



“Smithson’s Unresolvable Dialectics,” and “A Nonsite, Franklin New Jersey.” In Robert Hobbs. *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981; pp. 19-30, 105-108.

Text © Robert Hobbs

SMITHSON'S UNRESOLVABLE DIALECTICS

Robert Hobbs

A Plea for Complexity

Artists are not straightforward thinkers, even though they may be logical and concrete in their use of materials. Artists think indirectly in terms of a medium. Whenever historians and critics consider themselves to be doing an artist a service by tidying the peripheral morass of difficulties surrounding a work of art—unclear meanings, possible uncharted courses of significance—they do an artist a disservice because they recreate the art, substituting in place of the difficult and even contradictory work their own narrow, carefully reasoned, and often clearly articulated point of view. With some the damage would not be permanent, but with Robert Smithson, who constantly strived to conflate and expose the complexity of issues, elaborate on possible interpretations, and remove clear focal points for the more difficult periphery, the damage would be severe. Smithson was a clear thinker about muddled issues. As an artist he was a maker of objects that seem rational and consistent, but his works usually represent the uneasy conjoining of contradictory systems of thought.

Exemplary of this unresolvable dialectic is the seminal work *Enantiomorphic Chambers* (1965) which joins together many ideas into a purposeful ambiguity. Composed of bracketed mirrors obliquely positioned, the sculpture relies on the look of the Minimalist style that it appears to perpetuate but instead ironically refutes. Looking almost like a Donald Judd machined form, the sculpture resembles the very quintessence of rational technology. This approach to the work is confirmed in part by the clear articulation of elements and fabrication by industrial techniques that make the piece appear to be more the design of an engineer than of an artist. The modern-day, suprapersonal articulation of the piece, however, is quickly dispelled when one peers into the glass chambers and finds that the mirrors reveal only their silvered pools of reflection. Each gives an abstract

vision of a mirror looking at itself and becomes a significant image of reflexiveness. To a viewer acquainted with the Minimalist need to reduce sculpture to its absolute essence, even to the point of appearing more object than sculpture, *Enantiomorphic Chambers* might be distressing. While the piece does appear to be more object than presence and does not seem to strain belief by suggesting anything more than the materiality of its constituent elements, there is something confusing about it. Even though viewers face two obliquely angled mirrors, they do not see themselves. The enantiomorphic mirrors make viewers feel disembodied and unreal as if they have been sucked into some new realm, maybe a fourth dimension in which commonly understood space/time coordinates are no longer applicable. In his writings Smithson confirms this idea, for he indicates that the vantage point of *Enantiomorphic Chambers* is the void on the horizon usually found in one-point perspective paintings and drawings, where all transversals meet.¹ Consequently, the vantage point is outside conventional space or indicates the convergence of time and space in another dimension. *Enantiomorphic Chambers*, then, looks rational and coherent even though it is not. The piece becomes an entry into a new way of perceiving, or perhaps one should say a way of nonperceiving, in which the void is apparent both visually and somatically, because the disembodied viewer forms its nexus. These nonvisual aspects of Smithson's art represent a continuation of ideas important to Ad Reinhardt, who was famed for his black paintings that, in Reinhardt's own words, served to "push painting beyond its / thinkable, seeable, feelable / limits."² These studies of the nonvisual and intimations of the fourth-dimensional also sug-

¹ "Interpolation of the Enantiomorphic Chambers," in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 39.

² Ad Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. 81.

gest an interest in Marcel Duchamp's investigations of N-dimensional geometry which began early in the century, and they also indicate shared concerns with Will Insley who began to develop concepts of totally abstract, uninhabitable architectural spaces in 1963. In *Enantiomorphic Chambers* the rational thus becomes irrational; the mute and apparent, puzzling; and the sculpture, an entropic time/space vehicle for draining conviction in the Cartesian system by casting one into a wholly different realm.

Throughout his art Smithson used mirrors. The mirrors are not, however, always glass. Sometimes, as in *Spiral Jetty* and *Broken Circle*, they are bodies of water. At other times objects and situations mirror: Sites and Nonsites (actual designated locations and gallery pieces consisting of bins containing ore from the location) tend to reflect each other; like mirrors they focus attention on that which they reflect rather than on what they themselves reveal. In *A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey*, an ironic form of mirroring takes place. The Nonsite contains an aerial map of Franklin which repeats the outlines of the trapezoidal bins and which is shaped according to the rules of linear perspective. The irony of the piece occurs at the point in Franklin where the lines of perspective would converge: an actual dead-end street in the town. Frequently in the Nonsites Smithson created three-dimensional parodies of two-dimensional schemata such as perspective to suggest in still another way that the objects are three-dimensional images of a fourth-dimensional world. If perspective (a two-dimensional concept) mirrors a three-dimensional realm, then three-dimensional perspective (it should follow by the same logic absurdly applied) mirrors a fourth-dimensional world.³

Mirrors confuse what they reflect: they reverse images and serve as uncritical recorders of visual phenomena. Because mirrors displace reality, they provide an important sine qua non for a work of art. They contain within themselves the possibility of embodying the fourth dimension when they become art, because works of art commonly transcend notions of real time and conceptions of real space in the creation of their own temporal and spatial standards.

In the mid-sixties Smithson wished to underscore confusion rather than to simplify and clarify it. He wished to employ cool, austere shapes indicative of rational thinking and then assemble them in ways that would under-

mine their rationality. In his *Alogons* (systems devoted to "alogic") he created tensions between two generative equations—linear and quadratic (curves suggested by diminishing shapes)—to confuse clear thinking and replace it with what he termed "solid-state hilarity." The *Alogons*, which diminish in size from one vantage point, were intended to be a concrete section of the infinity of reflections that occur when an object is positioned between a pair of parallel mirrors.

Smithson's humor is low-key, at times almost unapparent. Carefully he planned, structured, and measured his humor, giving it crystalline shapes that appear to mirror crystals' supposed clarity and transparency. Because humor is usually spontaneous—at least it sports the look of immediacy—Smithson's carefully worked-out factory-made wit may appear foreign. If his wit is less than a chuckle, not quite a giggle or even a mild titter and in fact produces nothing ribald or infectious, still it is so beautifully concealed in the work, so much a part of its formative process, that it is capable of at least producing a grin in those who take issue with this culture's insistent blind faith in logic. He made fun of such rational systems as the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, synthesis in his Sites/Nonsites.

Smithson's dry, almost bland, wit is all-embracing; it even encompasses his practice of leveling through which he made the prosaic significant and the glamorous prosaic. Or as Virginia Dwan has said:

