

# La Jetée en Spirale: Robert Smithson's Stratigraphic Cinema

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*The experience of the work necessarily exists in time.*

—Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture”

*. . . a span of time unfinished, a spaceless limbo on some spiral reels*

—Robert Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty”

Traveling to Rozel Point on the Great Salt Lake, one is confronted with the decrepit remains of abandoned machinery that appears to belong to any time but our own. Perhaps it was these same “incoherent structures” that Robert Smithson saw as “evidence of a succession of man-made systems mired in abandoned hopes” and to which he built *Spiral Jetty* as a kind of anti-monument.<sup>1</sup> Persisting, beyond any function, into an incompatible present, these structures do not allow the site to “cohere” into a single time or place. The experience of the *Spiral Jetty* is constituted by an analogous layering or stratification of time: the present is palpably covered over by sheets of mnemonic sedimentation, of read descriptions, seen images, and projected expectations. Smithson’s warning concerning his earlier *Yucatan Mirror Displacements* would seem to apply: “If you visit the sites (a doubtful possibility) you find nothing but memory-traces. . . . It is the dimension of absence that remains to be found.”<sup>2</sup>

While seductive, the rhetoric of absence has not been proven a helpful guide to understanding the complexity of Smithson’s project with the *Spiral Jetty*. The structure’s recent drama of disappearance/reappearance, combined with the increased market visibility of the period, has threatened to elicit a nostalgia for just the kind of heroic interpretation of the earthworks movement that Smithson’s thoroughly mediated practices consistently sought to oppose. And while an exclusive focus on the *Jetty* as a solitary sculptural object has been thoroughly dispelled by Smithson’s

most perceptive critics, it manages to rise again and again—as if through the shifting tides of the Salt Lake itself—to impart an erroneous clarity to waters Smithson had purposely intended to muddy.

Recently some scholars have claimed that an exclusive concern with the rhetorical topos of materiality and dematerialization has served to obfuscate a more substantive interest in questions of temporality and process in the art of this period.<sup>3</sup> This is indeed the case with Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, in which a privileging of the physical object and site has consistently led critics away from the complex interrogation of process and temporality to which the work, considered as a whole, gives rise.<sup>4</sup> In particular, Smithson's critics have largely been content to use the *Spiral Jetty* film as a form of documentary evidence while ignoring the specificity of its cinematic mediation—ignoring the film's rich temporal structure and the ways in which this structure might be said to mirror the phenomenal experience of the earthwork itself.<sup>5</sup> In the present essay I argue that we can begin to consider this temporal structure, and the larger question of Smithson's relation to cinema, by recourse to what Gilles Deleuze has called "the time-image."

Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* sought to rejuvenate the conception of temporality within contemporary philosophy through an encounter with the radical aesthetics of postwar cinema.<sup>6</sup> While Bergson and Peirce form the philosophical ground from which Deleuze's project begins, he spoke not of "applying" philosophy to cinema but rather of rejuvenating philosophy through it. Similarly, my present use of Deleuze is not intended to explain or interpret Smithson's film according to Deleuzian theory but to allow the rich temporal structure of Smithson's film to present itself more clearly and so reveal a broad connection, on the level of epistemology, with the many contemporary aesthetic investigations organized around temporality and process in the late 1960s and 1970s. Deleuze's terminology bears an insistent and telling homology with Smithson's own: their shared rhetoric of stratigraphy, of topology and cartography, and of crystalline structure and movement are not incidental but bear witness to a deep conceptual affinity around the critique of space and spatialized paradigms of thought, as well as the processes of desubjectification and decentering manifest in and through a radical encounter with time. A Deleuzian framework may also be helpful in avoiding the contentious problem of the *Spiral Jetty's* "textuality" that divided critical scholarship in the 1980s. Deleuze's shift from a linguistic to a perceptual semiotics can allow for the salutary deterritorialization effected by Craig Owens in his seminal essay "Earthwords," while avoiding the admittedly problematic containment of semiotics within a purely linguistic model,

with its corollary that perception can only ever be a kind of “reading.”<sup>7</sup> While the republication of his *Collected Writings* only cements obvious centrality of these works within Smithson’s oeuvre, we should also consider that the years immediately before the *Spiral Jetty* heralded “a major redirection of Smithson’s energies away from his writing . . . he appears to have searched for a new vehicle with which to communicate many of the ideas he previously expressed in texts—a search that led him to explore the visual and narrative potential of film.”<sup>8</sup>

Deleuze’s cinema books are of particular use because they are organized around understanding an event—what he termed an “image-epistemological shift”—which, far from being contained within cinema, bears a deep affinity to theorizations of temporality and subjectivity in postminimalist aesthetics.<sup>9</sup> Schematically, Deleuze argues that European and American postwar cinema registers the collapse in the belief of a subject-centered humanism by producing a modernist cinema no longer exclusively or even principally ordered by human action. The failure of the great sociopolitical movements of the 1920s and 1930s, combined with the traumatic alternatives of Fascism and Stalinism, contributed to a sense of disillusionment in confronting the “culture industry” that America was so successfully exporting worldwide. For Deleuze, this cultural malaise is cinematically registered as a futility of directed action and the inability of the protagonist to command, or even fully conceptualize, the spaces into which he has been thrown. He describes this shift as

the very break-up of the sensory-motor schema: the rise of situations to which one can no longer react, of environments with which there are now only chance relations, of empty or disconnected any-space-whatevers replacing qualified extended space. It is here that situations no longer extend into action or reaction . . . these are pure optical and sound situations, in which the character does not know how to respond . . . [he is] vaguely indifferent to what happens to him, undecided as to what must be done. But he has gained in an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction.<sup>10</sup>

This cinema rejects the kind of spatial mastery privileged within the earlier “sensory-motor schema.” The map—as a diagrammatic representation and conceptualization of a spatial route—is ineluctably bound up with the physical movement of a purposeful subject. Yet already in Smithson’s “non-sites,” maps had lost this function of explaining and delineating concrete spaces so as to become anti-maps—“maps that showed you how to get nowhere.”<sup>11</sup>

Recall Smithson’s fascination with Lewis Carroll’s strange cartographies in *The*

*Hunting of the Snark* (in which the ocean map is described as a giant “blank”) and in *Sylvie*’s fiction of the cartographers who “experimented with larger and larger maps until they finally made one with a scale of a mile to a mile.”<sup>12</sup> As in both of these earlier precedents of “anti-mapping,” Smithson’s cartography frustrates the very spatial order the map is ordinarily supposed to clarify. Inhibiting the possibility of directed movement, it thrusts the subject into a conceptual topography. What was not yet clear in this early work, but would become increasingly evident within his writing and film, was *where* these ideas were headed. In what follows I want to follow Deleuze in associating negation of space with the figuration of time and claim that the project of mapping within Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* film is less concerned with delineating spatial location than with the elaboration of what could be called a “stratigraphic” conception of time.

