

**Planetary Imaginations and the Anthropocene:
Tracing Geoaesthetic Acts between 1968-1972**



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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own original work and that it has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other degree or professional qualification.

The research is entirely my own except where otherwise acknowledged.



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Abstract:

This dissertation investigates the rise of planetary thinking and geologic imaginaries that are instigated by the Anthropocene in the late 1960s and early 1970s through their reflections in art and architecture. I examine the discursive traces and speculative imaginaries – those that underpin the contemporary Anthropocene - in the planetary aesthetic that gained an impetus with the rise of the “Whole Earth” discourse throughout the period between 1968 and 1972. I aim to reveal a prehistory of emerging Anthropocene aesthetics through offering a critical analysis and comparative reading of Michael Snow’s *La Région Centrale* (1971), Superstudio’s *The Continuous Monument* (1969) and Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970). I position these works as what I define as *geoaesthetic acts*: as cultural manifestations that take the Earth as their subject matter and focal point and that I contextualise within the Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. I mainly argue that by taking the Earth as a site, scale and aesthetic condition- as architects Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy put it-, these *geoaesthetic acts* foreground planetary imagination and point towards an Anthropocenic aesthetics.

This dissertation responds to the question of which representations of Anthropocenic thinking in art and architecture can play a similar preliminary role as *Las Meninas* (1656) does in Michel Foucault’s analysis in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences* (1970). For Foucault, *Las Meninas* is a painting which testifies to an epistemic rupture between the Classical and Modern and identifies the emergence of the figure of man as an epistemological consciousness upon which the new form of knowledge, the modern episteme will be founded. I map Foucault’s *Las Meninas* analysis as a conceptual and methodological guide by focusing on the relationship he builds between an epistemic shift and conditions of representation. The Anthropocene implies an epistemological shift that challenges the central positioning of this figure of man in the Modern episteme and points to its dissolution both on conceptual and material terms. In this regard, I argue that *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as a representational assemblage plays a similar inaugural role to *Las Meninas* in terms of identifying an epistemological shift, and foreshadows an Anthropocenic aesthetics by decentering and dissolving the figure of man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. In particular, I reveal how these three *geoaesthetics acts* respond to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and

collision of Earth and human temporalities posited by the Anthropocene thesis retroactively, through their radical conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale.

Although an emerging Anthropocene aesthetics can be identified -albeit loosely-, a genealogical exploration of the cultural manifestations that take the Earth as a site, scale, and aesthetic condition from an Anthropocenic lens has not yet been undertaken. Through my critical, comparative analysis and close readings of *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument*, I start to trace a lineage of Anthropocenic imaginary by exploring how these *geoaesthetic acts* established new or rather overlooked aesthetic modes, discursive, affective and sensual strategies through which to interrogate the relationship between the Earth and humans. I explore how they forged radical and inventive ways of conceptualising and representing the Earth as well as engaging with geologic life. By contextualising them within the "Whole Earth" discourse, I reveal how the period between 1968-1972 was a pivotal time in the history of Anthropocene aesthetics and uncover the impetus that gave rise to planetary aesthetic and geologic imagination in visual culture. I argue that through offering new frames of analysis, the Anthropocene theory allows us to reread these three works with new angles of thought and new layers of meaning and this rereading in turn contributes to Anthropocene studies. Since my research is positioned within Anthropocene studies, my approach is necessarily transdisciplinary, intersecting science, philosophy and aesthetics -which encompass art and architecture- and combines historical, theoretical, archival research methods as well as close readings and visual and architectural analysis. I argue that we can read these works as already engaging with the Anthropocene theory even before the term was invented and thereby foreshadowing an Anthropocenic aesthetics, allowing us to map the origins of the current Anthropocenic cultural-aesthetic context. This rereading provides a deeper understanding of the current distinctive set of historical, cultural, aesthetic, and geopolitical circumstances that is implied by the Anthropocene thesis, an understanding that goes beyond the fables of awakening that appear frequently in Anthropocene discourse. In doing so, this rereading offers critical, productive and creative insights into our contemporary situation in terms of developing an Anthropocenic thought and sensibility, that reconfigures our imagined relations with the planet.



