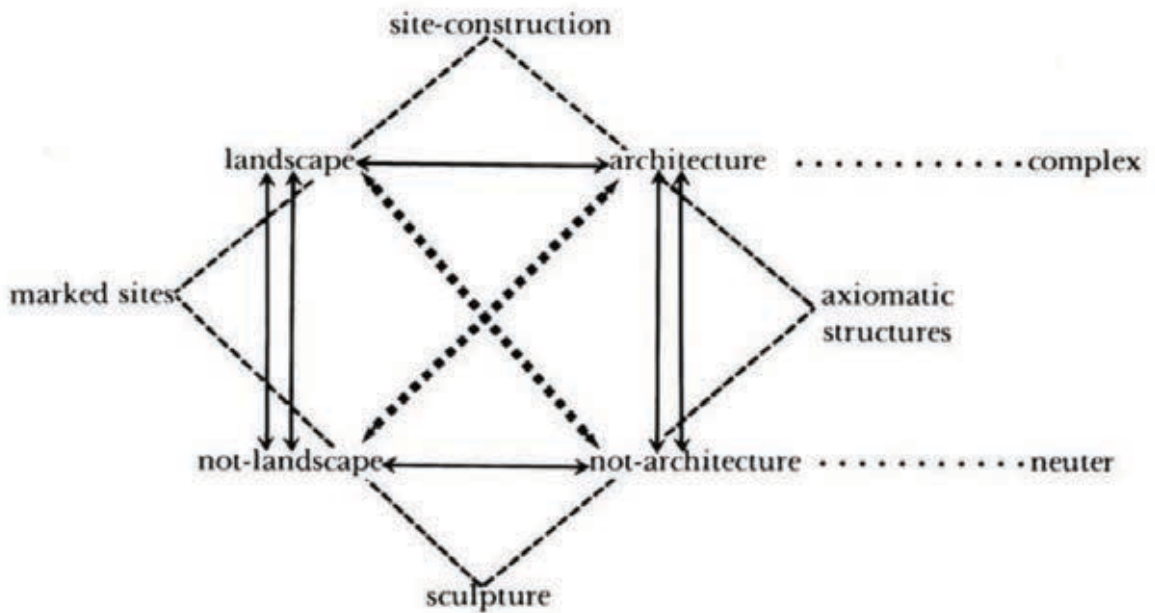
FIGURE 3.7. The "expanded field," from Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October*, Vol. 8, Spring, 1979.

FIGURE 3.8. Tanks repurposed as tractors leveling an airfield. From Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Pravda*, no. 7, 1922.

FIGURE 3.9. Eisenstein editing *October*, 1927.

FIGURE 3.10. The tractor-driver cranks the engine. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.11. Smithson staking out the path of the *Spiral Jetty*. Still from Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.12. The completed *Spiral Jetty*. Stills from Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.13. Bob Fiore's photographic sequences. From James K, Monte and Marcia Tucker, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969).

FIGURE 3.14. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty, Great Salt Lake (Movie Treatment)*, 1970. The top three rows depict the Hitchcockian sequence in which Smithson flees from the helicopter.

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FIGURE 3.15. Robert Smithson, *Movie Treatment for Spiral Jetty*, Parts I and II, 1970

FIGURE 3.16. Final shot from Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.17. Film still-like photographs of Central Park's Vista Rock Tunnel made in 1862 (*left*) and 1972 (*right*). From Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmstead and the Dialectical Landscape," *Artforum*, February 1973.

FIGURE 3.18. A solar overture. The opening "vignette" from the first part of Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970

FIGURE 3.19. The second "vignette" from the first part of Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.20. The third "vignette" from the first part of Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.21. The fourth "vignette" from the first part of Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.22. The fifth "vignette" from the first part of Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.23. The sixth "vignette" from the first part of Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.24. Dziga Vertov, *The Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.25. Dziga Vertov, *The Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.26. Dziga Vertov, *The Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.27. Fomka's rapid aging. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.28. The kolkhoz's money multiplying through stop motion. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.29. The Lifting of the Bridge sequence, from Sergei Eisenstein, *October*, 1928.

FIGURE 3.30. Sawing a house in two. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.

FIGURE 3.31. Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.32. Paul Thek, *Birthday Cake*, ca. 1967.

FIGURE 3.33. Selection of snapshots of *Spiral Jetty* from Cooke, Lynne, and Karen J. Kelly, eds. *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

FIGURE 3.34. The "process," including the "ripping" of the *Spiral Jetty*. From Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.35. Robert Smithson, *King Kong Meets the Gem of Egypt*, 1972.

FIGURE 3.36. May 4 graffiti on Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970.

In Tuscaloosa, Ala., public, police and pigs celebrated Pig Day, a tribute to the local cops.　　　　　—Life Magazine

The artist does not have to *will* a response to the "deepening political crisis in America." Sooner or later the artist is implicated or devoured by politics without even trying. My "position" is one of *sinking* into an awareness of global squalor and futility. The rat of politics always gnaws at the cheese of art. The trap is set. If there's an original

to be tender; they have an acute fear of blood baths and revolutionary terror. The political system that now controls the world on every level should be denied by art. Yet, why are so many artists now attracted to the dangerous world of politics? Perhaps, at the bottom, artists like anybody else yearn for that unbearable situation that politics leads to: the threat of pain, the horror of annihilation, that would end in calm and peace. Disgust generated by fear creates a personal panic, that seeks relief in sacrifice. Primitive sacrifices controlled by religious rites were supposed to extract life from death. The blind surge of life, I'm afraid, threatens itself. Modern sacrifices become a matter of chance and randomness. Nobody can face the absolute limit of death.