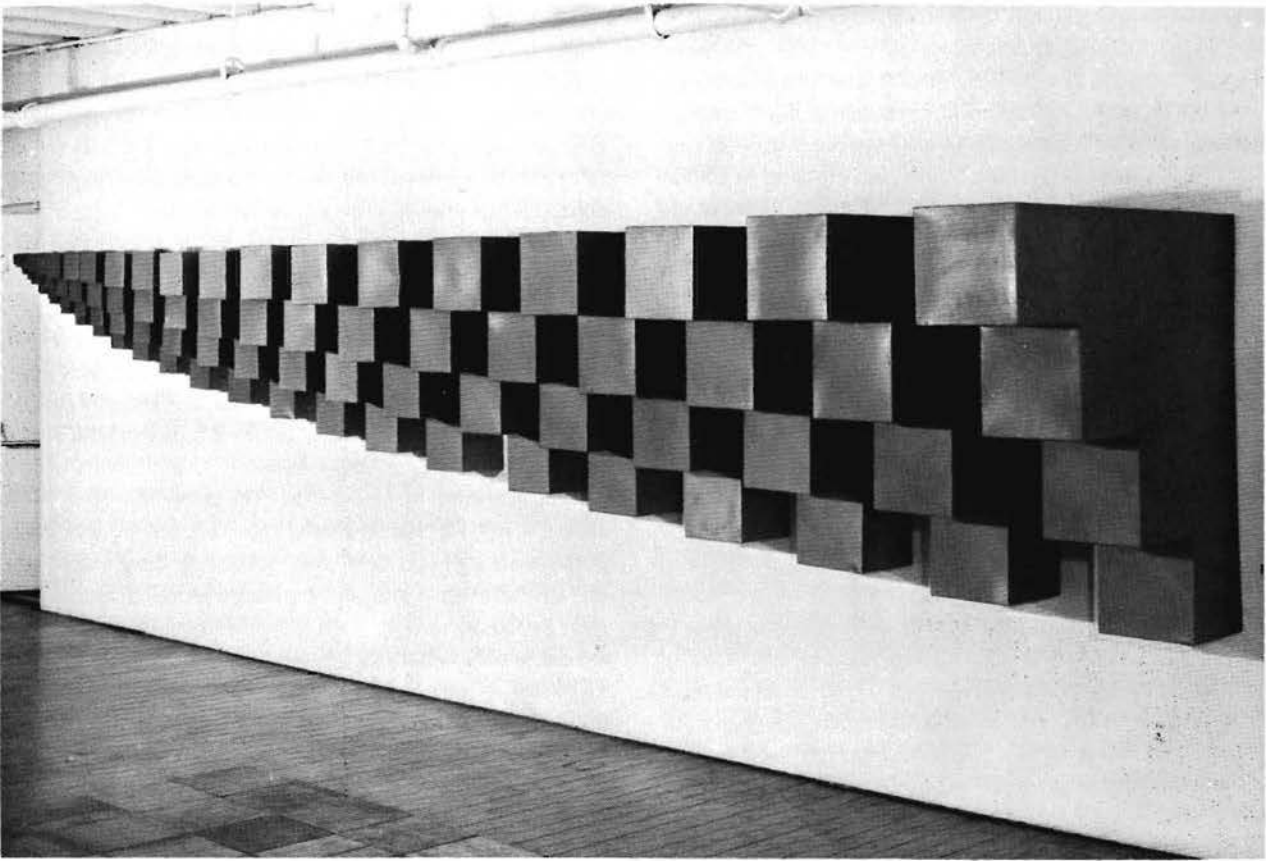
You want to know what was most important about Bob? Well, I don't know. All I do know is that he had this—call it an uncanny ability to take the most mundane things and make them seem—well, make them seem fantastic and intensely exciting. Like the Golden Spike Motel, for example, that dumpy nowheresville kind of place with linoleum rugs and strange heaters up high on the wall. To Bob the Golden Spike was not just a dump, it was an adventure, a place of mystery, so strange and exciting one would swear he was in a science fiction world. He communicated this idea, he made those around him feel it, and I guess that's what was so exciting about Bob and his work.

It took me a while to catch on to it, his work. It appeared so cool and rational—cold really, and yet there was this other quality, kind of underneath like a subtle dry wit, a slow almost sardonic ha ha. I guess that's what was important about Bob—this other quality that was not exactly on the surface, and yet was there all the same, especially in his personality.⁴

In addition to mirrors, crystals were important to Smithson because they helped him to enlarge his world view beyond the anthropomorphic and organic: crystals

³ In developing this analogical conception of the fourth dimension, Smithson was no doubt influenced by Marcel Duchamp's art. And for the elaboration of this idea I am particularly indebted to Craig Adcock, who is giving it its most complete explication in his forthcoming dissertation on Marcel Duchamp and N-dimensional geometry (Cornell University).

⁴ Conversation with the author, January 1980.



Alogon #3, 1967; steel; 20 units, largest 46 x 11½ x 46". Collection Estate of Robert Smithson, Courtesy John Weber Gallery. Photograph by Walter Russell.

account for most of the crust of the earth, all metals, and many synthetics and plastics. Similar to plants and animals, crystals grow and form aggregates. Unlike living forms, however, crystals are highly representative of entropy, of energy channeled into unavailable states; they represent the cooled-down state of liquids and gases and so require additional outside energy in order to be converted into another form. Traditionally crystals suggest clarity and translucence, and yet scientifically they exemplify only regularity and entropy.

In his art Smithson depended on all these connotations and characteristics of crystals. When he created precise geometric forms, suggestively crystalline in structure, such as the *Alogons*, he hinted at clarity and easily understood regularity, but instead he created static structures that become models of entropy when considered in terms of their unvarying structure. Rather than clarify, some of his crystalline forms incorporate such oppositions as the Site/Nonsite dichotomy. Similar to Zen *koans*, these contradictory works compel viewers to transcend mere systems of logic in order to gain real understanding.

Smithson's interest in crystals received impetus in 1966 when J. G. Ballard's science fiction tale *The Crystal World* was published. Elaborating on the structural properties of viruses that exist at the threshold between animate and inanimate worlds, between both crystalline and organic forms, Ballard constructs a glittering realm in which all living forms are encased in a faceted jewel-like encrustation, enshrouded in living-death immortality. This strange world, frozen and crystalline, resembles a Cubist painting, and may well have suggested to Smithson the entropy of a modern art that has become overrefined, insular, and incapable of being understood except by the initiated. Instead he tried to alter this course of development in his criticism, and his work ironically became both a comment on and a manifestation of the entropy (the unavailable energy) in modern art.

Tough Art

In recent years New York artists in particular have felt the need to assume the look of difficulty, to create what

has been called "tough art" (an updating of the macho sensibility that prevailed among the Abstract Expressionists), one that is not easily conformable to age-old standards of beauty, radiance, and presence. Certainly no exception to this tendency toward the abstruse, Robert Smithson's work is perhaps a most outstanding example. To the uninitiated his art appears at worst to be about nothing and at best to be a picture of the void. His writings at times seem exemplary expositions, but then they trail off into convoluted passages or multiply meanings and possible ramifications to the point that readers are inevitably saturated, even though they are often exhilarated by the numerous possibilities.

Like many artists Smithson made objects, though he had ways of discounting their importance. His first mature works, beginning in 1964, are quasi-Minimalist constructs in which he provided a bare envelope of form—machined parts of thin rolled steel coated with flat paint that makes the pieces appear dead and inert. Later, in 1968, he started creating the Nonsites, comprising metal or wood bins filled with rock and usually accompanied by photographic and written documentation. Acting in a dialectic with the Sites, the Nonsites negate both the gallery's space and the primacy of perception as they point away from themselves and to the Site. In this way the art object's actual presence is undermined.

Instead of becoming easier to understand as he became established, Smithson tended to become more difficult. He left the gallery and went out into the world to create monuments like *Spiral Jetty*, but the monuments are hollow testimonials to man's dominance of the landscape. Instead of glorifying man and modern technology and making Earth art a means for directly acting on the landscape, Smithson, in *Spiral Jetty*, created a largely inaccessible antimonument that gave on-location viewers a vertiginous sensation as they stumbled over the rocks, salt crystals, and mud forming its causeway. The *Spiral Jetty* becomes an ironic focal point in the landscape, a convoluted question mark that casts in doubt man's relationship with the land as well as with monuments.

For the larger number of people to whom the *Spiral Jetty* was inaccessible—it is now inaccessible to all since it is under water—Smithson's film and article on the work provide important, but problematic, glimpses. When he became a filmmaker and essayist as well as an Earth artist, Smithson appropriated large segments of the art network, placing in question traditional limits of the aesthetic: Is the art object really autonomous? Does the artist's creative act begin and end with the work of art per se? Then he even subjected to scrutiny the very significance of meaning when he piled one interpretation on

another so that the sculpture is about all truth or no truth: it is a vortex of crystals and a void whirlpool of thought.

Never placing himself solely within the art network and always probing untraditional sources (crystallography, cartography, physics, science fiction, and literature), Smithson went even farther afield in the early seventies. At this point in his career his motives were highly complex and at times ambiguous. What he wanted was to rid art of its ivory tower, its art-for-art's-sake orientation, and make art out of the forgotten spaces, the "non-spaces" of the present—strip-mining sites, industrial sludge heaps, and polluted parks and streams. His goal, not idealistic but also not pragmatic, was to sell big corporations on the need to use art as a tool for land reclamation. Smithson did not, however, view art as a new means for land improvement. He used the term "reclaim," but he was actually referring to the symbolic potentialities of art, to its way of turning devastation and reclamation into signs of the precarious balance between man and nature. Although his plans would save corporations vast sums of money and provide them with high visibility as patrons of art, the corporations were less than enthusiastic about them. One could write off their lack of interest as an inability to understand, but that explanation does not provide an adequate assessment. For even though Smithson intended to turn a strip mine into a backdrop for an artwork, to add a curving terracing of berms to a tailings pond, he wished to leave exposed tracks of the corporation's despoliation of the land, to focus on it and not simply eradicate all vestiges of change, all ravages incurred in mining. What he wanted was to create an art that serves as a bridge between mining and reclamation, that points back to one as it hearkens the future of the other. Art in the form of land reclamation projects was not so much aimed at providing an Eden-type gloss over the landscape as it was intended to expose and symbolize change. For those corporate executives who felt compelled to cover the tracks of mining, Smithson's proposals looked like impediments. Earthworks emphasized the change without taking sides, and his proposed land reclamation pieces, such as the one for the Bingham Copper Mining Pit, were immensely political in orientation even if they were not partisan in their focus. Smithson was no ecologist: he took an almost perverse delight in the look of devastation. Had his Bingham Copper Mining Pit project been built, it would have turned this Grand Canyon of strip mining into an excuse for a central art work.