Lay Summary

This dissertation explores the roots of an emerging aesthetic regime defined by the Anthropocene in art and architecture in the period between 1968 and 1972. The Anthropocene thesis introduced by the Earth sciences in 2000 proposes a new geological epoch in which humans are defined as a dominant geomorphic force, acting upon Earth's planetary systems. Following the Climate Change thesis, the Anthropocene is the latest planetary imagination that describes massive extinction, brutal resource extraction, and irreversible environmental damage. It reveals that the long accepted division between nature and culture does not exist and therefore has been regarded as creating a paradigm shift in knowledge production. This dissertation explores the epistemological shift created by the Anthropocene from the field of aesthetics and excavates the roots of this epistemological rupture in three case-studies; Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale* (1971), Superstudio's *The Continuous Monument* (1969) and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970). I reread these works as what I define as *geoaesthetic acts*, as cultural manifestations that take the Earth as a site, scale and aesthetic condition and that I contextualize in the Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. Through my critical and comparative analysis of these three *geoaesthetic acts*, I argue that these works can be read as already engaging with the Anthropocene theory and foreshadowing the emerging Anthropocene aesthetics. There has been a significant rise in cultural and artistic production that engages with the problems identified by the Anthropocene, yet a study on its genealogy has not been undertaken yet. This dissertation argues that similar concerns and responses were present in the period between 1968-1972 and specifically tracks the epistemological origins of the Anthropocene in the Whole Earth discourse. My rereading of the three works as *geoaesthetic acts* not only sheds new light on the contemporary cultural-aesthetic context defined by the Anthropocene but also provides a deeper historical and critical understanding of the current planetary predicament, an understanding that goes beyond fables of awakening that frequently appear in the Anthropocene debate.



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List of Acronyms

AWG: Anthropocene Working Group

VAB: Vertical Assemble Building



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INTRODUCTION

Planetary Thoughts and Geologic Imaginaries in the Anthropocene

“Thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the Earth.”¹

In this dissertation, I pursue the rise of planetary thinking and geologic imaginaries in the late 1960s and early 1970s through their reflections in art and architecture. I examine the discursive traces and speculative imaginaries – those that underpin the contemporary Anthropocene – in the planetary aesthetic that gained impetus with the rise of the “Whole Earth” discourse throughout the period between 1968 and 1972. More specifically, I aim to reveal a prehistory of emerging Anthropocene aesthetics through offering a critical analysis and comparative reading of Michael Snow’s *La Région Centrale* (1971), Superstudio’s *The Continuous Monument* (1969) and Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970).

In broad strokes, I take the Anthropocene thesis as this dissertation’s departure point, position it as the most recent scientific planetary imagination and mobilise it as a contextual framework for defining our contemporary socio-ecological and cultural-aesthetic condition. As is now well-known, the Anthropocene thesis introduced by the Earth sciences in 2000 proposes a new geological epoch “in which humans are defined as a dominant geomorphic force, acting upon Earth’s planetary systems”.² Besides proposing a historic-geologic novelty, the Anthropocene thesis sets forth a totalising framework that ties human cycles with bio-geo-chemical cycles of Earth at multiple scales. Following the climate change thesis that precedes it, the Anthropocene is an addition to planetary imaginations that impose a *transcalar* connectivity of material processes and a radical contingency and complexity of the relationships between human and Earth temporalities. It implies what is broadly defined as a geologic turn in cross-disciplinary knowledge production and cultural awareness by entangling geologic forces in reciprocal relationships with social and political agencies.³ This “inclusive disjunction”⁴ opens

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson. (London: Verso Books, 1994), 85.

² Benek Çinçik and Tiago Torres-Campos, “Postcard Notes on the Anthropocene”, in *Postcards from the Anthropocene: Unsettling the Geopolitics of Representation*, eds. Benek Çinçik and Tiago Torres-Campos (Barcelona: DPR Barcelona, forthcoming).

