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## The Sedimentation of the Social: Spiral Jetty and the Ruins of the Death Drive

Theories like things are also abandoned. That theories are eternal is doubtful. Vanished theories compose the strata of many forgotten books.

Robert Smithson

To describe *Spiral Jetty* (1970) as a well-trodden example of twentieth-century art is something of an ironic understatement. For postmodern writers and critics, as Caroline A. Jones has already argued, the significance of this canonical work stems from its much touted inaccessibility.<sup>1</sup> From the late 1970s until the late 1990s the dissemination of Smithson's submerged earthwork via its cinematic, photographic and textual versions posited it as the paradigm case for the Linguistic Turn's reduction of artistic production to forms of 'writing'.<sup>2</sup> The suggestion that there is still more to say about *Spiral Jetty* does not herald yet another chapter of dry discursivity in postmodernism's history of art. Over the past twenty years numerous scholars, most notably Jack Flam (1996), Jones (1995), Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (2005), and Ann Reynolds (2003, 2005), have sought to affirm the material nature of Smithson's dematerialised practice.<sup>3</sup> This essay takes up this affirmation by situating *Spiral Jetty*'s emergence on the Great Salt Lake, Utah as an unfolding of materially bound conceptual and historical forces. As anthropologist Tim Ingold has so consistently and eloquently argued, such modes of artistic inquiry do not proceed from predetermined ideas that impose logic on form. Rather, he explains 'thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work.'<sup>4</sup> To conceive of the material production of art as the outcome of ignorance, the unthought, and the not known is to open up a critical space from which to say something new with *Spiral Jetty*.

The primary aim of this essay is to think through the making of *Spiral Jetty* to interrogate its discursive operations. As Flam notes, Smithson took great delight in contradiction. It is my contention that attention to the differing material operations of *Spiral Jetty* destabilizes one of

the key concepts that underpinned the work's production and subsequent criticism. That concept is Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic thesis of the death drive (1920). Smithson drew on Freud's idea to foreground the 'time' of the artist in 'contact with matter' and so resist art criticism's preoccupation with finished artworks. Close attention to Smithson's works between 1966-1967 illuminate the confluence of psychoanalysis' critique of civilisation and twentieth century representations of pharonic Egypt precisely at the moment that he first conceived of a remote monument. In contrast to Smithson's interest in the ancient cultures of the Aztecs and the Mayan's, Egypt has been accorded little critical attention to date. What makes it worthy of further consideration is that the representation of Egypt as an exhausted civilisation, which framed Smithson's research resources, had been a construction of colonialism.

Recent excavations and postcolonial scholarship have revealed the profound misrepresentation of ancient and modern Egyptian culture by nineteenth and twentieth century Egyptology. An analysis of this ideological fallacy and the frame it constructed for Smithson's research materials offers an opportunity to pit *Spiral Jetty* against Freudian psychoanalysis' insistence that humans are inherently aggressive, asocial, discrete beings. The complex social relations necessary to the construction of Egypt's pharonic monuments and their subsequent value for that nation's indigenous population draw the cooperative production of *Spiral Jetty* into sharper relief. The writing of anthropologist Tim Ingold brings these social relations to the foreground of *Spiral Jetty's* operations to reveal the limits of the thesis of the death drive's which cannot be borne out either by the making or experience of Smithson's artwork.

## I The time of the artist and the social

For too long the artist has been estranged from his own "time." Critics, by focussing on the "art object," deprive the artist of any existence in the world of both mind and matter.<sup>5</sup>

This essay begins with two photographs taken by Gianfranco Gorgoni at the time of *Spiral Jetty*'s making in 1970. The first shows Smithson and Richard Serra on site, considering a sketch for the proposed earthwork (fig.1). The second shows Smithson smiling up at Grant (Boozie) Busenbark, the Caterpillar driver responsible for much of *Spiral Jetty*'s construction (Fig.2). Both photographs accompany the essay 'Building the Jetty' written in 2005 by Bob Phillips, the foreman of Parson Construction Company who oversaw the making of *Spiral Jetty*.<sup>6</sup> These photographs are extraordinary because of the nature of the project, but they are also quite ordinary: Serra eats a sandwich and Boozie grins at the camera. Unlike other photographs that Gorgoni took in Utah (fig.3) they do not embody the entropic vision of art, life, the universe, and everything that has driven the histories written for this artwork. Instead they belong to the category of events recounted by Smithson in his text of 1972, which Margaret Iversen dismissed in 2007 as the 'pedestrian details' of *Spiral Jetty*'s beginnings.<sup>7</sup> Within Smithson's economy of matter, process, and time, however, I would argue that all of the details of *Spiral Jetty*'s making are worthy of critical attention. The social relationships necessary to the work's construction make these photographs ordinary, but they also make them remarkable.

As early as 1995, writing prior to the re-emergence of the *Jetty* from the Great Salt Lake, Caroline A. Jones reminded audiences that even dematerialised works of art are indebted to material decision making processes. Her significant corrective countered arguments based on the intangibility of the earthwork with the fact of its 'madness', a position which necessarily recognised the collaborative, social foundations of *Spiral Jetty*'s construction:

'What exhilarates us [about *Spiral Jetty*] is not just the "breathless experience of horizontality," but the dramatic expenditure of capital, labor, and low-level technology marshalled for the purposes of art, the supposed frippery of aesthetics being accorded the serious resources of the civil engineer.'<sup>8</sup>

Her argument reasserted the physical experience of the work as recounted by British critic and curator Lawrence Alloway, which revelled in the monumental physicality of *Spiral Jetty*'s making:

'It is 1,500 feet from the top of the ridge out to the tip of the coil which measures about 15 feet across, just enough to support the trucks. The fill is made up of 3,500 cubic yards of boulders and earth; each cubic yard weighs 3,800 pounds, which means that a total of 6,650 tons was moved to constitute the embankment. These statistics, which should be read as the equivalent of a technical description, such as oil on canvas or watercolor on paper, indicate scale.'<sup>9</sup>

Alloway had visited the site of *Spiral Jetty* no less than eleven times between June 1970 and April 1973. It is this experience of the work's emergence from the ground up that revealed the extent to which Smithson *needed* the skills and co-operation of others to overcome the project's 'considerable technical difficulties'.<sup>10</sup> Twenty years later Jones had been cautious, and rightly so, about the hierarchy of so-called collaboration in an inherently capitalist economy. Nevertheless, she posits the emergence of Smithson's practice within the 'expanded studio' that is 'shadowed' by the presence of other authors.<sup>11</sup> I want to supplement Jones' argument, however, by looking beyond the economic value that capitalism places on labour.

This line of enquiry has been enabled by the Royal Anthropological Institute's Huxley Memorial Lecture, *On Human Correspondence*, given by Tim Ingold in 2014.<sup>12</sup> In the early phases of that presentation Ingold outlines Herbert Spencer's vision of social life. For Spencer the social world had been comprised of discrete individuals, or 'blobs' as Ingold terms them, whose relationships were governed by self-interest and modelled on the operations of the market. 'In the market', Ingold tells the audience 'it is what changes hands that matters not the hands themselves. The handshake seals the contract but is the contract not a binding of lives in itself?' As he points out the etymological root of the term 'contract' unites 'con' meaning together and 'trahere' meaning 'to draw or pull.' For Ingold life is lived not as a self-contained 'blob', whose being is comprised of an isolate interiority bound by an

exterior impermeable membrane.<sup>13</sup> Rather life is lived as multitude of lines, which unfurl and knot, braiding our becoming and potentialities with the lives of others. ‘Social life’ he insists ‘lies not in the solitary accretion of blobs but in the fluent correspondence of lines’ and without it there can be ‘no life’.<sup>14</sup>

In Ingold’s intertwined paradigms of social life and making, others may be instrumental to our being but not its instrument. The artist is not master of their materials or ideas but negotiates the emergence of the not yet known in response to the physical demands of the work’s production. As Ingold succinctly expresses it: ‘concrete form does not issue from the idea.’<sup>15</sup> It is the question of cooperation and material handling which brings me, somewhat obliquely, to James Elkins’ wonderful book *What Painting Is* (1999).<sup>16</sup> What calls Elkins to mind is his reference to the Latin definition of the word *Labor*. Elkins notes that the industrial revolution’s reduction of the proletariat to a mass of exploitable energy has obscured a concept of labour ‘used to describe procedures, methods, and techniques—the daily struggle with materials.’<sup>17</sup> For Elkins, painting is a matter of pushing stones around a surface in a liquid suspension. Unlike the painters cited by Elkins, however, Smithson could not push his stones around alone. What is needed, therefore, is a model that rejects the oversimplified divorce of industry and craft, which views Parson’s employees not as unthinking tools engaged in manual and mechanical labour in a preordained project, but as an instrumental workforce equipped with material intelligence.