Student and police riots on a deeper level are ceremonial sacrifices based on a primal contingency—not a rite but an accident. Nevertheless, because of media co-option, the riots are being structured into rites. The students are a "life force" as opposed to the police "death force." Abbie Hoffman makes reference to William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* on page 184 of *Revolution for the Hell of It;* Golding's pig devil surrounded by flies is compared by Hoffman to an "unbelievable smell of decay and shit." Golding's novel abounds in images of piggishness; there is the fat boy called Piggy, and the rotten head of a pig. The overall mood of the novel is one of original disgust. One must remember that this novel was very popular with students some years ago. Life is swollen like Piggy and this is disappointing, the clean world of capitalism begins to stink, "the sexual channels are also the body's sewers" (George Bataille), nausea and repugnance bring one to the brink of violence. Only the fires of hell can burn away the slimy, maggot-ridden de-

FIGURE 3.37. Image of *Partially Buried Woodshed* accompanying Smithson's contribution to "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum* 9, no. 1 (September 1970): 35–39.

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FIGURE 3.38. Vladimir Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International*, 1919–20

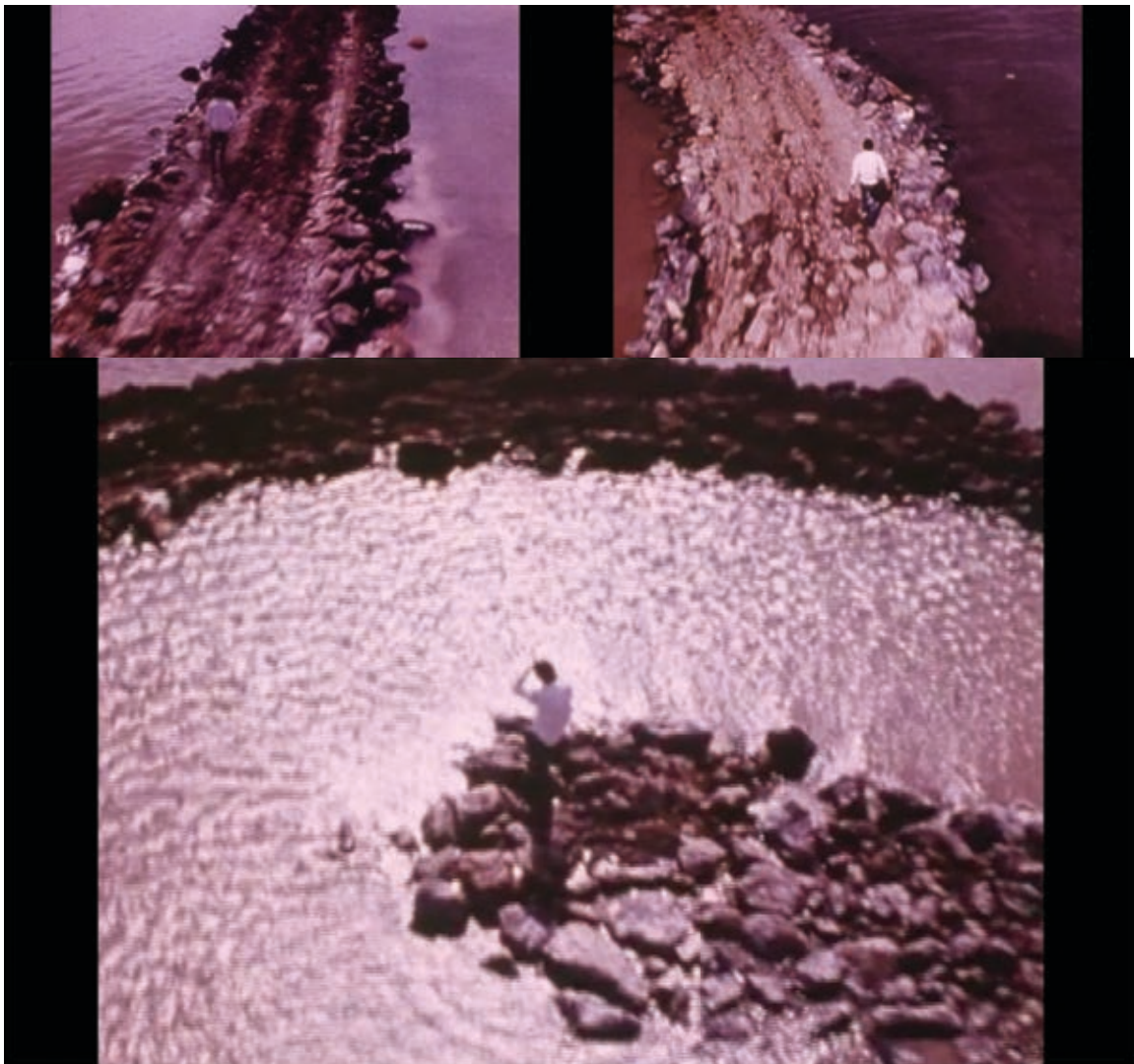FIGURE 3.39. Stills from Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic cinéma*, 1925–26

