The Crossroads of Industry and Ecology: The New Landscapes of Robert Smithson, Edward Burtynsky and Susan Leibovitz Steinman

Amanda Helen Beattie

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ABSTRACT

The Crossroads of Industry and Ecology: The New Landscapes of Robert Smithson, Edward Burtynsky and Susan Leibovitz Steinman

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This thesis is concerned with the changing status of the North American landscape art tradition, focusing on the 1970s to the present day. The relationship between industry and ecology is at the forefront of these changes, as the interaction between these areas has become essential during this time of ecological crisis. With the use of different media and from diverse theoretical approaches, artists Robert Smithson, Edward Burtynsky and Susan Leibovitz Steinman all contribute to the development of a 'new landscape' and utilize industrial and urban sites as the subject matter and location of their artworks. They enable the possibility of a nature/culture dialogue through their art production that has the capacity to introduce a deeper understanding of environmental concerns from an original perspective. This thesis focuses on select works from Smithson's land reclamation projects of the early 1970s, Burtynsky's industrial photography of the 1990s, and Steinman's interactive environmental art of the 1990s, and demonstrates that art can play a significant role in raising awareness on the state of our environment. These artists' works are powerful tools of communication that encourage contemplation and, in certain cases, direct action toward a deeper appreciation of the environment in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and play significant roles in the contemporary landscape art tradition.

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INTRODUCTION

My thesis research consists of a study on three North American artists who have used different media and conceptual strategies to address the changing status of landscape art: Robert Smithson, through Earthworks and land reclamation projects; Edward Burtynsky, with his photographs of industrial sites; and Susan Leibovitz Steinman, through interactive environmental art. I focus on Smithson's *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* (Emmen, Holland, 1971) (Figure 1), Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings Nos. 31, 32* and *34* (Sudbury, Ontario, 1996) (Figures 2, 3 and 4) and Steinman's *Mandela Artscape* (West Oakland, California, 1998 – 2002) (Figure 5), in order to demonstrate these artists' challenge to the North American landscape art tradition. They are not revering the typically pristine and sublime landscapes of the so-called natural world, nor are they celebrating industrial beauty and technological power. Rather, they are commenting on the space in between these two extremes that is usually left unnoticed and uncared for. In so doing, they explore how these spaces are used and how they change over time. These artists' creations of new landscapes are at the forefront of my study. In this chapter, I provide a section of definitions, in which I explain my usage of terms that I employ throughout my thesis. This will be followed by a synopsis of each chapter, which includes an explanation of my approach and the ideas presented.

1. Definitions

In methodological terms, I use an art historical vocabulary to describe landscape art, but I also use concepts that derive from a more interdisciplinary background. For example, I employ the terms 'ecology', 'environment', and 'nature' throughout my thesis, which

have numerous definitions. German biologist, zoologist, and philosopher Ernst Haeckel first used the term 'ecology' in his *Generelle Morphologie* (1866). He defined this term as "the science of relations between organisms and their environment."[1] By the 1960s, the term had become imbued with moral and political implications as well, thus suggesting a more normative understanding of ecology. In 2000, Félix Guattari published *The Three Ecologies*, in which he extended the meaning of this word to encompass environmental concerns, human subjectivity, and social relations.[2] Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman each have their own understanding of the term, which I discuss in each chapter. When I use the term 'ecology' in a more general way, I refer to the normative sense of the word, which goes beyond a biological understanding.

The term 'environment' is also used in numerous ways. David Kemp, Australian Minister of environment and heritage from 2001 to 2004 and author of *Exploring Environmental Issues* (2004), states that "the environment in which an object finds itself consists of the other objects or elements that surround it."[3] This definition can be part of a scientific field of study as opposed to the more cultural meanings of the term, which suggest environmental consciousness or respect for the natural world. The terms 'nature' and 'natural' become even more complicated. The meanings of these terms are constantly in flux, depending on various historical periods, as well as personal beliefs. Raymond Williams, British cultural historian and author of *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and*

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[1] Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 40.
[2] Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London and New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press, 2000), 13.
[3] David D. Kemp, *Exploring Environmental Issues: An Integrated Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

Society (1983), emphasizes the complexity of the term 'nature' by stating that it can refer to "the material world itself, taken as including *or* not including human beings."[4] Each artist has developed his or her own understanding of the term, and position in the nature/culture debate, and I therefore approach the topic on an individual basis. Again, my use of the terms 'environment' and 'nature' is based on what has come to be cultural definitions.

Finally, I refer to the term 'entropy' in Chapters One and Two. Entropy has numerous definitions, but two seem to be the most relevant for Smithson and Burtynsky. The first dates back to the root of the term. German physicist Rudolph Clausius (1822 – 1888) introduced the term 'entropy' in the 1850s to refer to the measurement of disorder in a given system. It makes up part of the second law of thermodynamics, and is also used in Information theory.[5] The second involves the geological understanding of the term, defined as 'fluvial entropy'. This is the state of decomposition and decay toward which all matter is inevitably headed.[6] Entropy, then, is irreversible and headed toward destruction and deterioration. I further explain the artists' use of this term and its complexity in the following two chapters.

This conceptual vocabulary and historical approach has come to inform a way of redefining landscape. I use the notion of a *new landscape* as a basic tool in linking the works of Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman. This expression introduces a number of

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[4] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 219 (my italics).
[5] Robert A Sobieszek, *Robert Smithson: Photo Works* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 27.
[6] "Entropy," *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 8th ed., 381.

questions: what is 'new' in a world that is advancing so rapidly? Is a 'landscape' a physical space, a category in art historical discourse, or both? In order to understand the expression 'new landscape', it is necessary to break down and analyze the terms.

The term 'landscape' is inherently complicated. As stated by Eugénie Shinkle "[l]andscape describes a space that is both material and discursive, real and represented."[7] Landscape can be regarded as a physical site that one can occupy, or as a genre in art historical discourse that has a long and rich history, conventionally associated with painting and a surface view of the so-called natural environment. Both of these definitions of landscape are generally linked with a scenic and beautiful site. In this thesis, I refer to landscape as the art historical genre. The 'new landscape', then, involves a movement away from the traditional, two-dimensional paintings that were paramount in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and toward a phenomenon of artists and art historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who are rethinking the artistic category of 'landscape'. Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman actively produce landscapes that are different from the landscape art of the past, and as such, have contributed in an innovative manner to the long history of landscape art.

Throughout history, landscape art has involved more than the visual reproduction of a given site: it is also based on social and cultural relationships involving land use, which determine the manner in which artists produce their artworks, as well as the reception of the public. For example, as the Industrial Revolution expanded in the nineteenth century, both in Europe and North American, so too did the production of landscape art. These

[7] Eugénie Shinkle, *The Body in the Landscape* (Montreal: Concordia University, 1997), 5.

paintings provided a refuge from the overwhelming expansion of industry.[8] Today, much landscape art addresses the issue of widespread ecological crisis, as we are becoming more aware that these issues must be acknowledged and dealt with immediately. Through their new landscapes, Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman all take heed of these questions by approaching industry and urban living in new and poignant ways.

Before delving into the 'newness' of these artists' work, it is first necessary to investigate the general trend of landscape art in the past, both in terms of artistic and sociological details. I will begin this brief discussion of the landscape genre with the French Barbizon School of the mid-nineteenth century, as the artists associated with this School were instrumental in setting a standard of plein-air painting during a time of severe industrial expansion. Due to their approach to painting in the outdoor environment, they can be instantly linked, and even seen as predecessors, to Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman. The Barbizon artists turned away from the Academic tradition of painting as well as the theory of the French Realist movement to focus on naturalism. Nature's magnificence and awe-inspiring qualities motivated Barbizon artists such as Charles-François Daubigny and Théodore Rousseau, and they disregarded the industrialization that was ravaging through France in order to focus on the countryside.[9] During the same time period in North America, Hudson River School artists had a similar approach. Hudson River artists such as Thomas Cole and David Johnson painted scenes that were removed

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[8] Mark Roskill, *The Language of Landscape* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 121.

[9] Steven Adams, *The Barbizon School and the Origins of Impressionism* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 9 – 13.

from the industrialization that was taking place around them in the form of wheat production, iron, leather shipping and logging, to nostalgically glorify nature as being a safe haven away from the reality of industry.[10] They embedded their landscape paintings in light and framed them with drastic perspectives. Through the dramatic representation of rocks, trees, mountaintops and rivers, Hudson River School artists perpetrated the ideas of Manifest Destiny and an American national identity.[11]

The contribution that these Schools made to the landscape genre is vast, due to the attention given to the physical sites, as well as their choice to disregard industrialization and focus on nature as either refuge, or as almighty and powerful. As stated by Denise Oleksijczuk "[e]ighteenth- and nineteenth-century modes of landscape painting, whether ideal, heroic, or sublime, conveyed nature as infinite, mysterious and inviolate."[12] In sociological terms, there was evidently a resistance to industry taking over nature. In artistic terms, painting en plein-air became an influential approach to landscape art that was to come, in the forms of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism.

The landscape genre is perhaps most widely recognized as represented by the Impressionists. Techniques such as giving the impression of movement due to the use of light brush strokes were important elements of the outdoor work that these artists pursued. Claude Monet's series paintings of the late nineteenth century have become emblematic studies of the varying degrees of light and shadow. Unlike Barbizon and

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[10] Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 146.
[11] Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape into Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 159.
[12] Denise Oleksijczuk, "Nature in History: A Context for Landscape Art," *Lost Illusions* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1991), 5.

Hudson River artists, however, Monet did not entirely ignore industry. Rather, his exploration of more urban and industrial subject matter also demonstrates an appreciation of industrial advancement. Monet and Camille Pissarro, among many others in their generation, found themselves in a predicament that has become paramount in the twenty-first century: the dilemma between industrial advancement and the benefits that it brings, in opposition to the destruction that it imposes on the natural world.[13] Other important landscape painters of the time had different concerns. Paul Cézanne's innovation is primarily in relation to human perception, and his landscapes do not engage directly with social or industrial transformations of the land. After Cézanne, the landscape genre saw few significant changes for decades.

Each movement in the landscape genre discussed above involved a two-dimensional format. By the late twentieth century, the 'traditional' landscape genre came to be viewed as somewhat outdated in art historical discourse. Artists and art historians began to disassemble and reassemble the landscape art tradition, using different tools and approaches. A 'new landscape', involving setting, display, material, concept, and reception was born. The landscape genre expanded tremendously with the introduction of Earthworks in the United States in the 1960s, and has continued to grow ever since. With Smithson as a main proponent of Earthworks, paintbrushes and canvases were replaced with shovels and dump trucks, and the four white walls of the museum institution were temporarily abandoned for the expansive outdoor environment; with Burtynsky, blockaded areas became sites of artistic inspiration, and landscape

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[13] Francis Frascina et al, *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 134.

photography took on a whole new meaning; and with Steinman, viewers became participants, and destruction became a site for artistic, ecological education. Concerning both Smithson's and Steinman's work, the physical barrier between the viewer and the work of art was abolished. Instead of passively admiring a two-dimensional painting as, historically, the landscape genre imposed, viewers were now encouraged to physically interact with the landscape art. Furthermore, the relationship between industry and art, perhaps implicit in earlier art, now became explicitly addressed.

Since the 1960s, there has been an outburst of new artistic approaches to creating landscapes and commenting on various social and cultural issues. Throughout this thesis, 'newness' should not be confused with 'current' or 'contemporary', which simply replaces the old and outdated. The 'new' that I am referring to is original and innovative in relation to the landscape genre. Ecological degradation and social responsibility are two key issues that are recurrent in landscape art of the recent past, demonstrating the weight that must be given to such significant problems. In this thesis, I embark on a discussion of new landscapes by Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman, and the importance of these landscapes both artistically and socially.

2. Chapter Synopses

Chapter One is based on American Earthworks artist Robert Smithson. Since his untimely death in a helicopter crash while surveying *Amarillo Ramp* (Amarillo, Texas, 1973) (Figure 6), which was to be his third and final major Earthwork, Smithson has become somewhat of an iconic personage in the field of art history. Beyond the physical

artworks that he created, his written contributions to art historical discourse, as well as his photo works and films, are extremely influential and continue to be scrutinized by artists and art critics more than thirty years after his death. Much of the literature concerning Smithson focuses on his sites/nonsites of the 1960s and on the famous *Spiral Jetty* (Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970) (Figure 7). Most recently, the Dia Art Foundation published *Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, edited by Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (2005),[14] and Eugenie Tsai, along with Cornelia Butler, organized *Robert Smithson* (2005),[15] in which many leading Smithson scholars revisit the artist's oeuvre from his early days to his Earthworks.

I am interested in what happened *after* the *Spiral Jetty*. Chapter One is thus concerned with Smithson's turn to reclamation projects in the last few years of his life and more specifically, to his single completed reclamation work, *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill.* Robert Hobbs (1981),[16] John Beardsley (1989)[17] and Ron Graziani (2004)[18] dedicate a certain amount of attention to the path down which Smithson was heading with land reclamation projects. I expand on these ideas and provide an in-depth analysis of Smithson's aesthetic concerns for post-industrial sites.

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[14] Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly, eds. *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2005).
[15] Eugenie Tsai and Cornelia Butler, eds. *Robert Smithson* (Los Angeles: the Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004).
[16] Robert Hobbs, ed. *Robert Smithson: Sculpture* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).
[17] John Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989).
[18] Ron Graziani, *Robert Smithson and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Chapter One begins with a discussion of some of Smithson's most essential theories, including his ideas about dialectics and the site/nonsite relationship. This is followed by a thorough presentation of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, as well as an analysis of Smithson's quest for industrial or post-industrial sites on which he could create additional land reclamation projects. I consider Smithson's understanding of nature, as well as the nature/culture dichotomy, and present a brief history of environmental awareness in the United States as it relates to his practice. This is followed by a discussion of two more theoretical concepts that are recurrent in Smithson's art practice, with *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* as the point of reference. First, I examine the aspect of time in Smithson's physical artworks as well as in his writing. Entropy and the notion of pre- and post-history play key roles in Smithson's art and writing. Next, I discuss the presence of the picturesque in Smithson's works and his employment of this term as opposed to the 'sublime' or the 'beautiful'. The information for the above sections is largely drawn from Smithson's own writings, which have been compiled by Nancy Holt (1979),[19] Eugenie Tsai (1991)[20] and Jack Flam (1996).[21] My main area of interest throughout this chapter is Smithson's turn to land reclamation in the last years of his life. I am also interested in the implications of this in Smithson's dialectical understanding of the relationship between industry and ecology.

In Chapter Two, I focus on select works from photographer Edward Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series. Burtynsky's artwork is significantly different than Smithson's and

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[19] Nancy Holt, ed. *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays and Illustrations* (New York: New York University Press, 1979).
[20] Eugenie Tsai, *Robert Smithson Unearthed: Drawings, Collages, Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
[21] Jack Flam, ed. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Steinman's in that he does not manipulate the land himself, but rather artistically documents the manipulation done by others. Nonetheless, many of the artistic and environmental issues that can be seen in Smithson's and Steinman's work are evident in Burtynsky's practice as well. Burtynsky's environmental ideology stands as a mediator between that of Smithson and Steinman. Over the past twenty years, Burtynsky has been building a name for himself in both the art world and the environmental scene, nationally and internationally. The coexistence of artistic and environmental concerns in Burtynsky's work raises questions pertaining to the nature of his photographs as well as their purpose. While there are numerous newspaper clippings, art magazine articles and exhibition catalogues about Burtynsky's photographs, the discussion of his work rarely goes beyond formal analysis. I am interested in taking a deeper look into this artist's photographic production by embarking on an investigation of the nature of his photographs as documentary and/or art photography. Chapter Two thus begins with a description of *Nickel Tailings Nos. 31, 32* and *34* in terms of their formal qualities, as well as background information about the site and the mining process. This historical discussion leads into an analysis of time and entropy as they appear in these works. I describe the existence of entropy in Burtynsky's new landscapes, and the manner in which this relates to Smithson's interest in entropy. I also discuss the importance of time in Burtynsky's work and the significant role that it plays in these new landscapes. I then place Burtynsky within an historical discussion of landscape and industrial photography, dating back to the survey photographers of the nineteenth century. I also situate his works within a larger context of photographers working with similar subject matter in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is followed by an historical examination of

categories in photographic practice – such as documentary versus art photography – based on the important works of authors such as Rosalind Krauss (1982),[22] John Tagg (1988),[23] Alan Trachtenberg (1989),[24] Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1991),[25] Allan Sekula (1997)[26] and Liz Wells (2004).[27]

Having covered the more documentary aspect of these images, I embark on a discussion of their aesthetic quality by focusing on the sublime. I discuss Burtynsky's work through the lens of the industrial sublime and the return to an *alternate* natural sublime. Throughout this discussion, I refer to David Nye's history of the natural sublime in the nineteenth century through to the technological sublime of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as presented in his *American Technological Sublime* (2004).[28] I also refer to eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant and his Third Critique, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790).[29] This analysis confirms the importance of one's own understanding of environmental issues as a basic point of departure for one's interpretation of Burtynsky's photographs. Finally, I dissect the essential ambiguity of Burtynsky's practice concerning the nature/culture debate. This clarifies the notion that regardless of one's ecological position, the outcome in the physical world is identical.

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[22] Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1982).
[23] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographic Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).
[24] Alan Trachtenberg, "Naming the View," *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (Toronto: Hill and Wang, 1989).
[25] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
[26] Allan Sekula, ed. *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).
[27] Liz Wells, ed. *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).
[28] David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).
[29] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Throughout these areas of interest, Burtynsky's place in the history of landscape and industrial photography, as well as the possibility of a hybrid nature of photography and the practice of documentary, are the focal points of this chapter.

Chapter Three is based on urban environmental artist Susan Leibovitz Steinman, whose artwork takes the form of new genre public art installations and is guided by ecological and educational motives. In this chapter, I focus on *Mandela Artscape*, which was a response to a site that had been deserted after an earthquake destroyed a freeway in 1989. This project is indicative of Steinman's larger body of work: only found objects are used, the art-making process involves community members, and the final product serves as an aesthetic educational tool for environmental awareness. The element of engagement with the public is a crucial aspect of this project, and is the focus of this chapter.

Chapter Three begins with a description of *Mandela Artscape* in terms of the process of creation as well as the final product. The location of *Mandela Artscape* in the public space of a city environment is a defining element of the work. I present a discussion of the three distinct stages that the public art movement in the United States saw from the 1960s to the 1990s based on Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002).[30] I also present the ideology of new genre public art based on Suzanne Lacy's *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1995),[31] where the act of engagement is emphasized. This leads to an examination of the meaning of public space in the city setting informed by the influential writings of important authors

[30] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
[31] Suzanne Lacy, ed. *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

such as Michel de Certeau (1984)[32] and Rosalyn Deutsche (1996).[33] Throughout this discussion, I focus on certain concerns based on the definitions of 'community' and 'public', as well as the criticism aimed at interactive art practices. I present *Mandela Artscape* as an example of a successful interactive environmental art project that encouraged sustainability.

The ecological aspect of *Mandela Artscape* is a defining component of the project. I therefore dedicate a substantial section to Steinman's creative use of found objects in her art production. Her use of the found object is based on environmental values following the "three R's:" reduce, reuse, recycle. In order to situate Steinman's work, I present an historical discussion of American and European artists' use of the found object in art from the early nineteen hundreds to the present day. This discussion is based on the writings of Andrew Causey in *Sculpture Since 1945* (1998),[34] and Jeff Nuttall in *Art and the Degradation of Awareness* (2001),[35] and highlights Steinman's contribution to the field due to her environmentally sound emphasis on found objects. Steinman is a member of numerous environmental activist groups that promote environmental awareness, which I discuss in terms of the influence this has on her art production. This leads into a discussion of the consumerist culture that has taken over the North American lifestyle, and the danger that this creates for sustainable living. The fact that *Mandela Artscape* was an interactive project allowed for people to become attached to the site and

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[32] Michel de Certeau, "Spatial Practices: Walking in the City," *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[33] Rosalyn Deutsche, "Agoraphobia," *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
[34] Andrew Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[35] Jeff Nuttall, *Art and the Degradation of Awareness* (London: Calder Publications; New Jersey: Riverrun Press, 2001).

to learn firsthand how to be creative with found objects in order to promote sustainability. It is this element of engagement that makes Steinman's work so important, and that creates a bond between people, their neighborhood, their environment, and their own personal creativity.

3. Traversing the Crossroads

Through this study, I demonstrate the different approaches that these three artists take in addressing the changing face of the landscape genre. The variety of settings in which they work – from post-industrial and industrial sites to the middle of a city block – emphasizes the fact that these landscapes are deserving of attention in all of their different forms. The focus on distinctive aspects of each artist's practice (including land reclamation for Smithson's Earthworks, the question of documentary for Burtynsky's industrial photographs, and the element of engagement in Steinman's urban environmental artwork) allows for a deeper understanding of the landscapes of our times. Despite the differences in medium, approach and ideology, the common threads of art and ecology link these three artists. Through their presentations of new landscapes, the crossroads of industry and ecology are constantly being traversed in the search for understanding.

CHAPTER 1:
ROBERT SMITHSON AND LAND RECLAMATION

> Art can become a resource, that mediates between the ecologist and the industrialist. Ecology and industry are not one-way streets, rather they should be crossroads. Art can help to provide the needed dialectic between them. [36]
>
> Robert Smithson

In the last years of his life, Robert Smithson was working toward the goal of creating a dialectical relationship between industry and ecology through the means of art. He achieved this goal once in 1971, with the creation of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* (see Figure 1) in Emmen, Holland, and had numerous other land reclamation proposals and projects in mind at the time of his death in 1973. *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* remains as the first and last land reclamation project that Smithson brought to full completion. As such, it deserves much attention, because it was the direction in which Smithson's artworks of the 1970s were headed. Smithson's interest in land reclamation and this work in particular will thus be the focus of this chapter.