Smithson's art partakes of the anti-"Establishment" temper of the late sixties. Paralleling many of his contemporaries who were becoming disenchanted with bigness, with bureaucracy, and with traditional definitions

of success, and who were seeking instead "alternative lifestyles" in the form of communes and pioneered settlements, Smithson shifted his art from a gallery context to the out-of-doors. The main focus of his art became the landscape itself, although he still partially relied on the gallery and the museum. Smithson was realistic—he wanted to make and sell art. He accepted the gallery as a necessity, but chose to allocate to it the residue of the art process which it was capable of containing.

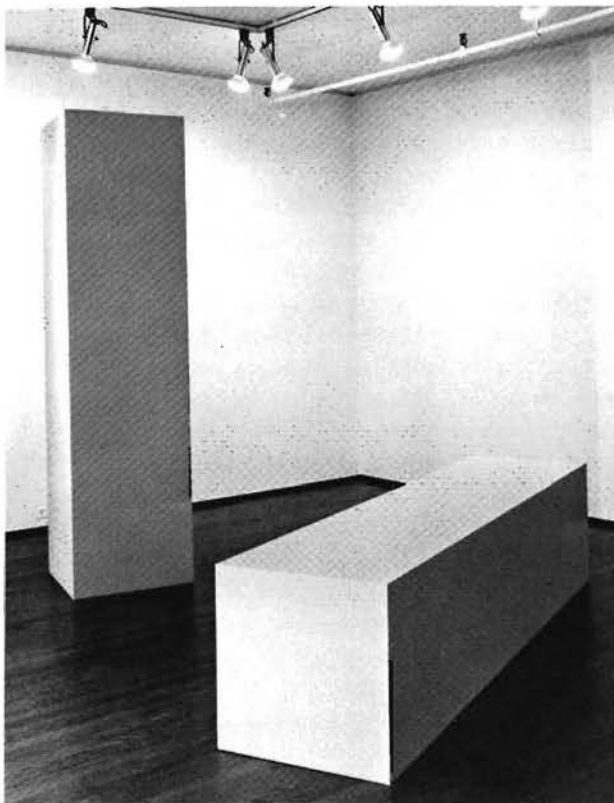
His politics represented part of an attitude that he shared with his contemporaries without ever wholly subscribing to it. Smithson never endorsed the nature-worshipping, anti-"Establishment" shibboleths of the day, even though his art springs from a similar need to break away from entrenched ideas. He turned from galleries but still used them. He moved away from cities while still maintaining more than a foothold within them. He appeared to be a pariah of the art world, and yet he actually accepted many of its limitations. He wanted, as he once stated, to understand the network through which he was being cycled. Not an uncompromising purist, he was a pragmatist who bemoaned the status of museums as repositories. Even though he made several statements about the problems of museums and current art criticism (particularly that of Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg), he continued to make art as best he could in an impure world. He was more fortunate than most artists. He found encouragement in Virginia Dwan, surely one of the most enlightened of gallery owners, and he exhibited in museums that were willing to explore new alternatives. He rebuked the system and yet partially worked within it and used it to his own advantage. He accepted aspects of the art world, and yet he did not relinquish quality—he merely adapted himself to the status quo and created artistic statements applicable to it.

In spite of Smithson's marked affiliations with his generation, his art is independent, pragmatic, irritating, and complex; it is concerned with deflecting meaning, with taking the narrow course between extreme positions and pointing to those positions without becoming part of them. His art could be called the art of unresolvable dialectics: it maintains its gratuitousness even though at times it looks as if it has taken up a particular point of view. This type of nonpartisan thinking is clearly exemplified by proposals for land reclamation that side neither with the industrialists nor with the ecologists, but attempt to serve as constant irritants that point to change and devastation without making moral judgments.

If Smithson's art rested on "either/or" propositions, it would not be so difficult to understand. But rather than an "either/or" situation, he created a "both/and" proposal where the "both" is "either/or," the "and" adds

up to confusion, and the combination of the three terms is equally valid and useless at the same time. Smithson constantly strove to achieve a state of indeterminacy in which meanings are projected as well as canceled out. To examine his art is to tread over a mine field, for one is always in danger of finding one's own reflection in the mirrors he used, instead of the intended state of mirrored reflexivity. For anyone who attempts to understand Smithson's world without latching onto the cumbersome treadmill of meanings he has attached to it and also without denying its complexity, one of the few paths open for exploration is the limited but important area of function. While one cannot look for specific meanings as ultimately relevant, because Smithson multiplied interpretations to create informational overload, one can localize the individual work's significance by asking how it works as art. Before being a writer, filmmaker, social commentator, and critic, Smithson was a sculptor.

In his art Smithson polarized traditional givens and looked at the resultant positive and negative forces. If Earth art is about a location, a Site, he concerned himself with the negation of place and arrived at the concept of Nonsite—a term that refutes place at the same time that it puns the refutation of vision, that is, nonsight. What Smithson did with sight, he also did with space. Traditionally sculpture is about space—real, three-dimensional space. One of the great obstacles facing sculptors in the twentieth century has been to create significant three-dimensional forms. The problem has been almost insurmountable because advances in physics exploded traditional notions of material reality, and innovations in art, beginning with Cubism, have emphasized two-dimensionality in painting and the falseness of illusionism. Even the most important sculptors have adhered to frontal, hieratic, and basically two-dimensional orientations. Except in the work of Giacometti, who admitted the overwhelming force of space in his attenuated figures, and of Calder, who opted for dynamics over blocky substance, sculpture has been mainly a two-dimensional scheme for three dimensions. In the 1960s, however, a revolution in form was instigated by Minimalists Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, and Carl Andre who elected to create pieces that hovered between sculpture and objects. In *Column* (1961–73), Robert Morris set up a test case for examining real space unidealized by overtones of mythic presence and theatrics. He created a sculpture as close to an object as possible so that the absolute reality of its space would become apparent. In the early sixties, Tony Smith solved many of modern sculpture's problems by creating crystalline shapes that departed obliquely from the then repressively frontal orientation of sculpture and that consequently oscillated be-



Robert Morris, *Column*, 1961–73; aluminum; 2 columns, each 8 x 2 x 2'. Anonymous collection. Photograph courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

tween machined presence and dynamic object. But curiously, the pieces by Smith which were most favored at the time tended to be those that were the most poignantly inert and objectlike, particularly works such as *Die* (1962) which appeared to be part of the new venture toward unidealized objecthood.

Within this context Robert Smithson began working. Not wanting to be simply a maker of objects, he veered away from the Minimalists. Not wishing to make basically two-dimensional translations of paintings and drawings, he refused to follow the lead of such a sculptor as the then universally acclaimed David Smith. The only viable option was shown by the work of Tony Smith. Like Tony Smith, Smithson took the idea of crystals as an organizing principle. As he studied crystals, Smithson became fascinated with their structure and symmetry. Then he found that one can map crystals, and so he turned from crystals to mapping. And at this point he became involved with the possibilities of turning maps into three-dimensional objects. He succeeded in creating three-dimensional, disjunctive maps in 1968, when he originated the Sites and Nonsites. Furthermore he joined together in these works his interests in sculpture, crystal-

lography, mapping, drawing, perception, and landscape. No doubt a catalyst for the Nonsites was Tony Smith's famous description of the nonspace apparent to him while driving along the New Jersey Turnpike at night:

When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the fifties, someone told me how I could get onto the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first, I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art.

The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it. Later I discovered some abandoned airstrips in Europe—abandoned works, Surrealist landscapes, something that had nothing to do with any function, created worlds without tradition. Artificial landscape without cultural precedent began to dawn on me. There is a drill ground in Nuremberg, large enough to accommodate two million men. The entire field is enclosed with high embankments and towers. The concrete approach is three sixteen-inch steps, one above the other, stretching for a mile or so.⁵

This description started Smithson thinking about the ways that twentieth-century man conceives of space, and led him to formulate a new paradigm for sculptural space.