### **“Northwest by North”: Reversing Hitchcock’s Action-Image**

*How many stories have I seen on the screen? All those “characters” carrying out dumb tasks. Actors doing exciting things. It’s enough to put one into a permanent coma.*

—Robert Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia”

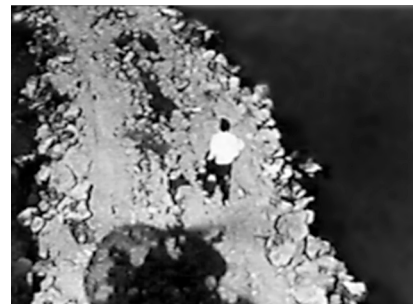
Near the end of *The Spiral Jetty*, as the “completed” work is finally coming into view, we are treated not only to the sole “action-sequence” in the film but to the only sustained encounter with the work’s author. In a loose quotation of the iconic “crop-duster scene” from Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* (1958), Smithson runs along the *Spiral Jetty*, pursued by the cameraman in a helicopter whose noise fills the audio track and whose shadow occasionally passes across the screen. Yet if this was a kind of cliché, it was appropriated from a film that had itself been a self-conscious jumble of genres and clichés. Simply recall the line from the auction scene in which Hitchcock’s protagonist is admonished, “has anyone ever told you that you *overplay* your various roles rather severely, Mr. Kaplan?” Yet far from threatening the dramatic movement of the film, Hitchcock’s self-consciousness made his clichés and generic conventions seem fresh and exciting, the spectator’s recognition of them a kind of game. For this reason Deleuze considered Hitchcock to be the mature master of the early cinema of the action-image, bringing it to the height of its formal evolution while beginning to strain against its limitations. Now consider Smithson’s transformation of the cinematic action: in Hitchcock’s film the running sequence is actually quite short—just two five-second bursts as the plane strafes overhead and Thornhill runs to hide in a nearby cornfield. The scene acquires its power not through the direct

presentation of action but through the lengthy periods of stillness and anticipation that work to “suture” us into identification with the protagonist, to envelop us within what Stephen Heath would call the film’s “narrative space.”<sup>13</sup>

For Deleuze the cinematic “action-image” operates through a metonymic logic whereby the individual part can be said to stand for, and take up a specific location in, a whole that would encompass it. Through standard cinematic conventions like the establishing shot and the shot/reverse shot, a coherent narrative space is built-up that links characters and situations, on-screen and off-screen space, into a spatially coherent cinematic world. An occasional aberrant or unmotivated cut serves only to solidify what we understand to be the normal spatial logic of the whole. Yet many new cinemas of the 1950s and 1960s (and not simply those of the self-proclaimed avant-garde) began to break with this spatial paradigm to produce what Deleuze calls “pure optical and sound situations” in which aberrant or unmotivated cuts now became the norm. As the sensory-motor schema was shattered from within, this modernist cinema began to shift from an indirect representation of time—in which our sense of cinematic temporality arises only *incidentally* out of the physical and spatial movement within the narrative diegesis—toward more direct forms of the “time-image” in which temporality *itself* becomes the force and motor of cinematic enunciation.

In contrast to the narrative space Hitchcock elaborately constructs, Smithson’s film has no build up, no identification or suspense. Rather than seeing the plane coming at us from above, we simply see Smithson jogging down the spiral as the helicopter’s noise presses in and its wind ruffles his clothing. Not only is Smithson running from something that is clearly not pursuing him, but we know from the start that he has nowhere to go. His action is thus neutralized from the beginning, its superfluity and purposelessness drawn out and highlighted. Reaching the end of the spiral, he pauses, then turns to walk back. What was for Hitchcock already a transformation of the action-image away from direct screen movement toward the production of suspense (the vast emptiness of the plains being the truly frightening aspect of his crop-duster scene), for Smithson becomes a mockery of the action-image itself, its emptying out into an image of “pointless” duration. Lengthened and dissected qua form, the scene’s blunt, frontal presentation bespeaks a whole range of precedents that consciously stage the phenomenal experience of their temporality, from the cinema of Andy Warhol’s early and middle periods to the studio films of Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra.<sup>14</sup> Paradoxically, by providing too close an alignment between the time of spectatorship and the time of the film, these films establish a

Robert Smithson.  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Film Still.



cinematic space that is not a narrative space—images of duration we can no longer enter but only see without occupying.

“One thing all film has in common is to take perception elsewhere,” Smithson says in “A Cinematic Atopia.”<sup>15</sup> But outside the cinema of the action-image, the characteristics of this “elsewhere” cannot be considered through our traditional spatial categories. In the late 1960s Smithson’s “non-sites” could already be understood as a critique of traditional notions of space and spatialized thought. These works strained against the traditional logic of the monument that had tied sculpture to a particular place, and a particular chronology, as a commemorative marker. If modern sculpture had already traded the specific place of the historically rooted site for the abstract “white-box” of the museum, Smithson’s work refused to settle in any determinate space whatsoever. The site/non-site dialectic inhabited a no-man’s land between concrete and abstract space; it refused to be contained either within the museum or indeed at any definite geographic location, just as it refused to be understood as a purely abstract or conceptual work through the sheer experience of its materiality. Nor did the indexical “documentation” Smithson included do anything to clarify this conceptual and spatial confusion. “Maps are elusive things,” Smithson proclaimed in an interview about one of the most famous non-sites. “This map of Mono Lake is a map that tells you how to get nowhere.”<sup>16</sup>

While often dismissed as pure provocation, we might consider this idea a map that tells us how to “get nowhere.” What happens when we’re “getting nowhere,” when we’re “spinning your wheels?” The idea is that we have stopped keeping pace with the forward march of time, which continues forward regardless of our intention, action, or desire. And in attempting to consider a movement divorced from spatial categories, we are led—perhaps inevitably—to the dimension of time. Already in his 1966 essay “The Shape of the Future and Memory,” Smithson was attempting to rethink his aesthetic along temporal lines:

Memories have a way of trapping one’s notion of the future and placing it in a brittle series of mental prisons. . . . The “time traveler” as he advances deep into the future discovers a decrease in movement, the mind enters a state of “slow motion” and perceives the gravel and dust of memory on the empty fringes of consciousness. Like H.G. Wells [The Time-Machine], he sees the “ice along the sea margin”—a double perspective of past and future that follows a projection that vanishes into a nonexistent present. *I have constructed some replicas of such perspectives, but I find they tell me less and less about the structure of*

*time. The perspectivism of my esthetic has caved-in. . . . The continuous dimensions of space with all its certainties and rationalisms have broken through my consciousness into the discontinuous dimensions of time where certainties and rationalisms have little value. The calamitous regions of time are far from the comforts of space.*<sup>17</sup>

Here Smithson clearly indicates a frustration not only with his own developing sculptural practice but with the possibilities of explicitly spatial practices *tout court*. The “calamitous regions” Smithson wants to address cannot be confined within the three dimensions of the physical object but have expanded into the more complex arena of temporality itself. And while his sculptural works would increasingly exchange the self-sufficiency of the minimalist object for a complex process of photographic and textual mediation, it was not until the *Spiral Jetty* that Smithson would allow himself to work within time-based media to give form to the idea of the “time traveler” contained within this early essay. For this quintessentially cinematic project, his “jumping off point” (Old French, *Jetee*) was not the phenomenological “present-tense” of Warhol’s early filmmaking but the “stratigraphic” temporality within Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962).