1.1 Biography

Before diving into an analysis of one of the last works that Smithson created, it is important to look at some background information. Smithson was born in Passaic, New Jersey, in 1938. His early works involved much collage and mixed media. His self-proclaimed mature works began in 1964, when he was working with steel, plastics and mirrors. In 1966, Smithson began to visit urban, industrial, and quarry sites in New Jersey, which would eventually lead to the works in the outdoor environment for which

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[36] Robert Smithson, "Untitled, 1972" (Unpublished Writings, 1972), printed in Holt, *Writings*, 220.

he is most remembered.[37] *Earthworks*, as Smithson would come to label large-scale outdoor works of the early 1970s, is the title of a science fiction book by Brian W. Aldiss written in 1965 that depicts a nightmare version of the future in a state of social and ecological havoc.[38] In his 1967 article, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," Smithson wrote that he had bought a paperback copy of *Earthworks* to accompany him on his voyage through the Passaic monuments, and proceeded to quote the opening lines. Therein lies the birth of at least one of the titles for this "movement" of artists in the 1970s who brought their works of art to the outdoor setting.[39] As is often the case with art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, assigning labels, or categorizing artists into movements, is somewhat problematic. The works that Smithson and his colleagues produced in the outdoors have been referred to as Land Art, Earth Art, Outdoor Art and Projects on Site, among others.[40] In this thesis, I will follow Smithson's example and use the term 'Earthworks'.

Smithson, an avid artist, photographer, filmmaker, and writer, was deeply involved in the theoretical side of the art world. Among Smithson's most significant and innovative theories is that of the site/nonsite. To summarize, a site is outdoors, free of visual limitations, and on the fringe of society. A nonsite involves an indoor Earthwork that necessarily follows certain limitations involving space, material and size.[41] The relationship between the site and the nonsite is constantly being negotiated and

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[37] Robert Hobbs, "The Works," in Hobbs, *Sculpture*, 232 – 5.
[38] Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (published as "The Monuments of Passaic," *Artforum*, December 1967), reprinted in Flam, *Collected Writings*, 68.
[39] Gilles A. Tiberghien, *Land Art* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 13.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Robert Smithson, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson" (*Avalanche*, Fall 1970), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 176.

complicated. Smithson's Earthworks of the 1970s are examples of physical sites that require a full body experience and incorporate all of the senses. While Smithson is most well known for works designed for sites outside the museum, he did not reject the museum setting entirely. It was essential for him to collaborate with the indoor setting of the museum or gallery in order to display photographs and show films of his outdoor works.

While the site/nonsite dialectic is important to Smithson's art practice as a whole, the goal of this thesis is to focus on another dialectical relationship in Smithson's later work: industry and ecology, or, more specifically, mining and land reclamation. Smithson's thoughts concerning the role of dialectics are at the base of his work in every respect. This concept must be understood in order to see the potential relationship between any seeming pair of opposites, such as the outdoors (sites) versus the indoors (nonsites), natural objects versus commodities, pre- versus post-history, the ephemeral versus the eternal, and so on. Smithson's theory of dialectics is quite a positive approach to dealing with opposites. The goal is to bring two extremes of an abstract idea or a tangible entity together and to learn from their relationship. All things form part of a dialectic and have two sides that play off of one another. One is not better or worse than the other, as they are both necessary for the other's existence.[42]

I agree with the assessment that all of Smithson's chosen forms of creativity, be it the art object, film, photograph, or written work, are part and parcel of *the* work of art. Robert

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[42] Robert Smithson, "Earth" (Symposium at White Museum, Cornell University, 1970), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 166.

Sobieszek similarly argues that "Smithson's work can be considered a picto-ideo-photographic-filmic text, a hybridization of pictures, concepts, photographs, and cinema as well as other mental and physical abstractions."[43] I would take this argument further by adding that there is a dialectical relationship between all of Smithson's various forms of creativity that ties them together, thus making them inseparable and constantly influenced by one another. Had his life not been cut short by a tragic helicopter accident on July 20, 1973, in Amarillo, Texas, Smithson's career would surely have continued to expand, and the reclamation projects that he was pursuing may have had the opportunity to be brought to fruition.

1.2 Broken Circle/Spiral Hill

In 1971, Smithson was invited by the Sonsbeek international outdoor art exhibition to create an Earthwork.[44] The title of the event was *Beyond Lawn and Order* and the curatorial theme was *From Exhibition to Activity*. The idea behind this exhibition was compatible with Smithson's initial reasons for leaving the museum setting in order to expand on the traditionally accepted spaces of art, and to bring artists out of the institution and into public space.[45]

The Earthwork was initially supposed to be located in a park, but Smithson was interested in finding an acculturated area. In an interview with Gregoire Muller in 1971, Smithson stated, "I was looking for an area that was somehow raw because Holland is so pastoral, so completely cultivated and so much an Earthwork in itself that I wanted to

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[43] Sobieszek, *Photo Works*, 16.
[44] Hobbs, "The Works," 209.
[45] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 121.

find an area that I could mould, such as a quarry or a disused mining area."[46] This relates to Smithson's interest in creating new landscapes, while keeping with his notion that "the old landscape of naturalism and realism is being replaced by the new landscape of abstraction and artifice."[47] Smithson's new landscapes are situated apart from a long tradition of landscape as a place where nature was put on a pedestal to be enjoyed by humans in the form of manufactured parks and other "tame" settings. Smithson's interest involves working, as he stated in 1972, in "the outskirts or in the fringe areas, in the backwaters."[48]

As demonstrated in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Smithson did not want to work in an area that had already been cultivated. Rather, he wanted to take a plot of land that was under-appreciated and bring it into the spotlight.[49] Robert Hobbs refers to Smithson as "the aesthetic spokesman for the suburbia and the parking lot, the nonspaces."[50] Smithson (and, by extension, Hobbs) borrowed the term 'nonspace' from fellow artist Tony Smith, who used it to describe the artificial, concrete setting of the New Jersey Turnpike.[51] One of Smithson's primary objectives in his art became to take into consideration these nonspaces, the forgotten places of any given environment, be it the city or the desert, and to play with the dialectical relationship between nonspaces and spaces.

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[46] Robert Smithson, "The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, Is a Cruel Master" (Interview with Gregoire Muller, *Arts Magazine*, November 1971), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 179.
[47] Robert Smithson, "Aerial Art" (*Studio International*, February – April 1969), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 92.
[48] Robert Smithson, "Conversation in Salt City" (Interview with Gianni Pettena, *Domus*, November 1972), reprinted in Holt, *Writings,* 186.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Robert Hobbs, "Introduction," in Hobbs, *Sculpture*, 16.
[51] Robert Hobbs, "Smithson's Unresolvable Dialectics," in Hobbs, *Sculpture*, 24.

Sjouke Zijlstra, a geographer and the head of the Cultural Center in Emmen, worked with Smithson to find an appropriate location for his work.[52] Smithson visited and rejected an urban park in Arnheim, a factory in Veiteveen, and a run-off in St Petershill (among others) before arriving at an abandoned sand-mining quarry near a terminal moraine in Emmen, a two-hour train ride from Amsterdam.[53] Visually, the site pleased Smithson. The quarry, which was already the intended site for a reclamation project, consisted of red cliffs, yellow and white sand, brown and black soil, and green water.[54] Ron Graziani describes the site as "an entropic landscape constructed by slow-moving geomorphological processes "[55] in reference to the movements of the glaciers in the last Ice Age that enforced sand deposits to sit at the bottom of what was to become the quarry.[56]

The geological aspect of the site where Smithson chose to build *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* is just one of the many important factors of his site-specific ideology. Miwon Kwon (2002) and Suzanne Lacy (1995) both approach the issue of site specificity in their writings, which will be discussed further in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Three. To summarize, Kwon takes a political approach to the various changes that site-specific artworks saw from the 1960s to the 1990s, while Lacy discusses an alternative form of site specificity through new genre public art, where the focus is on audience, interaction, and communication as opposed to space and material.[57] Smithson's work can be said to

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[52] Hobbs, "The Works," 209.
[53] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 121.
[54] John Coplans, "Robert Smithson, The Amarillo Ramp," in Hobbs, *Sculpture*, 48.
[55] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 122.
[56] Ibid., 127 – 9.
[57] I will expand on Kwon and Lacy's ideas in Chapter Three when I discuss the work of Susan Leibovitz Steinman.

be site specific in that it is crucial that the work of art speak to the land on which it rests, as it will become part of that land. The shape and structure of his artworks were thus dependent on their surroundings, both visually and ideologically, as well as in many other respects. The designs of *Broken Circle* and *Spiral Hill* imitate industrial processes – the *Broken Circle* is both a jetty and a canal, and the *Spiral Hill* is a spoil mound – thus fitting into the industrial nature of the sand quarry.[58] The work is also historically site specific. Through *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Smithson was making reference to a major flood that devastated much of Holland in 1953.[59] Smithson had further plans to make a film of this project, in which he would have juxtaposed documentary images of the historic flood with the building of *Broken Circle*, where he used draglines and dikes to flood the area.[60] He recorded his ideas for this film in the form of preparatory drawings made during the construction of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* (Figures 8 and 9). Unfortunately, he ran out of funds and was unable to follow through.[61]

Geology, appearance, ideology and history were all taken into account when Smithson visited a site and planned a work of art for it. He also considered material that would be appropriate for the site, and, in certain cases, mythological influences. For example, Smithson's most famous work, and arguably the most influential project of all the Earthworks artists, *Spiral Jetty* (1970) (see Figure 7), was linked to an ancient native

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[58] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 128.
[59] I encountered some discrepancy concerning the flood in Hobbs' *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*. In Lucy Lippard's "Breaking Circles: The Politics of Prehistory" on page 33, it is written that the flood was in 1951, yet in Hobbs' "The Works" on page 210, it is written that the flood was in 1953. After further research, I discovered that while there was a significant flood in 1951, the flood of 1953 was the worst that the Netherlands had experienced in over 300 years, therefore Smithson was undoubtedly making reference to latter.
[60] Lucy Lippard, "Breaking Circles: The Politics of Prehistory," in Hobbs, *Sculpture*, 33.
[61] Hobbs, "The Works," 211.

Indian legend about an underground river referred to as Rio Buenaventura that connected the Great Salt Lake to the Pacific Ocean and caused deep whirlpools to form in its center.[62]

Created just before *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, *Spiral Jetty* is the work that made Smithson move toward land reclamation projects. It is located in the Great Salt Lake, also known as America's Dead Sea,[63] and provides the quintessential space for a new landscape as it is situated on a post-industrial site in Utah, near an oil well and a disused pipeline.[64] When Smithson came upon this site, it was full of garbage, waste and remnants of oil spills. He described it as the result of man-made catastrophes that depicted "abandoned hope."[65] It was a perfect site on which to create a new landscape that would celebrate this forgotten, hopeless area. *Spiral Jetty* involved the displacement of 6650 tons of earth and rock, and in 1972, the work was submerged by the waters of the Great Salt Lake, thereby succumbing to the principle of entropy.[66] The work re-emerged in 2003, and has continued to attract numerous visitors.[67]

Broken Circle/Spiral Hill and *Spiral Jetty* are demonstrative of Smithson's art production that is based on his intention of working against or away from capitalism. He was against the fetishization of commodities, and even went so far as to state that "the

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[62] Tiberghien, *Land Art*, 146.
[63] Smithson, "Conversation in Salt City," 187.
[64] Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty" (*Arts of the Environment*, edited by Gyorgy Kepes, 1972), in Holt, *Writings*, 111.
[65] Robert Smithson, "Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institute" (Interview conducted by Paul Cummings, July 14 and 19, 1972), reprinted in Holt, 143.
[66] Tsai, *Robert Smithson Unearthed*, 3.
[67] Ann Reynolds, "At the Jetty," in Cooke and Kelly, *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty*, 73.

categories of 'good art' and 'bad art' belong to a commodity value system."[68] Instead of focusing on moral values such as good and bad, Smithson urged for values to be based in aesthetics. Indeed, as written by Graziani, "[t]he economic desires of capitalism never play an actual aesthetic role in the cultural lexicons on Earthworks – or, for that matter, in art historical accounts of contemporary art celebrated as significant."[69] Nonetheless, Smithson accepted certain aspects of capitalism, such as the museum and the gallery space.

Exhibiting in a museum or gallery setting is a central aspect of the art world. Since Smithson could not bring his large Earthworks to the museum, he displayed photographs of his works. Smithson seemed to have a love/hate relationship with the photographic medium. In 1970, he wrote that "photography steals away the spirit of the work,"[70] yet the following year, he described a photograph as a harmless map that pointed viewers in the direction of the physical work.[71] As mentioned earlier, I believe that all forms of creativity in which Smithson took part surrounding a physical artwork are part of the artwork itself, and offer different perspectives. Photography, for example, sets spatial limits and gives a certain scale to the work that one could not appreciate when viewing it *in situ*, thereby allowing for a particular outlook.

The actual Earthworks exist on large terrain and are only limited by sky and earth. They require a full body experience due to their size. *Broken Circle*, for example, was built off

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[68] Robert Smithson, "What is a Museum? A Dialogue Between Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson" (*Arts Yearbook*, "The Museum World," 1967), reprinted in Flam, *Collected Writings*, 50.
[69] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 58.
[70] Smithson, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson," 177.
[71] Smithson, "The Earth Subject to Cataclysms," 180.

a sandy peninsula, which continued into a green lake (Figure 10). Half of the circle is located on the peninsula and is outlined by a canal semi-circle, while the other half is in the water and is contained by a jetty semi-circle. Both of the semi-circles are, in fact, *less* than semi-circles, thus resulting in an incomplete, or broken circle. The lake gives the broken circle a mirror reflection – a recurring theme throughout Smithson's work.

The diameter of *Broken Circle* is 140 feet, and the canal is roughly twelve feet wide, with the depth of the quarry lake between ten and fifteen feet.[72] During construction, Smithson discovered an enormous boulder in the very center of the peninsula – and thus of his work. While he did not want a central focus to his work, the Dutch army would have been needed to displace the boulder, as it was one of the largest in Holland.[73] In an interview with Muller, Smithson stated, "I was haunted by the shadowy lump in the middle of my work. Like the eye of a hurricane, it seemed to suggest all kinds of misfortunes. It became a dark spot of exasperation, a geological gangrene on the sandy expanse."[74]

While Smithson often used circular forms in his artwork, the circles were never perfectly round or complete. Hobbs proposes that the broken circle is an assurance of an exit, whereas a full circle would suggest an infinite and constant repetition of movement.[75] Smithson did not believe in cycles, but rather in unidirectional continuity. He stated, "I

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[72] Hobbs, "The Works," 208.
[73] Ibid., 212.
[74] Smithson, "The Earth Subject to Cataclysms," 182.
[75] Lippard, "Breaking Circles," 32.

think things just change from one situation to the next, there's really no return."[76] The form of the spiral plays into this idea against the cycle – the spiral continues in the same direction and never turns back on itself or retraces its steps. The spiral in this work, *Spiral Hill*, consists of dark brown earth covered with black topsoil, and white sand spirals upward, or downward, depending on how one looks at the piece (Figure 11). The hill is seventy-five feet at its base.[77] The spiral is another recurring theme in Smithson's art production. As stated by Gary Shapiro, "[t]he spiral is one of the most ancient and widespread of religious and spiritual symbols, so its use evokes the prehistoric and the archetypal."[78] The spiral symbolizes the power of nature, as it is the form of whirlpools and tornados. It is also an ancient symbol reflecting growth, fertility and healing.[79] Smithson's interest in pre-history is referred to through the use of this form. The contradictory feelings of destruction and construction that the spiral shape suggests are as much a part of the artwork as the incomplete circle, and contribute to its dialectical richness.

There are many dialectical couples in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*. The work involves both a jetty and a canal, thus playing into a dialectic of water and land. The relationship between vertical and horizontal, the counterclockwise motion of the spiral (heading into the past) and the clockwise direction of the circle (heading into the future), and even the play between center and periphery can be understood through a language of dialectics.[80]

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[76] Robert Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible" (Interview with Alison Sky, *On Site #24,* 1973), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 196.
[77] Hobbs, "The Works," 208.
[78] Gary Shapiro, *Earthwards: Robert Smithson and Art after Babel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 139.
[79] Lippard, "Breaking Circles," 35.
[80] Ibid., 33.

The dialogue between both sides of these dialectical relationships contributes to the meaning and feeling of the work. According to Shapiro, both parts of the main dialectical relationship in this work – the *Broken Circle* and the *Spiral Hill* – are internally decentered. He states that "[t]he circle has been truncated, reduced to half its expected size, while one arm of its circumference juts out into the water. The spiraling structure suggests centrifugal and centripetal motion; rather than being a stable landmark, it is set into motion of an undecidable direction."[81] Despite the boulder highlighting the circle's center, the overall effect when both works are viewed together is continuous with the very Smithsonesque touch of working with contradictions.

The site of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, just a ten-minute bike ride from the center of Emmen, is easily accessible to visitors. Fishermen and swimmers flock to the area, and the artwork is much appreciated – so much so that although it was supposed to be a temporary work, the residents of Emmen voted to make it permanent.[82] Due to the success of this work with the public, Smithson became more aware of his audience and the potential role of public art.[83] Furthermore, as stated by Graziani, "[w]ith the equation between recreational life and waste becoming the horizon of political expediency, *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* became the artist's calling card when he approached prospective mining companies in the United States."[84] Reclaiming industrially marred land by making Earthworks became Smithson's main preoccupation for the remainder of his life.

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[81] Shapiro, *Earthwards,* 110.
[82] Lippard, "Breaking Circles," 33.
[83] Hobbs, "The Works," 221.
[84] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 138.

1.3 Land Reclamation

Before embarking on a closer study of Smithson's land reclamation proposals of the early 1970s, it is important to discuss his understanding of nature, as well as his view of where humans and human inventions such as industrial technology belong in the dialectical relationship between nature and culture. It is also necessary to state that in the 1970s, the term 'ecology' was just beginning gain popular currency. As such, Smithson employed this term rather liberally. It is no longer possible to make generalizations such as "the ecologists," as there now exist numerous branches of ecologists who have different interests and goals. The growth in the field of environmental science, awareness, and interest since the 1970s brings the appreciation and understanding of Smithson's land reclamation ideas to a whole new level, which must be approached based on the definitions of terms from both Smithson's time and the early twenty-first century, as described in the Introduction.

Smithson used the term 'ecologists' to refer to those who study the relationship between organisms and their natural environment, as we do today. He took issue with ecologists who he considered to have an unrealistic vision of how the natural environment should appear – as untouched and pristine as it was before human intervention – and in 1973, wrote that "[s]ome of our present-day ecologists [...] still see nature through eyes conditioned by a one-sided idealism."[85] Smithson was interested in developing an alternative kind of ecological vision than these idealist ecologists.[86] It is interesting to note that Smithson's desire to bring art to the outdoor setting (along with a handful of

[85] Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmstead and the Dialectical Landscape" (*Artforum*, February 1973), reprinted in Holt, *Writings,* 118.
[86] Philip Leider, "Smithson and the American Landscape," *Art in America* 89, no. 1 (January 2001): 76.

other American artists in the 1960s and 1970s including his wife Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria and Dennis Oppenheim), was as a critique of the confinements of the traditional four white walls of the capitalist museum or gallery as the defining space of art. His initial reasons for bringing art to the vast outdoors, then, were to expand the places and spaces of art, and were not linked to any ecological context. By the time that he created *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Smithson had developed an interest in using art to further his ecological views.

Smithson recognized three stages of nature: wilderness (as an area that is untouched by human hands), the countryside (where humans have set foot and live with nature), and urban areas (where humans have taken over).[87] He criticized ecological movements whose aim was to preserve the appearance of the 'countryside stage' of nature, which he considered to have already been manipulated by human hands.[88] The ecology movement, dating back to the late nineteenth century, has always been divided into two main fields of thought: conservation versus preservation.[89] American President Theodore Roosevelt (1858 – 1919) and Gifford Pinchot (1865 – 1946), the chief of the United States Forest Service from 1905 to 1910 and the Republican governor of Pennsylvania in the 1920s and 1930s, were the two main proponents of the conservation movement. They founded the National Conservation Association in 1912, which had the support of the upper middle class and focused on the economic and democratic dealing of resources.[90] John

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[87] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 168.
[88] Shapiro, *Earthwards*, 41.
[89] For a concise summary of the conservationist and preservationist branches of ecological thought, see Pursell (1973).
[90] Carroll Pursell, ed. *From Conservation to Ecology: The Development of Environmental Concern* (Los Angeles: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1973), 21.

Muir (1838 – 1914), an environmentalist, geologist, engineer, inventor and writer, was the main promoter of the preservationist approach to nature. He advocated protecting wilderness areas from private interests and founded the Sierra Club in 1892.[91] Smithson's understanding of ecology did not quite fit into either of these two established views.

In the early 1970s, Smithson's interest in yet another stage of nature was becoming more defined. The industrially defeated landscape was a place that inspired the artist. Philip Leider suggests that Smithson may have been feeling guilty about the state of the environment in the United States and that he was desperately trying to make amends in the last years of his life.[92] However, while Smithson's views of the manner in which one should interact with entropy and the landscape evolved into Earthworks, his written material suggests that he was simply furthering his understanding of dialectics in terms of bringing industry and ecology together.

Smithson began creating Earthworks at a time in American history when environmental awareness was on the rise. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), brought public attention to the hazards of pesticides such as DDTs used in the post World War II period.[93] Membership in environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club greatly increased, and the first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970.[94] Smithson was acutely aware that artwork involving nature would be analyzed with moral criteria. He argued that any person's interaction with the land, be it a farmer, a miner or an artist,

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[91] Ibid., 124.
[92] Leider, "Smithson," 78.
[93] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).
[94] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 61 – 2.

necessarily depended on his or her awareness of self and of nature.[95] Yet, as stated by Hobbs, "Smithson was no ecologist: he took an almost perverse delight in the look of devastation."[96] It was not naturalism that interested him so much as "denaturalization" or "artifice."[97] This is highlighted in Smithson's interest in sites that had suffered industrial ruin. However, I do not get the impression that Smithson was out to destroy nature himself. Nor was he out to save nature. I do not think that Smithson necessarily thought that nature had to be – or *could* be – saved. He was interested in the stages that nature goes through on the path toward entropy, as well as the role that his artwork could play in this process.