For that readers need look no further than Bob Phillips’ account of the artist’s first visits to Parson’s Construction Company:

‘He showed me the maps he had. And on those maps was a little *J* drawn, or little circles drawn on the bottom of it, very tiny. And, I said, “No, that’s not going to be good enough; we’ve got to have some better drawings than that.” So he showed me some of the sketches that he’d done. I was trying to convince him that he needed an engineer to do this, to prepare a design. “Then I can give you a bid on constructing the *Jetty* and how it must be built.” I’m not an engineer, but I tried very hard to make him think I was. I was trying to impress him with my knowledge of construction and that he was now in my domain—so he’d better pay attention. (...) “You’ve got to have soil reports. The ground pressure out there is only two hundred PSI (pounds per square inch), and it won’t support the construction equipment,

and you've got to have design calculations in order to get it up to fifteen hundred PSI as required. It takes up one foot of fill to raise the ground pressure five hundred PSI. We may have to use track machines with cleats and widen the tracks in order to work on the soft surface [...]' <sup>18</sup>

What Phillips made clear is that Smithson did not fully grasp the monumental nature of the forthcoming Salt Lake project. Indeed in early 1970 he described the construction of the earthwork as that which would be 'built on a salt reef'. <sup>19</sup> The 'risks involved' in the project were revealed on the first day on site which 'was almost the last [...] the loader broke through the area where the solid salt bottom meets the sand of the beach. The creamy grey mud oozed and trapped the loader.'<sup>20</sup> The equipment was rescued due to the skills of Boozie and Roger the other loader driver. 'Boozie', Phillips remembers, was a 'marvel with that machine.'<sup>21</sup> So much so that he 'wondered if the *Jetty* could have been built with anyone else but [Boozie] working on that dike and placing those rocks.'<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Phillips steadfastly maintains that Smithson made the *Jetty*. There were times when the artist's intuitive grasp of the site and ability to 'conduct' the workers baffled Phillips; he seemed to have 'all the answers'. The radical change in the earthwork's form from its first incarnation, with a semi-spiral arc and a 'bulb' at the end as seen in the photograph with Serra, to the costly remaking of *Spiral Jetty* as it exists today again underscores the emergence of art as the not yet known in the transformation of sketch on paper to rock, water, salt, and mud.

What emerges from Phillips' fascinating account of the making of *Spiral Jetty* is a tangled knot of tacit knowledges, problems, solutions, agreements, conflicts and resolutions. This was not some sentimental, utopian vision of collaboration particularly because, at one point, Smithson wanted Boozie fired. But in handling the challenges that building the *Jetty* presented, Smithson and the workforce came to a mutual understanding via an intertwining of materials and movement. It is in the sensuous unfolding of that work's material processes, in the collective push and pull of matter, which *Spiral Jetty* and the social relationships necessary to its construction cohered.

In Smithson's economy of matter and time it is of crucial significance that, writing in 1972, he chose to document the people who had contributed to the direction and resolution of *Spiral Jetty*.<sup>23</sup> His account does not just present a list of collaborators comprised of established artists like Nancy Holt or Richard Serra who already belonged to the 'system' of the art world as Alloway described it.<sup>24</sup> Rather it had been a meticulous naming of all the people who, in one way or another, contributed to the formation and construction of the earthwork and film.<sup>25</sup> Smithson carefully recounts the ups and downs of his encounters that led him, eventually, to establish the site at Rozel Point. He names Ted Tuttle at Utah Park Development; Bill Holt, who had been 'instrumental in building causeway' from Syracuse to Antelope Island; John Silver and his sons, who showed Smithson the only boat that would sail the Great Salt Lake; and Charles Stoddard, who had a barge on the north side of the cut off which Smithson had hoped to take before he found out that it had sunk.<sup>26</sup> This catalogue of beginnings, comic errors, false starts, and 'dead ends' underscores Smithson's commitment to art as the outcome of 'a total engagement with the building process from the ground up and the sky down.'<sup>27</sup> Smithson's decision to embed the impact of these human relationships, these 'tender' tendencies as he called them, in *Spiral Jetty*'s film and text are testimony to the debt he felt to others.<sup>28</sup> As such it marks the beginnings of what Timothy Martin called 'Smithson's political turn', through which the artist repositioned his engagement with the social via the thinking of Martin Heidegger.<sup>29</sup> By 1973, as Martin astutely points out, Smithson had mobilised his practice to critique capitalism's transformation of land and man into what Heidegger called 'standing reserve' and instead creatively reveal the being of 'being-in-the-world' and 'being-with-others'.



The *Spiral Jetty* text, it can be argued, performs Ingold's thesis of lives lived as lines, which is also indebted to Heidegger's thought. The essay's attention to the unfolding of practice reveals the temporary intertwining of beings, a bond which is sustained and extended it by the sharing of this disclosure with the reader. In acknowledging this debt Smithson ensures the impact of *Spiral Jetty* on all of those involved in its emergence and in return the testimonies and sadly, the obituaries of Busenbark and Phillips are marked by the pride they felt in that involvement, their fondness for Smithson, and profound sense of loss at his passing.<sup>30</sup>

What interests me is that this awareness of the dialectical relationship between beings and world emerged through the physical handling of matter. In other words, it is not something of which Smithson had always been aware. The pages that follow consider the way in which the historical and conceptual resources employed in Smithson's practice were diametrically opposed to the social dimension of his work. To reassert the impact of these pedestrian details, I argue, is to question the flow of discourse that has ensued from them and unseat the paradigm case of art's sublimation of the death drive.

## II Entropy and the Old Monuments

Smithson began to think about the possibilities of earthworks in 1966. His published and unpublished writings from 1966–67 clearly identify his 'urge towards civilised refuse', as he described it to Cummings in 1972, and pharonic ruins remained a lynch-pin in his practice at the time of *Spiral Jetty*'s construction.<sup>31</sup> As a prophecy of the fall of modern civilisation, the value of ancient Egypt's ruins appears to be self-evident for this artist's practice and a waste of 'printed matter'.<sup>32</sup> To consider which pharonic monuments Smithson referred to, to what end, and how they were framed by the Egyptological scholarship of the time poses new questions for the direction and tenor of this artist's research.

