The Archive of Place and Land Art as Archive: A Case Study of *Spiral Jetty*

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ABSTRACT

The land art movement of the 1960s and 1970s challenged traditional art notions of object-ness, commodification, and permanence. Land art resides within, or on top of, landscapes, which are themselves sites with histories and identities that precede the land art use. Frequently created in remote areas that pose accessibility issues, viewers most often experience the physical locations through visual and written documentation. Literature on landscapes and the built environment serves as a foundation for considering the importance of place in archives and culture memory, and literature on artistic documentation of landscapes informs a discussion about the role of art in interpreting and accessing remote places. This article examines the land artwork *Spiral Jetty* by Robert Smithson as an art object with information worth preserving, while considering how the universe of documentation surrounding *Spiral Jetty* has shaped its interpretation and accessibility, revealing a complex narrative carefully controlled by the artist. The article concludes by inviting closer consideration of three-dimensional modeling as a new method for documenting land art, while determining that no one-size-fits-all approach exists to document and preserve these unique, artistically significant sites.

KEY WORDS

Archival records, Archival theory and principles, Visual arts

For thousands of years, humans have been using the earth's surface to mark their existence, from cave paintings and petroglyphs to earthworks, which are large displacements of rock or soil. Earthworks have served many known functions, such as defense barriers, denoting burial sites, or for agricultural purposes, while others are believed to have served symbolic, spiritual, or ceremonial purposes. England's Stonehenge and Peru's Nazca Lines are two famous examples of early earthworks, both of which are shrouded in mystery, as the civilizations that created them left no records explaining the process or purpose of their creations. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a group of American artists embraced the earthworks model and popularized a new movement known as land art. While the peak of this movement was short-lived, it is critically important to contemporary art and art historical scholarship. Although seemingly a sharp contrast to the mass-market pop art that dominated this era, both land art and pop art "responded to mass media, consumerism and the turbulent geopolitics of the 1960s," and together greatly influenced art for decades to come.[1]

Land art is often considered more closely aligned with architecture than with sculpture due to the monumental scale of sites, and it also blurs the line between landscape and built environment. Born out of a desire to be freed from traditional gallery confines, consumerism, and the limitations of "object-ness," land art has naturally, and often purposely, resisted documentation. Because they are frequently created in remote areas that pose accessibility issues, forms of visual and written documentation have become surrogates for the physical locations. This raises questions as to whether the surrounding contextual information—often produced by, or at the behest of, the artists themselves—should be considered part of the larger art object. For many land artworks, the archival notion of "inherent vice" is no unavoidable defect; but rather, natural decay is intrinsic to the artist's intentions, and physical preservation would be antithetical. What, then, is to be preserved? At play are issues of ephemerality, contextual information, and the influence of land artists on the content and enduring value of their records. This article reviews literature on documenting landscapes and the built environment, considering ideas and issues relevant to the documentation of land art. This examination of the land artwork *Spiral Jetty* as a case study considers traditional archival notions under new circumstances and questions the documentary record.

Literature Review

While the documentation of landscapes and the built environment may be considered two discrete categories, Nancy Carlson Schrock, an expert on architectural records management, navigated the blurred boundary between the two in the setting of New England. In her 1987 essay, Schrock used the

term "built environment" to describe "the wide range of structures erected by New Englanders to alter their environment."[2] Her definition encompasses housing and commercial buildings; roadside attractions; industrial and engineering structures such as bridges, quarries, and canals; and it even extends to farmland and designed landscapes such as municipal parks. While documentation of buildings and structures, including maps, architectural records, and construction permits, is typically plentiful, Schrock recognized that the more that "built environment" blurs into "landscape," such as with the activities of farmers and horticulturists, the more documentary challenges arise.[3] Farmland and gardens are inarguably examples of humankind's control over the natural world, yet they are often not as imposing, permanent, or accompanied by the same types of planning records that surround the construction of buildings. In essence, the more visible, permanent, and planned humankind's domination over the landscape is, the easier it has been to document. According to Schrock, "the best sources for information about the built environment are the buildings or landscapes themselves."[4] However, the fact that neither buildings nor landscapes are static and "have often been so altered that it is no longer possible to judge their original appearance or trace their histories" challenges this.[5] She concluded that "visual documentation is essential to trace the patterns of change over time," which necessitates strategies to create, as well as to preserve, records.[6]

Whereas Schrock was concerned with the documentation of continually changing landscapes, Jeanette Bastian, an archival researcher interested in memory, considered the effect of changing landscapes on humans, specifically the relationship between physical surroundings and remembrance.[7] Writing for a public history audience in 2014, Bastian cited the changes to landscapes as capable of disrupting personal and collective memories, testing our abilities to locate ourselves not just physically but culturally. The landscape can be read as a constantly changing text, "a collection of information amassed and redefined over centuries and millennia, layered records of the relationship between the land and its occupiers."[8] Bastian called attention to the physicality of "the archive," a memory house, as well as to the archival importance of context and relationships.[9] While defining archives as being located in physical places, archivists are simultaneously concerned with establishing connections between records and the geographic places where they were created. "In the relationship between archives, memory and place, it is through understanding contexts and locations that the actions and events reflected through the records create a coherent and trustworthy narrative."[10] The concept of place, then, is deeply embedded in how we both define and practice archives. Bastian wrote, "The archival principles of custody and provenance, and the context of creation that they reflect, are not just abstractions but practical ways of conceptualizing the relationships and connections between people and their surroundings."[11]

Landscapes themselves are memory houses, which archivists use as loci for establishing relationships and context.