Smithson actively participated in the ongoing debate concerning humans' place in the age-old nature/culture dialectic. During an interview in 1972, Smithson stated: "I feel I am a part of nature and that nature isn't really morally responsible. Nature has no morality."[98] In that same year, he wrote, "[w]e have to develop a different sense of nature; we have to develop a dialectic of nature that includes man."[99] Smithson viewed technology as an extension of nature, arguing that all modern day machines are constructed from raw materials from nature.[100] He claimed that through Earthworks, technology is used to organically make alterations on the land, and that his works were

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[95] Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmstead," 121 – 3.
[96] Hobbs, "Smithson's Unresolvable Dialectics," 22.
[97] Smithson, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson," 177.
[98] Smithson, "Interview with Robert Smithson," 154.
[99] Smithson, "Conversation in Salt Lake City," 185.
[100] Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects" (*Artforum*, September 1968), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 82.

becoming a part of nature. Furthermore, he argued that human intervention in nature is as natural as earthquakes.[101]

Smithson's approach to working with visual destruction in nature did not appeal to certain people. Much of the criticism that the American Earthworks artists such as Smithson and Heizer were subject to involved anthropomorphic comparisons of the earth to a female virgin being raped and pillaged by heavy machinery.[102] In 1968, Grace Glueck wrote an article in *The New York Times* about the *Earthworks* exhibition held at the Dwan Gallery, in which Smithson participated. She described the earth as female, yet this time as "Mother Earth herself" being "furrowed and burrowed, heaped and piled, mounded and rounded and trenched."[103] Environmental activist and artist Alan Gussow, described by Malcolm Andrews as a "traditionalist-environmentalist," had a similar response to Smithson's approach. Andrews stated that "Gussow and others associated the Earth Artists with a kind of macho aggression in which the violation of the earth with huge mechanical diggers was seen as a raw assertion of male authority over Mother Earth."[104]

Other critics, such as English Land Art artist Hamish Fulton, felt that the American artists involved in Earthworks – anthropomorphism aside – simply had no respect for nature. Fulton criticized their approach as aggressive and permanent, versus the delicacy and

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[101] Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond*, 23.
[102] Tiberghien, *Land Art*, 217.
[103] Grace Glueck, "Art Notes: Moving Mother Earth" (*New York Times*, October 6, 1968), reprinted in Tiberghien, *Land Art*, 44.
[104] Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 213.

ephemerality of his own works, as well as others such as Andy Goldsworthy.[105] Yet another British Environmental Artist, Richard Long, criticized American Earthworks as being capitalist art despite the artists' claims to be moving away from capitalism. In many cases, land had to be bought, heavy machinery had to be paid for, the salaries of the workers had to be taken care of, and so on.[106] Others still, such as the Canadian *Society for Pollution and Environmental Control*, went so far as to protest Smithson's arrival at the airport in Vancouver in defiance of his proposed project, *Island of Broken Glass* (1970), which would have involved covering an island in the Georgian Strait with broken glass. Due to their complaint that Smithson's work would harm wildlife, Canadian authorities revoked permission for Smithson to embark on this project.[107]

Had Smithson been given the opportunity to expand on his land reclamation projects, his critics might have changed their minds, as he was attempting to give a new life to devastated landscapes. Land reclamation became a middle ground for Smithson between lethargic pessimism and overzealous idealism concerning the state of our environment.[108] In the last years of his life, Smithson traveled to various mining companies in the United States, pleading his cause. Timothy Collins, president of Collins Securities Corporation of New York City, was an avid supporter of Smithson's work who helped Smithson put together a land reclamation proposal arguing art's potential role as a mediator between industry and ecology. Collins knew many of the mining companies' presidents and later

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[105] Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond*, 42.
[106] Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, 215.
[107] Leider, "Smithson," 76.
[108] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 184.

became the president of United Mining Corporation.[109] Between 1971 and 1973, Smithson submitted this proposal to over fifty civic groups, mining companies and quarries such as Kennecott Copper, U.S. Steel, and International Minerals and Chemicals.[110] He believed that artists had a political responsibility, as did industrialists, to look after the (visual) well being of the earth.[111]

In this proposal, Smithson argued that ecology (defined here as the natural relationship between an organism and its environment) and industry (as an external source that disrupts this natural relationship) had been seen as enemies for too long, and that a middle ground had to be established between the two. As mentioned earlier, Smithson believed that industry was natural. Therefore, instead of treating ecology and industry as competing sources, Smithson argued that the time had come for these areas to be seen in relation to one another. He wrote that "a dialectic between mining and land reclamation must be developed. Such devastated places as strip-mines could be recycled in terms of earth art. The artist and the miner must become conscious of themselves as natural agents."[112] Smithson did not agree with idealist ecologists' views of the natural environment as pure and pristine, nor did he agree with those of money-hungry industrialists who only saw nature in terms of what could be extracted for profit. This dichotomy was evident in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*. Graziani wrote that "from the top of *Spiral Hill*, the view below suggested that the ongoing environmentalist/industry's

[109] Hobbs, "The Works," 219 – 20.
[110] Leider, "Smithson," 78.
[111] Lippard, "Breaking Circles," 40.
[112] Smithson, "Untitled, 1972," 220.

mechanistic concepts of nature were, in observational fact, broken attempts at best."[113] Because his thoughts were nonpartisan, Smithson was able to move between the different sides to create a vision of his own.[114]

Smithson had many arguments as to why mining companies should embark on his proposed land reclamation projects: the artwork would increase the value of the land, give the company a positive public image, educate the public, and provide publicity for the company through the media and art galleries.[115] Yet despite all the proposals that Smithson distributed in 1972, only a handful of companies responded. At the time of his death, Smithson was working on a few ideas for specific reclamation projects that had been accepted. *Lake Edge Crescents – Egypt Valley, Ohio*, also referred to as *Hanna Coal Reclamation Project* and *Reclamation Project for Open-pit Mine* (1972), was an important beginning to Smithson's land reclamation projects (Figure 12). A bill about strip-mining reclamation had been in debate in the state of Ohio since 1971. The bill obliged miners to either return land that had been stripped to its original state, or use the land for some other purpose, such as real estate or recreation. Smithson met with Senator Harry Armstrong to discuss his ideas for the Hanna Coal Company, and the Senator put him in contact with Ralph Hatch, the company's president. Smithson's preparatory drawings for the work show it to be similar (though much larger) to *Broken Circle.* He planned on using materials such as limestone from Hanna's Georgetown operation as well as crown vetch, a legume that the company had used in previous reclamation projects, thus playing into the site specificity of the work. Unfortunately, the company

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[113] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 127.
[114] Hobbs, "Smithson's Unresolvable Dialectics," 23.
[115] Sobieszek, *Photo Works*, 45.

decided to pursue other forms of reclamation that would not show any traces of the site's industrial past.[116]

Lewis Manilow, president of the Park Forest South Development Company and an avid art collector, commissioned Smithson to create an Earthwork located in a swamp area thirty-five miles from Chicago. Smithson was working on this project, *Lake Crescents – Forest Park South, Illinois* (1973), at the time of his death (Figure 13). Due to his success with the public in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Smithson wanted to give the area a recreational, as well as artistic purpose. Smithson's plan was to dig up peat, which would create a slope next to a lake, and to plant a shrub that would have a fiery red color. The hill would be the highest point in the whole area. There would then be a jetty with a gravel path – again, similar to *Broken Circle*. Also in 1973, Charles Melby, the president of Minerals Engineering Company, commissioned *Tailing Pond*, in Crede, Colorado (Figure 14). Smithson proposed to make a dam that would become a road, and that would take a circular form. Up to two years after Smithson's death, Collins was considering handing the project over to Nancy Holt and Richard Serra to complete following Smithson's sketches (as they had done for *Amarillo Ramp* – see Figure 6), but the project was never finished.[117]

Smithson's interest in mining was not entirely idiosyncratic. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, alongside a peaked interest in environmental organizations as mentioned earlier, the public was becoming increasingly concerned with the environmental impact of

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[116] Hobbs, "The Works," 217 – 219.
[117] Ibid., 219 – 226.

mining. In 1965, Congress passed the *Appalachian Regional Development Act* in order to survey strip-mining operations. Two years later, Congress published a report entitled *Surface Mining and our Environment*, which advocated the idea that mining corporations should return abandoned mining sites to the state in which they had been before the mining process.[118] The lack of support that Smithson received from mining companies was perhaps due to the fact that while they were interested in the concept of reclamation as it was becoming an important social concern, they preferred the land to undergo a complete makeover which would transform it into a pristine park or garden – just as the government and idealist ecologists recommended.

Smithson's land reclamation projects differed from this goal. His artworks did not intend to hide what mining had done to the land. Rather, by showing the industrial scars as an important aspect of the work, a new, artistic process in the land could be emphasized.[119] Instead of erasing the site's past, Smithson's approach would be more educational, since the artwork would be a reminder of industrial strength. As stated by Hobbs, "[Smithson's land reclamation projects] force a visual consideration of large-scale changes to the land wrought by both pollution and reclamation, and do not attempt to make value judgments."[120] The idea was to alter the land in yet another way that would encourage people to think about it in historical and industrial terms. His projects would make people aware of the sites' pasts, and persuade them to contemplate the processes that the sites had undergone.

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[118] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 60 – 7.
[119] Shapiro, *Earthwards*, 43.
[120] Hobbs, "Smithson's Unresolvable Dialectics," 15.

The potential that Smithson saw lying beneath the rubble in mining sites, quarries, and the general fringe locations of our populated societies is an area that I believe deserves more attention in art historical discourse. The controversial nature of Smithson's Earthworks must be re-analyzed in light of his attempts to bring mining and land reclamation together through art. I found an accomplice in Graziani's study, in which he wrote "[...] what is unfortunately missing in the celebration of Smithson's Earthworks is a critical discussion of his never-completed reclamation proposals."[121] The direction that his art was taking at the time of his death, and the area where his interests lay, had the potential to bring about a new way of appreciating the broken spaces of our land throughout history and time.

1.4 Time

The concept of time is important in the analysis of Smithson's work. Smithson argued that time was a thief that robbed him and other artists of their present by focusing on their artwork's relation to the art-historical past and potential for the art of the future. In 1968, Smithson wrote: "[t]he existence of the artist in time is worth as much as the finished product."[122] Furthermore, Smithson did not consider the final work of art to be of more importance than the process it took to get there.[123] Smithson paid attention to details of time that are usually ignored, such as the *work* aspect of the work of art, including the time it took to find an appropriate site, design the Earthwork, bring the necessary equipment together, and actually construct it. This interest is emphasized in Smithson's preparatory drawings (see Figures 8, 9, 12, 13 and 14). There is also the time that people

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[121] Graziani, *American Landscape*," 138.
[122] Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind," 90.
[123] Ibid.

must take in order to get to the work, be it a ten-minute bike-ride for residents of Emmen to get to *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* or a trek through the deserts of the American West to get to the *Spiral Jetty*. There is the actual passage of time, which physically affects the work of art by molding it into various forms and by adding to its approaching entropic final state of decay and ruin. There is time as it exists in the past, present and future, and time that is continuous and ongoing, yet bound to come to an end. As observed earlier, Smithson did not believe in cycles, but rather, in a kind of linear conveyor belt of instances that go on and on, until entropy as opposed to infinity.

Smithson wrote extensively about the relationship between his art and the concept of entropy. As described in the Introduction, entropy represents a state of absolute chaos and destruction. As a closed system, the earth only has a certain amount of resources, and they are finite. Smithson believed, for example, that recycling was implemented for public relations purposes, but is, in fact, a lost attempt to reverse the process of entropy.[124] One of the main influences in Smithson's understanding of entropy was Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's book *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (1971).[125] In this book, Georgescu-Roegen discusses the problems of a capitalist economy and an ecological reality. The idea that nature and economics are systems that work in similar manners and are both entropic is also predominant in the book – ideas that Smithson certainly supported.[126]

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[124] Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible," 190.
[125] Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
[126] Graziani, *American Landscape*, 130 – 3.

All aspects of life – natural, cultural, ecological, industrial and economic – can be understood on a spectrum of the ephemeral. The assumption that a work of art is eternal, for example, is a nonsensical but widespread belief that, according to Smithson, perpetuates the lie of progress, advancement and achievement. Nothing is eternal. All things exist for a fleeting amount of time that varies based on their physical components. All things will come to an entropic fate. In 1966, Smithson wrote, "[t]he artificial ingenuity of time allows no return to nature."[127] Entropy precludes a return to nature in its pure and pristine state because the system is irreversible and inevitably geared toward destruction. Therefore, while processes like industrial advancement may speed up the march toward entropy, they are nonetheless moving along the only possible path, which is to entropy. According to Hobbs, Smithson's interpretation of entropy borders on determinism.[128]

The idea that "the world is slowly destroying itself," as Smithson wrote in 1971, does indeed seem to have a negative undertone.[129] Hobbs describes entropy as "unsentimental, objective, and inexorable hopelessness."[130] Yet Smithson was not discouraged by the prospect of destruction and devastation. As far as he was concerned, sites that showed signs of decay and wreckage were more interesting and rich in potential than cultivated sites.[131] Smithson argued that instead of trying to fight the forces of entropy, we should accept the limits that it sets and even embrace our entropic fate by collaborating with

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[127] Robert Smithson, "The Shape of the Future and Memory" (Unpublished Writing, 1966), printed in Holt, *Writings*, 211.
[128] Hobbs, "Smithson's Unresolvable Dialectics," 25.
[129] Smithson, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson," 177.
[130] Hobbs, "Smithson's Unresolvable Dialectics," 25.
[131] Smithson, "The Earth Subject to Cataclysms," 181.

it.[132] Industrial sites were thus the perfect setting for his art as they represented the processes of entropy in human culture and natural phenomena alike.

Smithson's interest in the concept of time goes beyond entropy. In an interview with Paul Cummings in 1972, Smithson stated, "I guess I was always interested in origins and primordial beginnings, you know, the archetypal nature of things."[133] He was fascinated by history, or, as he specifies, a "junk heap of history."[134] All of his works incorporate some aspect of time. In *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, for example, even the "accidental center" plays into the game of time. The boulder ties the work to geological and pre-historic pasts: the boulders are very rare and can only be found in Holland along a glacial moraine running through the country. In the Bronze Age, the boulders were used to make passage tombs, or "Hun's Beds."[135] They were also used to build monuments in "Prehistoric Ages," as recounted by the artist.[136]

In his 1967 essay, "Some Void Thoughts on Museums," Smithson observes that "[h]istory is representational, while time is abstract."[137] History has stories attached to it – it exists within a particular context, whereas time in and of itself is free. Smithson often employed the terms 'pre-history' and 'post-history' to highlight his belief that time, while very real, is intangible. Rather, he argued that "both pre- and post-history are part

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[132] Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible," 194.
[133] Smithson, "Interview with Robert Smithson," 148.
[134] Ibid., 154.
[135] Lippard, "Breaking Circles," 33.
[136] Smithson, "The Earth Subject to Cataclysms," 182.
[137] Robert Smithson, "Some Void Thoughts on Museums" (*Arts magazine*, 1967), reprinted in Flam, *Collected Writings*, 41.

of the same time consciousness."[138] What can we know about pre- or post-history? Are *they* representational, and if so, of what? Since they are both part of the same time consciousness, would it be possible for the pre-historic (past) to meet the post-historic (future), and if so, what would the consequences of such a meeting be – if any?

Land Reclamation is a process that exists in all time. The projects refer to the past industrial alterations on a given site, as well as the future of such sites as spaces for art. The nature of the barren sites points to pre-historic beginnings and post-historic endings. Land reclamation projects collaborate with the process of entropy – they do not resist entropy's forces, nor do they give in entirely. Thus, there is something positive about the presence of land reclamation in the form of art. Even though Smithson had an unfailing belief in entropy, in which the implications are seemingly pessimistic, he still transformed otherwise hopeless sites into spaces that people could enjoy. People have aesthetic responses to these sites that exist in a realm that Smithson referred to, following eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory, as the picturesque.

1.5 The Picturesque

It would be difficult to summarize aesthetic theory in such limited space, due in part to the rich history that accompanies this term, but mostly because there is no single aesthetic theory. Rather, there are as many theories as there are theorists. In eighteenth-century Britain, philosophies about aesthetic theory were very popular, and thinkers such as Edmund Burke (1729 – 97), William Gilpin (1813 – 94) and Uvedale Price (1747 – 1829)

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[138] Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" (*Art International*, March 1968), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 71.

– all of whom Smithson referred to in his writings – wrote about their understandings of the terms 'sublime', 'beautiful' and 'picturesque'. Burke is at the forefront of making the distinction between the sublime, referring to overpowering feelings of awe and fear, [139] and the beautiful, as representing love and pleasure.[140] Gilpin took this idea further by arguing that the sublime and the beautiful are not necessarily opposites, and he appropriated the term 'picturesque' as a new aesthetic category that combines elements of the two.[141] He viewed the picturesque as a way to understand and therefore control aspects of nature that seem to be overwhelming. By employing artistic language used for paintings such as 'landscape' or 'scenery', so-called wilderness became safe.[142] Price was responsible for clarifying the definitions of each category, and separating the picturesque from the sublime and the beautiful. He contends that "[e]very place, and every scene worth observing, must have something of the sublime, the beautiful, or the picturesque."[143] The idea behind aesthetic theory as I understand it, however, is that people have aesthetic *responses* to a given situation (be it a natural setting or a work of art) that vary based on its appearance. It is not the landscape that is sublime – it is the *response* that one may have to that landscape that is sublime. This idea will be further discussed in Chapter Two. Smithson referred to both Gilpin's and Price's terminology to develop his ideas of dialectics and entropy in art and nature.[144]

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[139] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. and with intro. and notes by James T. Boulton, rev. ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 39.
[140] Ibid., 92.
[141] William Gilpin, *Essays on Picturesque Beauty*. 2nd edition (London: Blamire, 1794), 43.
[142] John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 5.
[143] Uvedale Price, *Essays on the picturesque, as compared with the sublime and the beautiful: and on the use of studying pictures for the purpose of improving real landscape* (London: J. Mawman, 1810; reprinted by Westmead, Farnborough: Gregg International, 1971), viii. Citations are to the Gregg edition.
[144] Robert Smithson, "The Crystal Land" (*Harper's Bazaar*, May 1966), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 19.

Smithson used the term 'picturesque' as a way to mediate between the two extremes of the beautiful and the sublime.[145] While feelings associated with the sublime are the most intense and overwhelming response that one can have to an aesthetic experience, Smithson found an alternative in the picturesque, a less dramatic form of the sublime.[146] As Shapiro astutely notes, the picturesque is thus dialectical in that it creates a dialogue between the beautiful and the sublime, and in its constantly evolving relationship between nature, humans, and outside forces – a relationship that Smithson would see as entirely natural.[147] Shapiro goes on to state that the picturesque "introduces time into the experience of the landscape, a 'deformity' due to natural or human causes, which is then modified by further changes of either sort," thereby contributing to Smithson's interest in time.[148] In 1973, Smithson used the example of a tree being struck by lightning to describe the picturesque.[149] In Smithson's own land reclamation work, his insistence on leaving marks of a site's industrial past defines his work as picturesque.[150] The picturesque necessarily involves change, thus fitting perfectly with the kind of art that he was making.[151] Due to the devastated industrial sites in which he enjoyed working, the necessity of change, and the contrast and transition in Smithson's work, Hobbs refers to Smithson as "the great rediscoverer of the picturesque."[152]

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[145] Shapiro, *Earthwards, 142.*
[146] Hobbs, "Smithson's Unresolvable Dialectics," 29.
[147] Shapiro, *Earthwards*, 142.
[148] Ibid., 143.
[149] Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmstead," 120.
[150] Shapiro, *Earthwards*, 142.
[151] Ibid., 199.
[152] Hobbs, "The Unresolvable Dialectic," 29.

1.6 Summary

Robert Smithson's proposed land reclamation projects, though they will never be realized, carry the potential success that this artist could have had in using art to bridge the gap between nature and culture, or ecology and industry. Through the understanding of dialectic relationships, as well as the acceptance of entropy, Smithson's single completed land reclamation work, *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, still stands today as a positive symbol of art's intervention. Its existence in time, along with the picturesque quality that it embodies, allows it to remain as a new landscape that is open to chance and change. All of these characteristics of Smithson's artwork, as well as his ideas, are important influences on contemporary artists who are concerned with ecology and industry, as will become clear in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2:
EDWARD BURTYNSKY AND INDUSTRIAL PHOTOGRAPHY

> These images are meant as metaphors to the dilemma of our modern existence; they search for a dialogue between attraction and repulsion, seduction and fear [...] Our dependence on nature to provide the materials for our consumption and our concern for the health of our planet sets us into an uneasy contradiction. For me, these images function as reflecting pools of our times.[153]
>
> Edward Burtynsky

The complex and controversial relationship between industry and ecology is at the forefront of Burtynsky's art production. His work generally focuses on sites that have been molded and modified by an industrial influence. This chapter will focus on select photographs from Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series (see Figures 2, 3, and 4) shot in Sudbury, Ontario, in 1996. Burtynsky's medium and approach is significantly different than that of Smithson's and Steinman's, and his work therefore contributes to my thesis in a unique way. In this chapter, I explore a question that is prevalent in the analysis of Burtynsky's work pertaining to the nature of his photographs, which is crucial to the understanding of the nature/culture dialogue within his art production: are his photographs documentary works, artworks, or both? I will respond to this question by providing an introduction to, and a brief history of documentary photography. This will be followed by a critical analysis of the category 'documentary', and finally, the introduction of a hybrid form of documentary. Throughout this analysis, I will explore the areas of time and entropy, theories of the sublime, and an ecological perspective on the state of our environment.

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[153] Edward Burtynsky, *Artist Web Page* <http:www.edwardburtynsky.com> (accessed throughout September 2005 and August 2006).