For all his originality Smithson owes an enormous debt to Tony Smith, who chose to look at sculpture in radically different ways. Smith did not consider his sculpture to be objects that activate space but rather voids that displace the solidity of space: in Smithson's terms they are Nonsites. Smith's attitude toward space was influenced by the Japanese sensibility, particularly the idea of space as solid. But his thinking did not appear at all exotic or foreign to Smithson who found it crucial to his formulation of the voids at the center of modern life. When Smith wrote of his sculptures that

⁵ Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum* 5, no. 4 (December 1966): 19.

they are black and probably malignant. The social organism can assimilate them only in areas which it has abandoned, its waste areas, against its unfinished backs and sides, places oriented away from the focus of its well-being, unrecognized danger spots, excavations and unguarded roofs.⁶

he laid down fundamental attitudes for a new subaesthetic terrain that Smithson developed in his Sites/Nonsites and later in his land reclamation projects. Even though Smithson's sculpture assumes a very different form from that of Tony Smith, the generative ideas giving rise to that form are dependent on Smith's thinking about space, form, and the desperate feeling of alienation that is part of modern man's existence.

With his dialectical turn of mind, Smithson considered that if sculpture is about space, then it should also be concerned with space's counterpart, nonspace. The most important spaces of the twentieth century are nonspaces, immediate surroundings that fail to impinge themselves on the modern consciousness—like suburban tract houses, those patchworks of status symbols that point away from themselves and toward their referents, that become a nowhere and nothing because they are always signs or containers for something else. Searching for the nonspace elsewhere in the everyday world, Smithson found that pristine white art galleries and museums are "canceled" places, as are also super highways and the strips of fast food chains, gasoline stations, and shopping centers that are repeated endlessly into an ever present nowhere. One of the most profound nonspaces that Smithson discovered is the movie house, where people become unaware of their present space as they drift into vicariousness, into what Smithson termed "cinematic atopias." In Smithson's art the space/nonspace dialectic is carried out in works such as *Leaning Strata* where two-dimensional abstract systems for plotting space meet, then are absurdly reified in three dimensions to become a conflated, illogical spatial system. The profile of this early sculpture is determined by the abutment of two logical but irreconcilable systems for conceiving space—cartography and perspective. The sculpture thus formed is a statement of rationality carried to the extreme, or irrationality. Nonspace too is the subject of the Nonsites, which appear to dispense with their own state of being as they cast reflections back to the nonapparent Site. Smithson's proposed land reclamation projects of the 1970s bring him in contact with another nonspace:

the strip mine. What, after all, are strip mines but scalped mountains, voids testifying to the act of removing, negatives left after the positive ore has been scraped off? The concern with space and nonspace even appears in Smithson's writing, particularly in those turgid passages—so dense in their syllables and so convoluted in their arrangement—that appear to connote a most important meaning and yet are devoid of any clear-cut significance. While the prose occupies space, literally, it allows for little interpretative space: Like some of Vito Acconci's early poems consisting of nonsequiturs that adhere to the page and do not allow clear-cut understanding, Smithson's writings occupy the nonspace of the page and resiliently defy easy explication. In "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan" (1969) Smithson created a slightly different type of prose nonspace: one of subject matter. The essay refers to no longer existent mirror displacements and thus becomes itself a Nonsite.

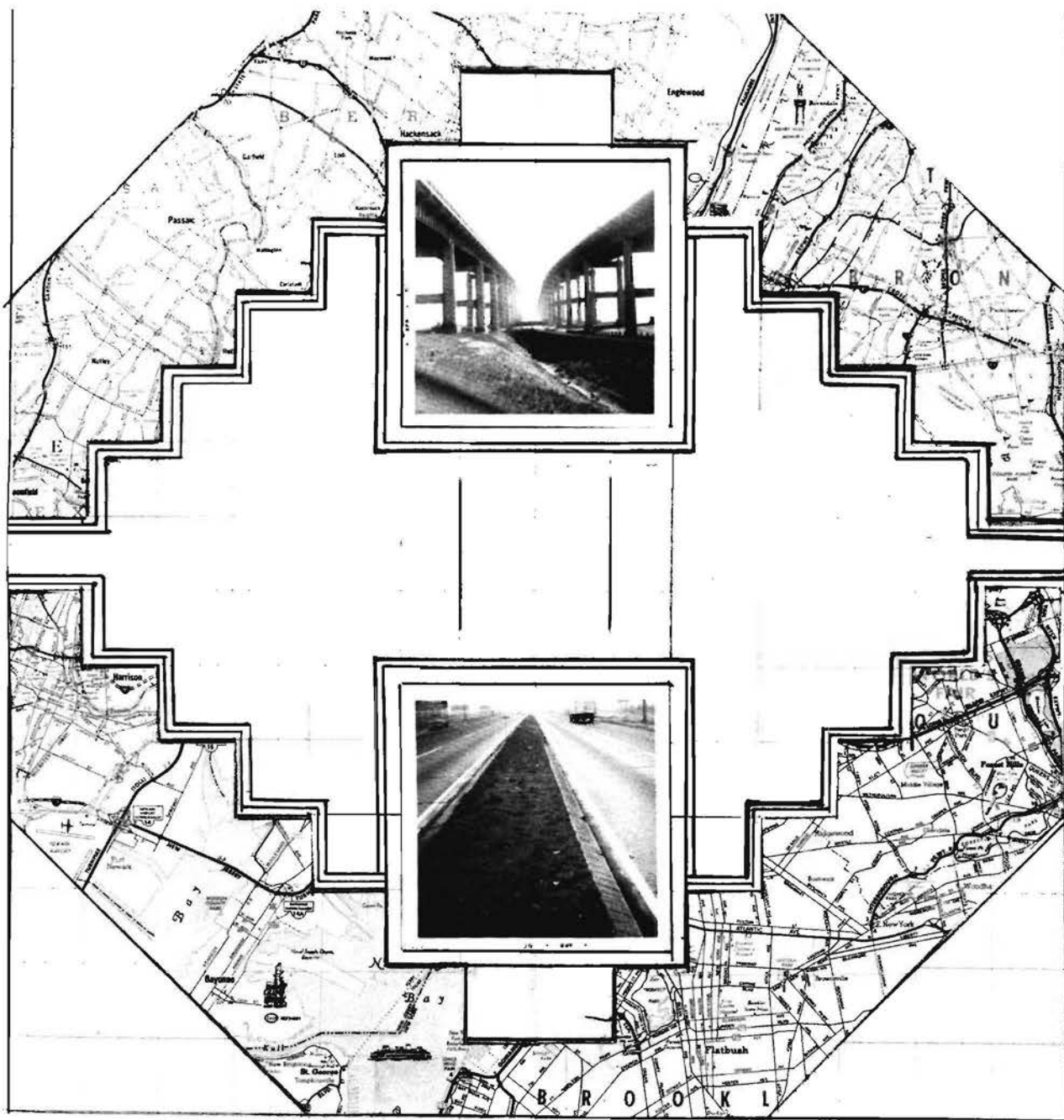
The Science Fiction Fiction and the Art of the Absolute Nothing

Smithson approached traditionally serious science fiction realms and pricked them with holes to release their mysterious afflatus, their quasi-religious sacrosanctity. In their place he created an art that marries the prosaic with the astounding, that links, as in *The Spiral Jetty* film, prehistoric monsters with modern bulldozers and giant caterpillars, and seizes upon entropy as a uniting faculty for generating an air of unsentimental, objective, and inexorable hopelessness. In Smithson's hands entropy comes close to determinism but is not quite so logical. Entropy conflates rational structures to the point that they become like the proverbial monstrous robot, an absurd manifestation of man's rationality often coming into conflict with itself, especially with its narrow programmed form of logic.