Smithson's famous essay 'Entropy and the New Monuments' had been published in *Artforum* June 1966. That text situated the aesthetic concerns of Smithson's contemporaries within a wider 'architecture of entropy' made manifest in 'the slurbs, urban sprawl, and the infinite number of housing developments of the postwar boom'.<sup>33</sup> He argued that the homogenisation of the life and landscape of America under the mantle of consumer capitalism had brought 'art to a new consciousness of the vapid and the dull'.<sup>34</sup> Artists responded in kind, providing 'a visible analog for the Second Law of Thermodynamics,' which as Smithson explained 'extrapolates the range of entropy by telling us energy is more easily lost [sic] than obtained, that in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness'.<sup>35</sup> This text, together with *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, once again published in *Artforum* December 1967, locates Smithson's interest in entropy on home ground. Those sites contained what Smithson called 'ruins in reverse, that is – all the new construction that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the "romantic ruin"', he continued:

'because the buildings don't *fall* into ruin *after* they are built but they rather *rise* into ruin before they are built. The anti-romantic *mise-en-scene* suggests the discredited idea of *time* and many other 'out of date' things. But the suburbs exist without a rational past and without the 'big events' of history.'<sup>36</sup>

I believe that two ancient Egyptian monuments had been instrumental to Smithson's theorisation of the ruin in reverse. The first, The Pyramid of Meidum, is represented in a small west section diagram, which features in the margins of 'Quasi-infinities and the waning of space' published in *Artnews* in November 1966 (fig.4). The artist reproduced this image from I. E. S. Edwards' *The Pyramids of Ancient Egypt* (1947) and this diagram should, therefore, be supplemented by the black and white photograph of the same monument, *The Pyramid of Meidum, View from the East* (c.2600 BCE, fig.5), which also appears in the same book. The second monument is the Great Pyramid at Giza (c.2560BCE), which features prominently in Smithson's unpublished essay 'The Artist as Site-Seer or, A Dintorphic Essay' (1966–67), and is also described and pictured in Edwards' text (fig.6).<sup>37</sup>

The opening passages of ‘Quasi-infinities’ describe it as ‘four blocks of print’ supplemented ‘ultramundane margins’ that contain footnotes and images.<sup>38</sup> The body text may be linear but the reader’s focus is persistently unsettled as it moves back and forth between the different modes of printed matter. It is within this hurly-burly of art criticism, history, physics, and contemporary art that Smithson makes a connection between entropy and the aesthetic vocabulary of ancient Egypt. The artist mobilises the ‘static’ nature of Egyptian artefacts which, unlike the ‘dynamism’ of Greek sculpture, failed to act as precedents to the protocols of realism that governed the development of the Western canon.<sup>39</sup> Instead, the stasis of Egyptian art confined it to the ruins of that ancient culture, rendering it a problematic entropic presence within the developmental chronologies forged by the museum. And for Smithson the discrete death of Pharonic culture runs parallel to the second law of thermodynamics: ‘what William S Burroughs calls “The Thermo–dynamic Pain and Energy Bank” – a condition of time that originates inside isolated objects rather than outside’.<sup>40</sup>

Viewed through this prism, Ancient Egypt presents a paradigm case for null civilisation. Smithson mobilised ancient Egypt’s capacity to turn in on itself to discuss the work of his contemporaries. We are told that Eva Hesse, Ruth Vollmer, and Lucas Samaras are making ‘solid objects that contain “ideas of time.”’<sup>41</sup> Rather than a collection of finished objects destined for the deathly preservation of the museum, their work had been indebted to processes without a future. As he notes in ‘Quasi-infinities,’ in reference to *Obelisk*, made by Ruth Volmer (1962), ‘matter’ in this work ‘opposes all activity—its future is missing.’<sup>42</sup> Hesse’s work, according to the same essay, had been ‘vertiginous and wonderfully dismal’:

‘Trellises are mummified, nets contain desiccated lumps, wires extend from tightly wrapped frameworks, a cosmic dereliction is the general effect. Coils go on and on; some are cracked open, only to reveal an empty centre. Such “things” seem destined for a funerary chamber that excludes all mention of the living and the dead. Her art brings to mind the obsession of the pharaohs, but in this case the anthropomorphic measure is absent. Nothing is incarnated into nothing. Human decay is nowhere in evidence.’<sup>43</sup>

Edwards' cross-section of the Meidum pyramid appears on the first page of 'Quasi-infinities.' It provides a compelling supplement to Smithson's text because this 'reproduced reproduction' indexes the monumental failure of a monument.<sup>44</sup> As the photograph and description of the Meidum pyramid in Edwards' text reveals, this twentieth-century diagram is the only completed form in which the pyramid appears.<sup>45</sup> The temple's construction is believed to have begun during the reign of Huni (c.2637–2613 BCE), last king of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty, and continued into the reign of his son, Sneferu (2613–2589 BCE), first king of the 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Although this step pyramid is credited to a successor of the pioneering architect and polymath Imhotep (2650–2600 BCE), the numerous changes to the design made by Sneferu's architects led Meidum's structure to become unstable and it collapsed during construction.<sup>46</sup> Edwards' diagram shows the remaining superstructure and the outlines of the three different pyramids that the workforce attempted to erect on this site.

At the time of its publication *The Pyramids of Egypt* was part of a historical project dedicated to unearthing the great deeds of kings rather than those of the pyramid makers.<sup>47</sup> Meidum never fulfilled its function for the pharaoh. Through Smithson's entropic lens, Meidum offers an archetypal example of the ultimate impotence of the power of civilisation, of inbuilt, if unwitting, obsolescence: an apotheosis of the collapse of matter and meaning. As Smithson notes his *Scrapbook* in November 1972, 'buildings [are] visualisations of power, people visit obsolete civilisations to get *gratification* from the collapse of architecture'.<sup>48</sup> The conceptual value of the Meidum pyramid draws into view a formal affinity between it and Smithson's 1967 drawing *The Museum of the Void* (fig8). The drawing echoes the perspective and superstructural outline of the photograph of Meidum in Edwards' text, and combines it with the stepped form of the pyramid's first and second failed versions. It is the physical and symbolic collapse of the Meidum pyramid, its inability to embody the 'big events of history'

in ‘Quasi-Infinities’ and *The Museum of the Void* that leads me to posit it in many, but not all, respects as a precedent for the ‘monuments’ described in Smithson’s 1967 tour of his birth place, Passaic, New Jersey.

True to the contradictory tenor of Smithson’s practice, however, the model of monumental failure afforded by the pyramid at Meidum is curiously concomitant with Smithson’s interest in the ‘immobile’ and ‘indestructible’ Great Pyramid at Giza, which is key to ‘The Artist as Site-Seer’.<sup>49</sup> Again Smithson’s thesis is indebted to thermodynamics and the thinking of George Kubler:

‘The Great Pyramid would qualify as a prime object [...] it is an agglomeration of codes and puzzles, clocks, tombic theories, secret passages, and lacunary mathematics. The Great Pyramid does not exist in terms of character or individual, but as a “semblance.” Like Stonehenge, it is an awesome computer, based on orbital chronologies and shifting calendars. The purpose of the Great Pyramid was defined by the Hebrews centuries ago—the name they gave it “Urim–middin”=“Light–Measures,” and the Phoenicians called it “Baal–Middon”=“The Lord of the Measures.” Greek “Pyra–midos,” “Pyra–mid.” A “beacon of reflexions,” and a “monument of measures.”’<sup>50</sup>

The prime object, Smithson explains in a particularly dense passage, ‘becomes the prime number if seen as “monument of measures.” The prime number only refers to itself or 1 and is in a way like the Kantian “thing in itself”’.<sup>51</sup> The ‘monument of measures’, which Smithson amalgamates from Hebrew and Greek via what he terms ‘linguistic drift’, thus directly invokes the collapse of meaning inherent within the self-referential potential of *Spiral Jetty* and his Non-Sites.<sup>52</sup>

It is in this context that Edwards’ description of the Great Pyramid in the *Pyramids of Egypt* demands closer inspection, even more so if the ‘monument of measures’ is viewed in tandem with Smithson’s fascination with the physicality of printed matter. Edwards tells the reader that Khufu’s temple had been the ‘apogee of Pyramid-building in respect of both size and quality’.<sup>53</sup> No ‘exact computation’ of its mass had been possible to date but it had been estimated that 2,300,000 separate blocks of hewn stone form the Great Pyramid at Giza.<sup>54</sup>