2.1 Biography

Born in St Catharines, Ontario, in 1955, Burtynsky always had easy access to industrial sites, as his father worked as a miner for the General Motors Plant. Today, Burtynsky lives in Toronto, where he has been the owner and director of *Toronto Image Works*, a photographic service company, since 1985. This establishment has expanded substantially since it first opened, and now includes a darkroom rental facility, a custom lab, a digital imaging center, and a new media computer-training center.[154] Since the 1980s, the subject matter of Burtynsky's photographs includes a wide variety of industrial scenes, including railways, tire pile-ups, shipbreaking fields and mining pits. This choice of subject matter, along with the large-scale format that he employs, create defiant, provocative and attention-grabbing results.

2.2 Nickel Tailings

As was the case with Smithson, Burtynsky's portrayals of industrial landscapes are what I refer to as his new landscapes. In an interview with writer Murray Whyte in 2004, Burtynsky stated that he is "trying to redefine the landscape."[155] The *Nickel Tailings* series is an example of Burtynsky's new landscapes through the depiction of nature after human intervention, as an enticing and yet venomous orange substance flows along a blackened earth. These landscapes appear foreign to most viewers and could easily be a representation of some uninhabitable planet. Burtynsky's images from this series have been referred to as Martian or lunar landscapes by numerous critics, including Dan Falk

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[154] Ibid.
[155] Murray Whyte, "Beautiful Mines," *Art News* 103, no. 2 (February 2004): 71.

(2003)[156] and Russell Smith (2004).[157] Interestingly, Smithson spoke of the suburbs and the 'fringe' areas where he worked as "the Martian landscape."[158] These spaces represent the Other, the foreign, the landscapes that people prefer to ignore. Labeling these sites as alien provides them with a name and an identity, and thus recognizes their novelty and difference.

Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series consists of thirty-seven photographs measuring roughly one-hundred-and-twenty-five by one-hundred-and-seventy-five centimeters. *Nickel Tailings Nos. 31, 32* and *34* are sneak previews of the twenty-five thousand acres in Sudbury that have nickel deposits, of which six thousand are tailing ponds. Sudbury has the largest mine in Canada, and nickel has been mined in the area since the late nineteenth century. This rich deposit of nickel is due to a meteor that hit the Sudbury region approximately two million years ago. The impact of the meteor left a depression of seventeen by thirty-seven miles that is now called the Sudbury Basin, and caused molten, mineral-bearing rock to rise to the surface of the earth. This resulted in an ideal spot for nickel mining.[159]

In Figures 2, 3 and 4, one stage of the intricate nickel mining process is being depicted. After the ore-bearing rock goes through a mill, it is grinded into silt by industrial-sized rotating cylinders. The nickel and other metals are extracted from the rock, but the iron

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[156] Dan Falk, "Documenting Detritus: Edward Burtynsky focuses on this other world of bleak industrial landscapes, and finds a kind of beauty in the chaos," *Toronto Globe and Mail* (February 10, 2003): R5.
[157] Russell Smith, "Surreal Photos," *Toronto Globe and Mail* (February 12, 2004): R1.
[158] Smithson, "What is a Museum?" in Flam, *Collected Writings*, 45.
[159] Martha Hoppin, "Photographing the Environment," *South Hadley Mount Holyoke College Art Museum Publications* (Spring 1999): Acquisitions.

remains in the silt as it is not profitable enough to remove. The silt is then mixed with water and poured into enormous tailing ponds, where it seeps into the ground. The bright orange colour is due to the oxidation of the iron. The tailings are therefore high in heavy metals and other toxins.[160] As described by Clint Roenisch,

> Here a livid, crimson stream cuts through a blackened, hellish earth. Looking at this photograph, it seems improbable this place will ever regenerate itself into a more ecologically balanced state. With the tailings, as one of the residual effects of mining, the corporation and nature come together for a spectacular presentation of Purgatory Incarnate. [These works are] a vision of northern Ontario as heavy industry sees it, thoroughly foreign from the pastoral scenes of the Group of Seven.[161]

The barren wasteland that is depicted in this industrial landscape is intriguing in spite of itself. Yet while the effects of the tailings are so fascinating in their other-worldly qualities, they are a particularly mundane waste. Nickel is a prime component of such quotidian objects as refrigerators, stoves and cars.[162]

The composition of Burtynsky's photographs is striking. In *Nickel Tailings No. 31*, the image is divided into two main sections of earth: the top seems to be sandy, yet smooth and moist all at once, as though liquid clay has oozed over a beach. The bottom section, which takes up most of the space, depicts an eroded and sparse landscape. Rocks and straggly bits of grey grass or twigs are scattered about chaotically. It resembles the after-effects of an oil spill when a thick coat of polluting muck covers the surrounding environment. The tailings begin at the top right corner of the image and work their way

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Clint Roenisch, "Dust Postponed: The Machinations of Man in the Work of Edward Burtynsky," *Edward Burtynsky: Works from Two Decades, 1981- 2001: A Gift to the Collection*, eds. Edward Burtynsky and Clint Roenisch (Kitchener, Ontario: Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, 1 November – 14 December, 2002), 19.
[162] Smith, "Surreal Photos," R1.

to the center. Once there, they split into two different paths, only to be reunited, join forces, and carry on together down toward the bottom of the photograph.

As is consistent with Burtynsky's work, the image is framed in such a way that it is difficult to comprehend the scale of the tailings. The elimination of the sky from the photograph dictates that there is no point of reference in the space Burtynsky presents, thus allowing the viewers' minds to wander. It is possible to imagine the tailings as a mere stream, just as they could be as large as rivers in this strange, barren and toxic space where desert meets deserted landscape. In this way, Burtynsky emphasizes the depth in his photograph. Furthermore, the tailings are most prominent at the bottom of the image, which is closest to us, and recede back to the upper right hand corner. This photograph was actually taken from a bird's eye view. Burtynsky stood on a road roughly twenty feet above this particular tailing pond in order to capture the image.[163]

In *Nickel Tailings No. 32*, the orange liquid spreads through the landscape like a toxic spider-web that will capture and smother any living element that steps in its path. Like *Nickel Tailings No. 31*, *Nickel Tailings No. 34* resembles a river that is winding its way through the desolate landscape. It is interesting to experience the various photographs that form the *Nickel Tailings* series in order to develop a more complete picture of the Sudbury nickel mines, yet the photographs remain equally powerful when viewed individually as well.

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[163] Hoppin, "Photographing the Environment," Acquisitions.

Mining in the Sudbury Basin has been occurring for over a century, and the techniques have changed significantly. In the early years, miners would set fire to wooden cribs that held the ore-bearing rock. The sulphur would burn off, and dark clouds would disperse into the atmosphere, producing sulphuric acid rain and black sediments. In 1972, the 381-meter-high INCO Superstack was built, resulting in a less concentrated area of acid rain. There are also numerous reclamation projects on site, with the goal of greening the area. Grass seed is sprayed onto the ground once it is no longer useful for mining purposes, and after a few years, a new biomass is born.[164] In 1992, the United Nations awarded Sudbury for its environmental rehabilitation projects, which included the planting of two million trees.[165] It is encouraging to see that from the onset of nickel mining until today, there have been numerous efforts to improve the techniques used. Nonetheless, these landscapes do not inspire confidence of a balanced environment. In fact, they appear to be a clear depiction of the process of entropy.

2.3 Time and Entropy

Though reclamation efforts will mold the Sudbury landscape to another state, the land will never return to its pre-industrial condition. As discussed in Chapter One, entropy only moves in one direction. Critic Edward Leffingwell describes Burtynsky's photographs as "juxtaposed monumental images of assisted entropy."[166] His use of the term 'assisted' is accurate and significant – this is entropy as created and perpetrated by humans' needs and desires. Burtynsky argues that while entropy is the destiny of our

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[164] Richard Rhodes, "Tailings," *Canadian Art* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 52.
[165] *SeaJay*, "The City of Greater Sudbury: The Home of the Big Nickel," 1995 – 2006 <http://www.cyberbeach.net/~seajay/sudbury.html#But_theres_much_more_to_Sudbury_than_kn> (accessed May 15, 2006).
[166] Edward Leffingwell, "Review of Exhibitions," *Art in America* 90, no. 6 (June 2002): 129.

species and the whole planet, we can accelerate, decelerate or stabilize the process. We have now reached the point where, due to the sheer volume of population growth, we are "a destabilizing agent."[167] Both Smithson and Burtynsky emphasize the fact that our world is made up of finite materials and that eventually, nature will run out of resources. This is the point of absolute entropy.[168]

The subject matter of tailings in general points to a somewhat dismal picture. In describing the scenery of Smithson's proposed *Tailing Pond* in Crede, Colorado, commissioned by the Minerals Engineering Company in 1973, Robert Hobbs wrote that "tailings are a paradigm of entropy."[169] As they flow along the earth and seep into the ground, they turn the landscape into a haven of entropy. The concept of entropy is thus a significant connecting point between Smithson's and Burtynsky's art production. When asked about Smithson's use of the term entropy, Burtynsky has made reference to the following passage from Smithson's "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967):[170]

> Picture in your mind's eye [a] sandbox 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 restoration of the original division but a greater degree of greyness and an increase of entropy.[171]

This didactic explanation allows for a visual understanding of the process of entropy. On a larger scale, the speed at which the modern world is growing and expanding in areas

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[167] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.
[168] Ibid.; Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible," in Holt, *Writings*, 190.
[169] Hobbs, "The Works," in Hobbs, *Sculpture*, 225.
[170] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.
[171] Smithson, "Monuments of Passaic," in Flam, *Collected Writings*, 74.

ranging from population to industrial technology is mixing the sand of our environmental sand box at such a high rate that the process of entropy is becoming increasingly accelerated.

Smithson and Burtynsky demonstrate that there are numerous different techniques for dealing with entropy. For example, Smithson's proposal for *Island of Broken Glass* (1970), mentioned in Chapter One, demonstrates a willingness to collaborate with entropy. This artwork, which would have involved the slow process of glass and mirror breaking down and returning to their original state of sand, is a true demonstration of geological time, as it would have taken thousands of years. While environmentalists from the *Society for Pollution and Environmental Control* criticized the concept, Burtynsky has stated that he admires Smithson's idea as it demonstrates a profound appreciation of the processes of entropy and time. In terms of ideological concerns, as well as physical space, Burtynsky has stated that his and Smithson's "paths have crossed many times."[172] For example, within a ten-year period, both Smithson and Burtynsky were interested in working in the Kennecott Copper Mine in Bingham Valley, Utah. Smithson's proposal to create a land reclamation project in the area was refused in 1973, while Burtynsky was allowed to visit and photograph the site in 1983 (Figure 15). While Burtynsky's artwork clearly has less consequences to the land as it leaves no physical trace, the public interest in environmental issues and industrial companies' somewhat forced willingness to make their work available and transparent began to increase in this decade, allowing for easier public access to industrial sites. For artists interested in

[172] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.

depicting entropy and the signs of advancing time, this access has opened numerous windows of opportunity and expression.

Time is an important concept in Burtynsky's work, as it was in Smithson's. When viewing works from his *Nickel Tailings* series, the final products resulting from this industrial process such as refrigerators, stoves and cars do not immediately come to mind. To the contrary, modern technology could be light years away from these landscapes that seem to reference a time *before* time. Burtynsky views the landscapes that he photographs as dating back to pre-history and describes the landscapes in the *Nickel Tailings* series as primordial.[173] The irony, of course, is that while primordial landscapes would have been untouched by human hands, the 'primordial landscapes' that Burtynsky captures exist solely because of human influence on the land. The interest in history and the beginning of time that Burtynsky and Smithson share demonstrates their understanding that the earth is changing, and informs their actions in raising awareness about these changes through their artwork.

2.4 Landscape and Industrial Photography

In the *Nickel Tailings* photographs, nature is depicted at the mercy of industry. Burtynsky comes from a long history of landscape photographers interested in illustrating both natural and industrial settings, which I address in this section. He refers to the American survey photographers of the nineteenth century as important sources of inspiration.[174] Among them, Carleton E. Watkins (1829 – 1916) and William Henry Jackson (1843 –

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[173] Rebecca Wallace, "Improbable Beauty: In the scars of industry, photographer finds rich, colourful scenes," *California Mountain View Voice* (Friday, September 9, 2005): Arts.
[174] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.

1942) have the most comparable approaches. The formal qualities in the work that these photographers produced for the California State Geological Survey in the 1860s and the Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories in the 1870s respectively are evident in Burtynsky's work as well. A sense of sublimity, beauty and grandeur can be seen, along with a close attention to detail. Furthermore, there is a strong focus on the ground and very little attention to the sky, as opposed to the popular photographs of Ansel Adams (1902 – 1984). Burtynsky's new landscapes allow for a different interpretation of nature than the work of early American nature photographers such as Adams and Eliot Porter (1908 – 1990), who looked to the splendor of the natural environment for their inspiration.

In "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View" (1982), Rosalind Krauss discusses the confusion concerning historical classification of nineteenth-century landscape photographers' work – specifically that of Timothy O'Sullivan. While the goal of O'Sullivan's photographic work was documentation for geological surveys, his photographs have subsequently been perceived from an artistic standpoint and displayed in art exhibitions. Krauss questions our contemporary reading of these works and dissects certain terms that may be misinterpreted, such as 'artist' and 'oeuvre', but comes to no definitive solution as to how these works *should* be seen – if, indeed, that were possible to determine.[175] In *Carleton E. Watkins: Photographer of the American West* (1983), Peter Palmquist further questions the nature of Watkins' photographs and concludes that "Watkins realized that photography's particular merit was that it was at

[175] Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311 – 319.

once a useful tool of documentation *and* an art."[176] Photography, then, seems to have a somewhat hybrid nature. I will further discuss this possibility shortly.

In the more recent past, many photographers have followed the path paved by the survey photographers of the nineteenth century in various ways. Between 1977 and 1979, the "Second View" American artists including Mark Klett, Ellen Manchester, John Verburg, Gordon Bushaw and Rick Dingus developed the *Rephotographic Survey Project.* This project involved re-photographing the exact location of one-hundred-and-twenty nineteenth-century photographs taken by Jackson and O'Sullivan, among others, in a manner that repeated the original images to the minutest detail.[177] The "Second View" artists were responding to the survey photographers by providing an updated view of specific landscapes, as their photographs depict the changes undergone in just over a century.

The "New Topographics" provided yet another response to the work of nineteenth-century survey photographers. In 1975, the *New Topographics* exhibition at the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, involved a group of photographers who were interested in industrial parks and the suburbs. German artists Bernd and Hilla Becher, as well as Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz and Frank Gohlke looked for beauty in desolate spaces such as factories and parking lots. Like Burtynsky's work, the large format was an important part of the impact that these

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[176] Peter E. Palmquist, *Carleton E. Watkins: Photographics of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), ix.
[177] Mark Klett, "Preface," *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 1 – 2.

works had. The Bechers were influential for many North American artists, including Robert Smithson. In 1968, Smithson met with the Bechers for a tour of the steel production site in the Ruhr District in Germany. He even had a photograph of theirs, entitled *Oberhaussen* (circa 1968) in his collection in Washington, D.C.[178]

The Bechers were also extremely important in their own country. Candida Höfer, Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, and Thomas Ruff all studied under the Bechers, and form part of the Dusseldorf-based school. While the approaches that these artists take to their work varies – such as black and white versus colour photography, natural images versus digital manipulation, as well as different ways of defining their work, such as documentary or not – one major commonality is that they all boast large-scale works of urban subject matter including buildings, factories, machines, and cities. The subject matter and scale of the work produced by the Dusseldorf-based school have encouraged numerous critics such as Dault (2003),[179] Milroy (2003)[180] and Whyte (2004)[181] to compare them to Burtynsky's work. Indeed, they are all photographers who capture the strange quality of the industrial settings by creating a new kind of landscape.

In the 1980s, numerous American photographers began to take a critical look at humans' large-scale industrial alterations on the land. Strip mines, tailing ponds and toxic waste sites became popular images to capture.[182] In 1990, an exhibition entitled *The New*

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[178] Sobieszek, *Photo Works*, 34 – 35.
[179] Gary M. Dault, "The Eleventh Hour of Photography," *Canadian Art* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 57.
[180] Sarah Milroy, "On the Eve of Destruction: Burtynsky's photos of China's Three Gorges dam confront us with the cist of our way of life," *Toronto Globe and Mail* (May 31, 2003): R6.
[181] Whyte, "Beautiful Mines," 72.
[182] Sobieszek, *Photo Works*, 34.

American Pastoral: Landscape Photography in the Age of Questioning, curated by Robert Sobieszek, was held at the International Museum of Photography – the very museum where the *New Topographics* exhibition had been held fifteen earlier. Lewis Baltz, John Pfahl, Emmet Gowin, David T. Hanson, Richard Misrach and Ray Mortenson, among others, displayed photographs consisting of various views of industrial landscapes in the exhibition. Critic Andy Grundberg suggests that while the "New Topographics" artists were pursuing a more documentary approach to photography, "The New American Pastoral" was geared towards a pictorial tradition that focuses on artistic qualities.[183]

2.5 Documentary and/or Art?

This critical language about photography that began to emerge in the 1970s, and became further complicated through the eighties and nineties, is important when discussing Burtynsky's work, and leads to questions concerning the nature of his photographs. For example, Ken Johnson, writing for *The New York Times* in 2005, describes Burtynsky's photographs from the *Manufactured Landscapes* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum (2005) as "numbingly clichéd colour pictures," and compares his work to that of any photojournalist.[184] Johnson writes that "[Burtynsky] uses the same pumped-up pictorial rhetoric of shock and awe in almost every one of more than 60 works on view. This produces a monotonous effect and, what's more, a loss of representational credibility." Johnson further argues that Burtynsky's photographs are "misleading" in terms of the

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[183] Andy Grundberg, "Review/Photography; Beauty and the Challenge in Modern Landscapes," *New York Times* (July 13, 1990): Arts.
[184] Ken Johnson, "Photography Review: A Magnifying Glass on the Industrial Wasteland," *New York Times* (October 28, 2005): Arts.

size and the toxicity of certain elements.[185] Johnson's comments suggest that Burtynsky's work is documentary and should therefore depict a clear and obvious reality.

This is not, however, the only way to interpret Burtynsky's photographs. *Nickel Tailings Nos. 31, 32* and *34* do not provide precise information about the size of the Sudbury mines, nor their toxicity. Burtynsky does not call himself a documentary photographer, and states that the initial purpose of his work is for the art world. He does, however, acknowledge the fact that he uses certain photographs for documentary purposes when they prove to be useful. For example, images from his *Nickel Tailings* series, among others, are displayed on the "World Changing" web page, a site dedicated to raising awareness about environmental sustainability.[186] Although photographs with similar subject matter to Burtynsky's have figured prominently in the past, as demonstrated above, his work seems to have captured viewers' attention on a different level. Perhaps this is due to the intriguing ambiguity that his photographs raise about many issues, including the nature of photography.

In order to get to the heart of this ambiguity about documentary photography versus art photography, it is useful to draw on recent writings on the issue. Since the development of the photographic medium, a certain vagueness concerning the nature of photography has been consistent. It is common for photography writers to introduce their analyses by commenting on this "tension between the photograph as document and the personal expressivity of art," as stated by Liz Wells, whose numerous photography texts have

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[185] Ibid.
[186] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.

served as helpful contextual material informing my analysis.[187] Burtynsky's practice can be situated in relation to a number of important texts written since the 1980s covering a wide variety of photographers dating back to the nineteenth-century survey photographers. As previously mentioned, Krauss problematized the reception and exhibition of these landscape photographs, questioning their newly ascribed status as art. Similarly, Trachtenberg (1989) discusses the complications of classifying the work of the survey photographers.[188]

In 2004, Derrick Price wrote that "documentary has been described as a form, a genre, a tradition, a style, a movement and a practice: it is not useful to try to offer a single definition of the word."[189] He nevertheless provides a brief history of so-called documentary photography, from its introduction to American society with Jacob Riis in the nineteenth century, through to the 1930s, when it referred mostly to capturing a truthful and 'objective' depiction of social problems with the eventual goal of reform, and to the 1950s with the work of Robert Frank, who began to depict every-day objects, people and events. Price goes on to state that beginning in the 1970s, photographs that were previously considered to be objective documentary began to be deconstructed in terms of subjective cultural ideas and influences. Thus, the neutrality of the camera was being put into question.[190]

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[187] Liz Wells, "On and Beyond the White Walls: Photography as Art," in Wells, *Critical Introduction*, 248.
[188] Trachtenberg, "Naming the View," 127 – 153.
[189] Derrick Price, "Surveyors and Surveyed: Photography Out and About," in Wells, *Critical Introduction*, 69.
[190] Ibid., 77 – 105.

The idea that documentary is necessarily opposed to art also came into question. As we have seen concerning the survey photographers, uncertainty as to whether these distinctions are helpful began to arise in the 1980s. Writing about the work of "Second View" artists in "Rephotographing Nineteenth-Century Landscapes" (1984), Mark Klett argues that "as an image, the photograph can be both document and picture, artifact and art, visual map and carrier of cultural meaning."[191] Along these lines, John Tagg (1988), Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1991), Allan Sekula (1997) and Liz Wells (2004), as mentioned above, all discuss this discrepancy in viewing any photograph that could, or could not be seen as documentary. In *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographic Histories*, Tagg discusses the development of documentary photography in US social services in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the photograph's transformation from a practice that was used for documentary purposes by the government, to a Fine Art.[192] He stresses the fact that photographs of an historical subject matter should not be considered as simply proof of that history because photographs "are themselves the historical" and go beyond a documentary purpose.[193]

In *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices*, Solomon-Godeau avoids referring to photographs as either documentary or art. Instead, she provides a critique of photographic criticism based on historical details. She questions "the utility, or even the logic, of dividing photography between poles of aesthetic or documentary intent and effect," a point that certainly applies when analyzing

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[191] Klett, "Rephotographing Nineteenth Century Landscapes," in *Second View*, 45.
[192] Tagg, *Burden of Representation*, 8 – 15.
[193] Ibid., 65.