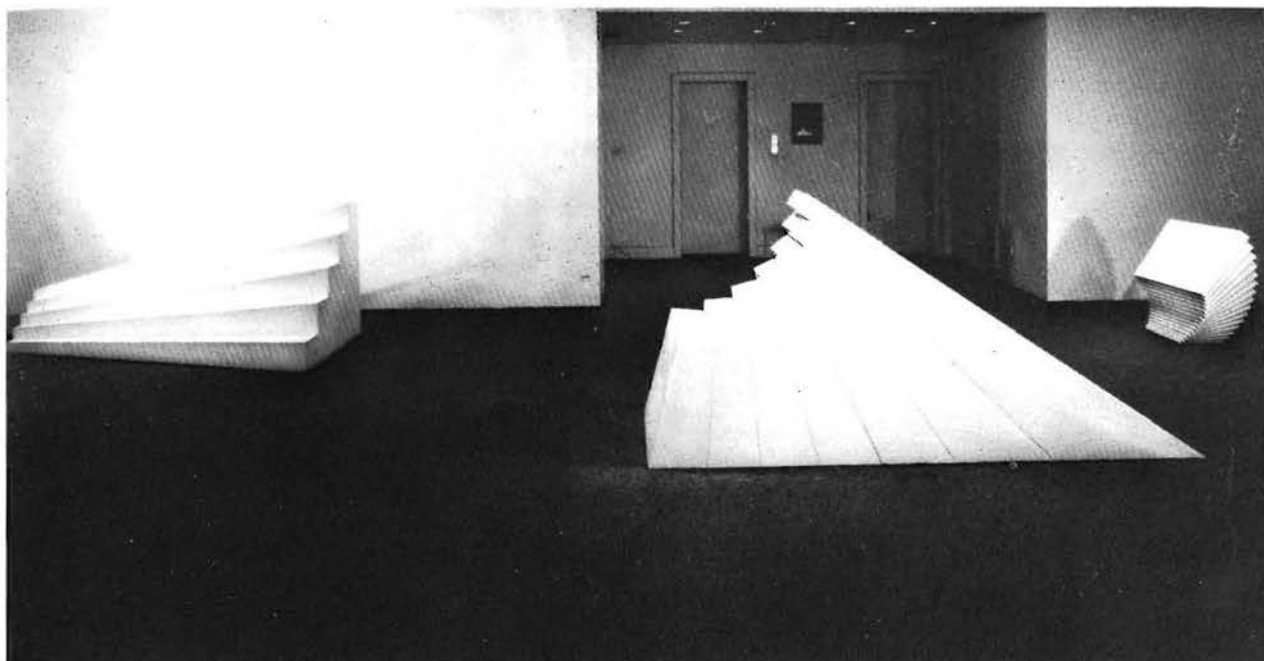
Like much science fiction, Smithson's work is prophetic even though it does not present forewarnings of an eventual doomsday. His art is not about the future, it is about the present and concerns the hopelessness of understanding life through systems, the absurdity of orthodox forms of rationality, and the meaninglessness of life and art when viewed from a universal vantage point. This futility is aptly underscored in such a work as *Nonsite, Oberhausen, Germany*, in which steel bins are fabricated to hold the waste by-products accumulated in making them.

Instead of perpetuating in his art the fiction of hope and progress, Smithson, especially in such works as "The Monuments of Passaic" essay and *The Spiral Jetty*

⁶Tony Smith: *Two Exhibitions of Sculpture* (Hartford: Wordsworth Atheneum, 1966), catalogue to the exhibitions held in Hartford, November 8–December 31, 1966, and in Philadelphia at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, November 22, 1966–January 6, 1967, n.p.



New Jersey, New York with 2 Photos, 1967; collage, maps, photographs, ink, pencil; 22 x 17¼". Collection Estate of Robert Smithson, Courtesy John Weber Gallery. Photograph by Nathan Rabin.



Installation view, Dwan Gallery, New York, March 2–27, 1968. From left to right: *Pointless Vanishing Point*, *Leaning Strata*, *Shift*. Photograph by Virginia Dwan, Courtesy Dwan Gallery, Inc.

film, creates a realm in which the distant past and ultimate future are self-canceling reflections of each other, forming a continuous desert of differentiated, undifferentiated, and dedifferentiated matter. In Smithson's art the prehistoric (whether it be earth as in the Nonsites or references to the pre-Olympian Greek god "Chronos" [sic] as in "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan") collides with the modern, and both come against an almost self-generating, definitely anthropomorphic intelligence, frequently in the essays an off-stage narrator, who is indebted to Robbe-Grillet's fiction. Together they represent various types of specialization. All three are caught in a framework that is both diachronic and synchronic; all are hopelessly intertwined in a never changing yet ever varying now; all ultimately are interlocked, yet separated and deflected. All contain the possibility of all meaning and consequently of absolutely no meaning because each truth is separate and incompatible with other truths. Examples of these kinds of truths appear to be knowingly parodied by Smithson who assumes the role of the art historian in his 1972 essay on the *Spiral Jetty* and finds spirals in such far-ranging places as salt crystals, helicopter propellers, and Van Gogh's ear. Somehow these various interpretations should congeal into one meaning, but they don't; they remain separate. These partial truths are important, however, because they point the viewer in the direction of Truth, while admitting their inability to deal with it directly.

Dialogue with the American Landscape

In the 1830s Thomas Cole, Hudson River School painter, often exhibited in such works as *Schroon Mountain* a great nostalgia about the present. Reared in England, familiar with the devastation already wrought on the landscape there by the Industrial Revolution, he looked at the still virginal American landscape with an eye to seizing hold of its primordial grandeur. He often captured the uniqueness of the landscape, its epic sweep and still untamed qualities, all of which he combined in *Schroon Mountain* into one scene to show changes of season, weather, and time of day. In his work he synthesized natural conditions that were soon to pass as man disturbed the delicate balance of nature, cut down trees, built settlements and factories, and polluted the environment.

Robert Smithson, resting on a New Jersey rock pile in 1968, surveyed the results of the Industrial Revolution evidenced by an abandoned quarry. He attempted to bring the ravaged landscape into his art. No longer looking for a primordial grandeur, for a startlingly beautiful landscape, as was Cole, Smithson immersed himself in the no longer useful fringes of the industrial world—abandoned rock quarries, tailings ponds, sludge heaps, idle tar pools, and retired oil rigs.

Smithson was interested in the American tradition of landscape painting in general and in Cole's work in par-



Thomas Cole, *Schroon Mountain*, 1838; oil on canvas; 39½ x 63". The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Hinman B. Hurlbut Collection. Photograph courtesy The Cleveland Museum of Art.



Robert Smithson sitting on a rock pile in New Jersey, 1968. Photograph courtesy Estate of Robert Smithson.

ticular, and his view of the landscape is an unidealized twentieth-century pendant to Cole's. Rather than looking for the most spectacular and enlarging on it in an almost Cecil B. DeMille fashion, as Cole did, Smithson accepted the conditions that were; he deliberately underplayed; and he sought out the prosaic along the wayside which he scrutinized until it became amazingly unfamiliar.

When visiting Italy, Thomas Cole became fascinated with the passage of time, to which he paid tribute in his imposing series *The Course of Empire*. The concept of passing time also framed his allegorical *Voyage of Life*.

Like Cole, Smithson was concerned with time. Having visited Rome briefly, he wanted to create a modern update of the Eternal City, and he found it in such suburban places as Passaic, New Jersey, where he was born. Suburbias are prepared ruins, twentieth-century-style conversions of weathered temples; they become eternal not through antiquity and endurance but through ubiquity. "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," a narrative work of art presented in the form of an essay in *Artforum* (December 1967), describes Smithson's day in the town; it shows the eternal to be always present, to be anywhere as long as it is nowhere in par-

ticular. Smithson's mundane eternity is suburbia and the "strip," places of rambling sameness with no one focus, places the artist pinpointed when he repeated Pascal's statement that "nature is an infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." Quoting Nabokov at another time, he said, "The future is but the obsolete in reverse." All Passaic is obsolete; it is a present already past, already used up. This eternal city, like Rome, has visible evidences of time withstood in the form of monuments. But the monuments—an early steel bridge with wooden walkways, a pumping derrick, great smoking pipes—are characteristically unidealized. And those of a smaller scale are also worthy of note. "Along the Passaic River banks," Smithson wrote,

were many minor monuments such as concrete abutments that supported the shoulders of a new highway in the process of being built. River Drive was in part bulldozed and in part intact. It was hard to tell the new highway from the old road; they were both confounded into a unitary chaos. Since it was Saturday, many machines were not working, and this caused them to resemble prehistoric creatures trapped in the mud, or, better, extinct machines—mechanical dinosaurs stripped of their skin. On the edge of this prehistoric Machine Age were pre- and post-World War II suburban houses. The houses mirrored themselves into colorlessness.

"Passaic Center," he recalled later in the essay, "loomed like a dull adjective. . . . Actually, Passaic Center was no center—" he admitted, "it was instead a typical abyss or an ordinary void. What a great place for a gallery!"