FIGURE 3.40. Smithson running the length of *Spiral Jetty*. From Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.
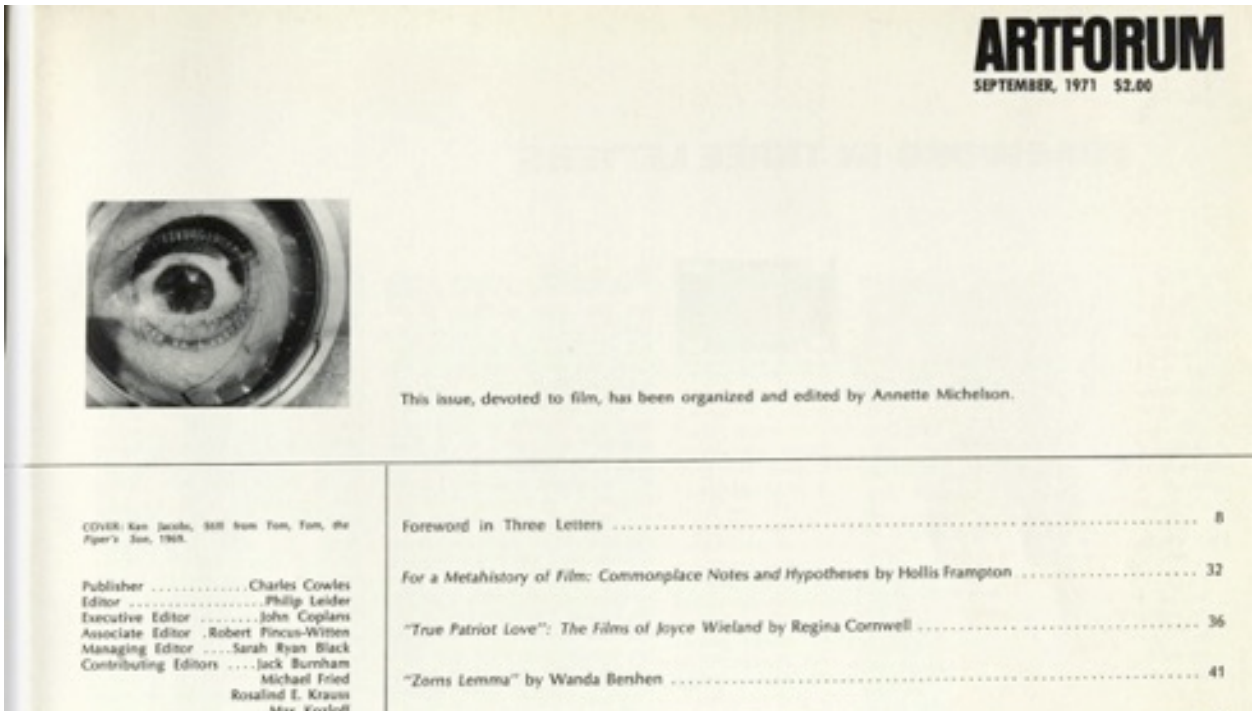
FIGURE 3.41. Vertov's Kino-Eye featured on the masthead of Annette Michelson's special film issue of *Artforum*, September 1971
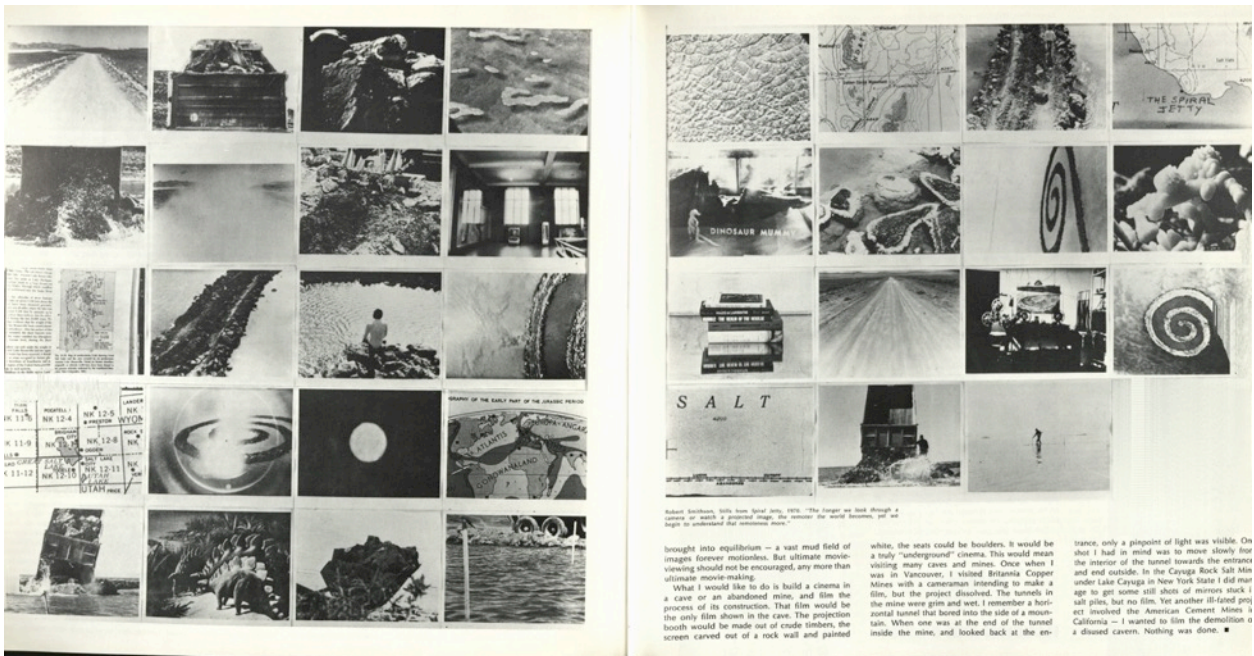

FIGURE 3.42. Spread from Robert Smithson's "A Cinematic Atopia," as published in Michelson's special film issue of *Artforum*, September 1971, and including a grid of stills excerpted from *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970.

FIGURE 3.43. Robert Smithson, *Towards the Development of a Cinema Cavern, or the Movie Goer as Spelunker*, 1971.

FIGURE 3.44. Robert Smithson, *Underground Projection Room*, 1971.

