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Succession

Turning to the science of ecology, one of the additional difficulties posed by addressing site-specific artworks arises from a friction between the actuality of their ecological condition and our terminology for understanding it. In other words, it is inevitable that living environments will adapt, but our concepts for explaining that adaptation are shaped by the specific methods of their corresponding academic disciplines. Artworks might compel us to draw from ideas in the natural sciences, but those ideas themselves must morph in order to make sense with respect to art. What results are layers of what ecology might mean to specific fields. There is a technical field of ecology sustained by scientific specialists, an ecology that attends to cultural objects, and an ecological interrelation that joins these various systems of thought and practice together.

The artwork *Shift* by the American sculptor Richard Serra is an uncommonly pertinent example for thinking through this kind of cross-communication between art and science (figures 10 and 11). Consisting of a series of low-lying walls situated on farmland in King City, Ontario—a small community located just north of Toronto—*Shift* has experienced a remarkable range of alterations since its creation in the early 1970s. The walls were placed by Serra and the artist Joan Jonas following their prolonged exercise of moving through and inhabiting the land. By Serra's telling of it,



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movement through the field, Serra erected walls in the direction of the most significant drop in elevation, extending each wall until this vertical drop reached a height of five feet. Varying in length and direction, the three walls on each side of the field zig and zag toward the three walls on the other, meeting in an open space in the center.

When Serra refers to “the place” in which *Shift* is located, he seems most interested in its shape; he essentially treats place as a combination of topography and space. But the place in which *Shift* exists might be understood to also encompass its community and

Figure 11. Richard Serra, *Shift*, 1970–1972, King City, Ontario, concrete, six sections: 60" × 90' × 8"; 60" × 240' × 8"; 60" × 150' × 8"; 60" × 120' × 8"; 60" × 110' × 8"; 60" × 105' × 8"; photograph: James Nisbet, 2017

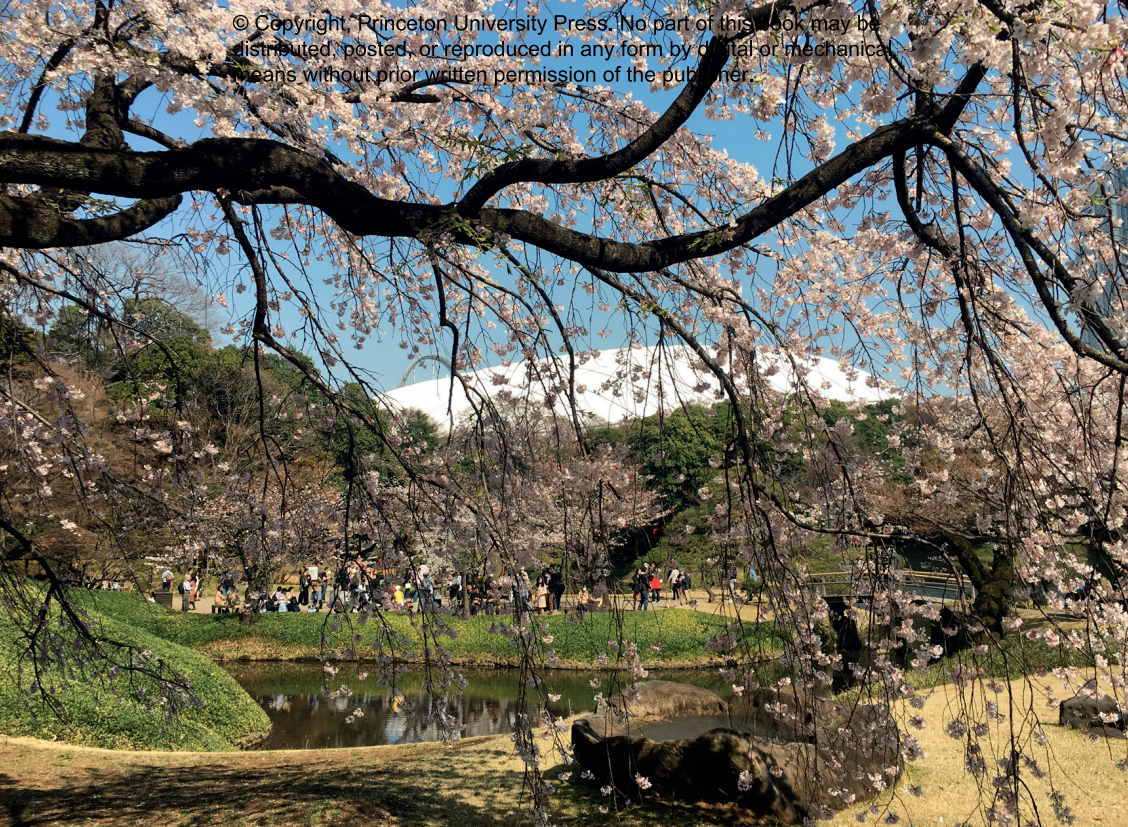
the species that live in and around the field in which the work is located. These aspects of *Shift*'s site have changed quite distinctly since 1972, a transformation all the more pointed considering that the sculpture and its parcel of land are owned by the Toronto-based development company Hickory Hill Investments, having been purchased from Serra's original patron, Roger Davidson, when he sold his farmland in 1974.³ Hickory Hill then ignored the presence of *Shift* on the land it bought for thirty years, until 2004, when members of King Township's city council moved to register the artwork as a heritage site. During approximately the same period of time, Hickory Hill had begun to build condominiums and single-family homes on its real estate holdings in King City. In the span of a few short years, this development significantly altered the demographics and organization of the town: a small rural, agricultural community became a growing exurb of nearby Toronto. Though these rapid alterations to King City generated uncertainty about the future of *Shift*, Hickory Hill staunchly resisted attempts to legally protect Serra's sculpture and site, claiming that any such designation was "inappropriate and unnecessary" for what the company described as "a private piece of art on private property" that was already protected by an environmental preservation act named after the local Oak Ridges Moraine.⁴ This legislation had been passed in 2001 to control growth within the lands immediately