Both Thomas Cole and Robert Smithson were influenced by eighteenth-century aesthetic categories: Cole with the sublime; Smithson with its less dramatic descendant, the picturesque. While the sublime deals with the strongest aesthetic emotion one is capable of feeling, and indicates that one is caught up in an environment, the picturesque (a term originating in art) suggests ways that the world has been aestheticized, and implies some distance between the viewer and the work. Smithson is the great rediscoverer of the picturesque; he looked for ways to understand devastated industrial areas, to take hold of them in aesthetic terms, and he found a ready-made concept in the picturesque, which deals primarily with change, and which assumes an aesthetic distance between viewer and landscape. In Cole's art of the 1820s and 1830s all sublime paraphernalia, occurring earlier in European art—splintered trees reflecting the uncontrollability of nature coupled with strong dark and light effects, broken irregular shapes, and awesome scale—is given a believable American form. Smithson took a less

heroic stance when he consciously employed the picturesque, emphasizing particularly its casual unevenness and its down-home rusticity. He was also intrigued with the picturesque's emphasis on contrast and transition. The picturesque landscape is a dialectical landscape. In *Partially Buried Woodshed* (Kent, Ohio, January 1970) Smithson created a picturesque situation when he ordered loads of dirt piled on a rustic vacated woodshed until the building started to give way. After creating the piece, he donated it to Kent State University with specific instructions that "the entire work of art is subject to weathering [which] should be considered part of the work." In light of this piece it is interesting to consider that aging rural thatched cottages situated at the end of curving lanes frequently characterize the picturesque, while the awesomeness of an already ruined cathedral is used to illustrate the sublime. Although he tended to romanticize the prosaic and cultivate the ordinary, Smithson deliberately minimized potentialities for the sublime in his art. He chose unfrequented places like the Pine Barrens and Bayonne's Line of Wreckage in New Jersey, because they are commonly considered unspectacular.

His Sites, then, are frequently unmemorable post-industrial places that bear the burden of change; often they are still in transition. And his Nonsites exude a feeling of uneasy containment, as if sandboxes were required to carry the burden of a despoiled landscape. The lack of ease, the feeling that something is missing in the gallery piece, is deliberate. Smithson wanted to show that art in the gallery is a diminution of a far more interesting activity—going to actual locations. The work of art in his hands becomes not so much a pictorialization of an idea—though he does use the realism of geology, namely mapping and ore sampling—as it is the residue of an activity. His Nonsites are also anticlimatic. The ore is dumb and inert: its relation to the Site is analogous to those surprisingly mundane rock samples brought back from the moon.

While Smithson's Sites and Earthworks deal with the picturesque, his Nonsites are mainly concerned with manifesting meaning through ideas commonly associated with the materials used. For example, in *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey*, the gallery piece comprises a land marker or three-dimensional map consisting of actual sand from the rarely used government landing strip and a two-dimensional map that helped to locate the Site. In this sculpture he makes a tacit reference both to the sandbox analogy he used to explain entropy and to the actual sandbox in Passaic that he proclaimed a monument.⁷ And in *Asphalt Lump* (1969) Smithson allowed

⁷ See "The Monuments of Passaic," in this volume.

the unaltered material itself to connote gravity and inertness. The idea of using elements of the real world in a work of art is common to art of the last three decades. The approach itself was innovated much earlier by the Cubists—when newspaper was represented on a table, Picasso collaged a bit of *Le Journal* to the surface of his work. Jasper Johns carried the idea to an extreme when he painted *Flag* (1955), throwing in doubt whether he was creating a painting or an object, making a representation or a presentation. Many American artists since the 1950s have attempted to make their symbols as literal as Johns's flags. They have feared nineteenth-century sentiments as they have also been distrustful of a subject that is not an inherent component of the materials manifesting it. Subject matter and meanings should not be an overlay, many artists have felt; if they are, the work will be an illustration. Artists such as Smithson, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Robert Morris, Donald Judd, and Carl Andre in the past two decades have tried not to illustrate, and they have refrained from dealing with awesome ideas like the sublime. Though they avoid literary overlay, modern vanguard artists have continued to subscribe to metaphorical meanings. The main limitation they have set is that the meanings must be an inherent part of the material.

Exemplary of this literalism is Smithson's Site, Nonsite, and Mirror Trail that he created in 1969 for "Earth Art," the first museum exhibition of its kind, held at Cornell University. For this work, the artist selected the Cayuga Rock Salt Company mine in nearby Lansing as his Site, the University museum's gallery as his Nonsite, and a series of points designated on a map between the two for his Mirror Trail.

The entire piece was called *Mirror Displacement (Cayuga Salt Mine Project)*, and there are a number of types of displacements involved. First there is a displacement, pure and simple, from one place to another when rock salt is carried from the mine to the gallery. Then there is a displacement of often oblique and blurred images by the mirrors. Further, the artist created an interesting inversion of another form of displacement found in his other Nonsites. Instead of constructing a rigid metal bin to hold amorphous material, he used rigid mirrors in the center of the various sculptures and allowed amorphous rock salt to lie along the periphery. The placement of rocks of salt admittedly appears random; but on the molecular (nonvisual) level, each grain of salt is highly structured since it is in a crystalline state. Moreover the glass making up the mirrors, which looks regular, is ac-

tually irregular in its molecular composition. Glass is noncrystalline; it is a congealed liquid in an inert state, and on the molecular level it is amorphous. Since he did study crystallography, Smithson may well have been conscious of all these meanings. Terming the *Project* a Nonsite is ironic, then, since the visual appearance of the piece is overturned once the elements are considered in terms of their molecular structure. The piece itself presents an ongoing dialectic between sight and nonsight which reinforces that other dialectic, between Site and Nonsite. The ideas presented in *Mirror Displacement (Cayuga Salt Mine Project)* are not a literary overlay; they are manifested by the materials comprising the piece. Smithson could thus convey meaning without resorting to illusionism. In this work, moreover, he literalized two traditional aspects of the work of art—its purity and its ability to reflect the world—by finding materials capable of constituting these ideas: salt, which is chemically pure as it comes out of the ground, and mirrors, which displace and reflect aspects of the external world.

Smithson was concerned with the picturesque while Thomas Cole was fascinated with the sublime. Randomness and change were important aesthetic considerations for Smithson. Unlike the Hudson River landscapist who preserved, with an aim at achieving the greatest effect, something very precious that eventually did disappear, the Earth artist was a confirmed realist—one might almost say scientific realist—who accepted the nineteenth-century artist's intimations of a dreaded future. But Smithson went further than Cole; he accepted change without making moral judgments, and he viewed the present as an already past tense.

Although Smithson was concerned with the picturesque, he was not limited to it. Rather than adhering to any one school of thought he opted for a method—the method of dialectics—which he used for a precarious, fluctuating synthesis. Creating an art in which dialectics are structured but not resolved, he erected antitheses such as Site/Nonsite, space/nonspace, and seeing/nonseeing. His importance lay in his realization that if art is about vision, it can also be about blindness, and he made works that hinged on these opposites, keeping them viable options for formulating and understanding art. In Smithson's terms, even nonunderstanding was worthy of study. Contrary to custom, in Smithson's art limits cannot be clearly established, and muddled issues are not to be clarified because their indeterminate lack of focus is an essential distinguishing characteristic.

enlarged it. When he emphasized one section, he made the perspective arrangement even more ambiguous. Instead of having all lines converge at a central vanishing point, as in *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens*, he abstracted schematic linear perspective in *Franklin Nonsite* so that it points in no particular direction, thus aborting efforts to see through this formula.

On the trip to collect sand for *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens*, Carl Andre, Virginia Dwan, Nancy Holt, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Mary Peacock accompanied Smithson. Sand was taken from the airfield making up the Site. (The airstrip was used for receiving fire-fighting equipment in an emergency and for routine government use.)

In light of Smithson's previous work with "aerial art" and on the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, the choice of a desolate, noncommercial airfield in the Pine Barrens appears deliberate. The Pine Barrens airfield could be considered antipodal to the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. Rarely used, composed of sand, the Pine Barrens strip is situated in a sparsely inhabited area that is partially protected by state and federal funds. In contrast, the Texas project represents one of the largest, most modern, and most frequented airports in the world. The desolate field in the Pine Barrens seems an antiquated modernism, signaling a period perhaps not too far in the future when air traffic might be a thing of the past.