Burtynsky's work.[194] Along the same lines as Tagg, Solomon-Godeau argues that instead of confirming our understanding of the world, photography actually constructs it, thereby introducing an additional layer of complexity to its nature.[195]

Allan Sekula is an artist as well as a theorist of photography. Due to his heterogeneous practice, John O'Brian has compared him to Robert Smithson.[196] As is the case concerning Smithson's practice, Sekula's writings often shed light onto the layered work that he produces. From 1985 to 1986, Sekula developed a photographic project entitled *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes*. This work involved photographing the mining city of Sudbury, including the INCO mines and various capitalist cityscapes such as shopping malls and video arcades, as well as scenes from Ottawa, including the Bank of Canada, Parliament Hill, and the National Gallery of Canada. Sekula focused on architecture and landscape in these two settings to demonstrate that they are both run by the same system. The basic theme is money, from its production to its implementation into society, in a world that is run by capitalism. As stated by Gary Dufour, "[t]he narratives constructed by Sekula define land and its political, social and economic demarcations."[197] Sekula was interested in providing a dialectical analysis to depict the commonality between the seemingly opposing cities of Sudbury and Ottawa. O'Brian describes the project as "a hybrid form of social documentary photography," alluding to the Farm Society Administration (FSA) developed in the United States in the 1930s, which had as its

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[194] Solomon-Godeau, "A Photographer in Jerusalem, Auguste Salzmann and His Times," in Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, 165.
[195] Solomon-Godeau, "Reconstructing Documentary: Connie Hatch's Representational Resistance," in Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, 187.
[196] John O'Brian, "Memory Flash Points," in Sekula, *Geography Lesson*, 78.
[197] Gary Dufour, "Allan Sekula: Gazetteer," in Sekula, *Geography Lesson*, 69.

purpose to document the state of the under-privileged after the Depression.[198] O'Brian's use of the term 'hybrid' is quite useful, as it allows for an expanded view of these photographs. In 1978, Sekula stated that, "[d]ocumentary is thought to be art when it transcends its reference to the world, when the work can be regarded, first and foremost, as an act of self-expression on the part of the artist."[199] The question arises: how to determine that point? This highlights the fact that photography is a subjective process. Sekula's work, like Burtynsky's, can thus be appreciated on many different levels.

2.6 The Sublime

Having considered the status of documentary photography, I will now shift the discussion toward aesthetics, and specifically, the sublime. Burtynsky's photographs encourage his viewers to question inherited notions of beauty. The confusing juxtaposition of the beautiful quality of his images and the horrible reality of the subject matter introduces the notion of the sublime. I will discuss two somewhat contradictory readings of the sublime in Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series in order to stress the layered possible interpretations of his work. This will lead to a discussion of the ecological issues that are introduced in the *Nickel Tailings* series.

In Chapter One, I briefly alluded to eighteenth-century thinkers Burke, Gilpin and Price, who were crucial to Smithson's understanding of aesthetic theory. In comparison, Burtynsky's work presents a revisitation of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century understanding of the sublime. During this time period, the experience of the sublime

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[198] Ibid., 76.
[199] Sekula in Price, "Surveyors and Surveyed," 73.

was often linked to the overwhelming power of nature, which artists attempted to capture through landscape paintings. Romantic artists such as German painter Casper David Friedrich (1774 – 1840) and English painter J.M.W Turner (1775 – 1851) did so by depicting the almighty and awesome force of nature, be it a vertiginous view from a mountaintop, or a shipwreck in an ice storm. In Burtynsky's photographs, a shift can be seen in the experience of the sublime due to a crucial change that has taken place between the nineteenth century and today: the growth of industry. While nature used to be the force that created a sense of awe and fear, industry has now taken that role.[200] This does not, however, signify the end of the natural sublime. To the contrary, it points to an updated natural sublime, as the threat of ecological disaster – due in large part to industrial processes – is very real. What we now face, and what works like Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series address, is the ecological sublime.

In *American Technological Sublime* (1994), David Nye discusses various categories of sublimity from the nineteenth century to the present day. Nye argues that "the succession of sublime forms – dynamic, technological, geometrical, industrial, electrical – fostered a sense of human control and domination that was radically at odds with the natural sublime."[201] The question, however, is whether these feelings of human domination depict a reality, or simply provide a (false) sense of security. Nye argues that the experience of the technological sublime consists of the public revering larger-than-life technological feats such as bridges, railroads and dams, and viewing them as a kind of

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[200] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.
[201] Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, 290.

spectacle. He states that they establish a sense of awe and pride.[202] The difference between the technological sublime that Nye speaks of and the industrial sublime that is referred to in Burtynsky's works, is the area of focus: while the technological sublime is based on the final product, the industrial sublime is concerned with the process. It is the making of the nickel that elicits a sublime response and that produces images such as *Nickel Tailings Nos. 31, 32* and *34*. The final product has become inconsequential to the experience. Furthermore, the element of pride that Nye discusses becomes questionable when viewing such industrial processes.

In fact, Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series encourages a return to the preoccupations of nineteenth-century artists and explorers, but from a new vantage point. We have come full circle, and have returned to the natural sublime. Yet this natural sublime differs from the wilderness that Friedrich and Turner depicted with paint and that Burke, Gilpin and Price theorized about. We are no longer awe-struck in the presence of technological feats such as buildings and bridges in the manner described by Nye. Rather, it is the impact of industrial processes on natural landscapes that have taken over as the new sublime. It is the fear and awe of sites such as those depicted in Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series that represent the ecological sublime, and that act as an awakening to the real threats that we are facing.

One's response to these threats is, of course, entirely dependent on one's personal reading of the situation. Decoding signs of an ecological sublime is not the only way of interpreting Burtynsky's work. Eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant

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[202] *Ibid.*, 126.

(1724 – 1804) developed many important theories on reactions to sublime experiences. In his third Critique, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) (following the first, *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781, and second, *Critique of Practical Reason* of 1788), Kant explored the psychology and the aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful.[203] I suggest that Burtynsky's work can also correspond to Kant's description of the sublime, specifically concerning the relationship between fear and pleasure, and the influence that these feelings have on the interpretation of the self. Kant argued that it is the dialogue between our selves and a given entity that causes a sublime response. More specifically, he contended that it is the *experience* that we undergo when interacting with that entity, as opposed to the entity itself, that can be referred to as sublime.[204]

Following Burke, Kant divided aesthetics into two categories: the beautiful and the sublime. He stated that these categories are not opposites, but rather, have a dialectical relationship. He referred to this relationship as an antinomy between two ideas concerning the critiques of taste.[205] According to Kant, the beautiful is that which can be enjoyed on a purely aesthetic level. He wrote: "[t]hat is beautiful which pleases universally without a concept."[206] The sublime requires intellect and emotion, and is recognized and responded to on many levels.[207] Kant further divided the sublime into two parts: the mathematical sublime, which is comprised of that which is vast beyond imagination (such as the view from a mountain), and the dynamical sublime, or that

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[203] Paul Guyer, "Editor's Introduction," in Kant, *Power of Judgment*, xv.
[204] Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, 8.
[205] Kant, *Power of Judgment*, 215.
[206] Ibid., 104.
[207] Mary Mothersill, "Sublime," *A Companion to Aesthetics: Blackwell Companions to Philosophy*, ed. Dan Cooper (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 410.

which is extremely powerful (such as witnessing a volcanic eruption).[208] Kant argued that when we are confronted with an experience that results in feelings of the sublime, the pleasure that we receive from our feelings of fright and our inability to fully comprehend that which is before us, is due to the fact that we recognize our capacity to exist despite this fear, as well as our attempts to rationalize our experience. Thus, our sense of self and our confidence is increased.[209]

Certain contemporary viewers of Burtynsky's photographs may identify with his work following a Kantian understanding. They may feel a sense of pride at the beauty of the images that Burtynsky creates, and that despite the toxic quality of this orange viscid liquid and the blackness of the earth, humans are in control. On the other hand, returning to the reading of these photographs as depictions of the ecological sublime, others may focus on the fact that the images are proof of environmental destruction due to industrial practices. Perhaps it is a question of a dialectical discourse between these two extreme responses that makes Burtynsky's work so interesting. The twenty-first century is imbued with large-scale technological advancement on one hand, and the realization that we are relying too much on finite sources on the other. While we have become accustomed to our North American lifestyles that are often not particularly environmentally friendly, are we willing to make the necessary changes toward more sustainable practices? This points to some of the reasons for which Burtynsky's work is so complex. In certain cases, there is a sense of guilt about appreciating his photographs

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[208] David Whewell, "Kant, Immanuel," in Cooper, *Companion to Aesthetics*, 250.
[209] Mothersill, "Sublime," 410.

aesthetically because of the unappealing reality that they depict. The resulting sentiment is one of confusion as to how to respond to his work in a time of ecological crisis.

2.7 Ecological Awareness

This social and discursive context of ecological awareness is at the foundation of Burtynsky's practice. As was the case with Smithson's work, one's view of nature and culture is central to one's understanding of human activity on the earth. Along the same lines as Smithson's words, Burtynsky has stated: "[i]f you think man's a part of nature then all of this [industry] has as much right to exist as a beaver dam. But if you think we're unnatural, then man's industry is yet another blight on landscape, something that spoils the natural environment we were once given."[210] The question remains: does this distinction really make a difference, as we follow the path toward entropy at an unprecedented pace?

In the intervening years between Smithson's work and Burtynsky's current practice, a mainstream sense of ecological change and devastation has set in. In North America, important figures in the public realm, such as environmental activist David Suzuki (b. 1936) and businessman Maurice Strong (b. 1929), have stressed the importance of reducing our ecological footprint time and time again. Burtynsky's work exists within a world of preconceived notions concerning the industrial impact on the natural environment, and yet many different people who have many different agendas appreciate his photographs. As stated above, corporate groups and environmental activists alike enjoy his work. Many large corporations, such as Microsoft Corporation (Redmond,

[210] Dault, "Eleventh Hour," 56.

Washington), the Ontario Mining Association (Toronto, Ontario) and the Power Corporation (Montreal, Quebec) have a Burtynsky photograph in their collection.[211] Burtynsky also collaborates with environmental organizations. In 2005, Burtynsky was the recipient of a distinguished award at the TED (technology, education, design) conference in California, through which he gets to have three wishes granted. Burtynsky's first wish is to support the website <worldchanging.com>, which promotes sustainable living on an international scale. Like Smithson, Burtynsky is not interested in what he calls "traditionalist environmentalists," in reference to those who are entirely against the realities of the modern world. He argues that the group "World Changing" "does not put the environmentally concerned in direct opposition to corporations," and that while some corporations are not moving in the direction of sustainability, others are.[212] The stereotypical categorization of corporations on one side and activists on the other is therefore perhaps inaccurate and unnecessary.

Burtynsky's second wish is to create a contest entitled "In My World" where preteens across Canada develop environmentally friendly projects. He firmly believes that involving younger generations in sustainable practices is the most productive way to spread awareness, and cites the Ontario government as successfully using this approach with the implementation of recycling.[213] Finally, his third wish is to have an Imax film of his works in order to reach out to a larger audience who may not visit art galleries. Companies such as Sony and Walt Disney are interested in helping to make a reality out

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[211] Roenisch, "Dust Postponed," 22.
[212] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.
[213] Ibid.

of these dreams.[214] In his first and third wishes, Burtynsky is using his artistic work to further his goals as an activist. Yet throughout these wishes, Burtynsky has stated that he wants to be seen as a "sustainability advocate" and not an artist.[215]

The link between Burtynsky's attitude toward his art and his actions can be somewhat perplexing. In 2004, Burtynsky stated: "[t]here is no judgment on my part. This is who we are. It's not a critique, nor is it a celebration,"[216] yet in an interview the following year, he stated: "our conspicuous waste is starting to have an effect. Our lifestyles are not sustainable."[217] Burtynsky's response to his own work represents just one of the many contradictions and complications of our times that he discusses through his photographs. He is creating a dialogue between the natural environment and industrial technology in a way that makes us rethink our relationship to both. While he is not looking to save industrial spaces, nor is reclamation on his agenda, raising awareness to these issues is a part of his practice.[218]

This kind of ambiguity exists in all work dealing with the nature/culture dichotomy, as previously seen with Smithson and his numerous critics. Watkins and Jackson also faced these issues in the nineteenth century, in that they worked for geographical surveys as well as companies interested in expanding industrial growth and development for profit. Therefore, while some of their photographs aided in the designation of Yosemite Valley

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[214] Guy Dixon, "A Warning from the Wasteland," *Toronto Globe and Mail* (April 7, 2005): R1.
[215] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.
[216] Whyte, "Beautiful Mines," 74.
[217] Dixon, "Warning," R1.
[218] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.

and Yellowstone respectively as protected national parks, others were used as evidence of lands and resources that could be exploited.[219]

2.8 Summary

The uncertainty about whether to situate Burtynsky's photographs as documentation or art, and non-judgmental observations or advocates for environmental awareness, has afflicted numerous critics writing about Burtynsky, including Clint Roenisch (2002)[220] and Lori Pauli (2005),[221] and seems to have touched Burtynsky himself as well. The confusions, contradictions, and ambiguities about photography and the nature/culture debate have existed for centuries. Not having all the answers, and in fact, having different answers at different times, is therefore an entirely natural reality. It is this extremely topical and sensitive discussion that makes Burtynsky's work so interesting and multi-faceted.

Perhaps Burtynsky's art practice exists in many different realms at once. It is documentary in the sense that it captures a real moment in time, in a real place, and yet it is also suggestive of a kind of Martian landscape that we recognize as different from our familiar spaces and can therefore be seen as unreal; and it is art in that he is the unique creator of the images. His works are beautiful and aesthetically appealing depictions of a less-than-appealing subject matter, and can be seen as either enforcing our sense of superiority over nature, or as reminders of the natural environment's fragility. Finally, the

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[219] Palmquist, *Photographics of the American West*, ix – x.
[220] Roenisch, "Dust Postponed," 18.
[221] Lori Pauli, "Seeing the Big Picture," *Manufactured Landscapes. The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky*, ed. Lori Pauli (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada in association with Yale University Press, 31 January – 4 May, 2003), 24.

photographs can function as objects to be collected, or as an enticement to act toward more sustainable practices. Documentation and art; troubling and beautiful; industry and ecology. The crossroads continue to expand as it becomes clear that all supposed opposites in the enlarged chart of Cartesian dualisms actually work together in a world that is buried in contradictions. Yet whether we see ourselves on the nature or culture side of the coin, the coin remains the same and so the outcome is unchanged: our lifestyles are simply not sustainable. As we approach the eventual entropic grand finale, the choice of how we want to live – now – remains.

CHAPTER 3:
SUSAN LEIBOVITZ STEINMAN AND INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTAL ART

> The best of assemblage makes extraordinary connections between ordinary materials. Collaborative assemblage installation in community settings with indigenous materials can create positive connections between us and our environment.[222]
>
> Susan Leibovitz Steinman

Susan Leibovitz Steinman creates new landscapes out of urban devastation. Unlike Smithson and Burtynsky, who work in sites that can be difficult for the average viewer to experience firsthand, Steinman works in the heart of cities. In *Mandela Artscape* (1998 – 2002, West Oakland, California) (see Figure 5), Steinman literally worked in the middle of the street, at the crossroads of industry and ecology. This project involved regrouping West Oakland community members to reclaim a part of their town that had been destroyed by an earthquake in 1989, by turning the site into a creative, interactive, and environmentally friendly work of art.[223]

Steinman is not the first to transform the horrors of a natural disaster into a reclamation project. In 1964, the "Great Good Friday Earthquake," the second largest recorded earthquake at that time with a magnitude of 9.2 on the Richter Scale, struck Anchorage, Alaska. One-hundred-and-thirty-one people perished, towns were buried, and tsunamis tore across the area. The only possible positive outcome of such a terrible natural

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[222] Susan Leibovitz Steinman, Artist Web Page <http://www.steinmanstudio.com> (accessed throughout December 2004 and August 2006).
[223] Ibid.

catastrophe is the proactive and innovative reaction of the survivors.[224] The *Anchorage Earthquake Park* is the result of one particular reaction. The goal of this park was to reclaim a destroyed area and to educate people about the earthquake. There are bike paths, cross-country ski trails, picnic tables, and most importantly, information panels. In 1973, Smithson congratulated the people who reclaimed the Anchorage site through the creation of a park, stating that this action was "an interesting way of dealing with the unexpected, and incorporating that into the community."[225]

The significance of Steinman's work, and that which distinguishes *Mandela Artscape* from the *Anchorage Earthquake Park*, is the interactive nature of the creative process, as people from the community were involved in every aspect of the project. It is also this element of engagement with the public that differentiates Steinman's work from that of Smithson and Burtynsky, and that forms the basis of my discussion in this chapter. Through this study, I will present a history of public art and new genre public art in the United States, as well as discuss the status of public space. I will also examine the use of the found object in a sculptural history of the United States and Europe in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and the challenges that North American consumerist culture presents for a sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle.

3.1 Biography

Born in 1944 in Abilene, Texas, and now living in Berkeley, San Francisco, Steinman has always been interested in the environmental art scene. She pursued graduate studies at the

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[224] *US Geological Survey,* "40th Anniversary of 'Good Friday' Earthquake," March 26, 2004 <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article_pf.asp?ID=106> (accessed April 2, 2006).
[225] Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible," in Holt, *Writings*, 192.

California College of Arts and Crafts in 1989, where she became acquainted with renowned performance artist Suzanne Lacy.[226] While Steinman has exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the United States, her main area of interest is working in the outdoor urban environment. From developing community artscapes such as a mini-orchard near San Francisco's U.S. 101 freeway in *Food for Thought: Urban Apple Orchard* (1994) (Figure 16), to gallery installations such as *Cartwheels* (Figure 17), exhibited at the Oakland Museum of California in 2002, Steinman's work always involves aspects of environmental awareness, educational goals, and a constructive attitude, and often consists of ephemeral endeavors.[227] Steinman and her collaborators worked on *Mandela Artscape* over a five-year period, and the project serves as an example of the positive influence that this kind of work can have for the development of future, permanent projects.

3.2 Mandela Artscape

Through *Mandela Artscape*, Steinman and her collaborators physically transformed an abandoned part of West Oakland into an area that could be used and appreciated by the residents. This project was located on a site that is embedded with collective memory. In 1957, the Cypress Freeway was built in West Oakland despite adamant opposition from residents. They protested that the freeway cut through their community, and separated them from the rest of the city. In 1989, the freeway collapsed in the Loma Prieta earthquake, taking the lives of forty-two motorists (Figure 18).[228] The residents fought to

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[226] Sue Spaid, "Itinerant Nature," *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies* (July – August 2002): 56.
[227] Ibid., 57 – 60.
[228] Ibid., 58.

ensure that the new freeway would be built elsewhere, won the battle, and renamed the site 'Mandela Freeway', after Nelson Mandela. The land, however, remained deserted for ten years, until Steinman organized an urban regeneration project by creating a park with used freeway materials and native California plants.[229]

The idea for the project began while Steinman was teaching art courses in a West Oakland school, and heard people in the community expressing their frustration about the desolate space where the freeway used to be – a length totaling one and a half miles. Steinman wrote a proposal to enhance two acres of this land, which she presented to teachers, students and parents, as well as other community members. They were thrilled with the prospect of becoming involved with such a project. Steinman submitted her proposal to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and received their permission to proceed on the condition that it would be a temporary work. Caltrans is often reluctant to allow such grassroots projects to work on their land, but is more willing if the projects are for a limited period of time as it requires less commitment on their part. The temporary nature of *Mandela Artscape* allowed for it to act as a model for other groups to follow.[230]

Mandela Artscape was both a memorial for the motorists who were killed in the earthquake and a symbolic reconnection of the city of West Oakland, which had been divided in half by the freeway. Steinman received four grants from various organizations that support environmental art projects, amounting to a total of thirty-two thousand

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[229] Susan Leibovitz Steinman (artist), in discussion with the author, April 6, 2005.
[230] Ibid.

dollars, and Caltrans contributed much help-in-kind by donating materials, time and labor. The participating community members joined Steinman in planting three thousand native California plants (Figure 19), as well as a grove of cypress trees as a memorial to the victims of the earthquake. For the successful construction of this ecologically sound project, human strength and industrial machinery had to collaborate. Objects from the Caltrans junkyard were used (Figure 20),[231] and as stated by writer Sue Spaid, "metal frames that typically hold freeway signs became trellises and gorgeous salvaged blue water pipes lined a native grass patch like a river."[232] In his article in *The Oakland Tribune*, Denis Oliver described *Mandela Artscape* as "a living example of eco-awareness, public art and community pride."[233] Writing for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Catherine Bowman also described the pride that West Oakland residents felt due to their involvement in *Mandela Artscape*. Even passing motorists honked their horns in support of the project while people were working on the land.[234]

Steinman and participating West Oakland residents turned a desolate space in the city into a green haven for people to enjoy. Two official ceremonies were held in *Mandela Artscape*, including a seeding ceremony on the first day of winter in 1998, and a flowering ceremony on the first day of spring in 1999. The events, which involved live music, a barbecue, and children reciting poetry about the plants in the site, were planned by community members and welcomed over three hundred people, including the mayor

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[231] Brian Block, "Project Focus: The Art of Community Development," *Green City* 34 (March/April 1999): n/a.
[232] Spaid, "Itinerant Nature," 58.
[233] Dennis J. Oliver, "Junk Pile Becomes Ecological Artscape," *Oakland Tribune* (February 1, 1999): 6.
[234] Catherine Bowman, "Planting a Dream: A garden created on the site of the old cypress freeway is helping heal a West Oakland neighbourhood," *San Francisco Chronicle: East Bay and the Region* (November 28, 1998): A19 – A20.

and other city officials.[235] After the project was terminated in 2002, the City of West Oakland began to plan a massive regeneration project for the entire stretch of where the freeway, now referred to as the Mandela Parkway, had been situated. The new project, covering a total of eighteen blocks, cost thirteen million dollars to build, and was finally completed in September of 2005 (Figure 21). Since then, work has begun to build the Cypress Memorial Park for the Loma Prieta earthquake victims, which will be located within the Mandela Parkway.[236]

3.3 Public Art and Engagement

Since the 1960s, the terms 'public art' and 'public space' have been subjected to much debate and criticism. Questioning the nature of public space and what it means for an artwork to be 'public' are concerns that must be addressed. I will return to these ideas after introducing a history of public art as well as new genre public art. I will also address the aspect of engagement with the public that is an integral component of *Mandela Artscape.*

The term 'public art' was developed and defined in the 1960s, and has since undergone numerous transformations.[237] In *One Place After Another* (2002), Miwon Kwon discusses three stages in the public art movement in the United States from the 1960s to the end of the 1990s. The changes that occurred during this brief time period demonstrate the public's evolution from passive viewers of an artwork that is a final

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[235] Susan Leibovitz Steinman (artist), in discussion with the author, April 6, 2005.
[236] *Airport Area Business Association Newsletter*, "Spotlight on Mandela Parkway," September 2005 <http://www.aaba.org/Newsletter/September%202005.pdf> (accessed March 25, 2006).
[237] Tom Finkelpearl, "Introduction: The City as Site," *Dialogues in Public Art*, ed. Tom Finkelpearl (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 15.

product, to active participants in the process of creating the artwork. This reveals the drastic changes that were occurring in the thought-processes of artists, the public, and government bodies during this extremely important period in the American art world.