FIGURE 3.45. Robert Smithson, *Plan for Museum Concerning Spiral Jetty*, 1971.
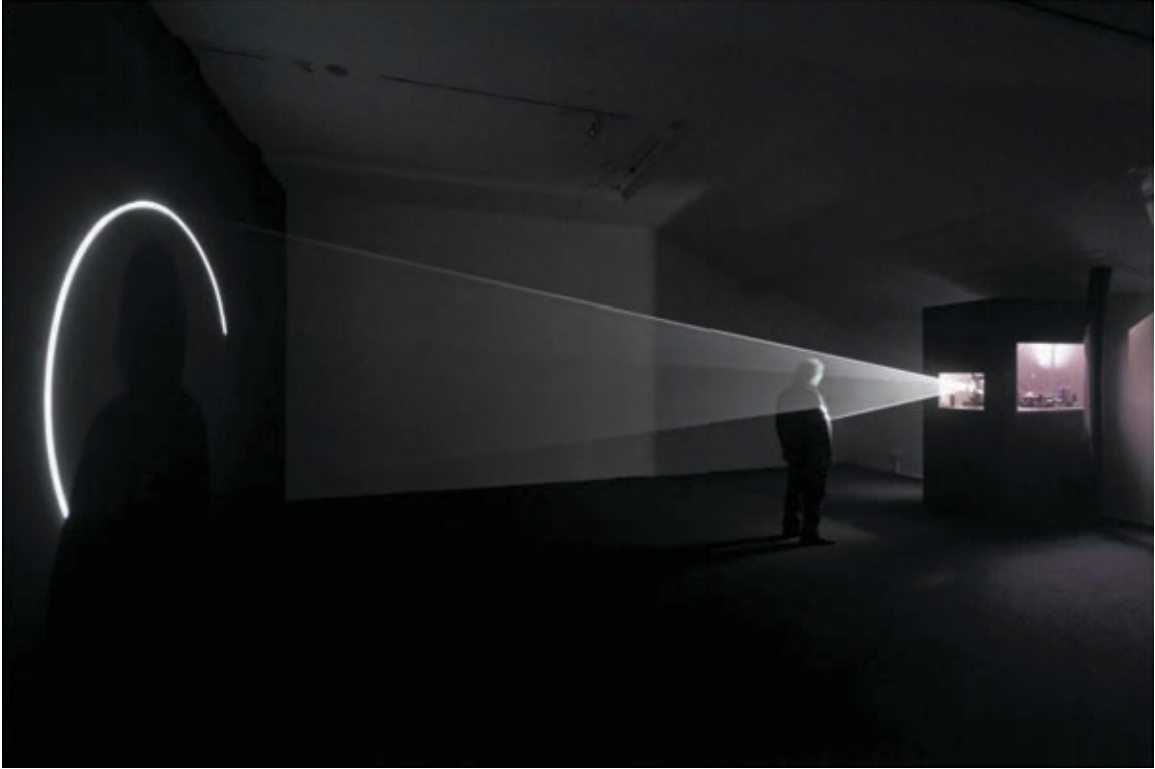
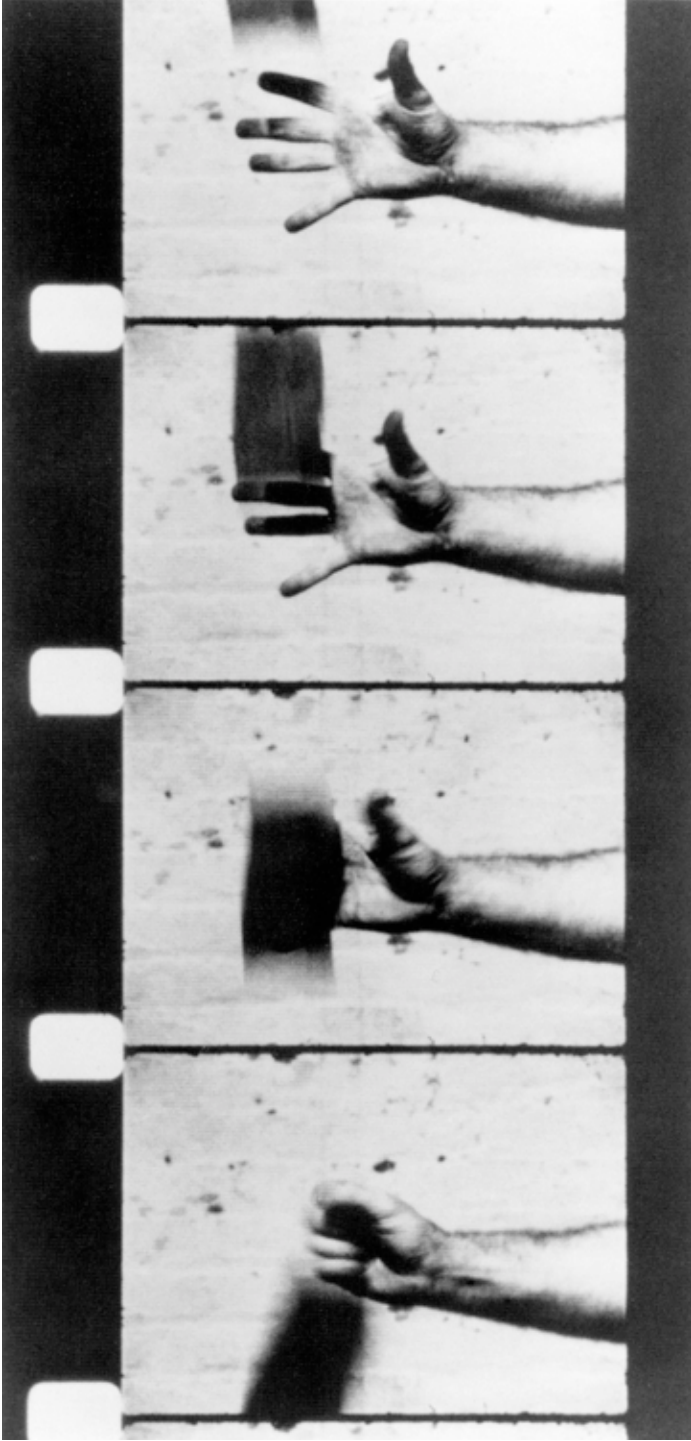FIGURE 3.46. Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973.