north of Toronto, protecting its wildlife and water quality. To claim it as protection for an artwork, however, is a more complicated matter, as the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act limits construction but doesn't strictly prohibit it.⁵ It wouldn't, for instance, prevent condominiums from being constructed around the work, or its field from being turned into a city park. To claim that such measures inherently protect site-specific artworks confuses environmental conservation with cultural heritage conservation. We turn to art preservation in more detail later, but to state the difference succinctly here, environmental conservation strives to protect "ecological and hydrological integrity," in the language of the Oak Ridges Moraine Act, while cultural heritage conservation is concerned with protecting artistic intent. In other words, one acts to maintain ongoing relationships in an environment, while the other focuses on the integrity of how an artwork is experienced by its spectator.

The suburbanization of King City is only part of the story of *Shift*. The annual cycles of the agricultural seasons and the accelerating changes to global climate have also had an impact on the work. We might consider, for instance, what it is like to see *Shift* during the late summer and early fall in a year when its field is planted with corn and its sculptural walls must be sought out through blind exploration amid the tall stalks growing across the site. Even when the walls have been located,

the restricted visibility of the cornfield limits the view to no more than one or two walls at any one time. In such conditions, the walls are not markers rising up from the flat topography of the land, as Serra described them, but rather pathways, sunken beneath the tops of the stalks, through the dense, all-over vegetation. Even when planted with a lower-lying crop, like soybeans, *Shift* can be significantly affected by local weather. During years with intense rains in the spring, wild plants grow up around the sides of the work that almost entirely cover its walls, leaving them visible only in small patches. In this state, the shape of the land might well be visible, but the shape of the sculpture becomes something left more to the imagination. Across such extreme experiences of seeing the field covered by full stalks of corn or the walls engulfed by overgrowth, the relationship between sculptural object and environment remains vital to *Shift* and its site. The work is still site-specific, just not according to the formal lines and planes of the sculpture Serra conceived in the early 1970s. Instead of being strictly a visible shape, the sculptural presence of *Shift* has taken on more dynamic relationships with the living aspects of its environment.