### **Beyond Site/Non-site Dialectics: *La Jetée en spirale***

*I needed a map that would show the prehistoric world as coextensive with the world I existed in.*

—Robert Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty”

Though suspiciously excluded from Smithson’s many writings on film, Smithson’s collaborator, wife, and fellow earthworks pioneer Nancy Holt recently confirmed what might have been surmised both from Smithson’s general cinephilia and his particular love of science fiction; namely, that Smithson had been “fascinated” by Marker’s *La Jetée* and had viewed it “repeatedly” when it was exhibited in New York in the mid-1960s.<sup>18</sup> Combining Smithson’s interest in science fiction, time travel, and dystopian narratives with the ground-breaking formalism of French New Wave cinema, Marker’s short, seminal film would have been an inescapable reference to Smithson’s subsequent thinking about temporality. For while the spiral image was a mainstay of contemporary iconography for both time travel (*Dr. Who*) and mental breakdown (*Vertigo*), it was the layered or “stratigraphic” structure—a cinematic structure Deleuze would term “crystalline”—that seems to have most foreshadowed

Smithson's presentation of temporality within his own *Jetty* film.

*La Jetée* circles around the image of a woman from the past. Standing at the edge of a jetty at Orly Airport outside Paris, her image propels a series of journeys the protagonist will undertake not within space but within time. The woman's face, we are told, was the last image of peacetime before the holocaust of the Third World War, after which the remnants of the world's population were condemned to live underground in relative immobility. According to D.N. Rodowick, Marker's film exemplifies Deleuze's idea of the way the cinematic time-image emerges through a refusal of the Newtonian conception of space:

Whether this passage is actual and physical, or mental and spiritual, is ambiguous. *Movement, drained from the image and divorced from the representation of action, has relinquished its role as the measure of time. . . .* The painful binding of the subject—physically stilled no less than movement is frozen in the image—liberates him briefly in time, just as the imaging of time is released from its subordination to movements linked with physical actions. Once chronology is pulverized, time is fragmented like so many facets of a shattered crystal.<sup>19</sup>

Filmed almost entirely of blocks of still frames, and illustrating the “travels” of a protagonist strapped to a table for the entire length of the film, *La Jetée* drains away all spatial movement and, with it, the traditional forms of spectatorial identification to which the cinema of the “movement-image” gives rise. Rather than linear succession in space and chronological succession in time, Marker's film presents a differential or “irrational” montage in which it is an incommensurability of space and time that is constantly reasserted by this general structure of “indiscernibility”—of past and present, of real and imaginary.<sup>20</sup>

At the film's structural center, the time traveler's experiments have been perfected enough that he is able to spend a whole afternoon with the woman, rather than the

fleeting instants to which he has become accustomed. After still frames of her sleeping beside him, we are given an instant in which she opens her eyes in real time. And within the curious space here opened up between the still and moving image, Marker's narrative deploys the metaphor of the museum—specifically, the museum of natural history.



Chris Marker.  
*La Jetée*, 1962. Film Stills.



As the couple tours the mummified specimens enclosed in glass, the narrator speaks of “a certain museum which is perhaps his memory.” There, in a vision that was sure to have captured Smithson’s heart, was the quintessential image of man’s futile attempt to classify, order, and understand a history of the world outside his own making.<sup>21</sup> While the present, reduced to a long-lost dream-image, seems almost Apollonian in its order and permanence, the future that surrounds it is a cataclysm of entropic disaster and chaos. The film’s overall structure is that which Deleuze calls a perfect crystal—past and future, actual and virtual moving back and forth in a closed exchange—with the timeless, placeless central scene constituting the only moment of respite in the protagonist’s ineluctable movement toward the image of his own death.

As much as Smithson might have been fascinated by the paradoxes of history, time, and memory that Marker’s narrative so eloquently presents, it would be this formal dimension of “indiscernibility”—the conceptual murkiness Marker gave to the idea of location within his film—that may well have given Smithson a blueprint for his own film of a *Jetée en spirale*, an endlessly circling no place that constituted not a physical site of encounter but rather a “jumping off point” for an exploration of history, time, and memory.

### **Movement in Place**

*A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement.*

—Robert Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty”

Smithson’s film begins with a description of something that does not strictly exist. Over an image of solar flares arcing up from the surface of the sun, and against the sounds of what seems to be mechanically assisted breathing, Smithson’s voice announces, “The *Spiral Jetty*, the Great Salt Lake, Roxelder county, Utah” before cutting to a lengthy and unnarrated shot of the undeveloped dirt road upon which we appear to be traveling. This first voice-over seems to locate the *Spiral Jetty* cartographically, as if describing a definite geographic location. But we are not given a corresponding image of this location. Rather, we are presented with an image of something we cannot even see with our naked eye. The sun, that aged mythopoetic signifier for vision, is itself represented in a way strictly divorced from human vision. It, too, is a kind of “no-place”—literally groundless, a sphere of charged gas we tend to represent as having a solidity it clearly does not possess. From the very

first image, then, the *Spiral Jetty*—whatever it is—will come to exist only through the disjunctive associations of images and sounds that the film gives us to comprehend.

I began with the term *description*, using it in the sense given by Alain Robbe-Grillet, the French novelist frequently cited within Smithson's writings.<sup>22</sup> According to Robbe-Grillet, descriptions can be organic or inorganic—the former aligned with a platonic mode of abstraction of the “thing itself,” and the latter aligned with an irreducible singularity that can only ever refer to other descriptions—but they are always provisional, always displaced. The “inorganic” mode of description, which might be said to characterize Smithson's oeuvre well before the *Spiral Jetty*, causes the “thing” to be *unmade* at the same time it is outlined, resulting in what Deleuze called a relation of “indiscernibility” between the “actual” thing and its proliferating representational mirrors or counterparts.<sup>23</sup> Physical object and mental description “become confused in a process that both deepens our understanding of objects or events and widens our access to circuits of remembered experience in a mutual interpenetration of memory and matter.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than the kind of organic description that would present an object, location, or process within the spatial and material terms we would expect of the documentary genre, Smithson's form of description in *The Spiral Jetty* perpetually seeks to complicate the referentiality it establishes. Smithson specifically writes that his former dialectics of site and non-site “whirled into an indeterminate state.”<sup>25</sup> Deleuze helps us to consider how this very indeterminacy, rather than lacking all form, can give rise to a mode of description analogous to the layered or stratigraphic quality of temporality itself:

How can we say that it is the same object . . . which passes through different circuits, because each time description has obliterated the object, at the same time as the mental image has created a different one? . . . [I]t is precisely in this “double movement of creation and erasure” that successive planes and independent circuits, canceling each other out, contradicting each other, joining up with each other, forking, *will simultaneously constitute the layers of one and the same physical reality, and the levels of one and the same mental reality, memory or spirit.*<sup>26</sup>



Only seconds after “traveling” down the road, the film cuts to a long shot of an eroded cliff-face strewn with shards of white paper. While the camera tracks horizontally along its face, the ticking of a clock is heard as sheets rain down from the sky. Smithson quotes from a geology textbook:

Robert Smithson.  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Film Stills.

“the earth’s history, at times, seems like a story recorded in a book, each page of which is torn into small pieces. Many of the pages, and some of the pieces of each page, are missing.”<sup>27</sup> Near the end of this phrase the film cuts to a medium shot of these sheets falling upon a dry, cracked earth and, finally, to a close-up of what we now see are pages of a world atlas, scattered over the cracked plates of dried mud.

Together with the voice-over these images constitute a complex image of temporality. While the ticking clock and the falling sheets of paper depict a forward progression of time, both the cliff face and the voice-over privilege a stratigraphic metaphor, the layering through which a geologist discerns the overlapping strata of the past. While sheets of a book fall to the earth in a kind of sedimentation, Smithson’s voice-over suggests this sedimentation is diffuse, scattered and, to an extent, irrecoverable. With the two close-ups our eyes are aligned with those of the geologist or perhaps the archeologist, progressively closing in on the bottommost layers of the cliff, or the furthest reach from the present. Yet it is here that we find that the earth itself is cracked, ripped into small pieces like Smithson’s history book that is not a book at all but a series of maps. If both ground and map—reality and representation, so to speak—are here rent, it would seem to suggest that the history within these maps can be unearthed only through a similar process of fracture. Only through its inoperability can the map continue in its function to represent.