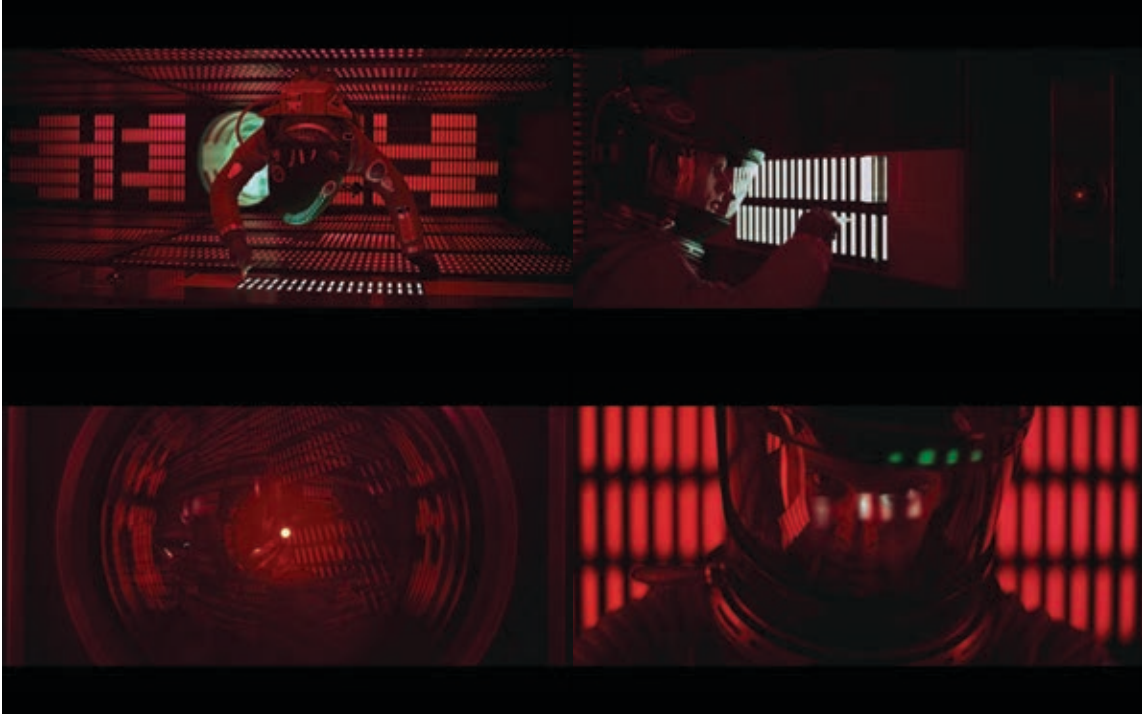FIGURE 3.47. Stills from Richard Serra, *Hand Catching Lead*, 1968.

FIGURE 4.1. Dr. David Bowman disconnects Hal. From Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.