The kind of change that *Shift* has undergone is difficult to describe with the language currently available to discussions of art and architecture. By way of counterexample, the variations to both the immediate site and the larger civic footprint of *Shift* are more systemic



than most encroachments of urban development on the fringes of other sites. In Tokyo, for instance, the white, air-supported roof atop the 1980s-era Tokyo Dome now hovering above the city's historic Koishikawa Korakuen Garden has undoubtedly changed that garden's sight lines, but it hasn't fundamentally changed the garden itself (figure 12). Designed in the seventeenth century to incorporate a combination of recognizable landscapes from both Japan and China, Korakuen is a place that

Figure 12. Mito Yōrifusa and Mito Mitsukuni, Koishikawa Korakuen Garden, seventeenth century, Tokyo, Japan; photograph: 2018

invites reflection on the passing of time in temporalities that range from the mere days of a flower's bloom to the years and even millennia that have shaped the rocks populating sections of the garden. In contrast, the Tokyo Dome's disruptive, techno-industrial presence looms large. It, too, invites reflection on the passing of time, but not through internal rumination so much as by evincing more external and unwieldy growth. Rather than adding to the biological and geological cycles of time cultivated within the garden, its presence is closer to montage—a collision of two images, each of a different temporal order and origin. Unlike the gradual and more thorough transformation of *Shift* and its site, the intrusion of the Tokyo Dome on Korakuen presents a more immediate juxtaposition in the visual field of the spectator. Looking in one direction, Korakuen appears remarkably internal, even self-enclosed; looking in another suddenly reveals signs of its clashes with the megalopolis that has grown around it.

A similar type of visual disruption has motivated recent protests staged at the land artwork *Espacio Esculptórico* in Mexico City (figure 13). Created in 1979 through the collaborative efforts of Helen Escobedo, Manuel Felguérez, Mathias Goeritz, Hersúa, Sebastián, and Federico Silva on the campus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), *Espacio Esculptórico* consists of a large, circular field of volcanic rock rimmed by sixty-four imposing concrete wedges.

Like Tokyo's Koishikawa Korakuen Garden, *Espacio Escultórico* invites its spectator to contemplate the deep cycles of time at its site. It also incorporates the natural landscape formation of the region: the uncultivated ground of lava in the center of *Espacio Escultórico* registers the millennia of volcanic events that created the ground upon which UNAM was built and which previously made the area resistant to human occupation. *Espacio Escultórico*'s frame of concrete structures is at once an abstraction of the urbanization of this land in the twentieth century and an invocation of the great architectural pyramids of the Aztec people, whose ancient capital of Tenochtitlán is located a little over ten miles to the east. *Espacio Escultórico* is sited on land that is part of the Pedregal de San Angel Ecological Reserve, which protects it from further development. But in spite of this apparent safeguard, the artwork's viewshed was recently disrupted by the completion, just outside that protection zone, of an eight-story midrise building to house UNAM's faculty of political and social science. Dubbed Building H, this structure was erected without consultation with anyone associated with *Espacio Escultórico*. In response, local sculptor Pedro Reyes initiated a campaign in 2016 to have the building either moved or removed, coordinating on-site protests and an online petition that garnered over thirty thousand signatures. Despite also gaining the support of significant members of the international arts community—who



Figure 13. Helen Escobedo, Manuel Felguérez, Mathias Goeritz, Hersúa, Sebastián, and Federico Silva, *Espacio Escultórico*, 1979, Mexico City, Mexico; photograph: James Nisbet, 2019

have promised to provide the money necessary to take action—Building H remains in place, and there are no apparent plans to alter it.