Returning to the road, we are not “moving forward” but looking back from whence we came. Yet this immediate past, far from having the clarity of immediate experience, has turned “murky,” the dry dust of the dirt road gathering in great clouds to obscure our vision. In the *Jetty* essay, Smithson describes it as “a road that goes forward and backward between things and places that are elsewhere.”<sup>28</sup> The road depicts a transaction with the past which is not one of visual lucidity but the phenomenal experience of both present and future, an anticipatory temporality of longing for change, for appearance.

In the midst of this present-tense experience, the film suddenly cuts to a page—a fragment of a page—from what appears to be a book on the region’s geological history. The sound of a clock is again heard, now much slower, giving rise to a more contemplative mood, the experience of time on a more expansive scale. As we close in on the “legend” of a map (a kind of visual pun), we see a curious



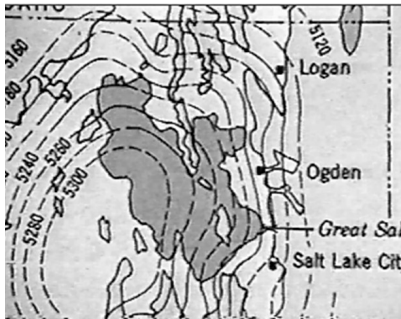
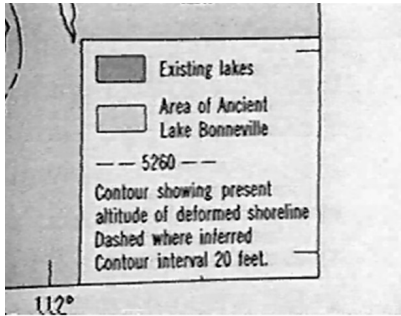
Robert Smithson.  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Film Stills.

juxtaposition of “Existing Lakes” with the “Area of Ancient Lake Bonneville.” In contradiction to the modern maps we will see later, this one contains traces of the obscured and literally *incredible* history of the ancient Lake Bonneville. Not only did the ancient lake completely cover all the cities in the region, but its center was the site of a strange mythopoetic production. Smithson tells us:

the notion that the lake must be connected to the Pacific Ocean, by a subterranean channel at the head of which a huge whirlpool threatened the safety of lake craft, was not dispelled until the 1870s—long after they should have known better. As a matter of fact, eye-witnesses reported the location of the whirlpool about midway between Fremont and Antelope Islands.

Just as the cities in the region are all built over land originally covered by the ancient lake, the mythopoetic character of the legend seems to spread out beyond its temporal borders and continue to effect the site today, “long after they should have known better.” Not only do ancient, early, and modern times seem to overlay one another in the description, but the possibility of any recourse to vision as a ground of truth is severely questioned by the reference to the testimony of “eye-witnesses” to the whirlpool. When the film cuts back to the road, now looking ahead, we are not going “forward” in the same sense as before. After these temporal juxtapositions, our relationship to this landscape, and to travel, has been subtly altered. While obviously not commanding our belief, these ancient histories and myths form a kind of overlay, an invisible sedimentation over the barren landscape before us. We may still be going somewhere, but our journey now seems less the spatial movement from one location to another (there are no identifiable landmarks, the road seems ongoing . . .) than a voyage from the past into the present, or perhaps vice versa. This “double perspective of past and future” is one that, within the film, continually “vanishes into a non-existent present.”<sup>29</sup>

This uneasy mirror reflection of an invisible past insisting into the present is literally figured in the next shot of books on a table. A voice-over reads the title of the first book, *The Lost World*, which seems to stand in for the whole, while the sound of a Geiger counter seems to register



Robert Smithson.  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Film Stills.

the invisible background radiation of the site. The books are stacked on a mirror, which casts a distorted reflection of their titles. Again the image is one of stratification, in which explanations of the present rest uneasily upon their historic and geological foundation—a foundation that itself seems less a solid support than a distorted mirror. And Smithson insists upon frustrating our spatializing (and narrativizing) desire for progress by again cutting to a shot of the road behind us—clouded over with dust and barely visible. Considered in isolation, these rarified images of the road are almost completely devoid of information. Yet it is precisely this barrenness that allows them to function as a direct image of time. They do so not simply through the brute phenomenal insistence of time passing in the present but in the way in which this time functions like a spacing or layering between what Deleuze might call “sheets of past” and the way this mnemonic sedimentation functions to perpetually raise, rather than discourage, questions of linkage, teleology, and signification.<sup>30</sup> “Adopting St. Augustine’s fine formulation,” Deleuze writes, “there is *a present of the future, a present of the present and a present of the past*, all implicated in the event, rolled up in the event, and thus simultaneous and inexplicable.”<sup>31</sup> Within the stratigraphic temporality of Smithson’s film, we are invited to inhabit multiple “presents” existing outside of any overarching chronology.

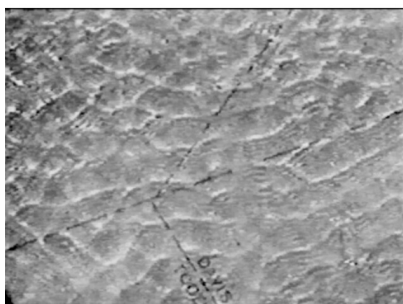
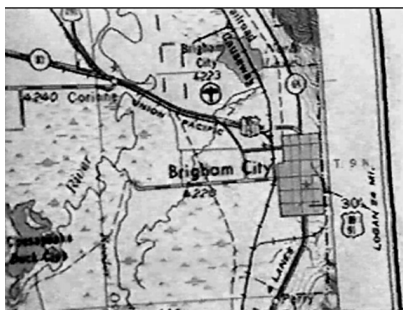
Leaving the road, we are suddenly thrust into one of the most powerful and disorienting of the temporal sheets Smithson’s film will construct. Plunging into what Smithson described as “halations of infinite redness,” we find ourselves within a museum of natural history in which both the sedimentation and evolution of geological time are archived behind walls of glass.<sup>32</sup> Smithson writes, “there are times when the great outdoors shrinks phenomenologically to the scale of a prison, and times when the indoors expands to the scale of the universe.”<sup>33</sup> Within this space both contained and infinite, and to the sound of eerie, echoing footsteps, we lose all spatial orientation in the spiraling movement of the camera. Light blares forth from two windows at the end of a barren room in what may be an homage to Snow’s *Wavelength* (1967). But while Snow’s investigation has typically been considered within the straight line and the present tense of the phenomenological reduction, Smithson’s camera spirals outside of spatial coordinates entirely, seeking an image of heterogeneous yet overlapping sheets of time that each bring about a different “present” to inhabit.<sup>34</sup> Smithson writes, “blindly the camera *stalked* through the sullen light,” as if the camera’s movement itself partook of this disjunctive prehistoric time; its detachment from the narrative of the road journey is not only disjunctive of the film’s spatial progression to the “site” but disjunctive of the time

within which the procession is supposedly taking place.<sup>35</sup> In its qualities of containment, exhibition, and, above all, temporal disjunction, the “no-place” of the natural history museum serves as a metaphor for the kind of journey Smithson’s film precipitates within and across these variegated temporal strata.