FIGURE 4.2. Dr. Bowman travels through a wormhole. From Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.
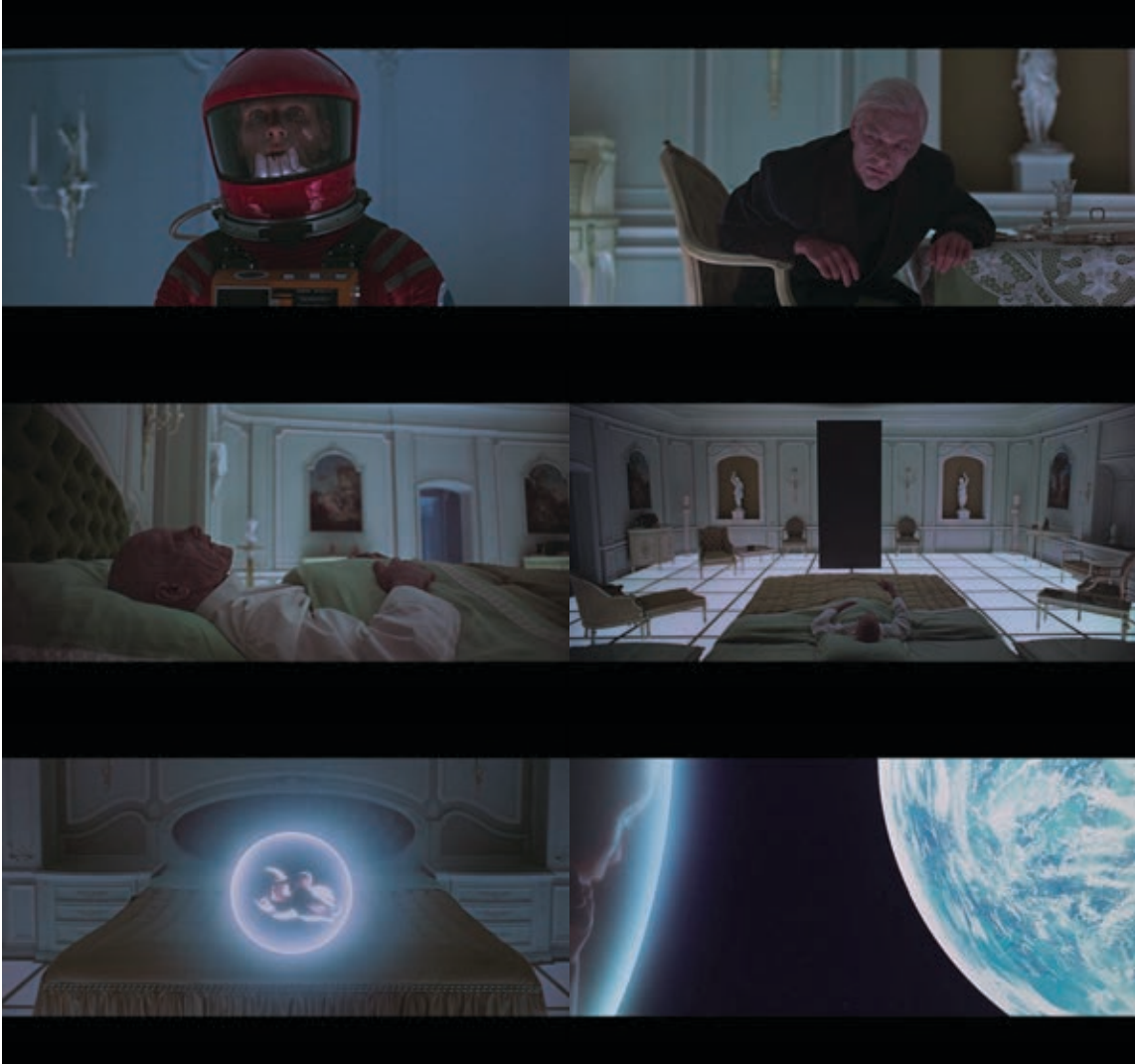
FIGURE 4.3. Dr. Bowman ages and is reborn. From Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.
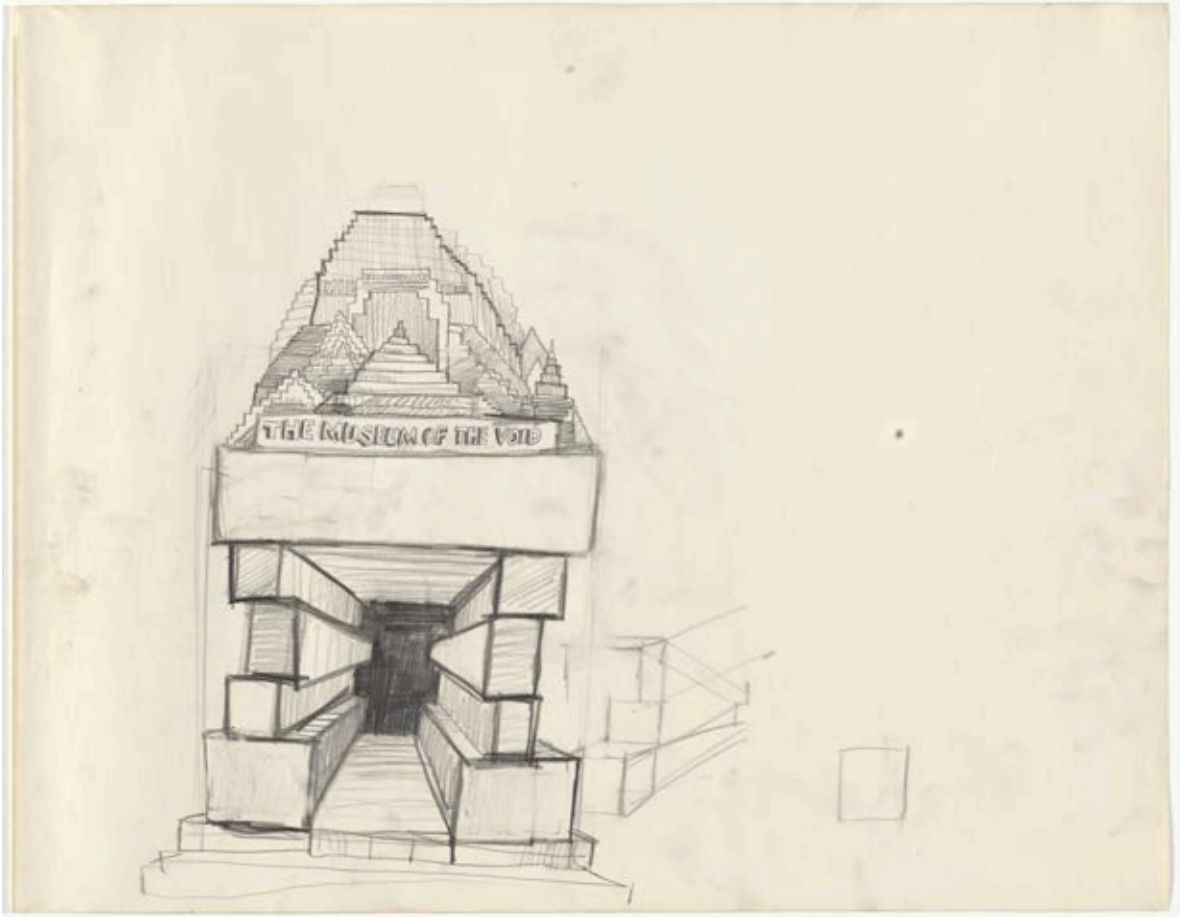
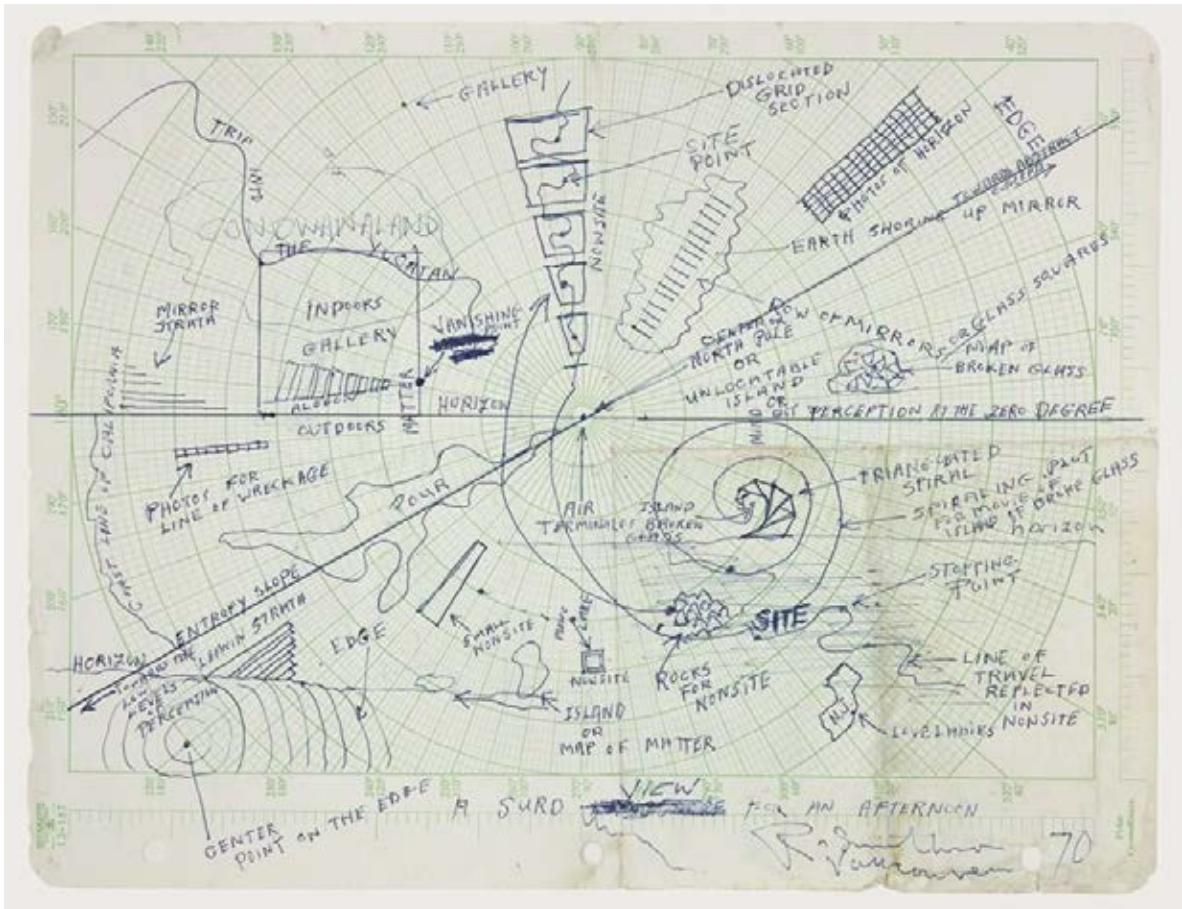FIGURE 4.4. Robert Smithson, *The Museum of the Void*, c. 1966–68.