³ See: Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse, “Evidence: Making a Geologic Turn in Cultural Awareness”, in *Making the Geologic Now. Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life*, eds. Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse (New York: Punctum Books, 2013), 3–18.

⁴ Claire Colebrook, “A Grandiose Time of Coexistence’: Stratigraphy of the Anthropocene”, *Deleuze Studies* 10, no. 4 (2016): 441. <https://doi.org/10.3366/dls.2016.0238>.

up “ethico-onto-epistemo-logical”⁵ questions on geologically informed subjectivities and agencies. Within this totalising and meta-level framework, I focus on the question and representation of the Earth as the contingent material support for both philosophical inquiry and the human condition and thereby conceptualising it as an aesthetic issue. In this regard, I position *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as what I define as geoaesthetic acts: as cultural manifestations that take the Earth as their subject matter and focal point and that I contextualise within the Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. And importantly, I will argue that by taking the Earth as “a site, scale and aesthetic condition”,⁶ these geoaesthetic acts foreground planetary imagination and point towards an Anthropocenic aesthetics.

This dissertation started as a thought experiment, in response to the question of which representations of Anthropocenic thinking in art and architecture can play a similar preliminary role as *Las Meninas* (1656) does in Michel Foucault’s analysis in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences* (1970). I map Foucault’s *Las Meninas* analysis as a conceptual and methodological guide by focusing on the relationship he builds between an epistemic shift and conditions of representation. For Foucault, *Las Meninas* is a painting which testifies to an epistemic rupture between the Classical and Modern and identifies a break with a prior system of representation which it undermines and fractures. Importantly, it identifies the emergence of the figure of Man as “an epistemological consciousness”⁷ upon which the new form of knowledge, the modern episteme will be founded. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the Anthropocene implies an ethico-onto-epistemo-logical shift that challenges the central positioning of this figure of Man in the Modern episteme and points to its dissolution both on conceptual and material terms. In this regard, I propose that *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as a representational assemblage plays a similar inaugural role to *Las Meninas* in terms of identifying an epistemological shift and foreshadows an Anthropocenic aesthetics by decentring and dissolving the figure of Man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. In particular, I reveal how these three geoaesthetic

⁵ As philosopher Evelien Geerts writes: “The notion of “ethico-onto-epistemology” was first coined by physicist-philosopher Karen Barad to point at the inseparability of ethics, ontology and epistemology when engaging in (scientific) knowledge production, with scientific practices, and with the world itself and its inhabitants – human and non-human beings that intra-actively co-constitute the world”. Evelien Geerts, “Ethico-onto-epistem-ology”, *New Materialism*, 14 August 2016, <http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/e/ethico-onto-epistem-ology>

⁶ Contemporary architects Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy write with regards to their own “planetary” projects: “The prefix “geo-” engages the Earth as a grand question of design: a site, scale, and aesthetic condition”. Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy, *Geostories: Another Architecture for the Environment* (Barcelona: Actar Publishers, 2018), 12.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. (1970; reis. New York & London: Routledge, 2005), 336.

acts respond to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and the collision of Earth and human temporalities posited by the Anthropocene thesis retroactively, through their radical conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale.

As I will outline in the following sections of this introduction, “the way we have come to understand the Anthropocene has frequently been framed through modes of the visual”⁸ and as cultural theorist Nicolas Mirzoeff emphasises “to visualize the Anthropocene is to invoke the aesthetic”.⁹ There has been a significant rise in the cultural and artistic manifestations that revolve around the provocations of the Anthropocene and respond to “the challenges posed to the human sensorium by the new cultural prominence of geophysical and deep temporal change” in recent years.¹⁰ Among many others, Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse’s *Making the Geologic Now: Responses of Material Conditions of Contemporary Life* (2013) and Etienne Turpin and Heather Davis’s *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (2015) could be given as examples that point towards an Anthropocene aesthetics. Although an emerging Anthropocene aesthetics can be identified - albeit loosely-, a genealogical exploration of the cultural manifestations that take the Earth as ‘a site, scale, and aesthetic condition’ from an Anthropocenic lens has not been undertaken yet. In this regard, I reveal a prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics by offering a critical analysis and relational rereading of *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument* as geoaesthetic acts.