While we might bemoan the kind of encroachment exemplified by the Tokyo Dome and Building H (and rightly, I think), both demonstrate situations in which the visual field around a site took on unexpected elements, but in which the site's internal order was not intrinsically transformed. This latter type of alteration is more difficult to apprehend, because it doesn't

present any singular elements, like new construction, to identify, protest, and potentially mollify. In other words, this other kind of change affects entire ecosystems. To briefly summarize, although ecology is a field of modern science dating back approximately a century and a half, the notion of an ecosystem was conceived considerably later. First coined in 1935, “ecosystems” initially designated interconnections defined primarily by the agency of animal organisms, particularly through the model of the food chain.⁶ But following the conclusion of the Second World War and the rise of cybernetics, ecosystems were reordered around more robust systems theories derived from new computing technologies; the result was the influential paradigm of the “steady-state.” A steady-state ecosystem was characterized by a consistent order that was understood to be both predictable and unchanging over the long run of time.⁷ Steady-state ecology remained the dominant explanatory model and means to imagine global connectivity throughout the long decade of the 1960s, when a public consciousness about environmentalism arose through such signal events as the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and the first Earth Day demonstrations (1970).

These basic assumptions about ecology started to be challenged in the years that followed, when a picture of ecological change as unpredictable and even chaotic overtook the previous assumption of unwavering

stability. Longer-term studies led to scientists' realization that ecosystems do not have a natural and timeless steady state, but instead consist of a balance of relationships that are invariably altered over time by the influx of both immediately disruptive and more incrementally unruly factors. This revised understanding of ecosystems had an impact on another crucial concept in ecology: succession. Just as the word suggests, "succession" describes how one set of living conditions follows from, or *succeeds*, others. Akin to the concept of the ecosystem, succession was first articulated in the early twentieth century, at which time scientists had assumed that communities of species do not fundamentally change in the long run.⁸ According to this line of thought, species might be temporarily disrupted, but they possess a natural order that will return if and when that disruption subsides. Following the decline of steady-state ecology, however, succession was likewise revised to recognize that, over time, species may decline, increase, disappear, or colonize to such an extent that they irrevocably alter the balance of their living environments, in one of two ways.⁹ In a "primary" succession, an ecosystem arises in a previously barren region, and in a "secondary" succession, a new organization of ecological relations replaces a previously existing one. Drawing from theories of chaos, the revised notion of succession also acknowledges that such alterations are erratic and therefore not the work of a single design, regardless of

whether that design was created by a person or by other means. In the words of the environmental historian Donald Worster, “‘Disturbance’ was not a common subject in [the] heyday” of steady-state ecology. “Now, however, . . . new ecologists [have] succeeded in leaving little tranquility in primitive nature. Fire is one of the most common disturbances they noted. So is wind, especially in the form of violent hurricanes and tornadoes. So are invading populations of microorganisms and pests and predators.”¹⁰

The idea of succession is a provocative one for thinking about the ecology and temporality of sites. We might consider, for example, whether *Shift* has undergone changes so fundamental as to constitute a succession of its relationship to site. That is, have impacts on what was originally an artwork by Richard Serra, we might ask, been so extensive as to recast its site-specificity as a different kind of work, one less attuned to experiencing topological shape and more to grasping the complexities of change that occur within living environments? To suggest that artworks undergo this kind of succession, however, implies that the original intentions of the artist who created the work have been replaced by a different set of creative forces—which, in the case of *Shift*, are creators other than a single artist or designer. Artistic intention is particularly important when thinking about Serra, because much of the received wisdom about site-specificity in the late twentieth century in

fact crystallized around his sculpture *Tilted Arc* and his stated intentions for it (figure 14). Originally installed in Lower Manhattan in 1981 using public funds, *Tilted Arc* was cast in controversy following complaints from a few federal white-collar workers employed in the area; subsequently, a public hearing was held to discuss relocating the sculpture. Despite Serra's adamant testimony that moving the sculptural element of *Tilted Arc* was tantamount to negating its site-specificity and therefore the work as a whole, the sculptural element was in fact removed from its site in 1989, effectively destroying the artwork.¹¹