Traditionally, landscapes have found their way into archives by way of maps, written records, oral histories, and photographs. Through a combination of these types of archival contents, archivists have sought to capture the spatial and temporal experience of place, and increasingly, to consider the interpretation of place. Maps are frequently looked at merely as cartographic interpretations of the natural world; however, they are abstractions with human-defined borders and boundaries. They have been used to provide a "material reality to something that human senses cannot grasp and providing this graphical device with a symbolic power, a social (and political) authority and an intellectual (or spiritual) efficiency."[12] Bastian further posited that through this human desire to situate ourselves, maps, or more generally records, "become potent definers of places and spaces, with the power to shape and control how the landscape is perceived, and, by implication, whose memories prevail and whose are forgotten or set aside."[13] It is critical to recognize that maps are constructed arguments about topography that can, and do, impact collective memory. While they are important tools in documenting place, they should not be regarded as impartial.

Thus, Bastian and Schrock both advocated for the use of records other than maps to document place. In the nearly thirty-year span between their articles, new technologies have helped expand the types of records that can be created and/or collected. Bastian updated Schrock's call for increased visual documentation of landscapes and the built environment by including digital tools. In particular, she saw the digitization of maps as a powerful method for exploring landscapes: "overlaying maps from different generations, even centuries and combining them with written records produced in and about that place, for example, enables deep and rich interpretations of archaeological sites, economic and population movements and historical events."[14] This allows for a more inclusive collective memory, and, through the ability to relate multiple cultural relationships to a place perhaps many "truths" in the archives may be revealed.[15]

Like Bastian, Kenneth E. Foote, a geographer, is concerned with archives' role in shaping collective memory.[16] He introduced a new term relevant to this discussion, "cultural landscape," which, although he never defined it, is generally considered to be "landscapes that have been affected, influenced, or shaped by human involvement," whether designed, ethnographic, historic, or vernacular.[17] Foote paralleled archives and cultural landscapes as both "maintain[ing] a representation of the past"; each is capable of bearing a society's selected memories.[18] Furthermore, in the absence of enduring value, the landscape may also forget: "A society's need to remember is balanced against its desire to forget,

to leave the memory behind and put the event out of mind."[19] Like a written record, a landscape may be expunged; Foote pointed to the "witch" executions in Salem, Massachusetts, as an example of an effaced landscape. Brought on by a sense of shame, the site of the 1692 executions has been forgotten, and written records lost or purposely destroyed. Witnesses recanted, and over time, the oral history detailing the exact location of the executions also faded away.[20]

Although a landscape may be erased, it is often still represented through visual mediums. Brian S. Osborne, a self-described historical-cultural geographer, wrote about Canadian artists' relationships with landscapes and the historical commentary provided by their art. He considered various capacities in which artists function: as reporters, interpreters, artisans, or conceptualizers.[21] While a reporter may be concerned with reporting a landscape's topography and precise features, Osborne cautioned that an interpreter may also record details, but intertwined with subjective adjustments, or interpretations: "The untidiness and rawness of frontier settlements could be domesticated into the picturesque mode by the artist's brush and imagination much quicker than it could by the pioneer settler."[22] Therefore, Osborne stressed the importance of closely examining art for its authenticity and reliability, as detail can exist within either "real" or "interpreted" worlds. The value of art for historical research is not limited to art that accurately reports facts, but instead, "art should be regarded as a documentation and an interpretation of the society of which it is a part and upon which it provides commentary."[23] Just as an artist may interpret and adjust a landscape's appearance with a paintbrush and canvas, a land artist alters an actual landscape, sometimes in ways nearly imperceptible to the casual observer.[24] This calls for close examination of the land art object and its record to understand the impact the artist has on shaping interpretations of the land.

Like Osborne, Joan M. Schwartz, a researcher in the fields of the history of photography, archives, and geography, raised questions about reality and representation in artistic mediums.[25] Schwartz paralleled the nineteenth-century rise of photography with archives, in that the records of both "were assumed to be accurate, reliable, authentic, objective, neutral, unmediated. They also trafficked in permanence. Photography 'fixed' a moment in time, 'fixed' the image of the *camera obscura*, 'fixed' the chemical development of the exposed plate or paper."[26] These perceived characteristics made photography a desirable surrogate for travel; whereas oral accounts and sketches of sights were undeniably human mediated, photography seemed to usher in a new era of "truthful" documentation that provided accurate knowledge about unseen places and objects.[27] However, Schwartz stated, "the photograph was, and continues to be, the material evidence of a human decision to preserve the appearance of a person, an object, a document, a building, or an event judged to have abiding value."[28] As

will be seen, photography has been the primary means for "knowing" land art, and the potential subjectivity of photographic records must not be overlooked.

In addition to visual documentation, landscapes and sites are increasingly being virtually documented. Patty Gerstenblith, a law professor specializing in cultural heritage preservation, wrote in 2016 that "the use of technological innovations to study, protect, and reconstruct the remains of the past has developed at a rapid pace over the past five years, urged on by wreckage caused by the destructive forces of armed conflict and looting of sites, particularly in the Middle East."[29] One such technological innovation is three-dimensional modeling, which Gerstenblith stated is particularly promising for recording the built environment. Three-dimensional modeling is being used to digitally preserve both vulnerable and lost cultural heritage sites. Reconstructing a lost site relies heavily on pre-existing documentation, particularly two-dimensional photographs, which are often brought together by way of crowdsourcing.[30] Thus, gaps may exist in the available documentation, which, in turn, hinder the process of creating accurate, complete models. For vulnerable sites still physically accessible, a greater number of digital reconstruction methods are available, such as using 3-D laser scanning to measure light bouncing off the structural surfaces, which yields highly accurate models.[31] Generally, it is much more effective to model sites before they are destroyed.