Through identifying and reflecting on these geoaesthetic acts - their radical conceptualisation of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale - I start to trace a lineage of Anthropocenic imaginary. By contextualising them within the “Whole Earth” discourse, I reveal how the period between 1968-1972 was a pivotal time in the history of Anthropocene aesthetics and uncover the impetus that gave rise to planetary aesthetic and geologic imagination in visual culture. I argue that through offering new frames of analysis, the Anthropocene theory allows us to reread these three works with new angles of thought and new layers of meaning and this rereading, in turn, contributes to Anthropocene studies. Since my research is positioned within Anthropocene studies, my approach is necessarily transdisciplinary and thus -very broadly- intersects science, philosophy and aesthetics, which

⁸ Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, “Art and Death: Lives Between the Fifth Assessment and the Sixth Extinction”, in *Art in the Anthropocene, Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* eds. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 3.

⁹ Nicolas Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the Anthropocene”, *Public Culture* 26, no. 2 (2014): 213.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2392039>

¹⁰ Nigel Clark, “Fiery Arts: Pyrotechnology and the Political Aesthetics of the Anthropocene”, *GeoHumanities*, 1, no. 2, (2015): 271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2015.1100968>

encompasses art and architecture. My transdisciplinary rereading of these three works allows me to map and interlink connections between the immediate past and contemporary moment in terms of the intensification of planetary thought and geologic imagination within cultural and aesthetic production. By revealing how these geoaesthetic acts respond to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities retroactively, I situate them as paradigmatic case studies within the epistemic rupture the Anthropocene implies. And by doing so, I argue that these works were already engaging with the Anthropocene theory even before the term was invented and thereby pointing towards an Anthropocenic aesthetics, allowing us to map the origins or what I call the prehistory of the current Anthropocenic cultural-aesthetic context.

In other words, I imply that with the development of the Anthropocene theory, we are in a better position to understand the wider implications of *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument*. Through my critical, comparative analysis and close readings, I explore how these geoaesthetic acts established new aesthetic modes, new discursive, affective, and sensual strategies through which to interrogate the relationship between the Earth and humans and forged radical and inventive ways of conceptualising and representing the Earth as well as engaging with geologic life. In doing so, I begin to map a cultural nexus that provides an understanding of the decentring and the dissolution of 'the figure of Man' in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. Since I define the Anthropocenic epistemic rupture as the decentring and the dissolution of the figure of Man, my reading is necessarily a feminist reading in ethico-onto-epistemo-logical terms. Although the works that I redefine as geoaesthetic acts are created by white and Western men, my reading focuses on the works themselves and explores what they do, activate and mobilise in terms of foreshadowing Anthropocenic imagination rather than focusing on their creators and their genders. Therefore, although these works were created by white and male practitioners, I reread them from a feminist perspective and demonstrate how they begin to decentre and dissolve the figure of Man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. By selecting these works by well-known figures and through offering an immanent critique of them, I aim to dissolve the master narratives around them and reveal the aesthetic tendencies within these works that initiate an epistemic transformation.

At this point, it is important to note that I do not suggest that the representational assemblage I offer involves the only possible precedents of Anthropocenic thought and sensibility in visual culture. There is a wide range of artworks and architectural propositions in the period between the late 1960s and early 70s that could be read through an Anthropocenic lens and could be considered as potential geoaesthetic acts since they also take the Earth (geo) as their subject

matter and focal point. The ecofeminist works by Ana Mendieta, earthworks by Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer, Jan Dibbets, Walter de Maria and Richard Long, ecological proposals of Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison and Agnes Denes, and Paolo Soleri's architectural typologies informed by ecology can be given as examples in this regard. These works could be tested as potential geoaesthetic acts because they also engage with the Earth as a 'site, scale, and aesthetic condition'. At the initial stages of my selection of case studies, I tested Paolo Soleri's experimental town Arcosanti (1970) as a geoaesthetic act but omitted it since the life in the town was dominated by the patriarchal attitude of Soleri which is in deep contradiction with my overarching hypothesis that preliminary geoaesthetic acts decentre and dissolve the figure of Man.¹¹