‘No monument in Egypt has been surveyed and measured so often and with so much care as the Great Pyramid [...] From this survey [of 1925] it was ascertained that the following were the original

measurements of the four sides of the base: north, 755.43 feet; South, 756.08 feet; east, 755.88 feet; west, 755.77 feet. While, therefore no two sides were absolutely identical in length, the difference between the longest and the shortest was only 7.9 inches. Each side was orientated exactly with true north and south or east and west, the following being the estimated errors; north side, 2' 28" south of west; south side, 1' 57" south of west; east side, 5' 30" west of north; west side, 2' 30" west of north. As the accuracy of this orientation implies, the four corners were almost perfect right angles, their exact measurements being: north-east 90° 3' 2"; north-west, 89° 59' 58"; south-east, 89° 56' 27"; south-west 90° 0' 33". When complete, it rose to a height of 481.4 feet, the top 31 feet of which are now missing. Its four sides incline at an angle of about 51° 52' to the ground. The area covered by its base is 13.1 acres.<sup>55</sup>

Edwards' inscription of carved matter unravels in print, becomes vertiginous, homogenous, unfathomable. When spoken, the performative rhythm of the text implicates this 'monument of measures' within the mapping and construction of *The Spiral Jetty*. As Smithson says in the film's 1972 monologue:

'TOWNSHIP 8 NORTH OF RANGE 7 WEST OF THE SALT LAKE BASE AND MERIDIAN:

Unsurveyed land on the bed of the Great Salt Lake, if surveyed would be described as follows. Beginning at a point South 3000 feet and West 800 feet from the Northeast Corner of Section 8, Township 8 North, Range 7 West; thence South 45 degrees West 651 feet; thence North 60 degrees West 651 feet; thence North 45 degrees East 651 feet; thence Southeasterly along the meander line 675 feet to the point of beginning. Containing 10 acres, more or less.'

For Smithson, the monuments of ancient Egypt, to recall 'Quasi-Infinities', presented sites in which 'human decay' had been 'nowhere in evidence. Nothing is incarnated into nothing'.<sup>56</sup> Devoid of human and animal life they turned in on themselves, had no other referents than stone and time: an exhausted civilisation par excellence.

Robert Smithson had visited the pyramids outside New Mexico in 1957 and journeyed to Rome in 1961 but he never travelled to Egypt. His engagement with pharonic culture had been conducted through the twin media of reproduction and discourse. It is at this point that my critique of his treatment of these monuments begins to take shape. What seals ancient Egypt's fitness for the allegory of entropy is the emptiness that marks the black and white photographs of its ruins which had been at Smithson's disposal. That deserted state is an index of the West's controlling interest in Egyptian antiquity.

Recent scholarship in Egyptology, in particular the writing of Eliot Colla in his *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania and Egyptian Modernity* (2007), and Peter Champion and T. C. Ucko's *The Wisdom of Egypt: Changing Visions through the Ages* (2003), have carefully plotted the impact of colonialism on the representation of Egypt during the early phases of Modernity. Ucko and Champion carefully argue the figure of Egyptian ruins became increasingly popular after the French Revolution, as Europeans imagined a series of 'apocalyptic visions' of the future.<sup>57</sup> When Jean-François Champollion deciphered the hieroglyphs on the *Rossetta Stone* in 1822 this new knowledge about Egypt's ruined past bolstered European claims to govern modern Egypt and preserve its antiquities.<sup>58</sup> As Edward Said argued in his classic text *Orientalism*, the British Mandate over Egypt (1882–1954) had been legitimated by 'knowledge from above'.<sup>59</sup> Not only were the present, indigenous inhabitants of Egypt deemed unfit to govern themselves, but they were also seen to have neither the technical facility nor the interest, beyond plunder, to look after the nation's antiquities. In a letter to Champollion dated January 1829 Étienne Pariset wrote:

'You are admiring the miracles of ancient Egypt, we scrutinise the infinite abominations of modern Egypt! How far one is removed from the other! The more I think about it the more I am astonished by the antiquity of Egypt, its wisdom, genius, knowledge and power. And the more I see, the more I am convinced that modern-day Egypt should be placed at the centre of the type of nations that one should mistrust and flee from.'<sup>60</sup>

Modern American and European travellers likened Egypt's modern population to 'animals' and could see little relation 'between the present-day Egyptians and the people responsible for the construction of the monuments they came to see'.<sup>61</sup>

Eliot Colla underscores this crucial point by drawing particular attention to the popular lithographs of Royal Academician David Roberts (1796–1864), which had consistently pictured Egypt's modern inhabitants as peasants, draped around ancient monuments in such a way as to 'communicate indifference and neglect'.<sup>62</sup> The 'degradation' of the ruins in the 'present' was believed to 'shame [the] glories of the past'.<sup>63</sup> Thus colonial rule constructed a

vision of a glorious but deserted and, consequently, utterly failed civilisation; ‘an empty place, lost in time’<sup>64</sup> that had succumbed to the ‘inevitable process of entropy.’<sup>65</sup>

While for Smithson ancient Egypt prophesied the futility of all action, the ‘philosophical imperative’ of the Islamic poetic tradition marks its mediations on loss as a loss in and of the social.<sup>66</sup> As the thirteenth-century poet Jamal al-Dinal-Idrisi makes clear, what shaped encounters with pharaonic ruins was their capacity to act as a trace of the lives and communities that made, grew, and lived with the monuments: ‘Where is he among whose structures the pyramids belong? Who were his folk? When did he live? And what brought him down?’<sup>67</sup>

Joann Fletcher draws on recent archaeological findings to answer some of these questions in her new book *The Story of Egypt* (2015). In that text she discusses an excavation in 1988 that uncovered ‘600 small tombs of the Giza workers’ known as the ‘Gerget Khufu’ or ‘settlement of Khufu’. Amongst the finds were the names and artefacts belonging to the ‘overseer Ptahshepsu’ and ‘the weaver Neferhetpes’. She continues:

‘Other such texts give official titles from the ‘Overseer of Masonry’ and ‘Director of Draughtsmen’ to the ‘Priestess of Hathor’, the ‘weaver’, ‘baker’, ‘potter’ and ‘carpenter’, the artist Peteti protecting his modest tomb with the imaginative curse “Listen all of you! The priest of Hathor will beat twice any of you who enters this tomb or does harm to it...”’<sup>68</sup>

It is estimated that it took ten years to build Khufu’s temple at Giza. During that time Giza had been populated by four thousand skilled paid worker gangs, such as the ‘Friends of Khufu,’ some of whom ‘added their names in red graffiti within the pyramid as they were building, albeit discreetly hidden from view’.<sup>69</sup> In *The Great Pyramid: Ancient Egypt Revisited*, (2007) John Romer agrees that far more is known about the pyramid-makers than the age of Khufu and his court:<sup>70</sup>

‘Millions of their careful chisel-marks still flicker over the great stones they cut and shaped – the marks of living hands at work – and there are many further traces too of the connected labours of surveying and design. And in the stone quarry to the south of the Great Pyramid the ancient chisel-cuts that stripe the cliffs still measure out in the line of their arc the spans of individual arms and shoulders and, in the disjunction of these patterns, their hourly progress at the rock face. Deep trenches in this quarry held the very shadows of the quarrymen who cut them.’<sup>71</sup>



Colla argues that after their production, the pharonic ‘ruins served as figures of memory, writing and the *possibility* of culture’ for Egypt’s indigenous peoples.<sup>72</sup> In direct contrast to Smithson’s position, contemporary Egyptology emphasises the way in which the pyramids entreat onlookers to muse on the greatness of human endeavour in the fields of science and engineering rather than focus wholly on the passing of time. Colla carefully unpacks Idrisi’s use of the term ‘wonder (*al-‘ajiba*)’ which combines the verb ‘to consider’ and the object of consideration to underline the significance of the pyramids for the faith and future of Egypt’s inhabitants.<sup>73</sup> He writes: ‘insofar as wondrous monuments, such as the pyramids, trigger the sensual experience of wonder and the cultivation of a sense of wonder (*ta’ajjub*), they provoke meditation, on both the objects of the created world and the intellect which contemplates the world’.<sup>74</sup>

To reappraise Smithson’s vision of Egypt through the postcolonial lens afforded by Colla, Romer et al is to reveal the circumscription of its monuments by the medium of reproduction and the discourses that shaped that nation’s history. The significance pyramid’s production in Idrisi’s text reminds the viewer that to seek gratification from fallen civilisations is to fix them at a specific distance and absent the time of its previous and present cohabitants and, with them, the time of its makers. In other words, Smithson’s analysis of the Great Pyramid as a prime object in 1966-67 goes against the grain of the philosophy of making that spans his practice.