While these modeling techniques could be used to document land art and provide a new method for preserving and providing access to land art sites, Gerstenblith raised valid concerns. She asked, ". . . if the faithful reproduction is allowed to be and is accepted as a substitute for the original, does it matter whether we still have the original or is the reproduction sufficient as a means to study, observe, and enjoy the past? This also leads to questions about who has the right to re-create and determine the authenticity of the past."[32] Just as Bastian reminded us that maps are tools of power, and Schwartz cautioned that photographs are mediated representations, the same scrutiny must be paid to three-dimensional models. Three-dimensional modeling consciously creates boundaries that halt the reproduction, often eerily suspending it in virtual space devoid of a physical context.[33] For land art, which blurs the line between landscape and built environment, a decision would have to be made as to the boundary of the land art object, defining its limits in a way that perhaps should only be done by the artist.

Though the artist may be the best source of information for what is or is not a part of the art object, it must be considered how much artists can, or do, exert control over the accessibility of information about their works. Nicholas Olsberg, chief curator of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, wrote a summary of the 1994 Working Conference on Establishing Principles for the Appraisal and Selection of Architectural Records, where conference attendees

created an analytical model for documenting twentieth-century architecture.[34] The resulting recommendations from this conference called for the development of a documentation strategy and recognized problems and areas for further research, one being the "copyright and legal issues commonly affecting the ownership and use of architects' records."[35] Copyright is not a prevalent issue in documenting landscapes; however, it is highly relevant to artistic outputs. For land art, individual artists' wishes about how much their artwork may be experienced through surrogate materials and/or reproductions instead of the physical site further complicate this issue. For Robert Smithson, a well-known land artist to be discussed later, documentation produced about the site was a valuable tool for disseminating information about the artwork, whereas for other artists, documentation "misrepresents sculpture that can be known only through physical experience."[36]

This literature, encompassing the built environment and landscapes, indicates that structures and landscapes contain rich histories, often layered on top of one another. These memories and multitude of meanings must be preserved, as the physical sites tend to undergo changes, whether through purposeful destruction or passive degradation. Furthermore, documentation about landscapes must be carefully considered for objectivity and reliability. Land art resides within, or on top of, landscapes that are themselves sites with histories and identities that precede the land art use. Likewise, the landscape may take on new meaning(s) following its use for land art, whether through clearing of the site and rebuilding, or through a symbolic connection to nearby events.[37]

For many land artists, the landscape serves as a temporary structure for their art, its longevity subject to the surrounding environment and events, after which the artwork will be either forgotten or remembered through documentation. The landscape will be repurposed or left fallow and again inscribed with new histories, as it becomes a new record of active or inactive use. A closer study of a land artwork, and the role documentation has played in informing its accessibility and interpretability, is warranted.

Case Study: *Spiral Jetty*

Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* is arguably the most well-known and documented work of land art. Its elevated status and abundance of related documentation make *Spiral Jetty* a useful starting point to consider traditional archival notions under new circumstances. This case study will examine *Spiral Jetty* as an art object with information worth preserving, as well as how the universe of documentation surrounding *Spiral Jetty* has shaped its interpretation and accessibility, while challenging the boundaries of content, context, and structure.

Spiral Jetty is located at Rozel Point, along the northern tip of Utah's Great Salt Lake. Smithson and a construction team, led by Bob Phillips, completed it over a three-week period in April 1970.[38] The jetty consists of over 6,000 tons of locally sourced rocks and earth, arranged in a coil 1,500 feet long and 15 feet wide, extending from the edge of the lake's shore into the water. It is considered a site-specific sculpture, that is, "the work is a combination of a form the artist creates and the environment in which that form is placed. The work of art is contingent not only on the artist's ideas but also on the physical, cultural, and historical characteristics of a specific site."[39] Smithson was interested in finding a site where bacteria would create red-colored water, and he chose to investigate locations at the Great Salt Lake. On selecting the site, he wrote:

> Two dilapidated shacks looked over a tired group of oil rigs. A series of seeps of heavy black oil more like asphalt occur just south of Rozel Point. For forty or more years people have tried to get oil out of this natural tar pool. Pumps coated with black stickiness rusted in the corrosive salt air. A hut mounted on pilings could have been the habitation of "the missing link." A great pleasure arose from seeing all those incoherent structures. This site gave evidence of a succession of man-made systems mired in abandoned hopes.[40]

Smithson was drawn to Rozel Point for its visible layers of past uses and disjointed histories, reminiscent of Bastian's statement, "the physical evidence of movement and location intimately connects the landscape and the people who inhabit it, suggest[ing] that the landscape itself may be the archive. The land becomes a recording medium, an embodiment of the context of creation."[41] Although Rozel Point was not in active use at that time, the land had recorded humans' past activities and abandonments: shacks and oil rigs, along with a pier, were traces of the site's past industrial use. This created a cultural landscape that provided a context that Smithson felt was appropriate for his use of the land.

Spiral Jetty is also a record of Smithson's interest in entropy, or the natural inclination for things to degrade—not unlike the archival concept of *inherent vice*, or "The tendency of material to deteriorate due to the essential instability of the components or interaction among components."[42] This unavoidable evil, to be combated through preservation and conservation techniques, reformatting, or duplicating of records, stands in contrast to *Spiral Jetty*, in which the inclination to deteriorate is an integral part of the artwork. Rather than focusing on how to preserve the site, the question becomes what can be done to document it and preserve the content of *Spiral Jetty*, even if its structure is subject to deterioration?