The site-specific interventions of the aforementioned practitioners engage with environmental concerns and issues related to ecology that gained impetus with the rise of the "Whole Earth" discourse in the period between 1968-1972. Yet, I propose that in order to recontextualise a historical work within the Anthropocene as a material and discursive framework and hence position it as a preliminary geoaesthetic act, a clear shift to the focus on geologic rather than ecologic needs to be identified. This clear shift to the focus on geologic is the first reason for my choice of *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument* among this range and nomination of them as geoaesthetic acts. As the Anthropocene initiates an engagement with the geologic, it expands the spatial and temporal frames of analysis. While the former opens up to the planetary, the latter becomes embedded in deep time. This recalibration along with the Anthropocene's dismissal of the division between nature and culture not only cause human temporality to become entangled with the temporality of the Earth but also brings geologically informed subjectivities to the foreground. In addition, as the Anthropocene emphasises a myriad of interconnections in geo-bio-socio assemblages across multiple scales, it requires a new, more complex imagination of scale. These conceptual implications that arise from the Anthropocene's shift to the geologic, namely the

¹¹ There are multiple reasons that led me to quit working on Arcosanti. First, in order to live at Arcosanti, one has to attend a six-week and very expensive workshop. The site and the buildings were developed through the resulting free labour over the years, which is ethically highly problematic. Second, Soleri's highly authoritarian attitude that initiated a problematic patriarchal social structure at the town was criticised by some of the residents. More importantly, recently Soleri's daughter Daniela Soleri gave a devastating account of sexual violence carried out by his father against her. The Cosanti Foundation has issued a statement in support of her. See: Sherwood Davidson Kohn, "Soleri thinks very big", *New York Times*, July 26, 1970, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/07/26/archives/article-6-no-title-soleri-thinks-very-big-conceptually-his-soaring.html> and Steve Rose, "'His inner circle knew about the abuse': Daniela Soleri on her father architect Paolo", *The Guardian*, Feb 29 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/feb/29/paolo-soleri-architect-abuser-arcosanti-utopian-city-steve-rose> See also: James Graham, "Narrating Arcosanti, 1970," in *A Year Without a Winter*, ed. Dehlia Hannah (Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2018), 86.

reconfiguration of subjectivity, temporality, and scale determined my criteria for selecting the works and positioning them as geoaesthetic acts. In other words, I position these three aspects as conceptual foundations for my identification and definition of geoaesthetic acts, as responses to the two main modes of operation an Anthropocenic imagination implies, that are the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and the collision of Earth and human temporalities. That is to say, I have chosen *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument* among the aforementioned range because they introduce unique conceptions of subjectivity, framings of temporality, and imaginations of scale.

The second reason behind my choice of *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument* is that I propose them not as individual works but rather as a representational assemblage with equivalent agency to Foucault's reading of *Las Meninas* in terms of foreshadowing an epistemic rupture and signifying the epistemic break of the Anthropocene. They build up a rich assemblage mainly because each of the works is a completely different kind of intervention, not only in terms of its medium but also its conceptual intentions, themes, means and modes of production mechanism, and methodological tools. Although they converge in their focus on the geologic and engagement with the planetary imagination, they diverge in the ways in which they decentre and dissolve the figure of Man and foreshadow Anthropocene aesthetics. As a starting point for outlining the distinctiveness of each work; *La Région Centrale* is a film contemplating on planetary motion, *The Continuous Monument* is an architectural project experimenting with planetary organisation and *Spiral Jetty* is a tripartite work consisting of earthwork, film, and essay that engages with planetary change. These differences, among many others, complement each other well and through these differences, I begin to map a conceptual landscape of preliminary geoaesthetic acts. By bringing these differences together, I aim to provide a wider perspective for exploring the epistemic origins of Anthropocene aesthetics. Consequently, I argue that a relational rereading of these three works as geoaesthetic acts can help us comprehend the roots of the emerging Anthropocene aesthetics and offer critical, productive and creative insights into our contemporary situation "due to their focus on some of the underlying problems of our imagined relations with the planet".¹²