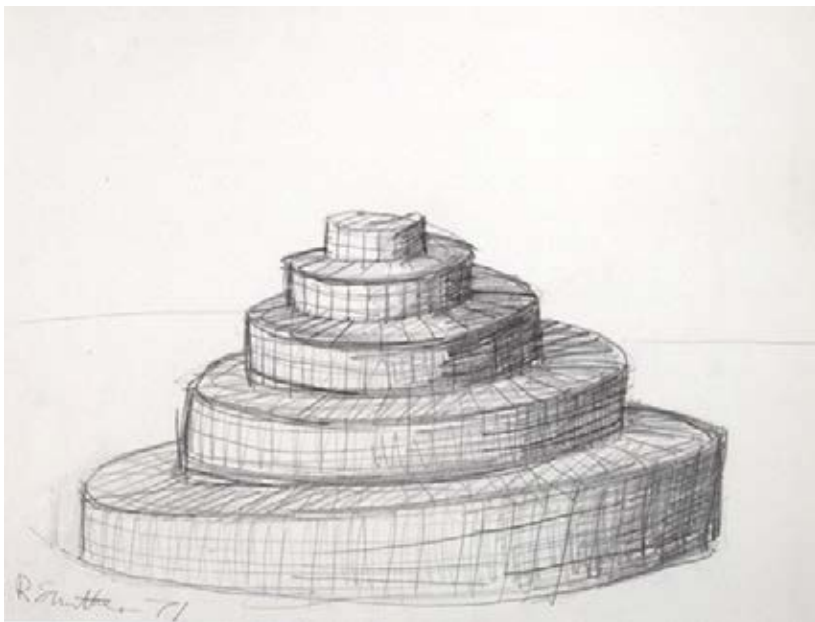FIGURE 4.5. Robert Smithson, *A Surd View for an Afternoon*, 1970.

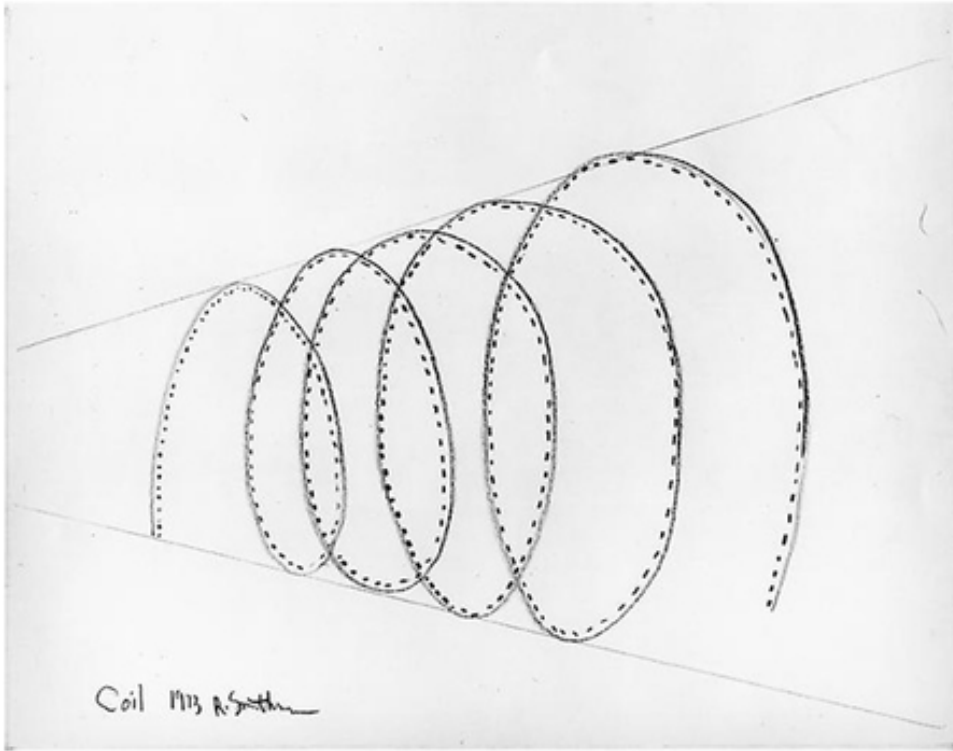FIGURE 4.6. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Hill*, 1971.

FIGURE 4.7. Robert Smithson, *Coil*, 1973.