Well before the *Tilted Arc* controversy, and even before he laid out *Shift*, Serra's ideas about site had been influenced by a 1970 trip to study the Myoshin-ji temple and gardens in Kyoto. On his way to Japan, Serra stopped off at the Great Salt Lake to help his friend Robert Smithson stake out *Spiral Jetty*.¹² According to Serra's later recounting, he took away from the gardens he studied in Japan a sense for how

these complexes are organized with a rigorous mode of placement. . . . The articulation of discrete elements within the field and the sense of the field as a whole, emerge only by constant walking and looking. . . . This concept of space is essentially different from our western concept which is based on central perspective, and which arranges all objects on lines emanating from the eye of a static viewer.¹³



What was so significant—even transformative—about this experience for Serra was coming to this understanding that the organizational logic of space could and would only unfold through the act of passing through it. That is, not only was time important to experiencing the gardens, but the spatial experience of the place was fashioned by the time-based movement of its visitors. As Serra himself noted, this is a fairly radical revision to understandings of space in European and American artistic traditions, whether linear perspectives in the tradition of Alberti or the Cartesian cubic grid. Western art

Figure 14. Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981, installation in Federal Plaza, New York, weatherproof steel, cylindrical section, 12' x 120' x 2.5"; collection of US General Services Administration, Washington, DC, destroyed by the US government, 1989; photograph: David Aschkenas, 1985

has long accepted that certain things, such as sculpture in the round, need to be walked around to be viewed in full. But Serra was not saying that the Myoshin-ji gardens—and by implication, his own later site-specific artworks—had to be walked through to be fully seen. He was saying that the work doesn’t “emerge” until it is walked through. What I understand him to mean is that movement and duration actually *realize* the relationship of things to their site, rather than revealing a relationship that already exists.

Though dynamic and innovative, Serra’s perspective nonetheless diverges from the concept of ecological succession with respect to what he further terms “rigorous placement.” Succession disrupts any assumption that such rationally planned placement or design is sustainable within ranges of time that extend into the ensuing decades and even centuries beyond the afternoon of a visitor’s walk. Nevertheless, as recently as 2008, Serra observed that the foundations of *Shift* continued to maintain the alignment of the work. “We had an engineer who took core samplings,” he explained, “so that we could put its foundations as deep as they needed to be in order to sustain the load. So far it’s proven to be correct.”¹⁴ Serra was also featured in *A Shift in the Landscape* (2014), a documentary film by Simone Estrin about the history of *Shift* and the local struggle to preserve it. In the film, he describes his conscious decision to treat *Shift* differently than *Tilted Arc*. Following an

expression of gratitude for the “group of people in [the] township of King City that [took] it upon themselves to make [*Shift*] a permanent part of their culture,” Serra explains: “I thought if I interceded on my own behalf, I wasn’t going to prevail. I did that with the United States government, and it was a saga that lasted for about four years. It was very, very trying, and I didn’t want to fight it out with the Canadian press.” The result in King City was indeed the successful preservation of *Shift* as a heritage site, but to date no further action has been taken to maintain the work’s sculptural elements. Whether or not those elements will retain their alignment or even continue to exist in the kind of landscape Serra originally intended has been left open to the more pervasive force of succession.

In 1978, the American artist Alan Sonfist created a work at the northeast corner of La Guardia Place and West Houston Street in New York City titled *Time Landscape*, which was meant to demonstrate the process and history of succession on Manhattan Island (figures 15 and 16). Covering a 45’ x 200’ area, it initially comprised three planting zones, each representing a different stage in the maturation process of the forest that once covered the island, ranging from grasses to saplings to developed trees.¹⁵ The work took Sonfist well over a decade to realize. Having first imagined doing a series of “Time Landscapes” across Manhattan, he ran up against the reality of what it meant to acquire the



Figure 15. Alan Sonfist, *Future Time Landscape*, 1965 to the present, 45' × 200', New York, New York

real estate and funding to do so. In a written proposal from those early days, he framed his work as

a restoration of the natural environment before Colonial settlement. . . . Throughout the complex urban city I propose to create a series of historical Time Landscapes.