The Pine Barrens is an apt choice for a Nonsite. The place befits Smithson's anti-idealist, but romantic aesthetic that concentrates on the forgotten and rarely mentioned outskirts of a thriving metropolitan world, areas that somehow never seem to be quite there, that always appear discarded and unimportant. If this artist chose a preserve as the location for a Nonsite, one could be certain it would not be the Grand Tetons or the Sequoia National Forest. The land he selected is composed of trees that are naturally dwarfed. Other forests can be compared with cities like Manhattan in terms of their height and grandeur; by contrast the Pine Barrens is more like the New Jersey suburbs. Unlike many forests, the Pine Barrens is a retired industrial site. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was distinguished as a site for the production of glass, charcoal, and bog iron. It was also probably important to Smithson that in the Miocene Age the Pine Barrens was a large body of land in the Atlantic Ocean, while the rest of the area, including large parts of New Jersey, was under water. In other words, the Pine Barrens was a "positive" land mass in the "negative" of the ocean. Now the prehistoric island is a "negative," a large, mostly uninhabited land area in populous New Jersey: it is both a Site and a Nonsite.

Although Smithson started creating Nonsites in 1968,

he did not elucidate their aesthetic until a year later when he published the following statement in Gerry Schum's *Land Art*:

Range of Convergence

The range of convergence between Site and Nonsite consists of a course of hazards, a double path made up of signs, photographs, and maps that belong to both sides of the dialectic at once. Both sides are present and absent at the same time. The land or ground from the Site is placed in the art (Nonsite) rather than the art placed on the ground. The Nonsite is a container within another container—the room. The plot or yard outside is yet another container. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional things trade places with each other in the range of convergence. Large scale becomes small. Small scale becomes large. A point on a map expands to the size of the land mass. A land mass contracts into a point. Is the Site a reflection of the Nonsite (mirror), or is it the other way around? The rules of this network of signs are discovered as you go along uncertain trails both mental and physical.³³

19. *A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey*, summer 1968; wood, limestone, aerial photographs; 16½ × 82 × 110"

Each of the trapezoidal wood bins making up this Nonsite correlates with an aerial photo-map of the Site from which the ore contained in the bins was taken. Smithson here, as in many Nonsites, punned the importance of vision to art, and also made reference to his negation of it, when he planned the cut-off apex of the cut-out map of Franklin to correspond to an actual dead-end street in the town. The five trapezoidal wood bins form a three-dimensional counterpart to one-point perspective. Seen from one vantage point, the bins actually appear to recede into space, but from the most commonly reproduced point of view—the one shown in the photograph here—the recession is reversed. In a sense the viewer forms the point of terminus, and the result is nonseeing—from the Renaissance point of view. The angle chosen for the photograph accords with Smithson's stated intention in *Enantiomorphic Chambers* to reverse one-point perspective. Ironically in *A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey*, as in other Nonsites, what occurs is that the viewer does not see the site (sight); vision is curtailed, made schematic and abstract. Clearly related to this Non-

³³ Statement incorporated as n. 1 to "The Spiral Jetty" (1972), in *Writings*, p. 115. For the bipolar part of the statement, see Alloway's essay, p. 43.

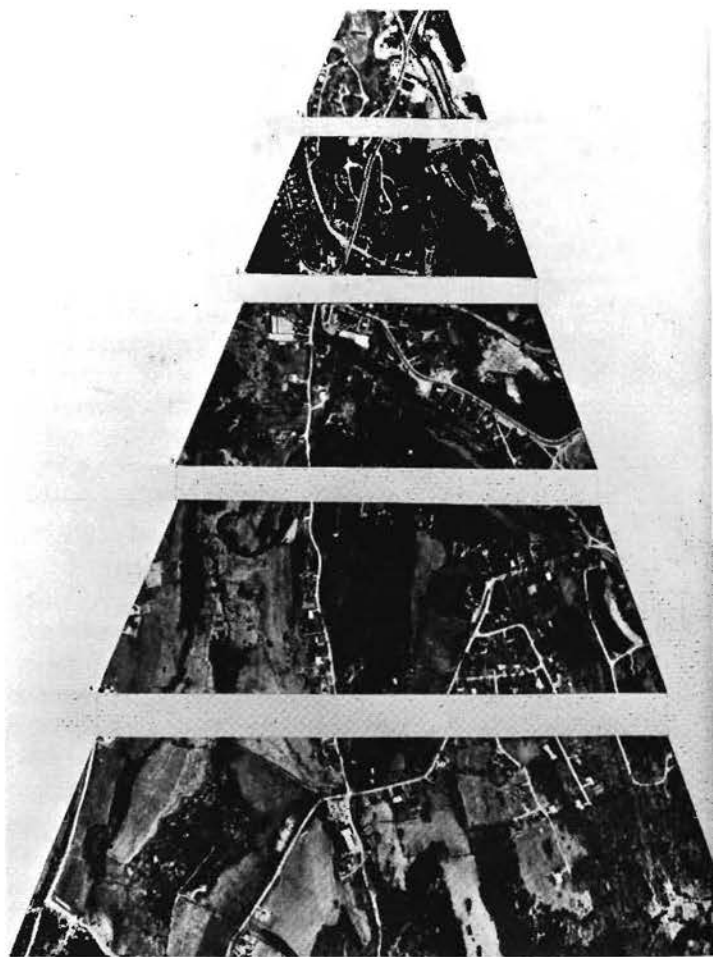


Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer at the Franklin Mineral Dump site, Franklin, New Jersey, June 1968. Photograph by Nancy Holt.

site is *Pointless Vanishing Point* of the same year: both ironically comment on perspective as the construct or schema that is seen (rather than seen through), but seen as a futile means of seeing, as an abortive convention.

In a diary of snapshots recording important trips, Nancy Holt has written the date June 14, 1968, when she and Michael Heizer accompanied Smithson to Franklin, New Jersey. In conversation with this author she has reflected that Franklin was important to Smithson for a number of reasons, an important one being that it is one of the few places in the world containing smithsonite, named for Charles Smithson, Robert's putative ancestor who discovered the mineral and who also was instrumental in founding the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Among areas of mineral deposits in the world, Franklin is famed for its number of unique ores. The only other place in the world comparable is Langban, Sweden. At Franklin there are over two hundred minerals, from albite to zoisite. Supposedly forty-two different minerals were discovered there, among them franklinite (named after Benjamin Franklin) and zincite.

Before the rock hunting trip with Holt and Heizer, Smithson visited the mineral deposits around Franklin. The favorite spot was the rock dump at the old Franklin zinc mine, abandoned since the end of World War II but reopened in the sixties for rock hounds who paid a dollar to hunt and chip away. Smithson actually collected other types of ore for the *Franklin Nonsite*, for which he had



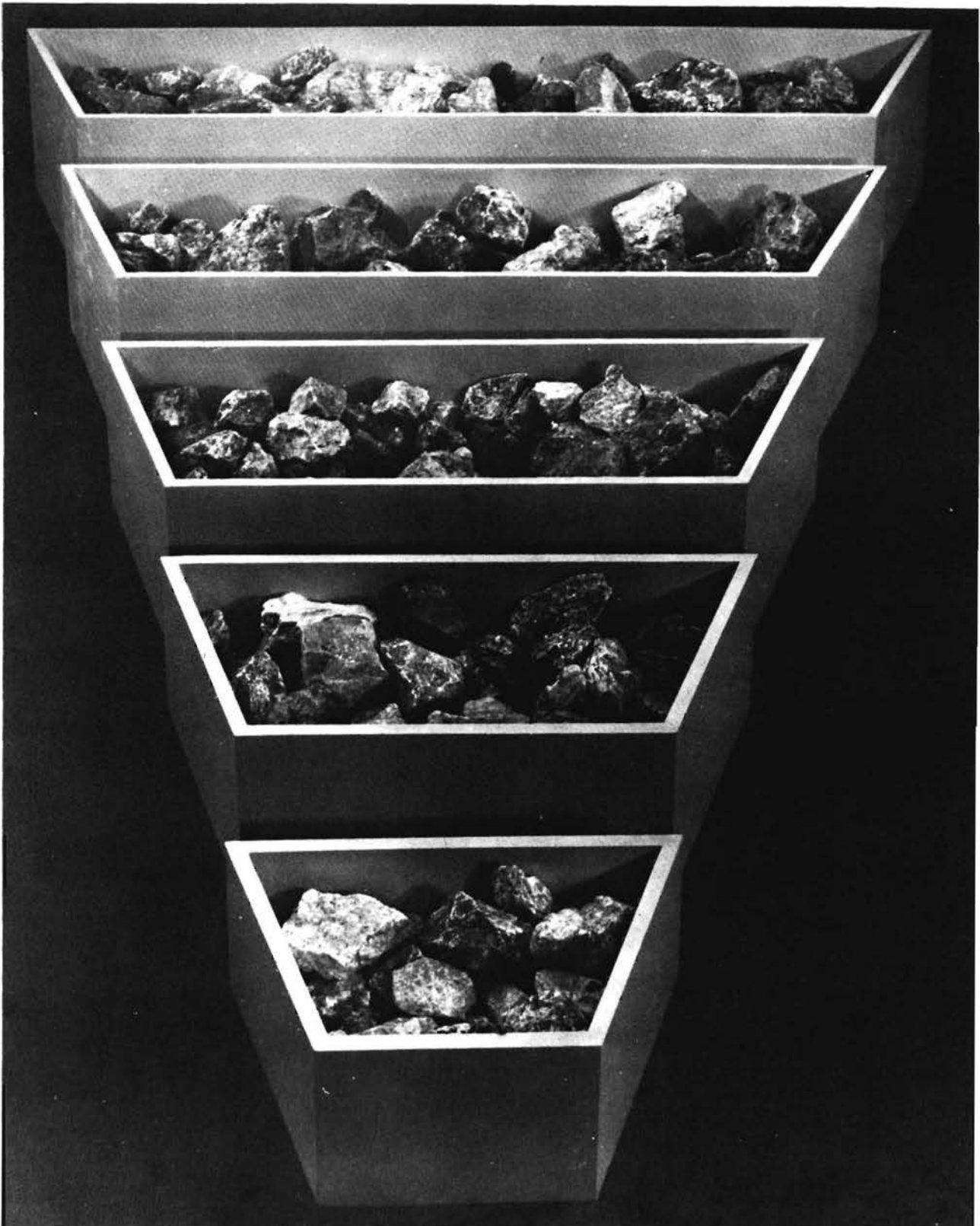
A *Nonsite*, Franklin, New Jersey, 1968; aerial map. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Partial gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Manilow, Chicago, Illinois. Photograph courtesy John Weber Gallery.