Smithson hired photographer Gianfranco Gorgoni to document *Spiral Jetty*'s construction phase and finished product, two of the key documentation areas identified by Carlson and Olsberg. Gorgoni's photographs "not only documented

the project but also evoked, by their snapshot feel, an approximate experience of the absent physical object."[43] The photographs were widely disseminated, used in exhibitions, and have been reproduced in numerous monographs on Smithson, books on land art, and even surveys of the history of American art; they are unquestionably the source by which most people know *Spiral Jetty*.[44]

For the majority of the 1970s through the early 2000s, *Spiral Jetty* was submerged in the Great Salt Lake. While the land was still inscribed with the physical structure that constitutes *Spiral Jetty*, its relative invisibility took away the location as its defining characteristic, and, instead, "it became known primarily through secondary means, that is, through those ubiquitous photographs, as well as Smithson's own film and essay, rather than through direct experience."[45] Recalling Bastian's statement that records "become potent definers of places and spaces, with the power to shape and control how the landscape is perceived," after decades of virtual physical inaccessibility, it is evident that its surrounding documentation has largely influenced the informational value of *Spiral Jetty*.[46]

While the photographs have been powerful tools in making *Spiral Jetty* widely accessible, they have also significantly impacted its interpretation:

> When *Spiral Jetty* is visible above water, layers of white salt crystals that have grown all over it dramatically alter its appearance. Its disappearances from view and its changed aspect, evident on the rare occasions when it can be seen, have made Gorgoni's images among the only photographs of the sculpture in its final, original state. . . . Despite Smithson's meticulous compilation of images in his various representations of Spiral Jetty, I think he realized that the image of the sculpture that would linger in most people's minds would be . . . captured in a single aerial photograph.[47]

The photograph, created by Gorgoni and not Smithson, arguably eclipsed the site to become the primary source within the *Spiral Jetty* constellation of works. The photograph's depiction of the "original" sculpture relies upon the assumption that the sculpture itself is no longer "original" due to its physical changes. While the structure of *Spiral Jetty* has degraded, it is still the same container; it still exists within the same coordinates plotted on a human-defined map. If considering the content of *Spiral Jetty* to be each individual rock, the content has also undoubtedly changed, yet the sculpture remains legible as a whole. The boundary between structure and content begins to blur when considering the surroundings of *Spiral Jetty*, such as the water of the Great Salt Lake, and how granularly to consider the content that makes *this* spiral jetty *Spiral Jetty*.[48]

A disconnect exists between the static, lone aerial photograph representing *Spiral Jetty* and the engaging experience of visiting the site, where one might ruminate over the divide (or lack thereof) between the natural and humanmade worlds. Perhaps for this reason, Smithson was interested in including film in his

Spiral Jetty corpus as a method for documenting the experience of *Spiral Jetty* not captured by still photography. After completing the site and returning to New York, Smithson began work on a thirty-two-minute *Spiral Jetty* film; interlacing footage of the site's construction phase and finished product, Gorgoni's still photos, footage of dinosaur skeletons at the Museum of Natural History in New York, a quarry in New Jersey, and "maps of hypothetical earlier stages of the earth representing lost continents."[49] Part documentary and part exploration of his interests in time, place, and mysticism, the film has been described as Smithson's attempt to "leave the viewer with a sense that the monumental art work is connected to a vast mental landscape of meanings and associations."[50] One of the most striking scenes in the *Spiral Jetty* film is of Smithson, filmed by his wife, the artist Nancy Holt. In it, he stands at the top of a quarry, throwing ripped up pages from books. His dead-pan voiceover recites: "The Earth's history seems at times like a story recorded in a book, each page of which is torn into small pieces. Many of the pages and some of the pieces of each page are missing."[51] While analogizing the fragmented pieces of text to earth's history, this scene indicates Smithson's interest in known absences in narratives and the recognition of history as more of a "story" than truth, due to the silences in documentation. That fall, the film was screened daily at Smithson's solo exhibition at Dwan Gallery in New York, followed by showings at numerous other galleries, museums, and film festivals. Over the next few years following its creation, *Spiral Jetty* was exposed to a wide and diverse audience.[52]

In 1972, Smithson published an essay entitled "The Spiral Jetty," which documented his process and musings on both the site and the film. The essay contributed to the mythology Smithson was now clearly crafting and underscored the importance of place in his *Spiral Jetty* body of works. On the film, Smithson wrote:

> I needed a map that would show the prehistoric world as coextensive with the world I existed in. I found an oval map of such a double world. The continents of the Jurassic Period merged with continents of today. A microlense [*sic*] fitted to the end of a camera mounted on a heavy tripod would trace the course of "absent images" in the blank spaces of the map. The camera panned from right to left. One is liable to see things in maps that are not there. One must be careful of the hypothetical monsters that lurk between the map's latitudes. . . .[53]

The essay expresses Smithson's interest in maps as constructed arguments and the ability for maps to present both absences and simultaneous, multiple relationships with a singular place. In Smithson's lexicon, *Spiral Jetty* was not a "Site" but rather a "Nonsite." In a footnote to the essay, he explained: "The range of convergence between Site and Nonsite consists of a course of hazards, a double path made up of signs, photographs, and maps that belong to both sides of the dialectic at once. . . . The land or ground from the Site is placed *in* the art

(Nonsite) rather than the art placed *on* the ground. The Nonsite is a container within another container."[54] Smithson explored the Nonsite throughout his career as a category of geographic locations presented in other formats.[55]

The essay also provides vivid insight into Smithson's creative inspiration: "As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. . . . The shore of the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into a fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored in the shape of a spiral. No sense wondering about classifications and categories, there were none."[56] Smithson's detailed description continues to explain the construction process: "The tail of the spiral began as a diagonal line of stakes that extended into the meandering zone. A string was then extended from a central stake in order to get the coils of the spiral."[57] Despite his meticulous version of events, the record put forth by Smithson is far from what actually transpired.