In order to beautify the urban environment in the 1960s and 1970s, committees such as Percent for Art Programs (at the local and state levels), Art-in-Architecture Programs of the General Service Administration (GSA), and Art-in-Public-Places Programs of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) were introduced. The Art-in-Public-Places Program included large sculptures that were considered to be public art because they were located on museum grounds, parks and university campuses. In the mid-1970s, this approach was criticized for focusing more on attracting prominent artists than on the amelioration of the given area. Creating a link between the work and the land was one way to increase the appreciation of both the artwork and the site.[238]

The NEA and the GSA therefore introduced Art-as-Public-Spaces, which lasted until the late 1980s. This involved site-specific urban sculptures with a strong design element. There was a move away from concentrating on the discreet art object, as artists became more involved with architects and urban planners. The fact that the works were site-specific also brought them closer to the public. This resulted in functional artworks such as benches, tables or chairs in public settings.[239] The public was therefore invited to physically participate with the art objects in a way that would further expand in the years to come.

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[238] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 60 – 65.
[239] Ibid., 67 – 69.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a stronger focus on community, political correctness, and constructive art became popular. Art-as-Public-Interest, a term coined by Arlene Raven, was introduced.[240] This category is the result of art that emphasizes getting closer to the people, their interests, and even their own input, as they were encouraged to become involved in the actual process of creating the work. In 1991, Suzanne Lacy introduced the term 'new genre public art', through which she provided an updated version of Raven's Art-as-Public-Interest. Lacy describes the new genre public art approach as "visual art that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives."[241] New genre public art artists focus on the public and emphasize engagement. This approach to creating art challenges set boundaries in art institutions and looks to educate people in an active, hands-on, and meaningful manner. Furthermore, the focus on contemporary issues such as women's rights and environmental issues has the potential to make people think about the world as it is, as it could be, and how to go about making it a better place.[242]

Influences of feminist art, ethnic art, Marxist art and activist art are evident in the thought-process and physical manifestation of new genre public art works.[243] Steinman focuses on the manner in which feminist approaches to art influence new genre public art, such as an emphasis on community participation. For example, in "The Crime of

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[240] Ibid., 82.
[241] Suzanne Lacy, "Introduction: Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys," in Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*, 43.
[242] Patricia C. Philips, "Public Constructions," in Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*, 41.
[243] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 106.

Candor: Feminist Art Criticism" (1991), Steinman wrote that "feminist art strategies are proving essential to public-interest art strategies: a commitment to a non-art constituency/audience; an inclusionary rather than exclusionary process; community involvement/participation; a community-based site for the work as opposed to an art-world site; [and] frequent collaboration."[244]

Despite all of the positive connotations of this approach to art production, some critics assert that there is an underlying danger to art that creates a direct relationship between the artist and the participants. Kwon, for example, is skeptical of new genre public art, claiming that it "can exacerbate uneven power relations, remarginalize (even colonize) already disenfranchised groups, depoliticize and ramify the artistic process, and finally further the separation of art and life (despite claims to the contrary)."[245] Kwon continues by arguing that the role of the artist is venturing dangerously close to that of colonizer, as despite claims to be collaborating with people, the artist generally has the final word. Along with these concerns arises the question of how to define a community.[246] Is it simply based on spatial boundaries, including where people happen to be living at a given moment in time? Is it linked to ethnic groups, racial groups, or income brackets? There is a risk of grouping people together under one heading when, in fact, they are all individuals with multiple affiliations and allegiances to different communities.

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[244] Susan Leibovitz Steinman, "The Crime of Candor: Feminist Art Criticism," *Studio Potter Art Journal* 20, no. 1 (1991), 14.
[245] Kwon, One Place After Another, 6.
[246] Ibid., 151.

Through *Mandela Artscape*, these concerns were responded to openly and clearly. Steinman is aware of the criticism directed at new genre public art,[247] and it is perhaps due to this awareness that her attitude and work seem to rise above it. Steinman acts as an enabler who encourages people in a way that stimulates creativity, sharing and respect. Concerning her role in the process of bringing a collaborative project to fruition, she has stated that she is "a cheerleader, an instigator, someone who plants the garden. The work must belong to the people whose environment it is so that they can take care of it and expand their own ideas."[248] Although she directs the projects, it would be virtually impossible to accomplish anything without the participation and dedication of her collaborators. This points to the co-dependence that is at the heart of such projects. Just as the participants rely on the artist who initiated the project for ideas and direction, the artist depends on the participants to bring the work of art (which involves the process of creation just as much – if not more – than the final product) to life.

It is important to understand the concept of 'community' as an umbrella term that encompasses numerous smaller and more specific communities. Steinman was only directly involved with certain communities from within the larger West Oakland community. Furthermore, the people involved in the project developed a new community of their own, including West Oakland residents, the Museum of Children's Art (a non-profit art organization), students, and design professionals. While the communal

[247]Susan Leibovitz Steinman (artist), in discussion with the author, April 6, 2005.
[248] Ibid.

experience is important for Steinman, she acknowledges the interests and goals of individuals within the community as well."[249]

Steinman's interactive approach is an integral component of all aspects of *Mandela Artscape*, from its conception, to the actual process of creation, and finally, to the final product. In addition to the strong volunteer presence mentioned above, *Mandela Artscape* created jobs. Students of Merritt College's Horticultural Landscape Department gave a free ten-month horticulture course, and those who attended were eligible for paid work. Steinman has stated that her ultimate goal through her artwork is to motivate people, and to initiate positive projects in places that are seen in a negative light.[250] This approach makes apparent that when people have been personally and physically involved in a project, their level of commitment is increased to unparalleled heights.

The site on which *Mandela Artscape* was located, as mentioned above, is embedded with a powerful and painful history. The connection that the people of West Oakland have to the site is therefore quite significant, and *Mandela Artscape* allowed for residents to reclaim a public space in their neighbourhood in a positive and therapeutic manner. Had another public artwork been proposed for the site that did not involve resident participation, it would not have had the same impact. Rosalyn Deutsche has stated that "those who challenge the conservative domination of public art discourse have largely reappropriated the term."[251] The new genre public art approach, and its embodiment in

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[249] Patricia B. Sanders, "A Conversation with Susan Leibovitz Steinman," *Artweek* 29, no. 11 (January – December 1998): 14.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Rosalyn Deutsche, "Agoraphobia," in Deutsche, *Evictions*, 280.

Mandela Artscape, has indeed reaffirmed the importance of the fact that public art takes place in *public* space.

The definition of public space is an important element in all art set outdoors, and has specific connotations when dealing with space in the city. In many occasions, only a specific part of the public is actually allowed access to a given space. Deutsche takes issue with the common use of the terms 'public' and 'community' in her essay "Agoraphobia" (1993). Deutsche uses the example of the publicity that Jackson Park in Greenwich Village, New York, received in the early 1990s. In order to "clean up" the park, an organization named *Friends of Jackson Park* decided to lock the park gates at night to keep homeless people out. This was written about in *The New York Times* and *City Journal* as being a success for "the community" and "the public."[252] The use of these terms in this context reduces their definitions to a specific group with a specific interest, and entirely excludes homeless people.

It could be argued that there is no real public space in the urban environment due to the set rules and regulations that govern and restrict the way that it is used. For example, Steinman could not simply begin physically working on her concept for *Mandela Artscape* – she had to get permission from Caltrans. Steinman went a step further by consulting members of the community first, thus distinguishing her approach and that of new genre public art in general from more traditional public art. Deutsche writes about Claude Lefort's notion of "appropriation" as a kind of undemocratic act that takes over

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[252] Ibid., 276.

public space.[253] In the case of *Mandela Artscape*, democracy was respected as much as possible, short of a citywide vote. Nonetheless, it is necessary to remain prudent with terminology: it is not the entire West Oakland community that gave their input for this project, but rather a select group of community members with whom Steinman was in contact, and while the project was open to the general public, not everyone was interested in participating. Nonetheless, *Mandela Artscape* was a space that was open to all and that encouraged participation.

Public art can introduce a new way of looking at space in the city. Artist and writer Gunda Lambton states that "public art, in communicating with a large audience, has to apply to various strata of cultural conditioning. To be appreciated, such works must penetrate a screen of 'habits of seeing.'"[254] Public art and new genre public art both deal with space in a way that people are perhaps unaccustomed to, which forces the passerby to contemplate – consciously or not – that particular space in the city. These art works act as interruptions or hiccups in what Michel de Certeau has referred to as "the pedestrian speech act" in his essay "Spatial Practices: Walking in the City" (1980). De Certeau compares walking in the city to a kind of written text with specific grammatical rules or paths to follow. He wrote that "the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language."[255] Art projects such as *Mandela Artscape* provide an alternate route, or a more poetic and creative form of expression.

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[253] Ibid., 275.
[254] Gunda Lambton, *Stealing the Show: Seven Women Artists in Canadian Public Art* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill – Queen's University Press, 1994), 4.
[255] De Certeau, Michel, "Spatial Practices: Walking in the City," in De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 97.

3.4 The Found Object and Environmental Awareness

Along with the element of engagement and the promotion of public art that is more public, an awareness of environmental issues is at the base of *Mandela Artscape*. This is emphasized by the use of found materials and recycled objects, which highlights the overwhelming overuse of commodities in North American culture. Steinman belongs to a long tradition of artists who have worked with found objects. Her original contribution to this rich body of work is her unique focus on environmental awareness and education. In order to clearly distinguish Steinman's approach, I will outline a brief history of the found object's appearance in sculpture of the twentieth century, focusing on artists and specific movements that are relevant to Steinman's practice. My analysis is based on artists from the United States and Europe, and includes both those whose works are comparable to Steinman's in their aesthetic and ideology, as well as those who differ in their approach.

The use of found objects in sculpture can first be seen in a significant way with the European Dada movement of 1916 to 1924. In *Art and the Degradation of Awareness* (2001), author Jeff Nuttall describes artists such as Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, and Hans Arp as having really developed the use of the 'objet trouvé', or the found object.[256] This introduction of the found object into the artistic realm launched the development of new modes of expression. By rejecting the tradition of high art, these artists were working toward a goal that is an integral part of Steinman's work as well, which involves bringing art to a more accessible level. The found object became the symbol of a new generation of artists who were exploring the limits of a new art form.

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[256] Nuttall, *Degradation of Awareness*, 37.

During the same time period as the Dada artists in Europe, American artists such as Man Ray, Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp, were developing similar goals in the United States. Duchamp's particular involvement in art's demystification allowed for art to be applicable to more or less anything.[257] His innovative contribution to the art scene through his ready-mades was, and still is, extremely influential. As stated by Steinman, "When you use a bicycle wheel [in a work of art], you have got to be making an homage to Marcel Duchamp!"[258] Duchamp is undoubtedly one of the most important artists of the twentieth century in terms of challenging the status of the art object. The found object became a work of art in-and-of-itself, without having its formal qualities adjusted in any way. All the object needed in order to be seen as a work of art was a museum setting. In a way, Smithson and Steinman both reverse this idea, as they take their artwork outside of the museum environment, and claim that objects do not need to be surrounded by four white walls in order to be considered as art.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the development of Surrealism in France under André Breton, consisting of many artists from the Dada movement along with others such as Georgio de Chirico, Salvador Dalí, and René Magritte, lead to further usage of the found object.[259] The Surrealists' interest in the constant production of manufactured goods, as well as the belief that a connection to the extraordinary could be made through daily objects, are ideas that can be seen in Steinman's work as well. However, unlike the Surrealists' art,

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[257] Ibid., 66.
[258] Susan Leibovitz Steinman (artist), in discussion with the author, April 6, 2005.
[259] Nuttall, *Degradation of Awareness*, 39.

Steinman's work is tangible and exists in the here and now. It exemplifies the work and the life of real people and real objects.

After the Surrealists' *sur*real approach to the found object, it was not given much attention until the development of Pop Art (short for Popular Art) in Britain in the 1950s, where the focus lay in the effects of modern society and mass culture. Pop Art, however, really expanded in the United States.[260] The use of the found object in this context was entirely different than the manner in which it had previously been employed. The incorporation of everyday objects into Pop Art works was based on a glorification of consumerism as opposed to a kind of rebellion as it had been for Dada and Surrealist works. Nuttall emphasizes the difference between these movements' uses of found objects by stating that:

> The development of consumerist bric-a-brac appearing in the later Pop Art, although often held to be a continuation of Dada and Surrealism, was existentially different. Although appearances and material used were similar, even identical, their use was a celebration of consumerism, not a subversion.[261]

Worshiping the everyday object as a commodity – a clean and shiny new toy that one could consume, dispose of, and consume again – became the hallmark of Pop Art artists such as Andy Warhol, notorious for his representations of soup cans, and Roy Lichtenstein, best-known for his close-ups in the comic-strip style.

American artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns both used the found object in their works in a way that is more comparable to Neo-Dada than Pop Art. This movement developed alongside Pop Art, but involved using second-hand, tattered objects as

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[260] Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945*, 86.
[261] Nuttall, *Degradation of Awareness*, 40.

opposed to fancy new commodities. Three decades after the European Dada artists, the American Neo-Dada artists returned to a tradition of using "junk" to create art. The interest that both Rauschenberg and Johns had in incorporating everyday objects into artwork has its roots in Duchamp's work, and the desire to create new meanings for the objects is reminiscent of the Surrealists' approach. The ideology of using such objects for Rauschenberg and Johns involved making disposable goods permanent through art.[262]

This is precisely the manner in which Steinman uses found objects in her work. *River of Hopes and Dreams* (1992) (Figure 22), for example, involved the reclamation and beautification of the San Francisco waste transfer and recycling facility of the NORCAL Sanitary Fill Company. Jo Hanson, a pioneer in the field of new genre public art, and Steinman designed an artist-in-residency program at NORCAL in 1990. This project was inspired by the work that Mierle Lauderman Ukeles did as volunteer artist-in-residence at the sanitation department of New York.[263] *Flow City* (Figure 23), an ongoing project that Ukeles began in 1983, makes the invisibility of waste visible by bringing people into the waste facility to view the garbage.[264] Tom Finkelpearl states that "[Ukeles] ventured out into the city, not to save it from its filth, but to understand it, to bridge the gap between [...] people and the waste they create."[265] Both Ukeles and Steinman use waste as an art form to make people aware of the environmental problems that we face.

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[262] Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945*, 97 – 99.
[263] Susan Leibovitz Steinman (artist), in discussion with the author, April 6, 2005.
[264] Jo Hanson and Susan Leibovitz Steinman, eds. *Women Environmental Artists Directory* (San Francisco: Hanson and Steinman, 2004), 93.
[265] Finkelpearl, "Introduction," 24.

As part of the program at NORCAL, artists create sculptures out of materials found in the dumpsite. Visitors are invited to view the works as well as take part in a guided tour of the facility. Steinman worked among the first artists-in-residence, though her contribution to the NORCAL site was different than the others. She proposed to liven up the backdrop for the sculptures, which consisted of an empty terrain that is now referred to as a garden. This plot of land consists of three acres and is located in the dumpsite. *River of Hopes and Dreams* involved three stages: first, she created a mountain out of earthquake rubble that made reference to Mount Saint Bruno. In 1990, Mount Saint Bruno was at the center of a conflict between developers wanting to exploit it, and environmentalists, as well as residents, arguing for its protection. Mount Saint Bruno is visible from the mountain of rubble, on which drought resistant flowers were planted to symbolize regeneration. The next step involved creating a "river" out of blue cement that flowed from the mountain. Finally, Steinman dispersed decorated concrete steppingstones throughout the garden. Seventy-five students from the neighbouring Philip and Sala Burton High School participated in the project by inscribing their hopes and dreams on the cement river. Employees at the NORCAL site also became involved by sculpting found objects onto the steppingstones.[266] Over one hundred artists have participated in the artist-in-residency program since its birth. The program reached such a high level of recognition that in 2003 alone, seventy artists applied for four positions.[267]

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[266] Susan Leibovitz Steinman (artist), in discussion with the author, April 6, 2005.
[267] Zahid Sardar, "Garden of Earthy Delights: A Park at the Dump is a Lesson in Conservation," *San Francisco Chronicle* (2004): n/a.

In his essay entitled "Cultural Confinements" (1972), Robert Smithson wrote, "nobody wants to go on a vacation to a garbage dump."[268] It appears that Steinman and Ukeles proved him wrong! Spaid has acknowledged that Steinman's artworks are "in the spirit of Smithson's revealing rather than concealing a degraded site."[269] Like Smithson's work, Steinman's art production is based on artistically altering devastated sites and raising awareness in the process, while taking into consideration its previous appearance and purpose. Nonetheless, Steinman sees her work as being inherently different from that of Smithson's due to the important element of engagement that her work entails and her more conventional ecological view. Steinman claims to be weary of Smithson's work, as well as that of other Earthworks artists who created their art in the deserts of the American West in the early 1970s, due to what she refers to as their aggressive approach to creation.[270] While Smithson was not interested in lifestyle modification for environmental reasons and had an extended idea of ecology that included industry, Steinman is concerned with ecological issues and through her work, is educating people about more ecologically friendly practices. Ideologically, her work is more closely comparable to the outdoor work of British artist Richard Long, whose projects tend to be of a gentle and ephemeral nature. Long refers to his art as "a formal and holistic description of the real space and experience of landscape," and, like Steinman, emphasizes respect to the natural world.[271]

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[268] Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinements" (*Artforum*, October 1972), reprinted in Holt, *Writings*, 133.
[269] Spaid, "Itinerant Nature," 57.
[270] Susan Leibovitz Steinman (artist), in discussion with the author, April 6, 2005.
[271] Stephen Jackson, *Redspace*, Artist Web Page for Richard Long <http://www.richardlong.org> (accessed on May 4, 2006).

Following the Earthwork artists of the 1970s, the return to the commodity as subject matter in the American art world of the 1980s saw a movement back to the city, consumerism, and manufactured objects. This is exemplified in the works of artist Jeff Koons. Koons' art production can be referred to as 'commodity sculpture', a term used by Andrew Causey in *Sculpture Since 1945* (1998), to describe sculptures made of new and appealing everyday objects. This approach is a direct descendent of the Pop Art movement.[272]

Steinman's approach can be compared to that of Rauschenberg and Johns in that she gives a new life to discarded objects. She has commented on the archeological aspect of working with found objects as they "have a human history."[273] The work ethic of projects like *Mandela Artscape* and *River of Hopes and Dreams* is entirely different from that of commodity sculptures and Pop Art works. They are a clear reaction against the mass consumption of the modern-day mentality. By using found objects and recycled goods, there is an emphasis on transforming discarded objects into art, reusing art materials instead of buying new ones, and pursuing a more sustainable art practice and lifestyle. Referring to the state of the ecological crisis that we are now facing, Steinman has stated that "consumerism is at the heart of the matter," in that it affects all aspects of modern society.[274]

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[272] Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945*, 242.
[273] Susan Leibovitz Steinman (artist), in discussion with the author, April 6, 2005.
[274] Ibid.

3.5 Consumerism

Steinman is critical of Western capitalist society. She is involved in many groups that have emerged as a response to the problem that the consumerist ideology presents. The Women Environmental Artists Directory (WEAD), for example, is an artist-produced, non-profit, national and international organization that Steinman and Jo Hanson founded in 1996. The WEAD lists over two hundred artists, all of whom adopt an activist approach to raising environmental awareness through art. Themes involve site, community and habitat specificity, an educational agenda, public participation, and works that are often temporary – many ideas that overlap with the new genre public art ideology.[275] Steinman is also involved with a group called "ecoart network." Similarly, the mandate of this group is to create ecological works of art that promote sustainability and environmental education.[276]

Consumerism is a basic concern for artists involved in environmental art, sometimes referred to as "ecoart." As stated by artist Ruth Wallen, "much ecoart is motivated by a recognition that current patterns of consumption and resource use are dangerously unsustainable. Instead of focusing on individual gain, ecoart is grounded in an ethos that emphasizes communities and interrelationships."[277] The criticism of consumerist culture has been rampant throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Beginning in the 1960s with authors such as Rachel Carson (as discussed in Chapter One), concern for the environment directly related to our lifestyles in the Western world has been significant

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[275] Jo Hanson and Susan Leibovitz Steinman, eds. *Women Environmental Artists Directory*, Brochure.
[276] Don Krug, "Eco Art Network" <http://www.ecoartnetwork.org> (accessed throughout December 2004 and August 2006).
[277] Hanson and Steinman, *Women Environmental Artists Directory*, Brochure.

for many people including scientists, artists, theorists, and the general public. As mentioned in the Introduction, Félix Guattari (1989) discusses the fact that social, mental and environmental ecologies are all interrelated and are being destroyed due to world capitalism.[278] Similarly, artist Suzi Gablik (1995) criticized the fact that "manic production and consumption, competitive self-assertion, and the maximization of profits are all crucial to our society's notion of success."[279] She argued that it is these qualities that are leading to global destruction.[280] Furthermore, author Timothy Luke (2003) addressed the problem of consumption in the urban environment of the global city, and condemned the fact that alternative, less polluting ways of living are generally ignored.[281]

One of the main problems with the consumerist ideology is the reliance on disposables and the emphasis placed on newness. The sheer availability of disposable objects encourages people to disregard sustainable practices of using and re-using objects, because they know that there will always be more products that are 'easier' to purchase than to wash and reuse. A consumerist culture is in danger of drowning in more goods than could possibly be consumed, and ignoring the detrimental consequences of this endless consumption. In *All Consuming Images* (1988), author Stewart Ewen emphasizes this point by stating that:

> The ever-mounting glut of waste materials is a characteristic by-product of modern 'consumer society.' It might even be argued that capitalism's continual need to find or generate markets means that disposability and waste have become the spine of the system. To *consume* means, literally, 'to destroy or to expend,'

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[278] Félix Guattari, "The Three Ecologies," trans. Chris Turner, *New Formations* 8 (1989), 134.
[279] Suzi Gablik, "Connective Aesthetics: Art After Individualism," in Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*, 74.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Timothy W. Luke, "Codes, Collectives, and Commodities: Rethinking Global Cities as Metalogistical Spaces," *Global Cities: Cinema, Architecture and Urbanism in a Digital Age*, eds. Linda Krausse and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 160.