I plan to reintroduce a beech grove, oak, and maple trees that no longer exist in the city. Each landscape will roll back the clock and show the layers of time before the concrete of the city.¹⁶

Figure 16. Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscape*, 1965 to the present, 45' x 200', New York, New York; photograph: James Nisbet, 2019

In one sense, this is precisely what Sonfist did. The varying ages of trees and densities of undergrowth he planted at the eventual *Time Landscape* in the West Village succeeded in miming the stages of maturity that a native forest would undergo and had undergone in that place. He was able to incorporate dirt from beneath the city's original Dutch cobblestones that had been unearthed in

a nearby construction project. Sonfist also chose species, such as the red cedar, tulip trees, and dogwoods, that would have been common in Manhattan's pre-contact climate, before they gave way to the more northern species of trees popular with landscape designers in the 1970s.¹⁷ In this respect, *Time Landscape* was conceived as a kind of reverse time capsule that "roll[ed] back the clock" to reveal Manhattan's native landscape across hundreds, if not thousands, of years in the past. Writing in support of Sonfist's project, one New York City Department of Parks and Recreation official described the work as "a developing forest that represents the Manhattan landscape inhabited by Native Americans and encountered by Dutch settlers in the early 17th century."¹⁸ Such an assertion is as intriguing as it is fraught with the profound difficulty of unpeeling the irreversible clamp of colonialism to envision the history of Manhattan—whether as a grid of streets, a financial center, or a cultural hub. All of these elements of contemporary New York City carry the substantial weight of the dispossession and deep disruption of social practices associated with the colonial seizure of Manhattan from the Lenape people in the 1700s. Casting backward in the form of a park to picture pre-contact Manhattan cannot address the erasure of generational violence that such a fantasy would entail.

In addition to the colonial elision of *Time Landscape*, we might also consider what the work suggests about

the ecology of site. Or what it might mean to picture Manhattan's arboreal succession in the space of a single plot of real estate planted a year after Jimmy Carter was inaugurated as president. Today the work remains in place, nearly forty years of growth having obscured the precise distinctions that were once visible among its three planting zones. While this is to be expected in the growth regions of a forest—even in miniature—other aspects of *Time Landscape* reveal the chaos of ecological succession more than the work's capacity for demonstrating an imaginary past. Although Sonfist wrote of his intention to create a landscape that preceded "the concrete of the city," the site's actual existence, marked by a number of anomalies that would seem entirely out of place in a snippet of old-growth forest, has proven resistant to this notion. For one, the trees along La Guardia Place reveal a distinct phototropic pull into the empty canopy of the street, leaning into a space of sunlight framed by the midrise buildings to the west and south. Wind channeled between two condominium buildings to the south and east has similarly influenced the growth patterns of the site's vegetation.

Beyond such ambient effects, residents of these buildings have had a more direct impact on the site by hiring tree-trimmers to lop off branches overhanging *Time Landscape's* exterior fence. Even more drastically, when city workers were recently called in to dig a trench through the northwest side of *Time*

Landscape—presumably to address a sewage issue—they severed the roots of the oldest elm tree on the site. This disturbance soon led to the death of the tree, which had grown so large that its removal resulted in further injury to the mature elms, one of which also died. Both remain on-site as large stumps. *Time Landscape* also requires regular maintenance to clear the site of rubbish discarded by passing pedestrians.¹⁹ For nearly two decades, this task has been single-handedly carried out twice a day by a local resident of the neighborhood named Wilhelmine Hellmann. A retired electron microscopist, Hellmann also works on behalf of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to care for *Time Landscape*'s plants. Much of this vegetation remains from Sonfist's initial planting of the site, but Hellmann has also observed that the park contains a number of new species, some of which are native to the region and some of which are not.²⁰ Thus, to encounter *Time Landscape* today is less an experience of traveling back in time than one of contending with the complexities produced by the collision between Sonfist's attempted retrieval of the past and the reality of sustaining a small forest in the midst of an active urban neighborhood.