By reflecting upon these geoaesthetic acts as incisive case studies from the immediate past in a critical and expansive way, I aim to provide a deeper understanding of the current distinctive set of historical, cultural, aesthetic, and geopolitical circumstances that is implied

¹² Angela Last, "We Are the World? Anthropocene Cultural Production between Geopoetics and Geopolitics", *Theory, Culture and Society* 3, no. 2–3, (2017): 150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415598626>

by the Anthropocene thesis. This deeper and more critical understanding goes beyond the fables of awakening that appear frequently in Anthropocene discourse. Through my critical and comparative reading of these three geoaesthetic acts, I use historical, theoretical, archival research methods and utilise close readings and visual and architectural analysis. Following a Foucauldian method, I intend to build up a critique of the present Anthropocenic cultural and aesthetic condition through the gesture of historicisation, by mapping connections and (dis)continuities through the genealogical thread of planetary ideas and the “Whole Earth” imagery. To do so, first I will contextualise the conceptualisation of Earth as a system within Cold War ideologies, knowledge, and technologies and techno-cultural transformations that expanded on this particular model of systemisation. Second, I will try to interlink the cultural anxieties of the nuclear/atomic age and the environmental insecurities that are anchored in ecological debates in the late 1960s and early 70s, with the prospect of an uninhabitable Earth rendered by the Anthropocene thesis today.¹³ This contextualisation will help us to comprehend both the epistemological and material conditions that led to the Anthropocene as a narrative and the aesthetic and cultural responses to its premise of a possible major biospheric annihilation. Through interlinking the “Whole Earth worry”¹⁴ in the period between 1968-1972 and the contemporary Anthropocene anxiety and by engaging with the dissolution of the figure of Man, I necessarily problematise the question of the end, which will then lead me to offer a reading of the geoaesthetic acts as future fossils, “as a future temporality turned back to current moment”.¹⁵

In the rest of this introduction, I will expand on the aforementioned aims and objectives by detailing the rationale and overarching hypothesis of this dissertation and offer a historical contextualisation of the roots of the Anthropocene narrative in the period between 1968-1972. In addition, I will reveal my conceptual approach and contribution to the Anthropocene aesthetics through which I define geoaesthetic acts, in more detail. I will conclude the chapter by drawing an outline of the dissertation.

The Anthropocene as an Epistemological Lens

Plasticised rocks, ocean acidification, anthropogenic mountains, ozone holes, nuclear wastelands, microplastics, species extinction, global warming, deforestation, soil degradation: this is only a partial sequence of an ever-expanding list that one encounters when entering

¹³ According to the International Union for Conservation, we are going through a sixth mass extinction event in the Earth's history.

¹⁴ Beatriz Colomina, *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines 196X to 197X* (Barcelona: Actar Publishers, 2011), 11-12.

¹⁵ Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 109.

the nebulous Anthropocene debate. The Anthropocene's attempt at a unifying framework raises difficulties of conceiving and narrating our relationships with nonhuman and inhuman ontologies in deep time. As postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, the collision of human and Earth temporalities calls for a re-thinking of the conceptual frames and narratives through which we forge our history.¹⁶

In this regard, in the very beginning of my engagement with the Anthropocene narrative, I responded to the Anthropocene as a temporal device that shifts perspectives and contemplated its possible implications in architectural design. As a contemplative response, with my design research collective OPPO, we have developed a visual thought experiment in order to explore how the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities could transform architectural modes of thinking and representation (*Figure 1*). This visual thought experiment aimed to reframe the “architectural section through scrutinising the material and epistemological conditions that led to the Anthropocene”.¹⁷ It argued that as Anthropocenic thinking “stretches the conception of time beyond human history with deep time, collides the speed of atomic vibrations with tectonic movements, and variates the scale from human to more-than-human”, it extends “architectural section vertically from satellites to the subterranean waste depositories and entangles fossilized microbial mats with radioactive plumes, endemic faunas with coal mines, ship-breaking sites with skyscrapers and Earthquake remnants”.¹⁸ I introduce the visual material in this dissertation with this OPPO collage because it exemplifies the destabilising, yet equally speculative and imaginative impact Anthropocenic modes of thinking cast upon visual and architectural modes of representation. The image responds to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities posited by the Anthropocene by mobilising the possibilities of the collage technique that enables juxtaposing various spatiotemporalities.