> and in the 'garbage crisis' we confront the underlying truth of a society in which ongoing market priorities and enormous productive capacities have engaged human needs and desires, without regard to the long – or even short-term viability of life on the planet. [282]

An important factor concerning disposable goods is that people are often unaware of where these objects go, and feel no sense of connection to their waste once it is out of sight. This is why works such as Steinman's *River of Hopes and Dreams* and Ukeles' *Flow City* are so important. In *Art, Space and the City* (1997), author Malcolm Miles discusses the importance of environmental artists and describes their work as "a response to the urgency of the threat of a world overwhelmed by its waste; a deluge produced by the 'invisible' aspect of global capitalism." [283] Steinman and Ukeles show people that their waste still exists and actually takes up space – space that is running out.

3.6 Summary

Mandela Artscape stands as an example of positive regenerative work that benefits the cityscape in which it is located as well as residents in multiple ways: aesthetically, the project involved transforming an abandoned and hopeless site into a green space open to the entire West Oakland community; socially, the five-year period in which *Mandela Artscape* existed led to the creation of jobs, as well as the voluntary involvement of different people from the neighbourhood; educationally, participants learned about the plants being used, as well as how to work on a communal project; and environmentally, the use of found objects and recycled material encouraged a sustainable interaction between living and creating. The underlying element of engagement makes Steinman's

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[282] Stewart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 236.
[283] Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 187.

work unique and powerful. *Mandela Artscape* rises above the controversial debates concerning the limits of public space as well as the questions about the artist/participant relationship in an environment of optimism, teamwork, and common goals.

CONCLUSION

The decision to write this thesis on Robert Smithson's *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Edward Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series and Susan Leibovitz Steinman's *Mandela Artscape* is based on a desire to present a sample of the vast possibilities that can arise in outdoor artworks that address the cohabitation of industry and ecology by creating new landscapes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While the aesthetic approaches, choices of medium, and ideologies of these three artists are quite different, they often point to similar issues. After having discussed the works of these artists individually, and keeping in mind a continuous underlying common ground, new layers of their art production – and sometimes even new understandings of their work – become apparent. In this Conclusion, I re-assemble the material presented throughout the entire thesis, and discuss links and overlapping areas of interest that tie these works together within the context of the ecological crisis that we are facing in the twenty-first century.

In order to do this, I have divided my summary into three main sections: first, I emphasize the central focus of each chapter, as well as the contribution that this focus provides to my thesis as a whole; second, I analyze aspects of the nature/culture debate as they are apparent in the works of each artist; and finally, I assess the role that these artists play in society, and the impact that their works can have. Through this final discussion, a thorough understanding of these artists' works and involvement in the worlds of art and environmental awareness will be reached, as well as an appreciation for art that can make a difference.

4.1 Area of Focus

In Chapter One, the focus on Smithson's land reclamation work introduced the premise of analyzing the relationship between industry and ecology in the art world. I concentrated on this area of Smithson's practice with *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, because it is an example of an innovative and creative way of acknowledging an industrial landscape and using the seemingly ruined site for artistic purposes. This contributes to the body of my thesis in that Smithson's approach corresponds to a certain kind of ecological awareness, and his work exemplifies a positive way of transforming a previously overlooked site into one that can be used and appreciated. The *interaction* of industry and ecology is an integral part of Smithson's land reclamation goals, which is embodied in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill.* In Chapter One, the stage was set for an analysis of artworks created by artists who are increasingly involved in the dialogue between industry and ecology.

Burtynsky actively pursues this dialogue with his photographic practice, which can be seen quite clearly in his *Nickel Tailings* series, as discussed in Chapter Two. Due to the fact that his subject matter is a landscape, questioning the nature of Burtynsky's photographic production is crucial to the interpretation process. He can be viewed first and foremost as an artist who exhibits his photographs in a museum environment; yet if one views Burtynsky's works as documentary photography, he can be regarded primarily as an activist and an advocate of sustainability, such as when collaborating with organizations such as "World Changing." As established in Chapter Two, the valuable lesson learned from investigating this crucial aspect of Burtynsky's work is that he is, in

fact, *both* artist and activist, and his works should therefore be regarded as *both* a form of art and documentary.

The new landscapes of *Nickel Tailings Nos. 31, 32* and *34*, as well as Burtynsky's ideas about his subject matter, have contributed to my thesis by acting as a kind of mediator between Smithson's ideas and Steinman's concerns. Smithson and Burtynsky's common interests in industrial sites and entropy, their emphasis on the age-old nature/culture dichotomy, and their attention to historical and geological time as well as aesthetic theory, suggest the value of this comparison. Despite these similarities, the manner in which Smithson and Burtynsky deal with these issues is quite different. In this respect, Burtynsky shares an interest in activist approaches to raising environmental awareness with Steinman. His work with the public through his "Three Wishes" for the TED prize, for example, can be linked to the interactive approach that Steinman takes in her urban environmental projects. His artwork alone also involves the public. In "Auradynamics" (2003), Martha Langford states that "[v]isitors [to the *Manufactured Landscapes* exhibition] should be advised that they have their part to play in this photographic event," thereby suggesting that Burtynsky's photographs require for visitors to actively participate by thinking about, and reacting to, the images.[284]

The photographic medium is an important element that links these three artists' works, as it is how the public is granted access to the work. In Burtynsky's case, the photographs *Nickel Tailings Nos. 31, 32* and *34 are* the works; for Smithson, photographs of *Broken*

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[284] Martha Langford, "Auradynamics: The Task of the Spectator in the New Era of the Aura," *Border Crossings* 22, no. 2 – Issue no. 86 – (May 2003), 57.

Circle/Spiral Hill are an integral part of the work, along with the physical Earthwork itself, the film, and the written texts; and as far as Steinman is concerned, photographs are now the only existing images of *Mandela Artscape*. As the mediating figure among the three artists in this thesis, Burtynsky also demonstrates the benefits of producing a project that can be read as both a work of art and as an instrument of environmental advocacy, as it reaches out to more people.

As presented in Chapter Three, the public's role is at the very heart of Steinman's art and ecological goals. This aspect of engagement in *Mandela Artscape* provides the most efficient and effective way for Steinman to get her message across. Focusing on the interactive quality of Steinman's work has contributed to this thesis in that it highlights those aspects in both Smithson's and Burtynsky's work as well, as they also engage with the public to a certain extent, and for various reasons. For example, people who visit the sites of Smithson's Earthworks interact with them by walking alongside the art works and experiencing their physicality firsthand. Lippard wrote about Smithson's pleasure when construction workers would invite their families to have picnics on the site of *Spiral Jetty*.[285] This suggests Smithson was interested in expanding his public beyond the art world. In *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Smithson also achieved this goal of interaction due to its placement in an area available for regeneration and recreational activities. In the design of Smithson's numerous incomplete land reclamation projects described in Chapter One, the inclusion of people's activities became an integral part of the works.

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[285] Lippard, "Breaking Circles," in Hobbs, *Sculpture*, 33.

The interactive quality of Burtynsky's practice is apparent in his use of the photographs for educational purposes. His goals of working with children and of reaching out to people beyond the art world demonstrate a desire to engage more people in the environmental issues that are introduced through his images. These aspects of both Smithson's and Burtynsky's art production become more evident after analyzing Steinman's approach. *Mandela Artscape* reached – and, in fact, *created* – a particular community of people who became actively and emotionally implicated in the project. This involvement allowed the participants to benefit firsthand from both the construction of the work as well as the final product. Steinman shares a site-specific objective with Smithson, but makes a point of working on inhabited landscapes. Interaction in the actual making of her art as well as the reception is a primary concern. In this way, Steinman creates art that is relevant to a specific public in their daily lives.

4.2 Nature/Culture

The relationships between industry and ecology that are explored in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, *Nickel Tailings Nos. 31, 32* and *34*, and *Mandela Artscape* encourage a new look at our interactions with both. The nature/culture dichotomy that I discussed in Chapters One and Two is an important aspect of this relationship, and has helped to achieve a deeper appreciation of the artists' interactions with both. The topics that I revisit in this section involve the artists' ultimate understanding 'nature' and 'culture', followed by a discussion on consumerism, recycling, entropy, devastated sites, and the necessary relationship with large corporations.

Understanding the nature/culture dichotomy that is presented in the artworks – especially in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* and the *Nickel Tailings* series – is a crucial step in interpreting these artworks. As seen throughout this thesis, the artists facilitate a nature/culture *dialogue* in order to achieve a deeper appreciation of their goals. For example, Smithson was not interested in lifestyle modification and had an ultimate belief that humans and their endeavors (including industry) are a part of nature.[286] This idea is distinct from the views of Burtynsky and Steinman, as they explicitly encourage a sustainable lifestyle.

In the discussion on found objects in Chapter Three, I commented on consumerist culture and the various reactions to this lifestyle that artists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have had. Here again, different understandings of 'nature' and 'culture' lead to distinctive preoccupations. Both Burtynsky and Steinman are concerned with mass consumption in North American culture and the manner in which it affects the environment, while Smithson was only troubled with consumerism as it related to art. For example, Smithson argued against the classification of art as a commodity, but did not extend his beliefs about consumerism to an environmental level.[287] Burtynsky's work as an artist and a sustainability activist, on the other hand, reveals an interest in finding a more sustainable balance between lifestyles and ecology. Similarly, Steinman's work with found objects demonstrates alternative ways of using and reusing commodities in order to lessen our impact on the environment. Her strategy is a creative stepping-stone on the path toward a more conscious use of objects.

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[286] Smithson, "Earth Projects," in Holt, *Writings*, 82.
[287] Smithson, "What is a Museum?" in Flam, *Collected Writings*, 50.

The question of recycling commodities is an interesting point of discussion that demonstrates quite clearly the artists' contributions to a nature/culture dialogue. Burtynsky and Steinman are avid supporters of recycling. Burtynsky has praised the Ontario government for its encouragement of recycling among school children, and based his approach to creating sustainable projects in schools on this model.[288] Likewise, Steinman encourages a creative approach to recycling and promotes recycling as means of lessening our impact on the environment. Smithson, on the other hand, considered recycling to be a pointless distraction along the inevitable path toward entropy. In 1973, he stated that "recycling is like looking for a needle in a haystack" due to the overwhelming amount of waste, thus insinuating that it is a worthless cause.[289]

An interest in entropy and geological time is reflected in both Smithson's and Burtynsky's work and ideas, yet they approach these subjects in vastly different ways. While Smithson was interested in collaborating with entropy through his artwork, Burtynsky's work as an activist demonstrates an unwillingness to give in to this process without some basic lifestyle modifications. Instead of allowing entropy to unravel as it may, Burtynsky's work is spreading an awareness that may slow down the process. Nonetheless, the fact that both artists create new landscapes in industrial settings points to the direction in which entropy is headed.

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[288] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.
[289] Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible," in Holt, *Writings*, 190.

It is interesting to note that neither Smithson, Burtynsky nor Steinman are concerned with saving devastated sites, if 'saving' means restoring to a pristine state. Rather, their artworks point to new aspects of the landscapes. For *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Smithson made major alterations on the land, which emphasized its industrial past in an aesthetically pleasing and interesting manner. For *Mandela Artscape*, Steinman's use of found objects and plants revived the site and pointed to the possibility of renewal and rebirth. The success of both projects is demonstrated by the fact that although they were meant to be temporary works, they resulted in a more lasting form. While no changes to the land were made for Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings* series, an original view of mining sites was established. The point of cohesion is that none of these artists forget the history of the sites on which they work, nor do they transform the sites entirely. Rather – particularly concerning the work of Smithson and Steinman – devastated sites are reclaimed and some kind of interaction takes place, varying from engaging with the public (to different degrees) to collaborating with corporations.

To produce their work, Smithson and Burtynsky were in constant communication with large industrial groups, and expressed interest in working with them. Smithson's land reclamation proposals were based on the very relationship that he believed needed to be developed between industrialists and ecologists, with artists acting as mediators. Similarly, Burtynsky is interested in collaborating with large corporations that have a "green" tendency, and argues that it is the corporations who hold the power toward a more sustainable planet.[290] Steinman collaborated with Caltrans to create *Mandela Artscape*, and was a strong influence in initiating the permanent *Mandela Parkway*. All

[290] Edward Burtynsky (artist), in discussion with the author, March 15, 2006.

three artists act as mediators between industry and ecology, as Smithson proposed in his land reclamation projects.

4.3 Artists' Roles

Analyzing the role that artists such as Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman have in the interplay of industry and ecology allows us to assess the powerful impact that visual arts can have beyond the art world. Smithson was very clear about the role of mediator that he and other artists could play between industrial issues and ecological concerns, as demonstrated in his land reclamation proposals and embodied in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*. Burtynsky's work as a photographer and a sustainability activist can result in a dual view of his role. As established in Chapter Two, the fields of documentary and art can coexist quite harmoniously and do not have to be viewed as separate at all. Finally, Steinman's artwork is entirely focused on a pro-active approach to raising awareness and moving toward the goal of creating environmentally friendly art projects in a group setting.

The different artistic approaches to creating new ways of thinking about landscapes that I examined through this thesis are united by numerous objectives. In the works of Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman, an expanded view of art and its possibilities is evident. Through the means of their artwork, the artists are attempting to reach an audience beyond the art world. Aside from being a renowned Earthwork in art circles, *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* has become a landmark in Holland and a recreational haven for residents of Emmen. Photographs from the *Nickel Tailings* series have been exhibited in

numerous museums, such as the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario (2003), the Musée d'art contemporain in Montreal, Quebec (2004), and the Brooklyn Museum of Art in Brooklyn, New York (2005). However, they are also used by environmental organizations such as "World Changing" in order to raise awareness. As a public artwork, *Mandela Artscape* existed as both a work of art and a community project at once.

The impetus for both *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* and *Mandela Artscape* was the process of creation, and not the final product, as can be determined by the fact that they were both initially intended as temporary projects. Likewise, the *Nickel Tailings* series is based on the *process* of nickel mining, with no interest in the final products that result from the industrial process. This focus on process, time and development points to an interest and curiosity concerning how projects are built, what it means to create them, and the impact that the process of creation can have. It points to an attentive and patient creative act.

4.4 The Artists' Way

These three artists are all activists in their individual ways in terms of validating a new kind of landscape art that acts as a liaison between industry and ecology. At a time when the ecological crisis is becoming more and more evident, it is crucial to be aware of what actions are being taken in various fields and at different levels of society. As a tool for communication, art can influence people to think about important environmental issues in an urgent and uplifting manner. Through their artworks, artists can facilitate new,

alternate views of landscapes, and can comment on the status of our relationships with our surroundings in an interesting and informative manner.

In this thesis, I have provided a sample of some North American artworks from the 1970s to the present day via three artists who have made substantial contributions to the colliding worlds of art, industry and ecology. I have demonstrated the valuable role that artworks – born from different media and with different goals – can have in raising awareness about the state of our world and of our actions. I have offered interpretations of the works based on the artists' comments, the interrelationship between the works, and my own assessment developed from research, comparison and personal study. These artists are important contributors to an area of contemporary art that seeks to invent new ways of looking at the natural world and the built environment, and new forms of art with which to do so. They have played crucial roles in transforming the landscape genre by expanding the definition of landscape art, and by using innovative materials with which to create their new landscapes. Finally, I have demonstrated, along with Smithson, Burtynsky and Steinman, that industry and ecology have met at a crossroads, and it is our responsibility to learn how to live with both in a more sustainable manner. Perhaps it is the artists that will lead the way to a more sustainable future.

Figures

Figure 1. Smithson. *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill.* Emmen, Holland. 1971.

Figure 2. Burtynsky. *Nickel Tailings No. 31.* Sudbury, Ontario. 1996.

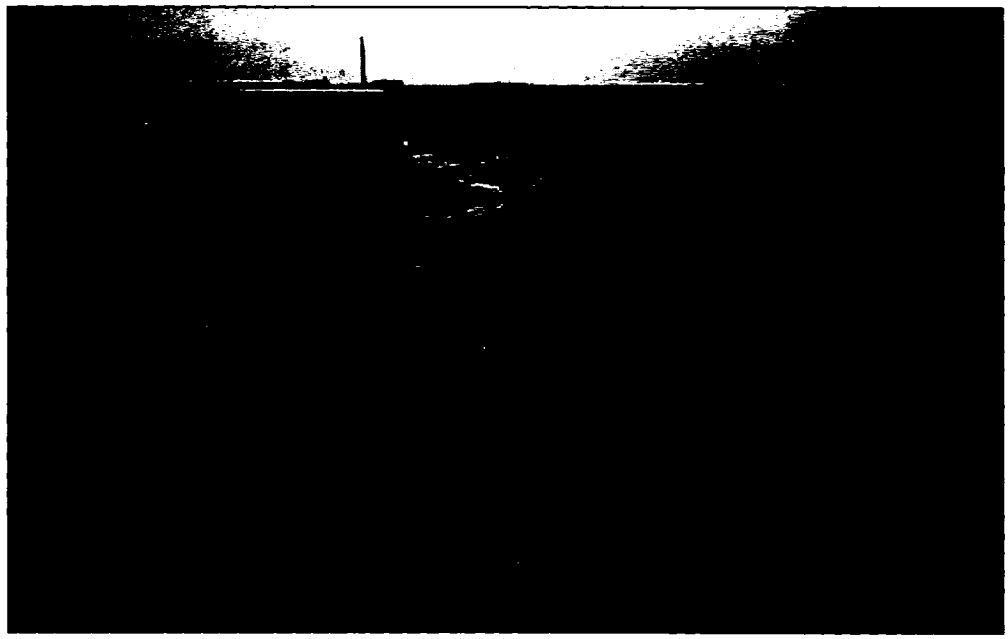

Figure 3. Burtynsky. *Nickel Tailings No. 32.* Sudbury, Ontario. 1996.

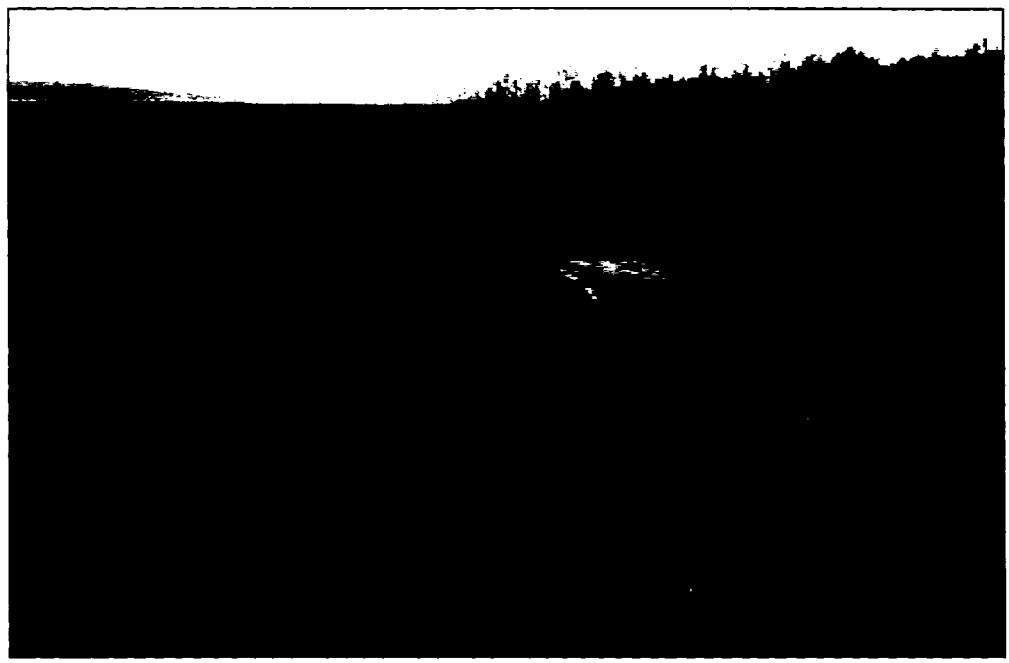

Figure 4. Burtynsky. *Nickel Tailings No. 34.* Sudbury, Ontario. 1996.

Figure 5. Steinman. *Mandela Artscape*. West Oakland, California. 1998 – 2002.

Figure 6. Smithson. *Amarillo Ramp*. Amarillo, Texas. 1973.