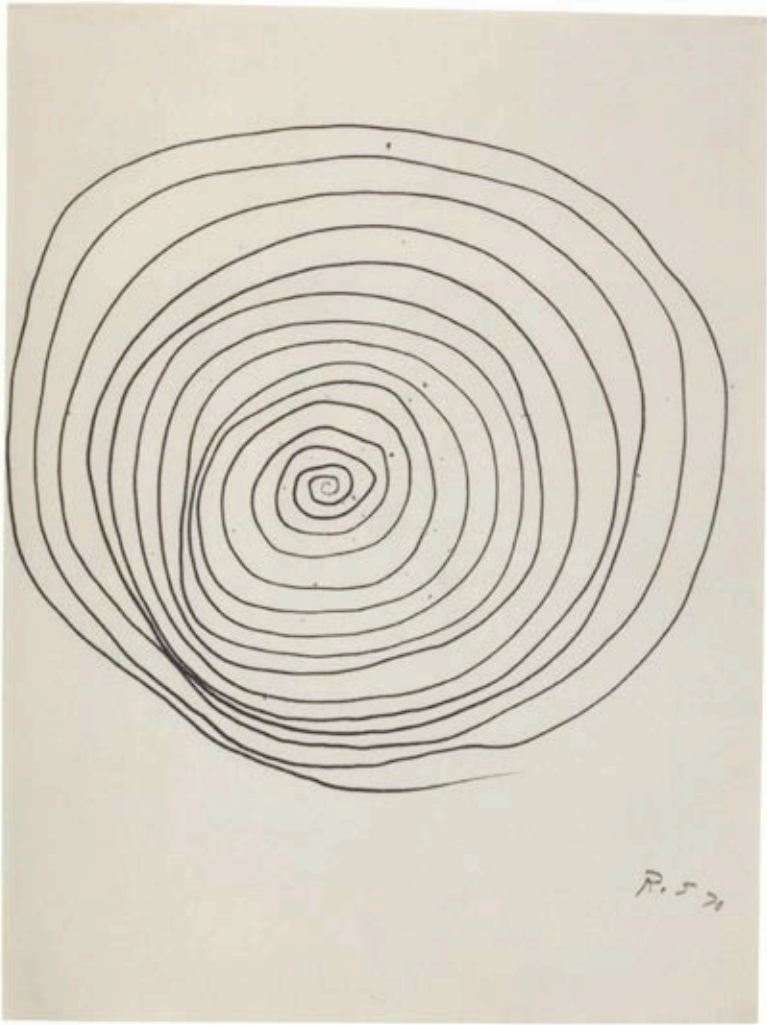FIGURE 4.8. Robert Smithson, *Spirals*, 1970.
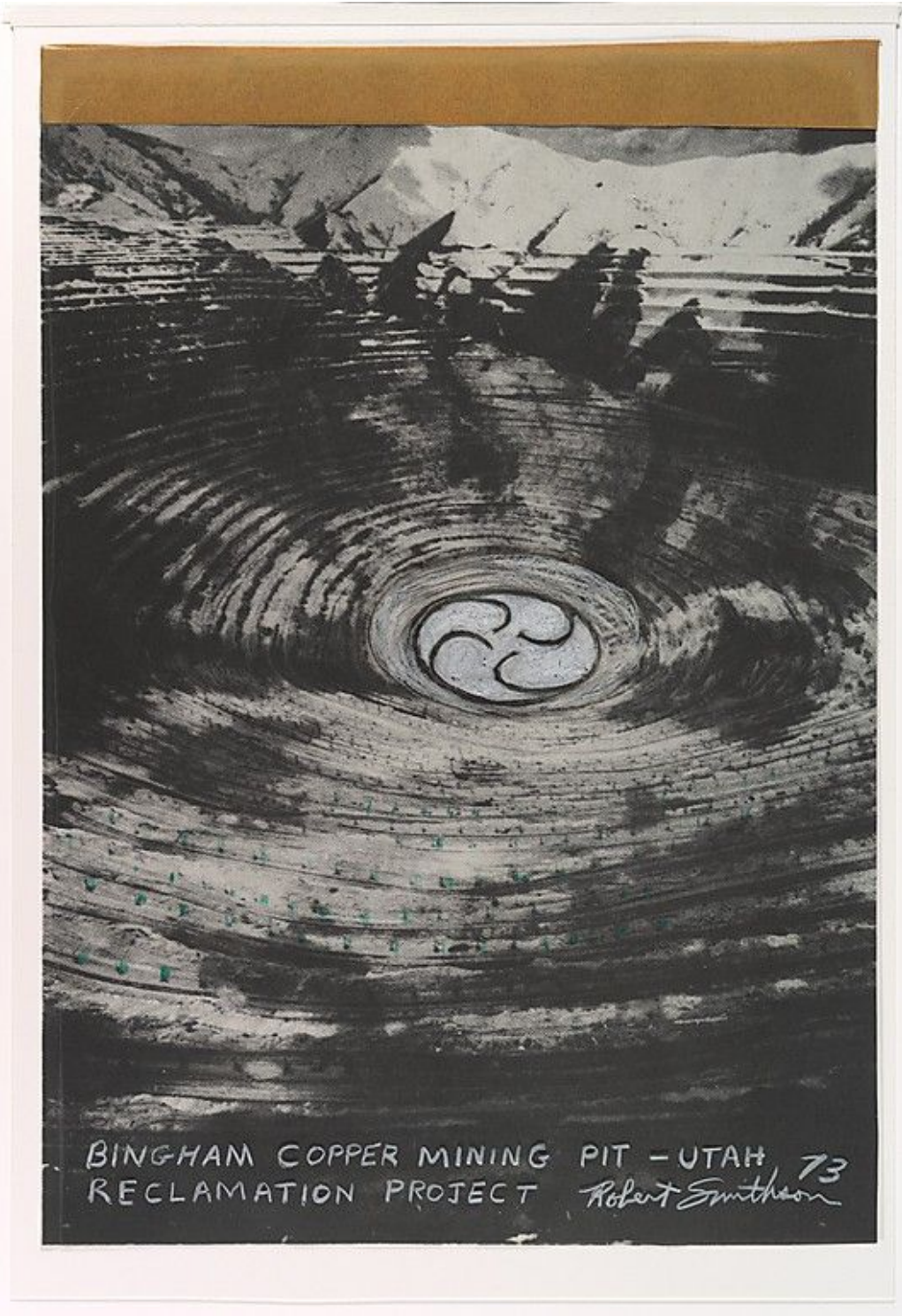
FIGURE 4.9. Robert Smithson, *Untitled*, 1970.

FIGURE 4.10. Robert Smithson, *Bingham Canyon Copper Mine, Utah, USA*, 1973.

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