An oft-overlooked aspect of *Spiral Jetty*'s history is Smithson's myth-making; not just the previously discussed mythology present in the film and essay, but the more subtle silences and absences in his controlled documentary record. Contractor Bob Phillips's essay for the aptly titled *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, a 2005 collection of texts about *Spiral Jetty*, revealed a more labored process: "The job was completed as per the drawing. At that point, it was a spiral with a bulb on the end of it, or an island on it. . . . About a week later, I got an anxious call from Smithson. 'It's not right. It's just not right.'—'What?'—'Well, the jetty, we've got to fix it. It's all wrong. We need to fix it.'"[58] Phillips went on to detail a three-day-long reworking of the jetty, transforming the bulb shape into a more evenly spaced coil.

Smithson's revisionism extended to an attempt to erase documentation of the first jetty, asking photographer Gorgoni to return a drawing of the original design and apparently destroying all related drawings and sketches. Gorgoni's photographs of the original *Spiral Jetty*, which still exist on his film contact sheets, have circulated, albeit minimally.[59] One of Gorgoni's photographs depicts Smithson alongside his friend and fellow artist, Richard Serra, looking at a sketch of *Spiral Jetty*. Originally depicting the first jetty, the sketch was modified to show the bulb being extended into the final spiral shape.[60] Images of the first jetty are notably absent from the photo documentation on the Robert Smithson Estate website and Gianfranco Gorgoni's website.[61] This absence extends to the *Spiral Jetty* project file in Robert Smithson's papers, housed at the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art.[62]

Brian Osborne called for closely examining artistic evidence for its reliability, and Smithson's papers further underscore the artist's subtle revisionist

relationship with documentation. The *Spiral Jetty* project file contains numerous versions of the essay; handwritten drafts marked up with strikethroughs to retract text, or arrows to insert additional words for emphasis. Though written in pencil, Smithson did not erase; he added and redacted while showing how each version informed the following. Initially, the project file does not seem to possess absences; in fact, it appears Smithson was more an over-saver than a destroyer. However, his penchant for editing reached far beyond the essay, which demonstrates the complexity of *Spiral Jetty*'s documentary record: it initially seems comprehensive, but perhaps the volume of documentation is intended to distract from the revisions and retractions he wished to conceal. Smithson used multiple techniques to shape the documentary record of *Spiral Jetty*: crafting a creation myth and destroying evidence that did not support it, producing a proliferation of information to increase accessibility of the site, and working across mediums to de-emphasize the original site. Is the "true" record the one Smithson produced and chose to put forward, as the creator, or does it include his omissions in the creative process?

Taken together, the essay, film, and photographs raise questions as to what is the content, or context, of *Spiral Jetty*. Gary Shapiro, a humanities and philosophy professor, wrote:

> One usual observation that has been made about the genre of earthworks, which Smithson is said to have helped pioneer, is that the works depend heavily on documentation of various sorts (maps, photographs, descriptive materials, films, and so on). I want to suggest, as do the multiple referents of the title *Spiral Jetty*, that there is no primary, authentic object (the spiral) to which the film and the essay are merely ancillary. One could say either that there are three distinguishable but interrelated works that bear that name or that there is one work existing simultaneously in a number of modes.[63]

Conversely, the film and photographs may be considered subordinate to the *Spiral Jetty* site, as the site is the primary subject matter, the content represented within the film and photography mediums. While the essay describes the site, it does not rely on visual documentation and could exist independently of the *Spiral Jetty* site as a fictionalized representation (which it arguably is); however, it too was produced in response to the construction of the site.

Each medium presented new opportunities for Smithson to convey overlapping yet distinct parts of his *Spiral Jetty* story, tailored to the capabilities of the medium. Thus, one part of the *Spiral Jetty* corpus cannot fulfill the purpose of another. While the site is unique, the film, essay, and Gorgoni's photographs exist in multiple copies and have been reproduced and reformatted for exhibitions and monographs; they are published materials. In terms of the uniqueness

of documentation, the *Spiral Jetty* site is theoretically more archival (although due to its physicality it cannot be placed in a memory-house-archives) than the visual and textual records (although these mediums are typically found in memory-house-archives).

Today, *Spiral Jetty* is one of the few remaining relics of the land art movement. The black basalt rocks are now encrusted in salt, creating a dramatic shift in the coloration of the spiral—a change that Smithson likely predicted. In 1973, Smithson's life was tragically cut short at age thirty-five in a plane crash while he was working on his site *Amarillo Ramp*. His death marked the beginning of the end for land art while simultaneously bolstering an interest in *Spiral Jetty* and elevating it to a pilgrimage-like site in the years since its re-emergence from the Great Salt Lake. Nancy Holt and the Estate of Robert Smithson donated *Spiral Jetty* to the Dia Art Foundation in 1999. Its draw as a tourist attraction has caused further damage to the site through the removal of souvenir rocks and foot traffic across the spiral.[64]