### III *Spiral Jetty* and the Death Drive

The third and final section of this essay builds on Smithson’s remote engagement with the monuments of ancient Egypt to illuminate the framework that the death drive constructs for *Spiral Jetty*. Smithson remained steadfast in his commitment to psychoanalysis right up until his death, as he said in 1973 ‘I’ve always been kind of a psychoanalytic type’.<sup>75</sup> What

interests me, however, is the point at which Freud's thinking, Smithson's thinking, and the artist's practice part company. The social relations embedded in *Spiral Jetty*'s construction and reception, I want to argue, offer the means with which to critique the death drive's ability to articulate the complexity of artistic production and reception. The first step in this process is to map Smithson's engagement with Freud's thesis and the way in which it frames understandings of this artwork. The second step is to then ask, what does the death drive *do* to *Spiral Jetty*?

Throughout his career Smithson deplored art criticism's indifference to artistic process. In 'The Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects' (1968) he mobilises psychoanalysis as a critical tool to resist that bias. He reclaims the 'time of the artist' via a combination of two important resources: Tony Smith's experience on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike that had featured in *Artforum* in 1966 and Anton Ehrenzweig's *Hidden Order of Art* (1967). Smith had taken a ride on a dark night with three of his Cooper Union students along the unfinished road in 1951. The absence of street lighting and road markers took Smith into the endless realm of the Kantian Sublime, questioning the conventional limits of art. Smithson read this experience through the prism of psychoanalysis as a means to circumvent the preoccupation with the end game of art and instead foreground 'the state of mind in the "primary process" of making contact with matter'<sup>76</sup>:

'This process is called by Anton Ehrenzweig "dedifferentiation," and it involves a suspended question regarding "limitlessness" (Freud's notion of the "oceanic") that goes back to *Civilisation and Its Discontents*.'<sup>77</sup>

Smithson's familiarity with the ideas expressed in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* is evident in the annotations in the artist's *Scrapbook* (1966–1972) that critique the operations of the museum.<sup>78</sup> For the majority of artists and thinkers interested in the death drive the primary text is Freud's speculative essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', written in 1920. Smithson's focus on Freud's more strident essay of 1930 is interesting, however, because it leaves the

reader in no doubt of the death drive's most radical proposition. As Laplanche and Pontalis note, it transforms self-aggression into the 'very essence of all aggressiveness'.<sup>79</sup> Freud says:

'The views that I have developed [in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*] were first put forward only tentatively, but in the course of time they have taken such a hold on me that *I can no longer think in any other way*. In my view they are theoretically far more serviceable than any others one might entertain; they produce what we strive for in scientific work – a simple answer that neither neglects nor does violence to the facts. I recognise that we have always seen sadism and masochism as manifestations of the destructive drive, directed outwards or inwards and strongly alloyed with eroticism, but I can no longer understand how we could have ignored the ubiquity of non-erotic aggression and destruction and failed to accord it its due place in the interpretation of life.'<sup>80</sup>

With great acuity, Smithson's sketchbook situated the genesis of psychoanalysis as an index of 'modern man's' turning away from twentieth-century life: 'confronted by the new realities of industrialisation, he preoccupied himself with primitivity and [the] unconscious'.<sup>81</sup> The opening passages of *Civilisation and Its Discontents* rail against modernity and set up an antagonistic binary between the will of civilisation and the archaic, destructive desires of the individual. As he stated in 'The Future of an Illusion' (1927) Freud believes that civilisation maintains power by curbing the 'liberty' of individuals, 'coercing' them into unnatural social relationships outside their kinship groups.<sup>82</sup> In one of the most brutal passages of *Civilisation and Its Discontents* Freud insists:

'Human beings are not gentle creatures in need of love, at most able to defend themselves if attacked; on the contrary, they can count a powerful share of aggression among their instinctual endowments. Hence, their neighbour is not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to take out their aggression on him, to exploit his labour without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, take possession of his goods, to humiliate him and cause him pain, to torture and kill him.'<sup>83</sup>

Made bold by Thomas Hobbes famous dictum '*Homo homini lupus* [man is a wolf to man]',<sup>84</sup>

Freud reasoned that people would be far happier if they rejected religion's call to love thy neighbour and instead embraced the 'primitive conditions' which give free reign to the 'brute force' of their inherent animal aggressivity.<sup>85</sup> At the level of the individual the death drive's formulation depends upon the psychic apparatus outlined in Freud's Second Topography of the Ego, Super-ego, and the Id. The death drive inhabits the Id: the most archaic unconscious part of the psyche whose motives and effects evade the detection of the subject. As such 'aggression was not created by property' and so is not a product of capitalism but rather

regulated by it.<sup>86</sup> It is this ‘fundamental hostility of human beings to one another’ that leaves ‘civilised society’ under constant threat of disintegration.<sup>87</sup>

The fraught relationship that Freud imagines between individuals and the social world is indebted to his formulation of the human subject a discrete being. First and foremost, the death drive is the will of the individual to return to an originary state of zero tension. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents* Freud posits ‘art’ and ‘scholarly activity’ as instruments of this state; they are ‘palliative measures’ that bring temporary ‘pleasure and consolation’ via a sensation of ‘mild narcosis.’<sup>88</sup> Crucially Freud’s model of the psychic apparatus is an economic one and hails from its key determinant, which Freud articulates as the flow of ‘excitation’ or ‘energy.’ Low levels of excitation or energy are conducive to ‘stability’ and thus pleasure whereas a large influx of excitation ‘floods the ego’ bringing about ‘instability’ and an experience of ‘unpleasure.’ These ideas, as Freud acknowledges, build on G. E. Fechner’s ‘principle of constancy.’<sup>89</sup> For Freud this archaic desire is indicative of:

‘An urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.’<sup>90</sup>

The biologism that shapes Freud’s thinking, as Ehrenzweig acknowledges, is derived from German Biologist Ernst Haeckle’s evolutionary concept of phylogeny.<sup>91</sup> Haeckle hypothesised that the gestation of human embryos repeated, or recapitulated, each evolutionary phase of the species. The significance of this idea for Freud, often expressed as ‘phylogeny begets ontogeny,’ had been two-fold: it situates the evolution of human subjectivity in relation to its animal ancestry and pre-organic development as inert matter. Freud reasoned that the residue of that archaic experience is retained in the deepest recesses of the unconscious. As he continues in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the drive toward inertia is ‘conservative’, signalling a return to an ‘old state of things’;

‘Everything living dies for *internal* reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that ‘*the aim of all life is death*’ and, looking backwards, that ‘*inanimate things existed before living ones*.’<sup>92</sup>

This blurring of the human and the animal is indicative of Freud’s debt to Darwin and his secularism, which differentiates his ideas from the dualism that characterises the majority of the Western Philosophical tradition critiqued by Derrida in *The Animal that therefore I am* ([1997] 2007).<sup>93</sup> As ethologist and primatologist Frans de Waal has argued, Freud’s equation of the animal and aggressivity remains trapped within a rationalist philosophical paradigm.<sup>94</sup>