¹⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”, *Critical Inquiry*, 35 (2009) 200.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/596640>

¹⁷ Benek Çinçik, “Strata Manifesto”, in *Postcards from*, p: n/a

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p: n/a



Fig 1: “Strata Manifesto” collage by OPPO. Digital image, 11,86 cm x 33,87 cm, December 2014, İstanbul. Reprinted in *Postcards from the Anthropocene: Unsettling the Geopolitics of Representation*, eds. Benek Çiñçik and Tiago Torres-Campos. (Barcelona: DPR-Barcelona, forthcoming), p: n/a.

By producing material evidence of the entanglements between nonhuman, inhuman and human (e.g. plasticised rocks such as “plastiglomerates”), the Anthropocene not only reinforces the problematisation of philosophical frameworks based on dualisms such as subject and object or nature and culture but also redefines and repositions the concept of human within the complex interactions and intra-actions¹⁹ of socio-bio-geo assemblages. In other words, it blurs the distinction between human, nonhuman and inhuman by pointing to the conversion of humans’ geologic agency into a stratigraphic inscription, hence provoking us to imagine ourselves as “walking rocks”.²⁰ That is to say, the epistemological shift the Anthropocene mobilises occurs in the dissolution of these binaries between nature and culture and subject and object and the entanglement of human and Earth temporalities. Yet it is important to note that such a dismissal of these dualities is certainly not new. The ontological separation between nature and culture as well human primacy and exceptionalism have been problematised by feminist studies and critical posthumanist discourse -stemming from Foucault’s antihumanism-, which can be exemplified in Donna Haraway’s notion of naturecultures.²¹ In this sense, I position the Anthropocene narrative as a scientific confirmation of the dissolution of these distinctions and argue that it acts as an amplification

¹⁹ Karen Barad writes: “It is not just a kind of neologism, which gets us to shift from interaction, where we start with separate entities and they interact, to intra-action, where there are interactions through which subject and object emerge, but actually as a new understanding of causality itself.” Karen Barad, “Matter Feels, Converses, Suffers, Desires, Yearns and Remembers: Interview with Karen Barad” in Dolphijn, van der Tuin (eds), *New Materialisms*, 55.

²⁰ Ellsworth and Kruse, “Evidence: Making a Geologic Turn”, 17.

²¹ See: Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto, Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

of this epistemological positioning.²² As media theorist Joanna Zylińska puts it, the Anthropocene problematic provides “a new epistemological filter through which we humans can see ourselves”.²³ And I argue further that it provides this epistemological filter by radically expanding the spatiotemporal frames of analysis and colliding human and Earth temporalities, thereby destabilising the ethico-onto-epistemo-logical positioning of the figure of Man upon which the Modern episteme was established.

Bruno Latour responds to the challenge of conceiving human history and natural history together²⁴ and questions the uselessness of older “traits associated with subjectivity or objectivity” to document, tell or represent the Anthropocene situation.²⁵ As an alternative, he offers a “common geostory”, whereby he suggests a reconfiguration of the relationship between Earth and human agencies, “a return of object and subject back to the ground -the ‘metamorphic zone’- they had both believed it possible to escape: one by deanimation, the other by overanimation”.²⁶ The “overanimated” human agency, defined as a collective subjectivity and described as a telluric force by the Anthropocene thesis is threatened by the formerly “deanimated”, vibrant, indeterminate agency of the Earth. Latour’s definition of ‘geostory’ is significant for this dissertation because it identifies one of the departure points for my conceptualisation of geoaesthetic acts. Latour argues further that the switch of “news” from “the facts of astronomy to the facts of geology” with the introduction of the Anthropocene activates a kind of “counter-Copernican revolution” in knowledge production, in which “science is forcing our eyes to turn toward the Earth considered, once again, as a cesspool of conflict, decay, war, pollution, and corruption”.²⁷ This conceptual reorientation identifies the epistemological shift the Anthropocene implies and demands a reconfiguration of the relationship between the Earth as a subject and an agency and human as a geologic subjectivity.²⁸