Unfortunately, it is impossible to know what measures Smithson would want taken to preserve the memory of *Spiral Jetty*. Physical conservation attempts of *Spiral Jetty* are challenging due to the remoteness of the site and its susceptibility to natural environmental conditions, which are furthered by climate change and tourism.[65] In late 2016, Dia Art Foundation began sharing aerial photographs of *Spiral Jetty* taken twice annually since 2012 from near identical vantage points as part of its commitment to "recording changes to the work over time through photographic documentation."[66] These photographs are publicly available on the Dia Art Foundation website which, perhaps notably, makes no mention of conservation. In addition to conservation being challenging, Smithson's artistic intent for the work to naturally degrade must be considered. As conservation measures may be antithetical, representing *Spiral Jetty* in alternative formats is the best option, a task begun by Smithson himself. However, this begs the question: can the *Spiral Jetty* site, as a unique form, be represented in alternative formats? On her longtime hesitation to visit *Spiral Jetty* due to its bounty of documentation, art historian Ann Reynolds wrote:

> There were plenty of existing descriptions of the *Jetty* to work with: photographic, cinematic, and hand-drawn images, as well as written accounts by the artist and by others who had visited the Jetty soon after its completion in 1970. Although I acknowledged that these descriptions were partial and distanced from their referent . . . I still felt they provided visual and conceptual proxies, images and ideas, that seemed sufficient. . . . As I stood on the *Jetty* last September for the very first time, I was deeply aware of the fact that neither my on-site experience nor the descriptions that I was familiar with, both old and new, were self-sufficient or even clearly distinct.[67]

Reynolds's account indicates that unevenness exists between *Spiral Jetty* as experience and *Spiral Jetty* as represented through other mediums. Returning to the relationship between Gorgoni's single aerial photograph and the *Spiral Jetty* site, it is worth noting that the photograph appears as the final shot in the *Spiral Jetty* film, shown tacked to a wall of the film-editing studio in New York. This shot "produce[s] a palpable awareness of the contradictions and necessary relationship between a description becoming a real presence and the real fading into a two-dimensional description."[68] The documentation of *Spiral Jetty* served an important purpose for the decades in which *Spiral Jetty* was physically inaccessible, and it continues to play an important role in better understanding Smithson as an artist interested in myth and how the presentation of information changes between mediums. However, the site has dramatically changed since this documentation was produced, and the record should be updated for better historical accuracy. Dia Art Foundation's recent effort to make these aerial photographs publicly available indicates an institutional understanding that the changes that have taken place, and continue to occur, are a worthy part of *Spiral Jetty*'s record.

As archivists, we consider the value of collections rather than fragmented documentation. *Spiral Jetty* asks us to do just that, to recognize the interrelatedness of diverse records united by a common provenance. We must also deal with decentralized holdings, with *Spiral Jetty*'s record dispersed between the site (in Utah), its custodian (Dia Art Foundation in New York), and Smithson's papers (Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art in Washington, D.C.). A promising sign for *Spiral Jetty*'s record is the Dia Art Foundation's 2016 formalization of an archival program. As of late 2016, it remains to be seen what materials it holds related to *Spiral Jetty*, and the Archives of American Art does not have any record of providing copies of the project file to Dia Art Foundation in the past.[69] In due time, institutional cooperation will be needed to share or reunite separated materials that benefit the documentary record.

Smithson actively shaped *Spiral Jetty*'s documentary record by producing a proliferation of information and de-emphasizing the original site. His carefully crafted creation myth, expressed through photographic, textual, and film documentation, has greatly shaped the interpretation of *Spiral Jetty*, while the documentation has also served a dual purpose of increasing accessibility to it. His creation of a corpus indicates he did not want the work, or his legacy, to vanish from cultural memory, yet it is still challenging to reconcile fully this side of Smithson with his interest in entropy. Perhaps he wished for the physical site once again to be repurposed and for this reason experimented with how the landscape might be best represented through other record formats. Throughout its nearly fifty-year lifespan, *Spiral Jetty* has always faced a precarious future: its susceptibility to natural elements, impacts of tourism, and, in recent years, the

potential for renewed oil drilling in the area. Dia Art Foundation and the conservation group Friends of the Great Salt Lake successfully fought a 2008 drilling proposal, citing the change to the surrounding physical landscape of *Spiral Jetty* as harmful to the artwork's experience.[70] Despite Smithson's intent for *Spiral Jetty* to succumb to entropy, interested parties must now grapple with balancing the artist's wishes with a seemingly inescapable desire to preserve and protect a landscape now bound to contemporary collective memory.

Conclusion and Areas for Future Research

Much still remains to be explored in the preservation and documentation of land art. Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, another well-known land art piece, was constructed in 1969–1970 and consists of two long trenches dug in the Nevada desert. Donated to the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles in 1985 under the strict order that it was to take no conservation measures, *Double Negative* raises far different considerations than does *Spiral Jetty* due to Heizer's purposeful restrictions on conservation, documentation, and surrogate materials.[71] Recently, however, Heizer is said to be rethinking the originally intended entropy and wants to restore *Double Negative*.[72]

Yet another set of considerations exists for *Sun Tunnels* by Smithson's wife, Nancy Holt, created between 1973 and 1976 in Utah. *Sun Tunnels* is composed of four concrete tubes (or tunnels) arranged in an X configuration to align with the sun at sunrise and sunset on the solstices, and each tunnel is pierced with holes in the shape of constellations.[73] While the concrete material of *Sun Tunnels* makes it less susceptible to decay than other land artworks, it nevertheless embodies an unwavering tie not just to place, but to light, space, and time; its reliance on interactions with the sky skews the work toward performance. This provokes new ideas about land art as experience and a different sense of temporality—rather than a linear degradation over time, *Sun Tunnels* deals with cyclical changes in response to the rising and setting of sun and moon. The challenge becomes how to document authentically something that is at once both stationary and always in flux, which is perhaps why Holt turned to film to capture the essence of *Sun Tunnels*.[74]