The Dia Art Foundation is perhaps the most recognizable institution that owns and maintains site-specific, outdoor artworks; it currently cares for *Spiral Jetty*, *Sun Tunnels*, and *The Lightning Field*. Each of

these works has experienced its own vicissitudes in the decades since being completed. The *Sun Tunnels*, for one, have acquired strange, circular markings within the interior of each concrete tube (figure 17). Before her death in 2014, Holt surmised that these were traces of bullets shot through the tunnels, and, according to a current Dia curator, she understood them to be a part of the work's evolution that should be left untouched by conservators.²¹ The experiences of *The Lightning Field* and *Spiral Jetty* are perhaps even more revealing in their respective differences. After *Spiral Jetty* resurfaced in 2002, Dia decided to hire a conservator, Francesca Esmay, to document the work aerially. In doing so, Esmay was attempting to track a number of factors, including water level, the drift of *Spiral Jetty*'s circular coil, and the buildup of silt deposits against it. While Dia continues to document these processes, it has yet to take any actions to conserve the coil itself. Esmay explained these choices in an interview:

For conservators, when we consider intervention and treatment on a work of art, we often think about preserving "original materials" and strive to align any intervention with the "artist's intent." In the case of *Spiral Jetty*, both of these issues are not straightforward since the original materials of the object arguably began changing the very instant the artwork was completed. Therefore, citing an original condition to use as a benchmark for a restoration is very challenging, if not impossible.²²

Notably, in deciding not to touch the rocks and dirt that make up the sculptural coil of *Spiral Jetty*, Dia has instead focused its attention on the viewshed around the work, attempting to preserve the appearance of the environment that visitors encounter when approaching and standing before the work. As a result, Dia has opposed local proposals to authorize oil extraction, but as recently as 2015 the foundation stated that it would not act to raise the water level along the lake's north shore surrounding *Spiral Jetty*, despite the sustained drought that has effectively marooned Smithson's earthwork.²³

Dia has also resolved to conserve *The Lightning Field's* viewshed by acquiring a land easement south of the work from local ranchers to prevent that land from being developed or commercialized.²⁴ Unlike its treatment of *Spiral Jetty*, however, Dia has subjected the sculptural element of De Maria's *Lightning Field* to more direct conservation, over time replacing selected poles that had been damaged by the local climate as well as undertaking a more significant and systemic effort in 2012 to reinforce the entire structure of the *Field's* four hundred poles.²⁵ To understand this curious divergence in approach between one site-specific work and another, we might return to Esmay's criteria concerning "original materials" and "artist's intent." Given that *Spiral Jetty* and *The Lightning Field* are equally susceptible to changes in their environments, the difference between



Figure 17. Nancy Holt,
Sun Tunnels, 1973–76,
Great Basin Desert,
Utah, photograph:
James Nisbet, 2018

them would seem to arise from the intentions of their respective artists. Smithson died in a plane crash in 1973 and therefore could not participate in Dia's more recent decisions, but he wrote extensively during his lifetime about his work. Across his numerous intellectually quirky and always studious texts, he valorized the concept of material entropy, which for him represented the gradual breakdown of recognizable form over time.²⁶ From Smithson's statements such as "nature does not proceed in a straight line, it is rather a sprawling development," Dia and others have inferred that the artist would accept the effects to *Spiral Jetty* wrought by the vagaries of erosion, coastal drift, and drought.²⁷ De Maria, by contrast, employed no such conceptions of entropy in his sculptural practice. He maintained extensive correspondence with curators during his career to repair freestanding sculpture that had been damaged during exhibition, and he even selected the particular stainless steel used for *The Lightning Field* for its resistance to oxidation rather than its facility in grounding the electrical current of a lightning strike.

Ultimately, however, Dia's different approaches to maintaining *Spiral Jetty* and *The Lightning Field* speak to the different relationships of these artworks to the organization. Dia was formed in the 1970s with the express ambition of funding and preserving De Maria's *Lightning Field* and similar long-term, site-specific works.²⁸

Dia shepherded every stage of De Maria's project, from his first sketch of the work on a hotel napkin in 1972 to its public opening and promotion nearly a decade later.²⁹ Crucially, Dia was founded after the completion of *Spiral Jetty* in 1970. Smithson's construction of the work had been funded by his New York gallerist, Virginia Dwan, and was not acquired by Dia until 1999. Smithson never provided a long-term plan for the maintenance of his work, although, as Hikmet Sidney Loe has noted, the artist did submit a letter in late 1971 to Utah's Department of Natural Resources requesting that his initial twenty-year lease be extended in perpetuity in the event that he "should ever have to invest more capital to repair or restore the jetty in the future."³⁰ His untimely death less than two years later cut short the formulation of any such repair or restoration plans.