It is the thesis of a return to an inorganic state, what Smithson referred to as the ‘desiccation of the organic’<sup>95</sup> and the remoteness of *Spiral Jetty* that led Iversen to propose that *Spiral Jetty* enacted a ‘symbolic ritual’ that gave ‘*temporary* sway to the death drive.’<sup>96</sup>

‘Because of the earthwork’s extreme inaccessibility, all most of us are ever likely to experience of the work are the filmic, photographic, and literary versions. But these, it seems to me, have the weight and interest they do precisely because they circle around the vortex created by this *great lost object*. As Eva Schmidt points out, the last image of a black-and-white photograph over the editing table – drained of colour and still – suggests that the jetty has already “irretrievably changed into an absence.”’<sup>97</sup>

Iversen’s argument is framed by Freud’s conception of the discrete subject and one of Gorgoni’s photographs of the vacant *Jetty*, enabling her to suggest that this great lost object refuses the ‘communal function’ of religion.<sup>98</sup> As such, her argument is consistent with Smithson’s *Scrapbook* (1966–1973) which draws on *Civilisation and Its Discontents* to note that ‘controlled by capital and politics’, there are parallels between the ‘function of [the] museum as “establishment”’, which causes ‘discontent’ and how ‘religion used methods to control’.<sup>99</sup> For Smithson the museum’s defining characteristic was its ‘nullity’, which divested its collections of their ‘charged’ relationship to the outside world.<sup>100</sup> While that ‘nullity’ had possibilities for art practice as the *Museum of the Void* proposes, ultimately the establishment would win the day and a more ‘extreme’ position was necessary: the remote monument.<sup>101</sup> What strikes me is that an analysis of the work as an irretrievable absence loses sight of the differing modes of nullity at play in the ‘dialectic situation’ of earthwork, text, film, and photograph.<sup>102</sup>

Like Smithson's engagement with the pharonic ruins of Egypt this argument only sees the work from the sky down. Without the oscillation between containment and limitlessness, the 'matter of looking' and 'matter of touching', irretrievable absence foregrounds one kind of ever increasing distance.<sup>103</sup> As Smithson said 'if you are immersed in a flood you can drown, so it is wiser to perceive it from a distance. Yet, on the other hand, it is worth something to be swept away from time to time.'<sup>104</sup> In the economy of absence embodied sensory experience is historicised, however, and becomes circumscribed as an operation of the mind that cannot sustain its connection to the world of matter. As a result the process of dissolution does not loom large as an apocalyptic vision of the present or future. Rather it is objectified, reduced to an anodyne time of the past and the pages of art's histories that can be assimilated by the establishment it sought to resist.<sup>105</sup> In other words, if the work loses its relationship to the ground it is disconnected from its charged relationship to the present.

In 1971, prior to the rise in the lake's waters, Smithson applied to the State of Utah to purchase a perpetual lease to protect the ongoing financial investment necessary to the 'maintenance' of the site.<sup>106</sup> The rationale for this investment, he argued, had been to 'preserve it for future generations.'<sup>107</sup> Smithson pledged that his meeting with State officials, in which he planned to screen the film, would 'elucidate' the 'meaning of the work and its relevance for Utah and the world at large'.<sup>108</sup> The re-emergence of *Spiral Jetty* in 1997 and its management by the Dia Foundation has reasserted the dialectical, material play of its versions and with it the tactile experience of the work on the ground. As Ann Reynolds wrote in her significant corrective to the myth of the work's inaccessibility in 2005:

'An ever-increasing number of individuals have [...] travelled to the *Jetty*, proving that it is not in fact so remote, and once there many visitors have produced new images, new descriptions of an unexpectedly white spiral encrusted and partially filled with salt crystals. Because of the *Jetty's* accessibility and these fresh descriptions, no one can have the luxury of thinking that the earlier, presubmergence descriptions are sufficient, or possibly ever were.'<sup>109</sup>

Just a few clicks on Google Earth, Instagram, Tripadvisor, or YouTube and instead of a frozen black and white vision of homeostasis, *Spiral Jetty* forms a somewhat ethereal backdrop to family snaps and videos: walks with the dog, commissioned engagement photographs, fashion shoots and, of course, more knowingly ‘artistic’ representations (fig.7).<sup>110</sup> At the time of writing in 2017, YouTube features a video with a sound track by *The Boards of Canada* in which a swimmer gently floats by the *Spiral Jetty* in the Great Lake’s saline waters.<sup>111</sup> While the cost of journeying to Rozel Point may remain prohibitive for those not native to the State of Utah, and poorly paid art historians, the earthwork not only has an audience but is part of the modern day folklore and community of Box Elder County. As *Observer* journalist Stuart Husband recollected during his journey to the *Jetty* in 2004:

‘We pull into the nearest gas station, 30 miles away. “Going to the jetty?” asks the woman at the till, seeing me load up with water and granola bars. “We get people coming in here all the time and asking the way. I went out there last summer. It’s ...” she searches for the right words to express the jetty’s essence. “It’s cool,” she concludes, nodding her head vigorously.’<sup>112</sup>

It can be argued that this this new era of access and dissemination has led, to borrow from Adorno’s vocabulary, to the deaestheticization of the artwork. The all-consuming homogenisation of consumer culture driven by social media has imbued the work with a different kind of nullity.<sup>113</sup> To my way of thinking, what is more compelling is that this documentation reveals that the ‘individuals’ that tread upon the earthwork do not do so discretely. The shared ‘on-the-spot’ experience of *Spiral Jetty*’s audience causes subjects to flitter between viewer, subject, and participant. They are at once alone and in the company of others, negotiating an embodied relationship with the work and one another.<sup>114</sup>

I want, just for a moment, to follow the death drive’s most radical proposition to the letter. In this new shared economy, the frustration of this narcotic longing would posit *Spiral Jetty* as an active agent in the production of aggression. Freud’s belief that self-aggression is the basis of all aggressivity means that the viewer stood on the *Jetty* must not allow welcome the dissolution of the self but they must also demand it of everything and everyone around

them.<sup>115</sup> In phantasy at least, viewers take ‘possession’ of the work by psychically killing off the other. If the hypothesis of the death drive is adopted in its entirety, *Spiral Jetty* acts as a dissolution machine that leaves ‘civilised society’ under constant threat of disintegration.<sup>116</sup> It is my contention that the emergence of *Spiral Jetty* in and of the social makes this hypothesis unsustainable because the death drive’s contempt for the other demands a falsification of the circumstances of artistic production in order to perpetuate the rejection of the social via its reception.

It is on the ground of *Spiral Jetty* that Freud’s thought and Smithson’s practices differ from each other. Without doubt, Freud’s thinking provided a framework with which Smithson could construct a response to the intense crises that gripped America in the late 60s and early 70s, what he named the ‘political whirlpool.’<sup>117</sup> Nowhere is this clearer than in ‘Art and Politics: A Symposium’, published in *Artforum* in September 1970 when Smithson wrote ‘perhaps’ artists were now engaged with politics because ‘like anybody else [they] yearn for that unbearable situation that politics leads to: the threat of pain, the horror of annihilation, that would end in calm and peace.’<sup>118</sup> America seemed to be engulfed in a ‘hurricane of carnage’ but while the artist wanted to ‘separate the liberating revolution from the repressive war machine [...] he discovers that real revolution means violence too.’<sup>119</sup> These reflections must be situated in response to the events of May 1970, the month in which *Spiral Jetty* had been completed and four unarmed students were shot dead and nine others injured on the campus of Kent State University.<sup>120</sup>

Smithson had spent a week as artist-in-residence at Kent State in January 1970. He gave lectures and studio crits but the final outcome of that stay had been the *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970, fig.8) which had emerged through collaboration with students.<sup>121</sup> Smithson had arrived on site with a plan for a work in the lineage of *Concrete Pour* and *Glue Pour* but



using mud; the only trouble was the Ohio winter had frozen the ground solid. Full of flu Smithson was all set to return to New York but, as sculpture professor Brinsley Tyrrell remembered, the students would not let him. Instead ‘they came out to the house and sat about on the living room floor and talked about what else they could do. “Well said Smithson, he has always liked the idea of burying a building”’.<sup>122</sup> So Smithson and the students worked together clearing and burying the site.<sup>123</sup> A few weeks later, in February, Smithson was in Utah finalising the site for *Spiral Jetty*.