Trying to find our bearings, we are provided only with a map of what Smithson calls “the lost world” that is at once readily recognizable and completely alien. “Tethys,” “Angara,” “Gondwanaland,” and other inscriptions overlay continents we now call by other names in a strange *verfremdungseffekt*. The inscriptions conclude with “Atlantis,” which is placed over an image of North America. Not only is the name rich with a mythological freight that provides a counterpoint to the scientific discourse of geology often invoked, but it once again insists that the exotic land to which our voyage is taking us is spatially coextensive with the one we already

inhabit in the present. Smithson tells us we must beware “the hypothetical monsters that lurk between the map’s latitudes designated on the map by the black circles (marine reptiles) and squares (land reptiles),” and as the camera pans over the map, we end at a square over Utah, perhaps uneasily marking the *Jetty*.<sup>36</sup> While a voice-over begins to read the topographical coordinates of the site of the *Spiral Jetty*, this mythopoetic square is then replicated in the topographical grid of the surrounding county, which bears the name “NK 12-7” and seems to contain almost nothing but a plethora of letters and numbers. From that grid the film cuts to another, apparently that of a “Brigham city” on what appears to be a more conventional road map. We follow Route 33 until the road disappears, past the words “Dismantled railroad” and then “Golden Spike Monument” on our way to the shore, at which we find the newly penned-in words “The Spiral Jetty.”

Ostensibly way stations along the route from the nearest urban center to the *Spiral Jetty* monument, the “Dismantled railroad” and the “Golden Spike Monument” we see on the map locate the *Jetty* among the sedimented historical strata of the region; namely, the great lost dreams of the transcontinental railroad that was to have brought prosperity and settlement but that was itself a kind of instant ruin, rendered



Robert Smithson.  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Film Stills.

obsolete almost immediately by the transcontinental freeway and airline system that would confine much of this region to economic decline.<sup>37</sup> The *Jetty* is located provisionally here, penned-in, only the most superficial layer of a vast and unevenly layered history, all built upon “speculation.” As we pan across the wide open blue of the map, its surface begins to ripple and dissolve into liquid, and we arrive at what might be called the “site.”

Throughout this first section of the film, Smithson’s montage suggests that our progress toward the site will be importantly aligned with a passage away from the present. In the simple “making of” documentary his audience would have had every right to expect, the filmic voyage would have simply progressed—both toward the “exotic” and “uncharted” wastelands of rural Utah that Smithson’s urban, coastal audiences would have expected to see and toward a fuller and richer vision of the earthwork they would almost certainly not otherwise hope to visit. Yet Smithson’s film frustrates this manner of “appropriative” perception at every level. Instead of a progression toward the site, the *Jetty* film redefines the very terms of this journey—replacing the spatial progression with a temporal, mnemonic, and historical one. This is certainly a kind of archeology or stratigraphy, yet it is not one that can be aligned with a clear and linear progression of the historical record. Rather it is an uneven history full of cloudiness and mythologies, indiscernible relations of fact and fiction that seem to rise up out of their chthonic slumber to disturb an unsuspecting present. The spatial coordinates of this cinematic map, rather than locating us unambiguously in space, throw us into an ambiguous time, a past now layered indiscernibly with the present.

Smithson’s film has tended to be understood either as documentation (within fixed spatial and temporal coordinates) of a particular (material) act of building, or as a subjective and rather free-floating record of Smithson’s conceptual associations during and after this building. Yet much of the film’s power lies in refusing the very terms of this dichotomy. Divided roughly into three equal segments, the film, we might say, documents, in turn, the mapping of the site, the building of the site, and the surveying of the completed work. As such, the film follows what might seem a typical organization for a documentary about the construction of a project. Yet it is precisely the familiarity of this documentary structure that highlights Smithson’s radical critique of the categories of spatiality, building, and vision as the ground of truth. We can schematize the film’s triadic structure in the following manner, with each stage confronting its own impossibility in turn:

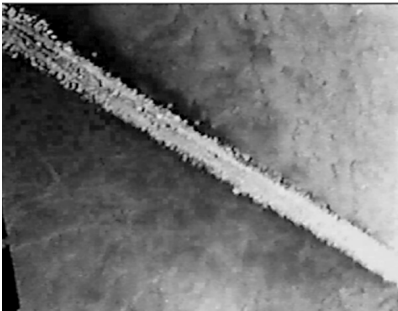
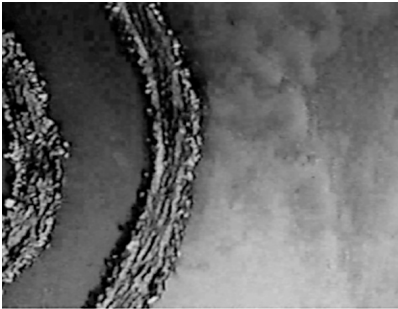
- I. the mapping/unmapping of the site
- II. the building/unbuilding of the monument
- III. the surveying/invisibility of the completed work

If, so far, I have dwelled almost exclusively on the first section, with its emphasis on the mapping and unmapping of the site, it is because this section establishes the conceptual frame for the rest of the film. Turning the expected spatialized act of location into a temporal series of dislocations, the film's enunciation substitutes an experience of temporality for what could have been a mere disclosure of information. As the image of the map is dissolved into one of gently lapping water, this first section of the voyage comes to an end, and a second section on building begins.

This second section documents the process of constructing the site in ways that largely parallel the discussions of sculpture and monumentality in the late 1960s. Schematically, we might say that if the traditional sculptural monument functioned to commemorate a specific moment from within a coherent and understood historical progression, the new "anti-monuments" of Smithson and others sought ways to counteract sculpture's implicit association with this teleological account of history. In Smithson's case, the second section of the film works to undermine the historical location of the *Jetty*, juxtaposing images of bulldozers loudly ripping through the earth with the gentle lapping of clear, shallow water, shots of foliage which seem to obscure the process of construction, and illustrations of dinosaurs from a children's picture book. We are located neither in the present nor in the past but within and among the various sheets of time that the film presents: the sedimented layers of discourse, fantasy, myth, and history that the machines seem to tear from the earth.

After frustrating both the spatial and chronological location of the *Spiral Jetty*, tearing it into pieces and scattering them among the various temporal sheets or strata, Smithson's concluding section presents the completed monument at long last. Yet as we might by now expect, this final vision will provide anything but the "full disclosure" we might have initially expected. Far from simply revealing the entirety of the monument, our first series of aerial views traces only a thin band that seems to cut the film frame in two. Such a cutting works to efface the immense materiality of the stone structure by rendering it on-screen as a kind of abstract figure.

Perhaps most important, as we begin to rise off the ground and anticipate a position that would finally allow us to situate both ourselves and the monument within a



Robert Smithson.  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Film Stills.



single coherent space—an overview of the totality that we have teleologically anticipated—Smithson disorients us one last time by turning to language. Our shifting position causes the sun to cast a shadow of the helicopter filming along the path in front of us, and Smithson begins to intone the following coordinates:

*From the center of the Spiral Jetty*

North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water  
North by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water  
Northeast by North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water  
Northeast by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water  
East by North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water  
East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water  
East by South—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water  
Southeast by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water  
[. . .]