Just as photography revolutionized the ability to experience faraway places in the nineteenth century, today the spread of technology such as three-dimensional modeling is giving way to a similar revolution in how we may preserve and access cultural heritage. This technology warrants further research into how it can be proactively employed to help document land art sites before they are lost. While digital models may succeed at translating detailed features into virtual renderings, the models lose the multisensory physical experience of place—the kind that gets deeply rooted in one's memory, or, as Bastian wrote,

"our inner archive."[75] To provide greater context to the three-dimensional models, rich metadata and the forms of documentation discussed throughout this article, such as textual narratives, overlaid maps, and visual documentation showing changes over time, could be made available alongside the models. In doing so, we must bear in mind the mediation that takes place in producing documentation, as cautioned by Osborne and Schwartz. Furthermore, the documentation should be made available by the institutions that are custodians of land art to increase accessibility despite the remote and ephemeral barriers preventing access to the physical sites.

Each land art case presents unique considerations and documentary challenges, ranging from a proliferation of documentation and questions of reliability, to intentionally scarce documentation, or how to faithfully represent what lies between a site and a performance. No one-size-fits all approach exists to documenting and preserving land art, and individual artists' intentions must be considered. Archivists are uniquely qualified to contribute to this task because of our abilities to contextualize the history of sites, manage decentralized records, identify materials of enduring value, and evaluate appropriate solutions for distinctive situations. While this study has focused specifically on land art, the issues are familiar to the management of a broad array of archives: deterioration and preservation, surrogates and authenticity, and "truth" and the influence of record creators on the historical record. Just as the concept of place is embedded in how we both define and practice archives, place is also layered in the archives of *Spiral Jetty*, as expressed through our understanding of it as a physical location, and Smithson's concern with the Nonsite and documentation of place. The landscape itself is a record, and it is also a structure that bears both visible and invisible histories. We must be bold in questioning dominant narratives and strive to document the histories that we cannot readily see.

Notes

The author would like to thank Nora Mattern at the University of Pittsburgh for her guidance in the preparation of this article.

1 Kristen Swenson, "Land Art for the Media Age," *Art in America*, October 2, 2012, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/land-art-for-the-media-age.

2 Nancy Carlson Schrock, "Images of New England: Documenting the Built Environment," *The American Archivist* 50, no. 4 (1987): 476.

3 Schrock, "Images of New England," 492–93.

4 Schrock, "Images of New England," 476.

5 Schrock, "Images of New England," 476.

6 Schrock, "Images of New England," 493, 495.

7 Jeanette Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space: Locating Archives in the Landscape," *Public History Review* 21 (2014): 46.

8 Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 47.

[9] Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 49–50.

[10] Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 50.

[11] Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 52.

[12] Christian Jacob, "Mapping in the Mind: The Earth from Ancient Alexandria," in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 24.

[13] Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 55–56.

[14] Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 53.

[15] For more on social memory and "truth" in the archives, see Francis X. Blouin Jr., "Archivists, Mediation, and Construction of Social Memory," *Archival Issues* 24 (January 1999): 101–12; and Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science* 13 (June 2013): 95–120.

[16] Kenneth E. Foote, "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory and Culture," *The American Archivist* 53, no. 3 (1990): 378–92.

[17] "About Cultural Landscapes," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, http://tclf.org/places/about-cultural-landscapes.

[18] Foote, "To Remember and Forget," 384.

[19] Foote, "To Remember and Forget," 385.

[20] Foote, "To Remember and Forget," 385–86. Foote also provides the example of Berlin, Germany, where buildings associated with the Nazi regime were destroyed.

[21] Brian S. Osborne, "The Artist as Historical Commentator: Thomas Burrowes and the Rideau Canal," *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983–84): 41–59.

[22] Osborne, "The Artist as Historical Commentator," 45.

[23] Osborne, "The Artist as Historical Commentator," 41.

[24] For example, British artist Richard Long has created art by walking in landscapes and photographing the land that he walked across. For more on this, see Dieter Roelstraete, *Richard Long: A Line Made by Walking* (London: Afterall Books, 2010).

[25] Joan M. Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision': Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000): 1–40.

[26] Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision,'" 34.

[27] Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision,'" 20, 25–26.

[28] Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision,'" 19.

[29] Patty Gerstenblith, "Technology and Cultural Heritage Preservation," in *Display at Your Own Risk: An Experimental Exhibition of Digital Cultural Heritage*, ed. Andrea Wallace and Ronan Deazley (2016), http://displayatyourownrisk.org/gerstenblith.

[30] Gerstenblith, "Technology and Cultural Heritage Preservation."

[31] Gerstenblith, "Technology and Cultural Heritage Preservation." For more on this method for 3-D modeling, see "About," CyArk, http://cyark.org/about.

[32] Gerstenblith, "Technology and Cultural Heritage Preservation."

[33] For example, the organization CyArk has created models of cultural landscapes, such as Hopi petroglyph sites. While the models float freely in virtual space, they are contextualized through text and visual documentation. See "Hopi Petroglyph Sites," CyArk, http://cyark.org/projects/hopi-petroglyph-sites.

[34] Nicholas Olsberg, "Documenting Twentieth-Century Architecture: Crisis and Opportunity," *The American Archivist* 59, no. 2 (1996): 128–35.

[35] Olsberg, "Documenting Twentieth-Century Architecture," 134.