On May 4<sup>th</sup> 1970 the Ohio National Guard opened fire on a student protest against Nixon’s planned invasion of Cambodia which seemed to break the president’s commitment to scale down American military action. Jeffery Miller and Sandra Scheuer aged twenty, and Allison Krause and William Schroeder aged just 19 were one hundred meters away from the National Guard when they were killed, sending shockwaves through America; more so Nancy Holt recalled, than the assassination of Kennedy.<sup>124</sup> In the July of that year ‘May 4 Kent 70’ was anonymously written on the work, which as Holt said made the ‘cracked’ structure of the shed roof synonymous with the cracks in the country.<sup>125</sup> It is this ‘disgust’ which can be felt in ‘Art and Politics’ when Smithson describes the bottomless whirlpool whose ‘political centrifugal force that throws the blood of atrocities onto those working for peace.’<sup>126</sup> The violence at Kent State radically ruptured the romanticism of the subject’s Dionysian unravelling configured by the death drive. Instead it made the human cost of revolution tangible, painful, and terrifying. Without the luxury of a safe distance it really did feel as if civilisation were being swept away, not by the acts of individuals but by the ‘terrorism’ of the state.<sup>127</sup> Viewed in this light *Spiral Jetty* is at once a physical articulation of that terror but also of the independence of individuals from the apparatus of the state; what actually sustains civilisation is therefore day-to-day cooperation of individuals on the ground.

Had Smithson lived another three years, to see Richard Dawkins' publication of *The Selfish Gene* (1976), he could have perhaps found a different evolutionary vocabulary for the social dimension of his practice. Contrary to Freud's vision of Godless brute humanity Dawkins attributed altruism beyond kinship groups and the imperatives of religion to shared genes and their unceasing bid to survive. This focus on prosocial behaviour has been taken up in game theory in Robert Axelrod's ground breaking *The Evolution of Cooperation* (1984), while more recently the work of Andrew Coleman and colleagues argue that cooperation does not emerge from conscious or rational decision making.<sup>128</sup> It is therefore possible to argue that the reciprocity of human relations is not the outcome of civilisation's coercion of the consciousness of the individual as Freud surmised. To my way of thinking, the emergence of *Spiral Jetty* and the social relationships to which it was indebted reveal this and more. As Smithson observed 'nobody can face the absolute limit of death' and for my money that includes Freud.<sup>129</sup> If the subject remains an island in the sea of the social, the betrayal, rejection, loss, or wounding of the other does not matter. What is most terrifying about death is not that we will cease to be but that we will cease to be with those we love.

## Conclusion

This essay has framed the emergence of *Spiral Jetty* as the product of a generative, speculative process in which the logic of the work had been revealed and tested through material form. Ingold's braiding of making and social life brings the essential role of others to the foreground of that form. Smithson's remote engagement with pharonic monuments and documentation of the social beginnings of *Spiral Jetty* highlights a shift in the artist's practice. The conceptual framework of the death drive cannot adequately articulate this complex weave of materials and forces because art it is an inherently asocial framework. To abstract aggression into the long view of inherent 'primitive drives' denies the significance of circumstance and the responsibility of the subject, which is to remain complicit with it not

critique it. Viewed from the political whirlpool of 2017 it seems to me that advocating a thesis which perpetuates narratives of individualism and protectionism is nothing less than irresponsible. To reject Freud's hypothesis of the death drive is not to disavow either the aggression that marks contemporary civilisation or art's capacity to exceed the confines of pleasure. On the contrary, it is to enable artists to engage seriously with the social dimensions of aesthetic experience and the impact of cooperation and aggression in that nexus.

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline A. Jones, 'Post-Studio/Postmodern/Postmortem', in Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner, eds., *The Studio Reader: on the space of artists*, Chicago, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, 1967, p.9 and Craig Owens subsequent argument that the various versions of *Spiral Jetty* 'transformed the visual field into a textual one'. Craig Owens, 'Earthwords,' *October*, 10, Autumn 1979, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly eds., *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty, True Fictions, False Realities*, Berkeley and London, 2005; Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from Las Vegas and Elsewhere*, Cambridge, Mass and London, 2003; Jack Flam, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkley, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Tim Ingold, *Making: Antropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, London, 2013, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects', 1968, in Smithson and Flam, 111.

<sup>6</sup> Bob Phillips, 'Building the Jetty', in Cooke and Kelly, eds., 185-197. See also Kelly Phillips, 'How the Jetty came to be' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvSko0LY53A>

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*, Pennsylvania, 2007, 84.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, 293.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Alloway, cited by Jones 293.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, 292.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, 296.

<sup>12</sup> Tim Ingold, 'On human correspondence,' Huxley Memorial Lecture, Royal Anthropological Institute, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vIq5s04wBU> (Accessed 01/02/2016).

<sup>13</sup> Tim Ingold, 'On human correspondence,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 23, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Ingold, 'On human correspondence,' Huxley Memorial Lecture.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London and New York, 2000, 342.

<sup>16</sup> James Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to think about oil painting using the language of Alchemy*, London and New York, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Elkins, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Phillips, 188.

<sup>19</sup> Smithson and Flam, 236.

<sup>20</sup> Phillips, 191.

<sup>21</sup> Bob Phillips in conversation with Nancy Holt, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment-jan-june05-jetty\\_5-6/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment-jan-june05-jetty_5-6/)

<sup>22</sup> Phillips, 191.

<sup>23</sup> Smithson and Flam, 111.

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- <sup>24</sup> Lawrence Alloway, 'Network: The Artworld Described as a System,' *Artforum*, September 1972, <https://artforum.com/inprint/issue=197207&id=33673>
- <sup>25</sup> Smithson, 'The Spiral Jetty', 1972 in Smithson and Flam, 145.
- <sup>26</sup> Smithson, 145.
- <sup>27</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Aerial Art' *Studio International*, February–April 1969, Smithson and Flam, 116.
- <sup>28</sup> Smithson and Flam, 134.
- <sup>29</sup> Timothy D. Martin, 'Robert Smithson and the Anglo-American Picturesque', in Rebecca Peabody Ed., *Anglo-American Exchange in Post War Sculpture 1945-1975*, Los Angeles, 2011, 170.
- <sup>30</sup> See 'Grant L. "Boozie" Busenbark' *The Standard Examiner*, Monday, November 2016 <http://www.standard.net/obituaries/2015/11/17/grant-l-boozie-busenbark> Sean P. Means, 'Bob Phillips, contractor on Spiral Jetty dies at 75', *The Salt Lake Tribune*, April 18, 2016 <http://www.sltrib.com/home/3791137-155/bob-phillips-contractor-on-spiral-jetty> and also Bob Phillips, 'Spiral Jetty Explained', Utah Museum of Fine Arts, <https://vimeo.com/19065567>
- <sup>31</sup> Smithson and Flam., 294.
- <sup>32</sup> Smithson and Flam, xvi.
- <sup>33</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Entropy and the New Monuments', 1966, in Smithson and Flam, 13.
- <sup>34</sup> Smithson and Flam, 13.
- <sup>35</sup> Smithson and Flam, 11-13.
- <sup>36</sup> Robert Smithson, 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey', 1967, Smithson and Flam, 72.
- <sup>37</sup> Robert Smithson, 'The Artist as Site-Seer or, A Dintorphic Essay', 1966–67, Smithson and Flam, 340-345.
- <sup>38</sup> Smithson and Flam, 36.
- <sup>39</sup> Smithson and Flam, 36. For a sustained consideration of the significance of Kubler's thinking for Smithson conception of the monument see Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, Cambridge, Mass., 2004.
- <sup>40</sup> Smithson and Flam, 36. For a sustained consideration of the significance of Kubler's thinking for Smithson conception of the monument see Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, Cambridge, Mass., 2004.
- <sup>41</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space', 1966, Smithson and Flam, 34.
- <sup>42</sup> Smithson and Flam, 36.
- <sup>43</sup> Smithson and Flam, 36-37.
- <sup>44</sup> Smithson and Flam, 36.
- <sup>45</sup> I. E. S. Edwards' *The Pyramids of Ancient Egypt*, London, 1947, 90-116.
- <sup>46</sup> Edwards, 90-96.
- <sup>47</sup> Edwards, back matter, 1961 edition.
- <sup>48</sup> Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, #8 *Scrapbook of clippings and notes*, 1966-1972, frame 115, dated November 1972. My emphasis.
- <sup>49</sup> Smithson and Flam, 340.
- <sup>50</sup> Smithson and Flam, 341. Smithson's remarks signal the significance of Robert Morris' visit to Wiltshire in 1964, see Michael Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, London, 2008, 107.
- <sup>51</sup> Smithson and Flam, 341.
- <sup>52</sup> Smithson and Flam, 344.
- <sup>53</sup> Edwards, 116.
- <sup>54</sup> Joann Fletcher, *The Story of Egypt*, London, 2015, 73,