These coordinates are anything but an attempt to help us locate the monument, or ourselves, within a precise and coherent space. While ordinarily we would expect a compass bearing to be followed by a specific and corresponding landmark, here all directions lead nowhere, or more precisely, they lead to no *other place*. In this inverted mapping, it is not the stable coordinates that refer to distinct things elsewhere but the identical referent that lends a dizzying confusion to the coordinates themselves. With its simple, trance-inducing repetition, these coordinates seem at first to conform to a natural progression. But upon closer examination, its perfectly regular, repeating form spirals into the ever-increasing complexity of a fractal pattern. Ignoring rhetorical and cartographic conventions, Smithson's progression around the compass is in fact constantly reversing direction and cutting back on itself. If this is a kind of map, it is one that is not designed to locate us unequivocally in a definite and coherent space but one that works to undermine the recourse to spatializing thought through the experience of a temporal process of recitation. As these coordinates conclude, and as we are given the first "complete" image of the *Spiral Jetty*, the helicopter—and the camera with it—begins to loop around in a way completely alien to our normal habits of perception. Contrary to any natural kind of spatial representation in film, yet curiously akin to what Michael Snow would elevate to a structural principle in *La Région Centrale* the following year (1971), Smithson's camera twists and distorts our perception such that, even as the

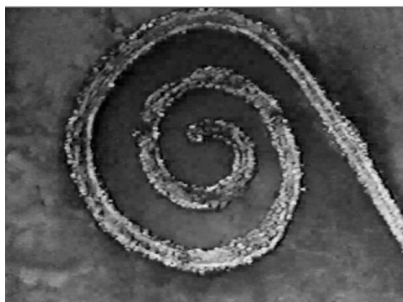
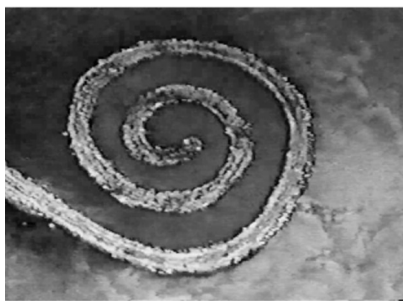
*Spiral Jetty* finally comes into view, our own position in relation to the work seems as uncertain, as muddy as ever.

After dizzying spirals have made it impossible to locate ourselves, or the monument, within any specific and coherent space, the film abruptly shifts from dramatic, vertiginous camera movements into a series of macroscopic still frames of crystals in the process of formation in and around parts of the *Spiral Jetty*. Just as *La Jetée*'s own still frames fractured our perception of movement to produce a direct image of time, Smithson's sudden juxtaposition (given at the height of the dramatic plunge into the center of the *Jetty*) wrenches us away from the sheer evidentiary facticity of this aerial representation and back toward the multiple disjunctive layers that characterized our initial journey toward the site.

Placed in between two sequences filming the *Jetty* from a helicopter, this "crystalline series" provides access to a distinct, differentiated time that nonetheless runs parallel to the surrounding sections; it is a structure that consistently subtends Smithson's cinematic enunciation. His description of the *Jetty* can never seem to move forward or progress toward its ostensible object without splitting off, making what Deleuze calls "quantic jumps" away from the present.<sup>38</sup> It does so not in the sense of a cinematic flashback that, linking past to present as pieces of a narrative puzzle, might provide something like a complete representation at its conclusion. Rather, these sequences build up and persist outside of narrative and teleology, like stratigraphic layers beneath, yet coextensive with, an unfolding present. In so doing, they are able to depict a strict contemporaneity of the past with the present that it has been, and the present with the past it will have become.

### Stratigraphic Time

The kind of stratigraphic temporality I have attempted to draw out of Smithson's film is oriented toward a past considered indiscernible from the present. Bound to the unfolding temporality of the present, the film progresses only by spiraling back to discover, within this present, multiple, overlapping, and concentric rings of the past. This stratigraphic temporality subtends the earthwork itself, as it necessarily resides within the variegated and overlapping histories of its physical site. But this temporality is most clearly and forcefully articulated through the process of cinematic layering that the *Jetty* film—the earthwork's



Robert Smithson.  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Film Stills.

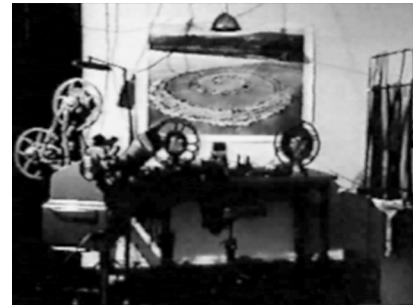
crucial “non-site”—is alone able to provide. This is why, in the concluding scenes of his film, Smithson contorts our perspective to depict the earthwork as a kind of giant, turning film spool and the construction of the *Spiral Jetty* as, in some ways, a specifically cinematic construction.

Despite their affinity, then, there is finally an important difference between the “Jetty” films of Marker and Smithson with respect to what I have called, after Deleuze, their “crystalline” form. Marker’s film is a closed, perfect crystal, its structural beauty stems from the way life and death, movement and stasis, past and future all mirror one another so precisely. By contrast, Smithson’s project is, on every level, about the refusal of closure. Through the gradual accumulation of temporal layers, Smithson’s film gives the site something like a nonsubjective memory, in the sense in which Deleuze writes, “Memory is not in us; it is we who move in a Being-memory.”<sup>39</sup> The film’s structure does not function to lend coherence to the earthwork but allows the earthwork, in its very disjunction, to cohere into a powerful metaphor for the subjective destabilization elicited by a radical encounter with temporality itself. Deleuze writes,

Between the past as pre-existence in general and the present as infinitely contracted past there are, therefore, all the circles of the past constituting so many stretched or shrunk *regions, strata, and sheets*: each region with its own characteristics. . . . It is true that these regions (my childhood, my adolescence, my adult life, etc.), appear to succeed each other. But they succeed each other only from the point of view of former presents which marked the limit of each of them. They coexist, in contrast, from the point of view of the actual present which each time represents their common limit or the most contracted of them. . . . We are constructed in memory: we are *simultaneously* childhood, adolescence, old age and maturity. . . . These are the paradoxical characteristics of a non-chronological time: the pre-existence of a past in general; the coexistence of all the sheets of past; and the existence of a most contracted degree.<sup>40</sup>

Smithson’s “landslide of maps” peels away the surface cartography within which we understand and experience our world spatially in order to expose or “unearth” a sedimentation that lies both beneath and before us.<sup>41</sup> Smithson’s film is frustrating in that its ostensible object, the earthwork at the Great Salt Lake, is constantly displaced—we find ourselves in the condition of constantly searching, as Smithson often put it, “elsewhere.” But lacking a fixed object, subjectivity finds itself unhinged. This frustration of our typically spatialized paradigms for thought and representation

Robert Smithson.  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Film Still.



works to inhibit an appropriative model of spectatorship—that spectatorship which, by falsely setting up and securing its object within spatial and temporal parameters, secures an illusory wholeness and fixity for the subject. In this way Smithson’s cinematic “description” provokes a confrontation with the variegated field of temporality itself; it provides us with a vision of what Bersani and Dutoit have called “temporality unsupported by teleology,” a decentered, fundamentally entropic temporality that seems to insist that time cannot be considered a function of the subject but is rather the subject that comes to be always and only through its temporalization.<sup>42</sup>

### **Impure Film, Subterranean Cinema**

*After the “structural film” there is the sprawl of entropy.*

—Robert Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia”

While scholars have long recognized the importance of temporality as an aesthetic and conceptual topos in both process art and the moving-image practices of the mid-to-late 1960s, an overwhelming emphasis on a supposed literalism and self-referentiality—what David James has called the idea of “pure film”—has tended to conceal those very instances wherein temporality becomes the subject of a more complex formal interrogation.<sup>43</sup> Much of the critical discourse around structural filmmaking was ineluctably bound up with a rhetoric of “medium-specificity” (and a concomitant desire for the cultural legitimation of experimental film as an autonomous modernist aesthetic practice) that has had a tenacious and unfortunate stranglehold on our conceptualization of these works.<sup>44</sup> Trying to unlearn disciplinary orthodoxies that have grown up to segregate the fields of film, video, performance, and installation, we might rather consider the ways in which Smithson’s work continues an important investigation into the domain of what was originally called “expanded cinema.”