[36] Christopher Knight, "Art Review: 'Ends of the Earth' Brings Land Art Indoors," *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 2012, http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jun/03/entertainment/la-et-knight-land-art-review-20120602.

[37] A controversial case in which a land art site became inscribed with a new history is Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970. Constructed on the campus of Kent State University, *Partially Buried Woodshed* would find its way into the narrative of the Kent State shootings, which took place on May 4, 1970. For more on this, see John Fitzgerald O'Hara, "Kent State/May 4 and Postwar Memory," *American Quarterly* 58 (June 2006): 301–28.

[38] For more on Bob Phillips's role in the construction of *Spiral Jetty*, see Bob Phillips, "Building the Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, ed. Lynne Cooke et al. (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2005), 185–97.

[39] Diana Shaffer, "Nancy Holt: Spaces for Reflections or Projections," in *Art in the Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art*, ed. Alan Sonfist (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1983), 174.

[40] Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 8.

[41] Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 52.

[42] Richard Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, s.v. "inherent vice" (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 207.

[43] Kathleen Merrill Campagnolo, "Spiral Jetty through the Camera's Eye," *Archives of American Art Journal* 47, nos. 1–2 (2008): 19.

[44] Campagnolo, "Spiral Jetty through the Camera's Eye," 22.

[45] Lynne Cooke, "A Position of Elsewhere," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 53.

[46] Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 55–56; "informational value" as defined by Pearce-Moses: "The usefulness or significance of materials based on their content, independent of any intrinsic or evidential value." Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, s.v. "informational value," 206.

[47] Campagnolo, "Spiral Jetty through the Camera's Eye," 23.

[48] "Content" as defined by Pearce-Moses: "The intellectual substance of a document, including text, data, symbols, numerals, images, and sound." Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, s.v. "content," 89; "Structure" as defined by Pearce-Moses: "The manner in which elements are organized, interrelated, and displayed." Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, s.v. "structure," 373.

[49] Gary Shapiro, *Earthwards* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 14.

[50] Campagnolo, "Spiral Jetty through the Camera's Eye," 19.

[51] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 12.

[52] Cooke, "A Position of Elsewhere," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 54, 65. As previously mentioned, land artists, including Smithson, sought to free themselves from the traditional confines and commercialization associated with galleries and museums. By working in open spaces and creating objects that could not be commoditized, Smithson stepped outside the literal walls that contain art, as well as the metaphorical walls that contain ideas of what an art object is. Yet, the film was marketed for sale by Dwan Gallery as an edition, which would provide Smithson profit from the documentation; marking a return to (or lack of ever departing from) art commodification.

[53] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 11–12.

[54] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 13.

[55] For more on Nonsites, see Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[56] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 8.

[57] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 8.

[58] Phillips, "Building the Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 192, 194.

[59] Campagnolo, "Spiral Jetty through the Camera's Eye," 21–22.

[60] Campagnolo, "Spiral Jetty through the Camera's Eye," 22–23.

[61] Gianfranco Gorgoni, "Robert Smithson," http://www.gianfrancogorgoni.it/en/gallery/category/52-robert-smithson.html; and Robert Smithson, "Earthworks: Spiral Jetty," Estate of Robert Smithson, 2017, http://www.robertsmithson.com/earthworks/spiral_jetty.htm.

[62] "Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt papers, 1905–1987, bulk 1952–1987," Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art, http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/robert-smithson-and-nancy-holt-papers-7105.

[63] Shapiro, *Earthwards*, 7.

[64] Randy Kennedy, "How to Conserve Art That Lives in a Lake?" *New York Times*, November 18, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/18/arts/design/18spiral.html.

[65] In 2009, Dia Art Foundation partnered with Getty Conservation Institute to develop a repeat-photography system to document changes to the *Spiral Jetty* site and monitor it for conservation needs. For more on this, see Rand Eppich et al., "Monitoring *Spiral Jetty*: Aerial Balloon Photography," *ICOM International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation* (2011): 1–8, http://hci.ptools.net/Browse-Topics/PREVENTIVE-CONSERVATION/Spiral-Jetty-Paper-Rand-Eppich.pdf.

[66] "Spiral Jetty Aerial Documentation," Dia Art Foundation, http://www.diaart.org/collection/spiraljettyaerials.

[67] Ann Reynolds, "At the Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 73.

[68] Reynolds, "At the Jetty," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, 75.

[69] Janeen Schiff (archivist, Dia Art Foundation), email message to author, November 28, 2016; Marisa Bourgoin (head of Reference Services, Archives of American Art), email message to author, December 2, 2016.

[70] Kirk Johnson, "Plans to Mix Oil Drilling and Art Clash in Utah," *New York Times*, March 27, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/27/us/27spiral.html.

[71] William Wilson, "New MOCA Acquisition Is a Hole in the Ground," *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1985, http://articles.latimes.com/1985-12-10/entertainment/ca-15620_1_land-art; Knight, "'Ends of the Earth' Brings Land Art Indoors."

[72] Dana Goodyear, "A Monument to Outlast Humanity," *The New Yorker*, August 29, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/29/michael-heizers-city.

[73] "Sun Tunnels Self-Guide," Utah Museum of Fine Arts, https://umfa.utah.edu/land-art/sun-tunnels.

[74] Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, 16 mm color film (Electronic Arts Intermix, 1978), video.

[75] Bastian, "Records, Memory and Space," 46. For more on the experience of physical versus digital objects, see Anastasia S. Varnalis-Weigle, "A Comparative Study of User Experience between Physical Objects and Their Digital Surrogates," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 3 (2016): 1–21, http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol3/iss1/3.

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