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- <sup>55</sup> Edwards, 117-118.
- <sup>56</sup> Smithson and Flam, 37.
- <sup>57</sup> Peter Ucko and Timothy Champion, eds., *The Wisdom of Egypt: Changing Visions through the ages*, London, 2003, 16.
- <sup>58</sup> Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, Durham and London, 2007, 75.
- <sup>59</sup> Colla, 100-101.
- <sup>60</sup> Colla, 100.
- <sup>61</sup> Ucko and Champion, 16-17.
- <sup>62</sup> Colla, 104-5.
- <sup>63</sup> Colla, 107-10.
- <sup>64</sup> Colla, 81.
- <sup>65</sup> Ucko and Champion, 16-17.
- <sup>66</sup> Colla, 81.
- <sup>67</sup> Colla, 81.
- <sup>68</sup> Fletcher, 76.
- <sup>69</sup> Fletcher, 75, .
- <sup>70</sup> John Romer, *The Great Pyramid: Egypt Revisited*, Cambridge, 2007.
- <sup>71</sup> Romer, 101-102.
- <sup>72</sup> Colla, 83.
- <sup>73</sup> Colla, 83.
- <sup>74</sup> Colla, 83.
- <sup>75</sup> Robert Smithson 'Out of the past: Lucy R. Lippard talks about Eva Hesse with Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson', *Arforum*, February 2008, 238.
- <sup>76</sup> Smithson and Flam, 103.
- <sup>77</sup> Smithson and Flam, 103.
- <sup>78</sup> Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, #8 *Scrapbook of clippings and notes*, 1966–1972. The organisation of the scrapbook makes it impossible to be more precise about the exact dates of Smithson's reading.
- <sup>79</sup> Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, London, 1988, 20.
- <sup>80</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, 1930, London, 2005, 71–72.
- <sup>81</sup> Smithson and Holt Papers, 'Writings' frame 0070.
- <sup>82</sup> Freud, 41.
- <sup>83</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, 60–61.
- <sup>84</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, 61.
- <sup>85</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, revised edition, London and New York, 2004, 30.
- <sup>86</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, 63.
- <sup>87</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, 61.
- <sup>88</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, 14.
- <sup>89</sup> Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', 277.
- <sup>90</sup> Freud, 308-9.
- <sup>91</sup> Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, Berkley and Los Angeles, 1967, 219.
- <sup>92</sup> Freud, 1920, 310-11.
- <sup>93</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, New York, 2007.
- <sup>94</sup> See Frans B. M. Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, Princeton, 2009, 4.
- <sup>95</sup> Smithson in Holt, Lippard and Smithson, 238.
- <sup>96</sup> Iversen, 74 & 85.

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- <sup>97</sup> Iversen, 87 & 89. My emphasis.
- <sup>98</sup> Iversen, 89.
- <sup>99</sup> Robert Smithson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute. Frame 120, April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1972.
- <sup>100</sup> Smithson and Flam, 155.
- <sup>101</sup> Smithson and Flam, 44.
- <sup>102</sup> Smithson and Flam 254.
- <sup>103</sup> Smithson and Flam, 254.
- <sup>104</sup> Smithson and Flam 254.
- <sup>105</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, London, 1992, 299.
- <sup>106</sup> Smithson and Holt Papers, Reel 3835, Frame 802.
- <sup>107</sup> Smithson and Holt Papers, Reel 3835, Frame 802.
- <sup>108</sup> Smithson and Holt Papers, Reel 3835, Frame 802.
- <sup>109</sup> Ann Reynolds, 'At the Jetty', in Cooke and Kelly eds., 73.
- <sup>110</sup> See 'Engagement Photos at The Spiral Jetty: Mallory + Christian', *Green Wedding Shoes* <http://greenweddingshoes.com/engagement-photos-at-the-spiral-jetty/> (Accessed 16/01/2016).
- <sup>111</sup> Angel Rafael Vázquez-Concepción, 'The Spiral Jetty, 1970, by Robert Smithson', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CqDVbZdK3I> (Accessed 14/03/2017). 'Anon 'Robert Smithson's Every Changing Spiral Jetty' <http://blog.instagram.com/post/74343849903/robert-smithsons-ever-changing-spiral-jetty-to> (Accessed 16/01/2016).
- <sup>112</sup> Stuart Husband, 'Ever Decreasing Circle', *Features Magazine*, 3&, *The Observer*, April 25, 2004. <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2004/apr/25/features.magazine37> (Accessed 16/01/2016)
- <sup>113</sup> Theodore Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London and New York, 1997, 104.
- <sup>114</sup> Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience*, London, 2009, 7.
- <sup>115</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, 97.
- <sup>116</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, 61.
- <sup>117</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Art and Politics: A Symposium,' *Artforum*, September 1970, Smithson and Flam, 134.
- <sup>118</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Art and Politics: A Symposium,' *Artforum*, September 1970, Smithson and Flam, 134.
- <sup>119</sup> Smithson and Flam, 134.
- <sup>120</sup> This essay's consideration of the significance of the Kent State Massacre for Smithson's practice is indebted to my conversation with Timothy Martin, 17/02/2016.
- <sup>121</sup> See Dorothy Shinn, *Robert Smithson's Partially Buried Woodshed*, Kent, 1990 available <https://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/pbw.pdf> (Accessed 06/06/2016).
- <sup>122</sup> Shinn, unpaginated. See also 'What is Left of the Partially Buried Woodshed Emerges from the Foliage after 45 years', Kent State University, <https://www.kent.edu/kent/news/what-left-partially-buried-woodshed-emerges-foliage-after-45-years>
- <sup>123</sup> Shinn, unpaginated.
- <sup>124</sup> Shinn, unpaginated.
- <sup>125</sup> Shinn, unpaginated.
- <sup>126</sup> Smithson and Flam, 134.
- <sup>127</sup> Smithson in Holt, Lippard and Smithson, 238.

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<sup>128</sup> See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, New York, [1984] 2006; Coleman, Pulford, Omtzigt and al-Nowaihi, 'Learning to cooperate without awareness in multiplayer minimal social situations,' in *Cognitive Psychology*, 61, 201-227; Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober eds., Frans De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: how morality evolved*, Princeton, 2006.

<sup>129</sup> Smithson and Flam, 135.