A NONSITE (FRANKLIN, N.J.)

5 sub-divisions based on the mineral ore deposits in the vicinity of Franklin Furnace Mines as shown on an aerial map (Robinson Aerial Surveys) at a scale of 1 inch = 200 ft. Of the more than 140 minerals found in this site, at least 120 are found in the zinc ore deposits, and nearly 100 are found only in those deposits. The 5 sub-divided parts of the *Nonsite* contains [sic] raw ore from sites 1.A, 2.B, 3.C, 4.D, 5.E—sites are shown on the map. Container sizes in inches are as follows: 1. 12 x (11½ x 20½) x 8, 2. 15 x (20½ x 32½) x 10, 3. 18 x (32½ x 46½) x 12, 4. 21 x (46½ x 63½) x 14, 5. 24 x (63½ x 82½) x 16. The map is three times smaller than the *Nonsite*. Tours to sites are possible. The 5 outdoor sites are not contained by any limiting parts—therefore they are chaotic sites, regions of dispersal, places without a Room—elusive order prevails, the substrata is disrupted (see snapshots of the five shots). The rocks from the 5 sites are homogenized into the *Nonsite*. The entire *Nonsite* and site map in the room are contained within two 70° perspective lines without center point (the center point is at the end of a deadend street some where [sic] in Franklin not shown on map). An unexhibited aerial photo of this point is deposited in a bank-vault. This photo can be seen—a key is available.

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originally intended six bins instead of five. In May 1968, he wrote a description of the work:



A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey, 1968. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Photograph courtesy Estate of Robert Smithson.

One site upon which the Nonsite is based is the Buckwheat Mineral Dump. It is a site used by rock collectors who hunt for fluorescent minerals. Near the dump is a wide dark room that allows collectors to admire the colors of the minerals under ultraviolet light. (A mercury vapor type lamp gives off energy capable of making minerals respond either by fluorescing or phosphorising.) The dump gets smaller each year as tons of rock are carried away. I chose this site because it has an abundance of broken rock. I needed fragments 2" to 15" thick for the six bins of *The Nonsite*. The most common minerals found on the dump are calcite (physical properties: crystal—hexagonal, cleavage—perfect rhombohedral, fracture—conchoidal, glows red) and willemite (physical properties: crystal—hexagonal, cleavage—basal, fracture—uneven to subconchoidal, glows green).³⁴

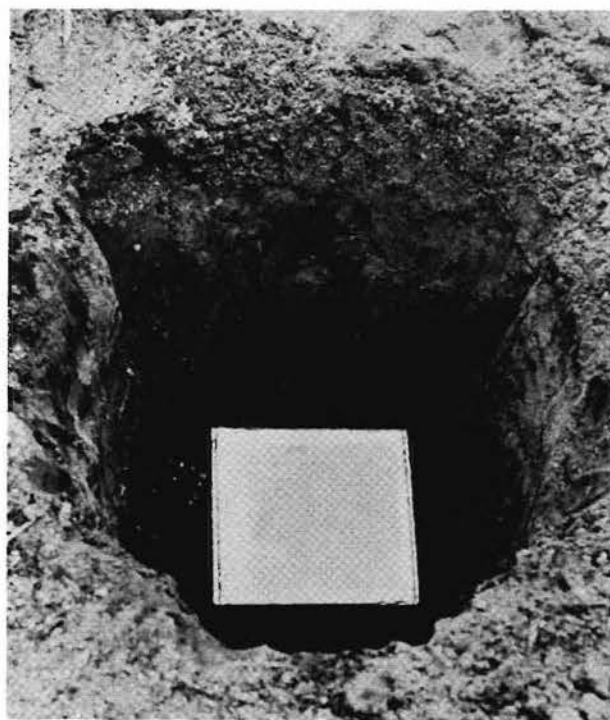
Evidently he originally intended a highly subtle structure. The fluorescent minerals, calcite and willemite, common finds at the Buckwheat Mineral Dump, together formed the potentiality of a complementary color scheme of red and green if viewed under ultraviolet light. They would, in their basic hexagonal structure, reiterate the six bins the artist had originally planned. That the inherent properties of the minerals were unable to be seen under ordinary circumstances echoed the notion of "Nonsite." Smithson's subtly reinforcing microscopic and fluorescent components on a larger scale through a hexagonal structure with six-part divisions reflects an important aspect of twentieth-century life in which the atomic and the subatomic have caused humankind to reevaluate basic assumptions about the world. The idea of a geocentric universe died centuries ago; the anthropocentric world has lasted longer. Only with Smithson's work does a truly nonanthropomorphic art appear—an art that refuses to make man's visual apparatus as well as his sense of time and space a *raison d'être*.

Structurally, Smithson's art is not always what it appears to be on the surface. While the six containers for the initial *Franklin Nonsite* reflect the hexagonal order of the crystals forming the two minerals, the random broken pieces of rock tend to refute any conception of order. Appearances often are deceiving: crystalline order can be found in rocks selected at random. Structure establishes its own criterion, while vision frequently is as accidental as the various views of one-point perspective the artist offers in his final solution. In these pieces he often plays on the dialectic between the visual and the not-so-clearly perceived, on the oscillation between Site and Nonsite.

³⁴ Unpublished notes, Smithson papers. Collection Estate of Robert Smithson.

The decision to reduce the Nonsite from six bins to five may have resulted from a reassessment of *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey* where the sixth bin is the hexagonal terminus at the center. When Smithson mentions in the description accompanying the *Franklin Nonsite* photo-documentation that "the center point is at the end of a deadend street some where in Franklin not shown on map," he may have wished to stress the idea that the vanishing point in perspective is just that—a vanishing point. And since it was not visible, he would make it invisible in his *Nonsite*.

There are precedents for Smithson's playing on the nonvisual, the not-able-to-be-seen. Sol LeWitt's *Box in the Hole* (1968) and Claes Oldenburg's grave dug in Central Park (1967) also comprise this significant area of artistic investigation. Smithson, however, gave the non-visual a new orientation when he grounded it in the dialectic between the individual piece and its referent. In his work the object is reworked until it constitutes in isolation a way of nonseeing. In Smithson's art, aesthetic apprehension takes precedence over mere looking at an object; it becomes a dialectical experience that takes into consideration thinking as well as looking, and context as well as the isolated object.



Sol LeWitt, *Box in the Hole*, executed at Visser House, Bergeyk, Holland, July 1, 1968; cube of unknown contents cast inside larger cube of concrete and buried in the earth. Photograph courtesy of John Weber Gallery.