Often mistakenly taken as the origin of the idea, Gene Youngblood’s popular 1970 volume *Expanded Cinema* was a latecomer to the field. At odds with Youngblood’s technophilic vision, Smithson would lament, “it’s hard not to consider cinema *expanding* into a deafening pale abstraction controlled by computers.” But five years earlier a discourse and practice of expanded cinema had already come to fruition that was oriented not toward the possibilities of new media technology so much as toward the reconceptualization of the “sitedness” of cinematic practice between the institutional dynamics of the movie theater’s “black box” and the museum’s “white

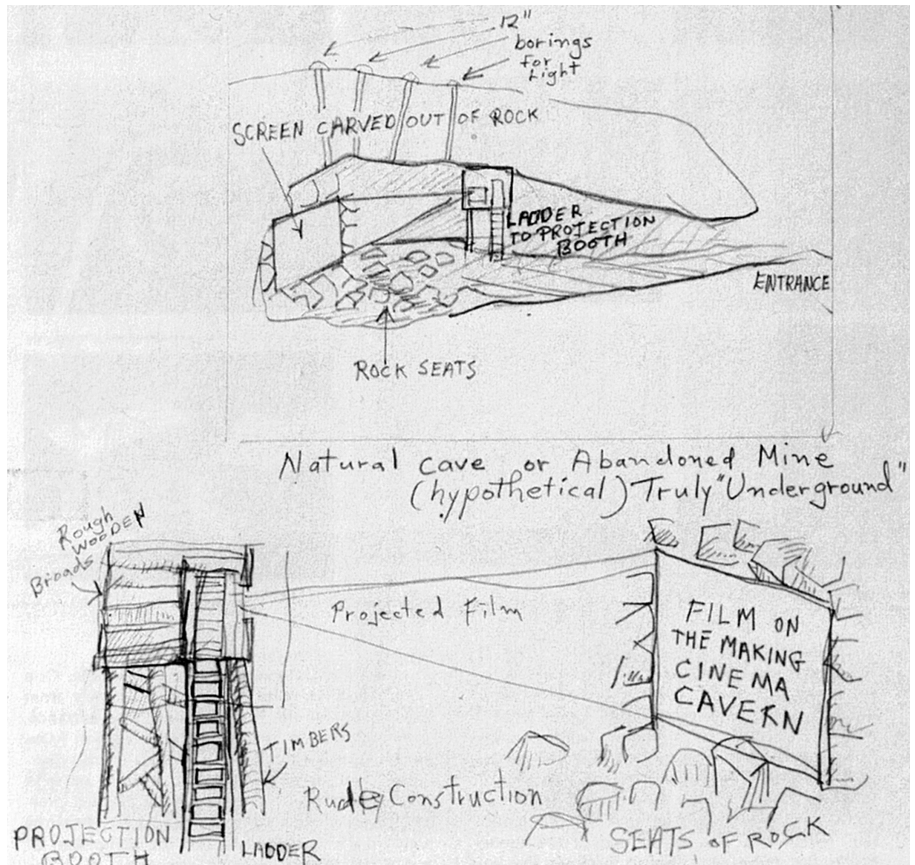
Robert Smithson. *Towards the Development of a “Cinema Cavern,”* 1971. Detail.

cube.”<sup>45</sup> Smithson’s own long-term desire to escape from the sedimented institutional dynamics of the white cube might lead us to reconsider his sketch for a “truly underground” cinema in *Toward the Development of a Cinema Cavern, or the movie goer as spelunker* (1971). Smithson was clearly intent on mocking the naive political aspirations of formal self-referentiality rampant within the underground film of his time.<sup>46</sup> But beyond this, the project harkens back to a crucial passage within his first major essay five years before:

Even more of a mental conditioner than the movies, is the actual movie house. . . . [T]he physical confinement of the dark box-like room indirectly conditions the mind . . . time is compressed or stopped inside the movie house, and this in turn provides the viewer with an entropic condition. To spend time in a movie house is to make a “hole” in one’s life.<sup>47</sup>

In both cases it seems obvious that Smithson is pointing to something more than the neo-Brechtian effect of distanciation gained through the foregrounding of the cinematic apparatus. Rather, it is the “sitedness” of moving-image practices—their particular imbrication with the sedimented cultural expectations and ossified spectatorial habits of the black box—that leads him to reframe the question of an “underground cinema.” Smithson’s sketch for a “truly underground” cinema seems to ask: “How might a radical transformation of cinema’s cultural and institutional location be necessary for any substantive transformation of cinematic practice?”<sup>48</sup>

With these cultural and institutional questions in mind, it seemed somehow appropriate to find this in the *London Guardian* the very week Smithson’s first career retrospective opened at the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Los Angeles:



Police in Paris have discovered a fully equipped cinema-cum-restaurant in a large and previously uncharted cavern underneath the capital's chic 16th arrondissement . . . beneath the Palais de Chaillot, across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower. After entering the network through a drain next to the Trocadero, the officers came across a tarpaulin marked: Building site, No access. Behind that, a tunnel held a desk and a closed-circuit TV camera set to automatically record images of anyone passing. The mechanism also triggered a tape of dogs barking, "clearly designed to frighten people off," the spokesman said. Further along, the tunnel opened into a vast 400 sq meter cave some 18 m underground, "like an underground amphitheatre, with terraces cut into the rock and chairs." There the police found a full-size cinema screen, projection equipment, and tapes of a wide variety of films, including 1950s film noir classics. . . . Three days later, when the police returned . . . to see where the power was coming from, the phone and electricity lines had been cut and a note was lying in the middle of the floor: "Do not," it said, "try to find us." Patrick Alk, a photographer who has published a book on the urban underground exploration movement . . . told RTL radio the cavern's discovery was "a shame, but not the end of the world." There were "a dozen more where that one came from," he said. "You guys have no idea what's down there."

## Notes

1. Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 146.

2. Flam, 132–133. Smithson's *Yucatan Mirror-Displacements* (1969) already anticipates and critiques, to little avail, the very nostalgia for “presence” that would characterize much of the subsequent discourse around *The Spiral Jetty*.

3. See Rosalind Krauss's discussion of the temporality of process art in “Richard Serra: Sculpture,” in *Richard Serra*, ed. Hal Foster and Gordon Hughes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 101; and Pamela Lee, “Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process Art,” in *Afterimage: Drawing through Process* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 25–80; and Chrissie Illes, “Between the Still and Moving Image,” in *Into the Light*, exh. cat., ed., Chrissie Illes (New York: Whitney Museum, 2001), 32–69.