Recounting the biographical details of Smithson's premature death or of Serra's visit to Japan provides vital information for understanding their respective artworks. But these details also prompt challenging questions about the implications of ecological succession alongside the role of artists as individual creators. Can we really say, for instance, that Alan Sonfist is as much the author of the *Time Landscape* that exists in the 2020s as he was of that work in the 1970s? Or that *Shift*, both past and present, is solely the creative work of Richard Serra? What I am suggesting is not that Sonfist or Serra

should lose their voice in expressing the significance of these works or what their future should entail. Instead, to fully internalize the implications of ecological succession for site-specific artworks we must also expand the time line of their authorship. If indeed the basis of art conservation is “original materials” and “artist’s intent,” then we likewise need to recast originality and intention as embracing their own kinds of secondness. With this broader and more dynamic understanding of authorship in mind, the primacy of Sonfist’s or Serra’s or any other artist’s opinions about original intention should be weighed alongside other considerations and voices that accrue throughout the life of a site.

The very idea of authorship, of course, has been under revision for some time in art and criticism. In 1919, Marcel Duchamp sent his sister a geometry book to hang outside and be torn apart by the weather to make *Unhappy Readymade*. In the 1960s, Fluxus artists around the world more systematically formalized chance operations in generating their work. During that same decade, the American artist Robert Morris theorized a condition of unfinishedness in the materiality of his sculpture, a concept that he called “Anti Form.”³¹ In my own scholarship, I have sought to carve out a role for ecology in the composition and completion of artworks by connecting the role of process in Morris’s Anti Form to emerging ideas in the postwar decades about the flow of energy through ecosystems.³² I now

think that position does not go far enough. To acknowledge that ecology plays a role in artistic composition is crucial; in Morris's case, such recognition connects his work to a range of European theorists from Umberto Eco to Roland Barthes to Wolfgang Iser, all of whom similarly sought to expand the source of cultural production beyond the preeminence of a single author.³³ Indeed, more recent interest in Bruno Latour's work on networks, Donna Haraway's on kinship, and the range of "new materialisms" to be articulated across the humanities has extended the idea of creation to relational frameworks that exist around and through cultural production. But in the sum of this work, duration tends to be limited to carrying out an initial setup or operation through time. For example, a chance operation may turn out a different result each time it is performed, yet its various results do not fundamentally change the nature of the operation itself. Even Morris's most radically open works, such as the use of steam as sculptural material, create experiences for their viewer that may draw on environmental conditions and even exceed the expectations of Morris as their creator, but they do not alter the process that Morris originally put in place.

Succession realizes a different order of secondness. Rather than creating unexpected or secondary effects, successions of site create entirely new relationships at an organizational level. At the site of *Shift*,

these relationships have been forged by a combination of local activities spurred by real estate development and global events driven by climate change, just as a similarly broad spectra of local and global forces have generated new site-based connections at *Time Landscape* and *Spiral Jetty*. There is an important difference, however, between the state of these artworks over time and that of an ecosystem undergoing secondary succession. In the latter, the prior ecosystem is entirely overtaken, whereas in site-based art it is possible for multiple orders of meaning and operation to coexist. For instance, to visit *Shift* on a snow-laden day in winter or to view it from the air is to have an experience largely in keeping with the original work described by Serra. It is during spring and summer each year that a dramatically different work emerges. Both of these aspects of *Shift* can be seen as extant in the artwork as it endures from year to year, formed through decades of activity by a series of authors and agents whose collective efforts now exceed the condition of any singular plan or design.