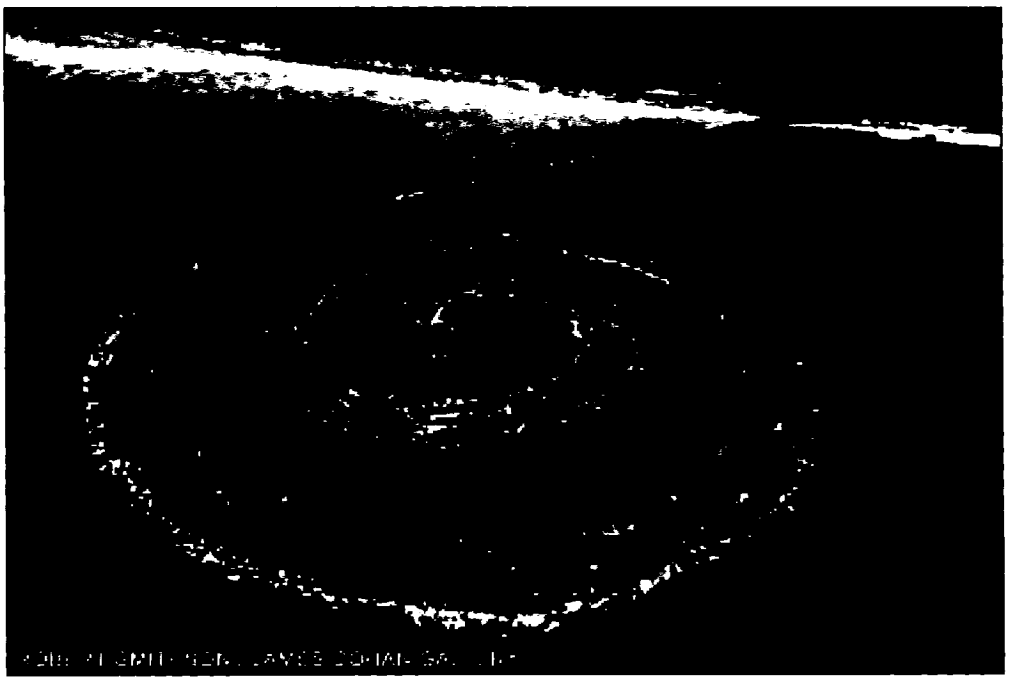

Figure 7. Smithson. *Spiral Jetty*. Great Salt Lake, Utah. 1970.

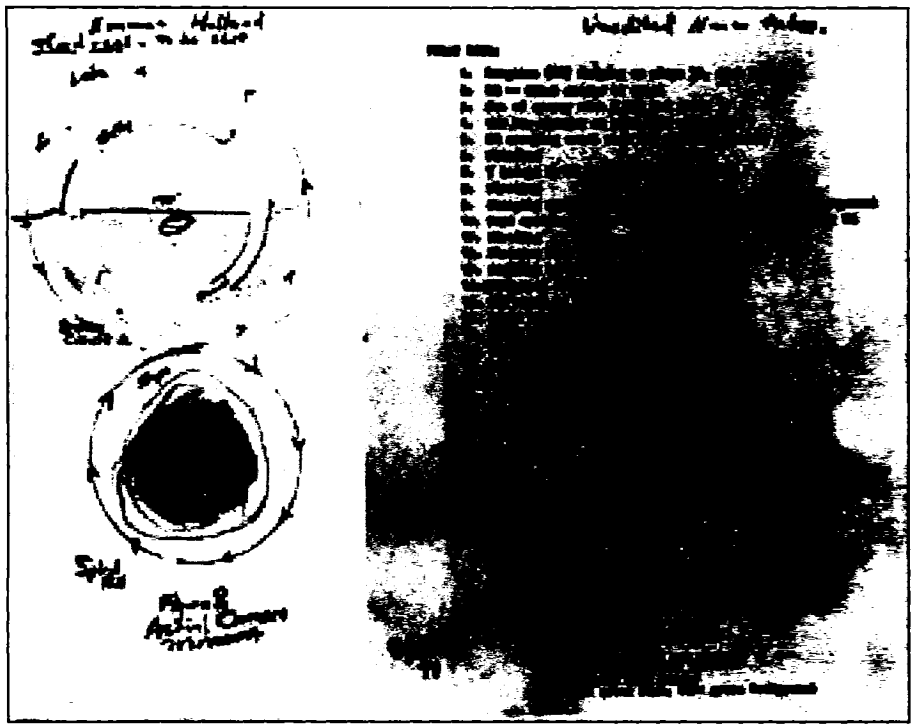

Figure 8. Smithson. *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Drawing 1. Emmen, Holland. 1971.

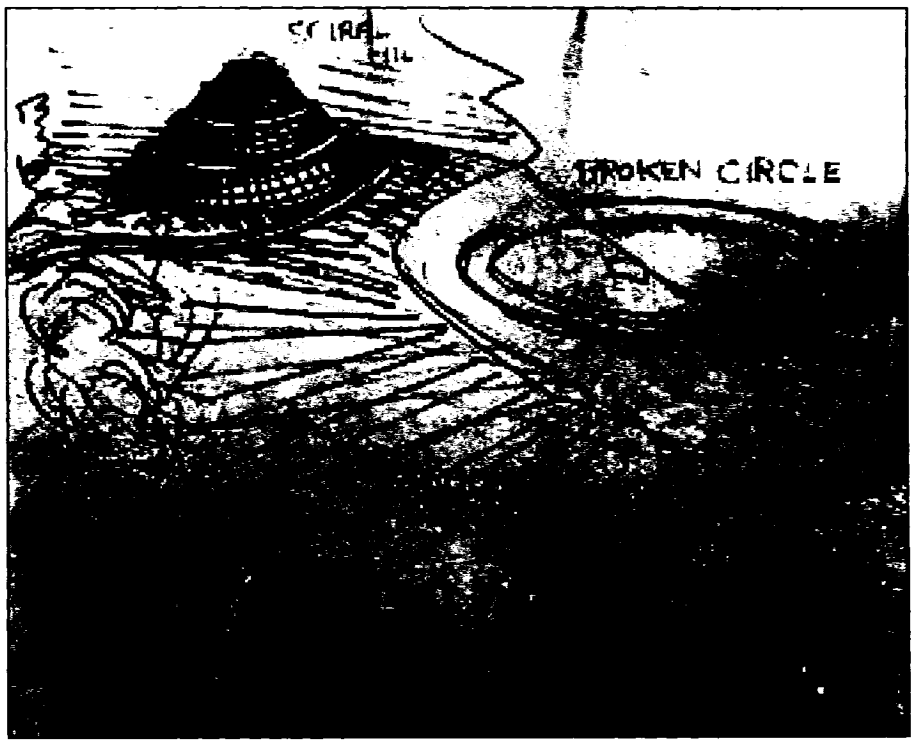

Figure 9. Smithson. *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Drawing 2. Emmen, Holland. 1971.

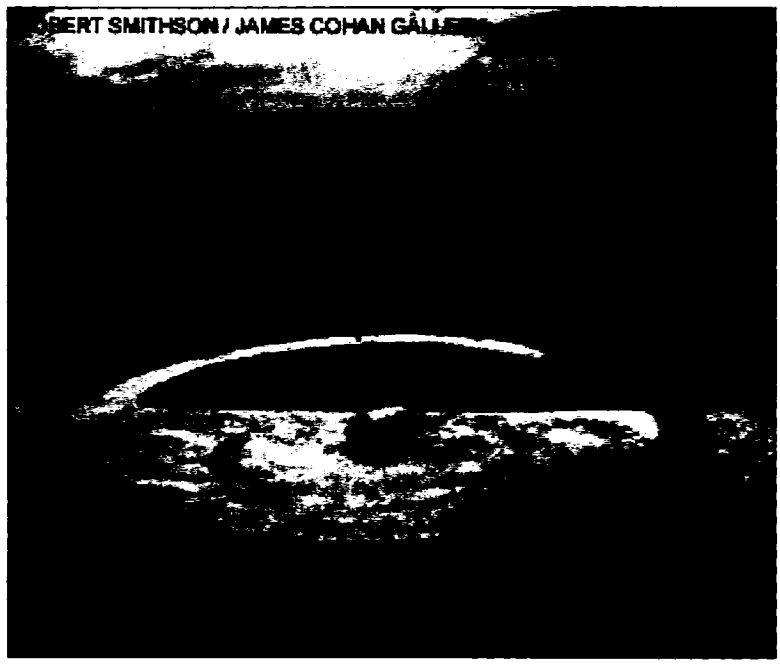

Figure 10. Smithson. *Broken Circle.* Emmen, Holland. 1971.

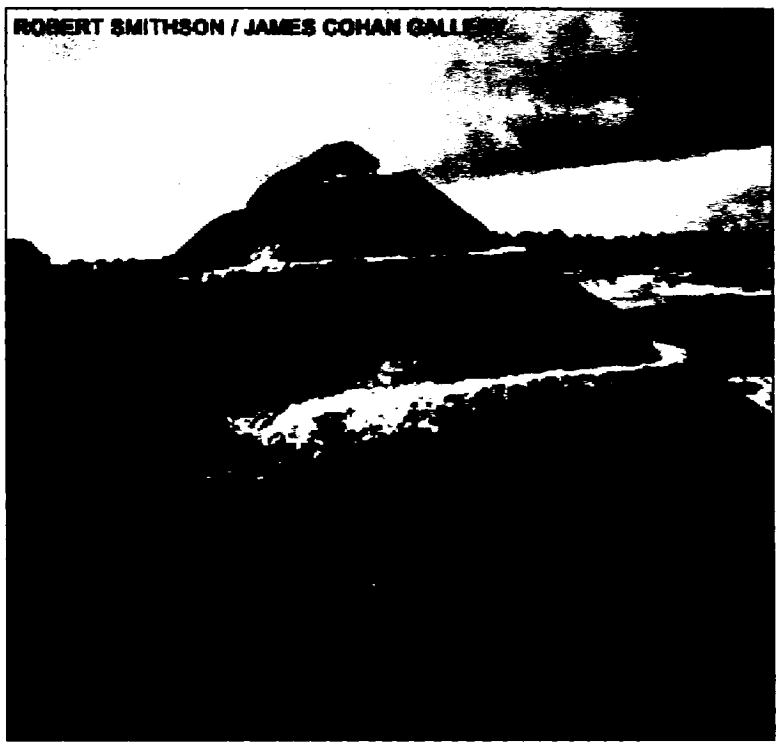

Figure 11. Smithson. *Spiral Hill.* Emmen, Holland. 1971.

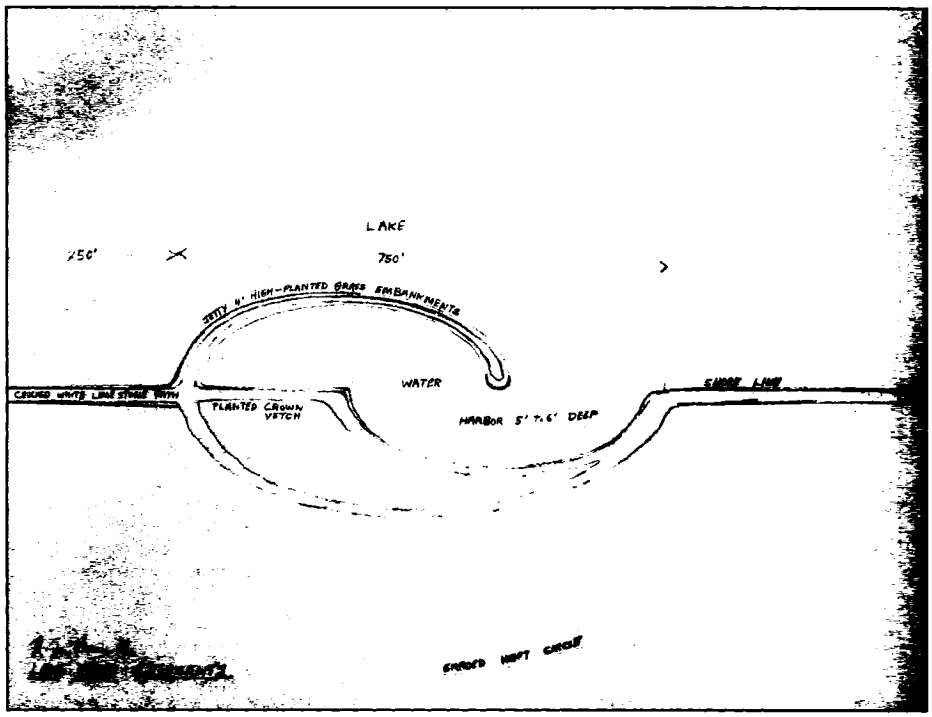

Figure 12. Smithson. *Lake Edge Crescents.* Egypt Valley, Ohio. 1972.

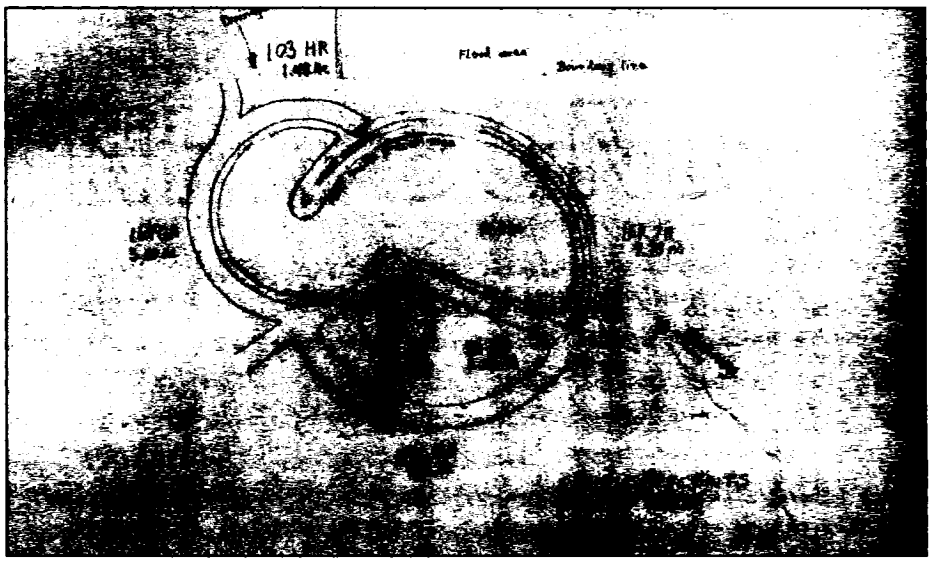

Figure 13. Smithson. *Lake Crescents.* Forest Park, Illinois. 1973.

Figure 14. Smithson. *Tailing Pond.* Crede, Colorado. 1973.

Figure 15. Burtynsky. Kennecott Copper Mine No. 22. Bringham Valley, Utah. 1983.

Figure 16. Steinman. *Urban Apple Orchard.* San Francisco, California. 1994

Figure 17. Steinman. *Cartwheels.* Oakland, California. 2002.

Figure 18. *The Cypress Freeway.* West Oakland, California. 1989.

Figure 19. Steinman. *Mandela Artscape*, Detail 1. West Oakland, California. 1998.

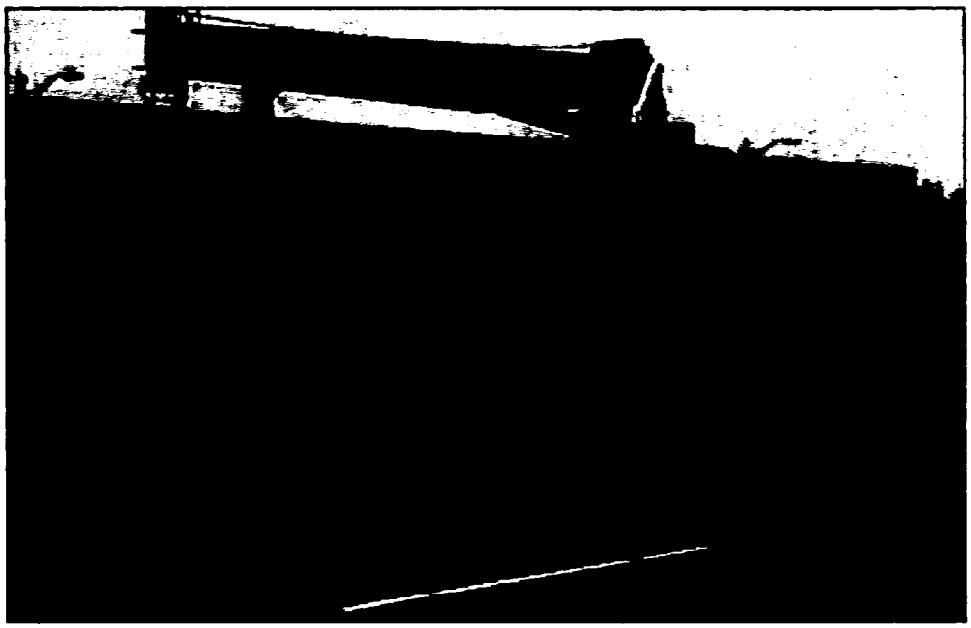

Figure 20. Steinman. *Mandela Artscape*, Detail 2. West Oakland, California. 1998.

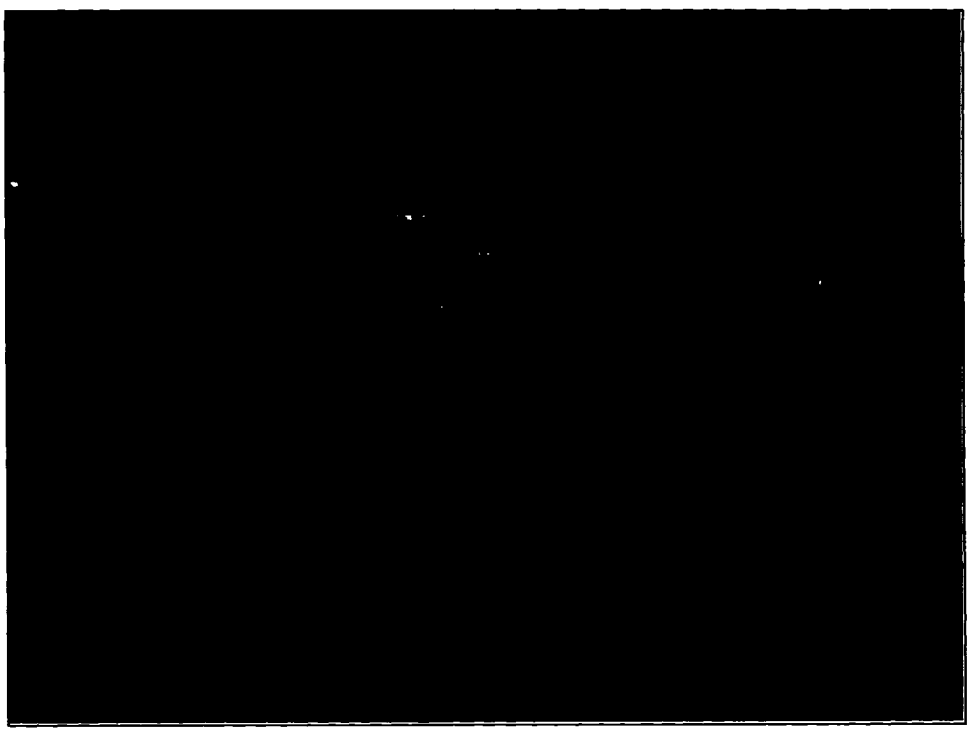

Figure 21. *Mandela Parkway*. West Oakland, California. 2005.

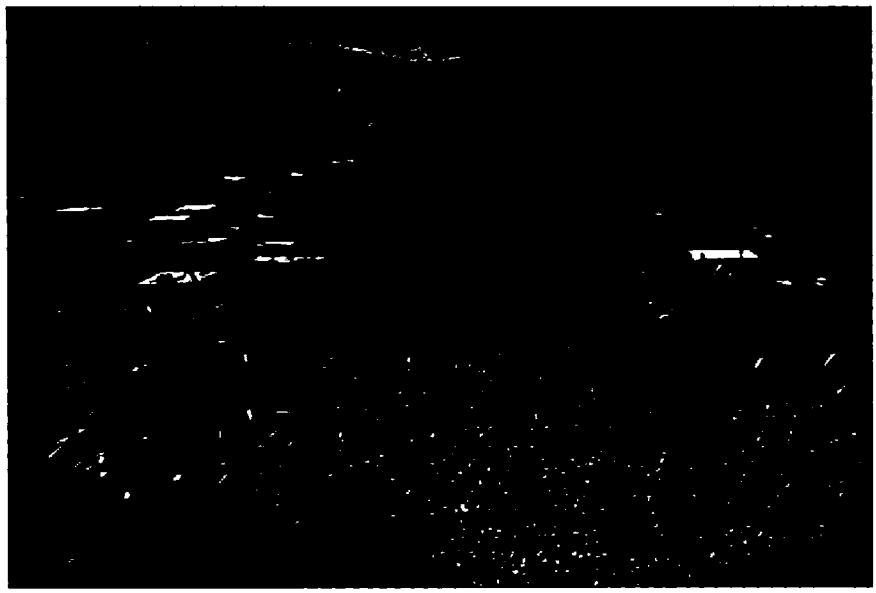

Figure 22. Steinman. *River of Hopes and Dreams*. San Francisco, California. 1992.

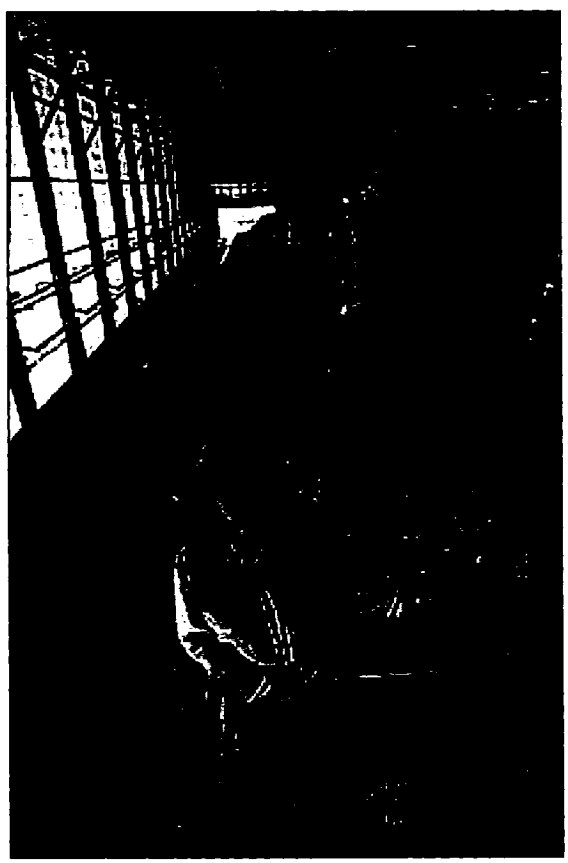

Figure 23. Ukeles. *Flow City*. New York City, New York. 1983.

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