4. Jennifer Roberts has proposed a fascinating reading of the historical temporality of Smithson's practice in her *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Within this essay I am interested in the specifically *phenomenal* experience of temporality as it is articulated in and through the cinematic mediation of *Spiral Jetty*. I believe that far from being opposed these two dimensions of Smithson's practice need to be thought together.

5. The *Spiral Jetty* film, shot during the construction of *Spiral Jetty* in 1970 and edited immediately thereafter, credits Robert Fiore, Nancy Holt, Robert Logan, and Robert Smithson for camerawork; Robert Fiore and Robert Logan for sound; and Barbara Jarvis for editing.

6. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). No short essay can succinctly clarify Deleuze's immense contribution to the philosophy of time, which encompass some nine books written over a thirty-year period. And as D.N. Rodowick points out, “there is a specific difficulty with reading Deleuze. With each new book, Deleuze writes as if his reader were familiar with everything he has published before. This is especially true of the cinema books.” D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), x–xi. Smithson's interest in temporality, perception, and cinema parallels that of Deleuze and thus provides a fascinating point of entry into the late philosopher's thought. With regard to the idea of process art mentioned above, Deleuze specifically stresses the importance of the “serial form” of association within the cinema of the time-image.

7. Craig Owens, “Earthwords,” *October* 10 (Fall 1979), 120–130.

8. C. Elizabeth Childs, “Robert Smithson and Film: The Spiral Jetty Reconsidered,” *Arts* (1981): 68.

9. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 7.

10. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 272.

11. Smithson says this about his *Mono Lake Non-Site* (1968) in “Discussion with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson” (1970), in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Flam, 249. The discussion was originally organized and edited by Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp for *Avalanche*.

12. Robert Smithson discusses Lewis Carroll in “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art” (1968), in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Flam, 92.

13. The film-theoretical concept of “suture” was first elaborated in *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977/1978) and has been substantively revised. Kaja Silverman presents both a history and an important revision of the con-

cept in her book *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 194–236. Stephen Heath’s “Narrative Space” can be found in his *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981). One of the many reasons Deleuze’s *Cinema* books have been so controversial within film studies is their implicit rejection of the idea of “suture” within much of the modern cinema of the time-image.

14. Smithson’s relation to the experimental film community of the 1960s and early 1970s is a complex topic, but it is obvious from the *Collected Writings* that he was an avid, if eclectic, cinephile—citing figures as diverse as Anger, Resnais, Kurosawa, Warhol, Landow, Frampton, Snow, Hitchcock, Corman, and Godard.

15. Robert Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia” (1971), in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Flam, 138.

16. “Discussion with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson,” 249.

17. Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 332–333; emphasis added.

18. While Smithson’s general interest in science fiction is obvious from his writings, Elizabeth Childs has specifically documented that “Smithson frequented ‘sci-fi’ film festivals in New York and avidly collected books on science fiction film and literature.” Childs, “Robert Smithson and Film,” 68–81. Gary Shapiro cites his 1993 personal conversation with Nancy Holt in *Earthwards: Robert Smithson and Art after Babel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 242, n. 8.

19. Rodowick, 4; emphasis added. Because of the extensive film-theoretical literature on Marker’s *La Jetée*, I am giving it only the briefest of introductions.

20. Deleuze discusses the relationship of “indiscernibility” and “irrational montage” within the “crystalline chronosign” in Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 68–133.

21. On Smithson’s particular relation to the natural history museum, see Ann Reynolds, “Reproducing Nature: The Museum of Natural History as Nonsite,” *October* 45 (Summer 1988): 109–127.

22. Smithson includes an epigraph from Robbe-Grillet, “The time of our minds is no longer that of the clocks” in his “The X Factor in Art,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, no. 3056 (July 1966): 78–79. The month before, Smithson had already introduced science fiction, temporality, and cinema as fundamental concerns in his first substantive essay, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” *Artforum* no. 10 (June 1966): 26–31. These references would persist throughout his later writings.

23. Deleuze discusses Robbe-Grillet and the “inorganic” mode of description in *Cinema 2*, 44–45.

24. Rodowick, 92.

25. Robert Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty” (1972), ed. Gyorgy Kepes, in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Flam, 146.

26. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 46; emphasis added.

27. Smithson’s voiceover is taken from Clark and Stern, *Geological Evolution of North America* (New York: Ronald Press, n.d.), 5. It is cited in Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 151.

28. Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 151–152.

29. Robert Smithson, “The Shape of the Future and Memory,” in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Flam, 332–333.

30. Gilles Deleuze, “Peaks of Present and Sheets of Past,” in Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 98–125.

31. Deleuze, “Peaks of Present,” 100; emphasis in original.

32. Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 152.

33. Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 152.

34. Often reductively described as a “continuous zoom,” Snow’s *Wavelength* is a sophisticated med-



itation on temporality, perception, and embodiment that partakes of a “layered” or “stratigraphic” time, although in a radically different way than *Spiral Jetty*. Michael Sicinski has recently considered the work from a Heideggerian perspective in “Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* and the Space of Dwelling,” *Qui Parle* 11, no. 2 (Fall/Winter, 1999).

35. Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 152.

36. Smithson’s voice-over is reprinted in “The Spiral Jetty,” 151. The essay continues, “In the pan shot one doesn’t see the flesh-eaters walking through what today is called Indochina,” again forging an uneasy temporal conjunction between the horrors of a distant past, and the horrors of a then-present reality.

37. On this layering of natural and cultural history, see Roberts, “Spiral Jetty/Golden Spike.”

38. Deleuze, “Peaks of Present.”

39. Deleuze, “Peaks of Present,” 98.

40. Deleuze, “Peaks of Present,” 99; emphasis in original.

41. The phrase “landslide of maps” is from another great “stratigraphic” work by Smithson, “Strata: A Geophotographic Fiction” (1967), in *Robert Smithson*, ed. Flam, 75–77.

42. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 41.

43. David James, *Allegories of Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 237–279.

44. It should go without saying that the strictly medium-specific or “materialist” interpretation of structural filmmaking was not one widely accepted by the artists themselves. An unearthing of this discursive sedimentation would have to take into account the formative influence of Annette Michelson’s 1966 “Film and the Radical Aspiration” and Peter Wollen’s 1975 articulation in “The Two Avant-Gardes,” both of which came at a impressionable moment in the development and legitimation of film discourse, when film studies was first gaining a foothold in the academy and desperately seeking to prove its institutional legitimacy, in part by radically distinguishing itself from the discipline of art history. See P. Adams Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000): 404–422, and Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings* (London: Verso, 1982).

45. Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970). Smithson refers to Youngblood’s volume in “A Cinematic Atopia,” 139. The aesthetic and conceptual genealogy of early moving-image media within contemporary art practice is the subject of my dissertation-in-progress, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Warhol, Expanded Cinema, and the Emergence of the Moving Image in American Art, 1963–1965*.

46. The mocking of formal self-referentiality can be seen in the “rough wooden boards” and “rude construction” of the projection booth at bottom, as well as in the film’s projected title. “Seats of Rock” and “Borings for Light” probably also allude to his own experiences with the contemporary “underground” cinema.

47. Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 17.

48. Jon Henley, “In a Secret Paris Cavern, the Real Underground Cinema,” *The Guardian*, 8 September 2004. This dimension of media “sitedness” would specifically animate the work of Smithson’s aesthetic and conceptual heir, Gordon Matta-Clark, well before he took his filmmaking *literally* underground in *Substrait (Underground Dailies)* (1976) and *Sous-Sols de Paris* (Paris Underground) (1977).