In other words, a re-positioning of the social within the materiality of the geologic extends geometries of power from the social sphere to the Earth system. Both the awareness of co-emergency and co-dependency between human and Earth agencies and a geologic self-

²² See: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2014.0003>

²³ Joanna Zylińska, *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 4.

²⁴ Latour, “Agency in”, 3.

²⁵ Ibid., 15.

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

²⁷ Ibid., 4.

²⁸ Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, transl. Elizabeth McArthur and William Paulson. (reissued; 1990, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995)

witnessing through “the recognition of destruction”²⁹ bring the limits of material and discursive capacities of human history into question. This results in an epistemological panic, what literature scholars Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall refer to as a “hermeneutical challenge”,³⁰ and raises the question as to what means, senses and methods we can encounter to reflect upon the complex interdependencies between Earth and human agencies, and our position therein, as a collective geologic subjectivity? I respond to these questions through offering an Anthropocenic reading of three geoaesthetic acts, three speculative geologic imaginaries from the period between 1968 and 1972, whereby similar -albeit ecological- questions and concerns are posited across diverse grounds of knowledge and cultural production. My reading of *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument* as geoaesthetic acts will reveal how they introduce new -or rather overlooked- discursive, affective, and sensual strategies to identify and engage with the Anthropocenic rupture.

Since its emergence, the Anthropocene has moved beyond being a concept limited to Earth sciences and has provoked an ever-expanding debate that traverses disciplinary boundaries in scholarly production. Its wide visibility in academic discourse has been accompanied by a rise of the term in popular culture and mainstream media, and triggered, on the one hand, solutionist responses by technofixers, and on the other hand, apocalyptic scenarios both of which enhance the anthropocentrism that led to the condition itself.³¹ This dissertation draws on and contributes to what Claire Colebrook coined as Anthropocene studies,³² an emergent transdisciplinary field that stretches across natural sciences, social sciences and arts and humanities, and engages with critical understandings of the Anthropocene that problematise anthropocentric thought conventions and dominant modes of technoscientific knowledge production.

In this regard, I situate the Anthropocene thesis as a “transversal”³³ concept that cuts across disciplinary grounds and enhances the figures and modalities of the planetary. Deploying new materialist inquiry and the proposition of the “transversal” as its “immanent gesture” that cuts across dual oppositions between subject-object, nature-culture, and mind-matter, and

²⁹ Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook, “Preface”, in *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols*, eds. Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook and J. Hillis Miller (Open Humanities Press, 2016), 9.

³⁰ Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall, “Writing the Anthropocene: An Introduction”, *Minnesota Review*, 83, (2014): 68. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00265667-2782243>

³¹ Joanna Zylińska writes “As a result the apocalyptic narrative of the Anthropocene also has an ontological dimension: it brings forth a temporarily wounded yet ultimately redeemed Man, who can conquer time and space by rising above the geological mess he has created.” in Joanna Zylińska, *The End* 12.

³² Claire Colebrook, “A Grandiose Time”, 451.

³³ See: Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, “The Transversality of New Materialism” in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, eds. Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (Open Humanities Press, 2012), 93-114.

intersects scholarly disciplines, I explore the potentialities of utilising the Anthropocene theory for “creating conditions for the implementation of transversality”.³⁴ As English studies scholar Jonathan Gil Harris puts it “to transversalize can only be done when always already ‘invoking a new frame of analysis’”. Accordingly, my positioning of the Anthropocene as a transversal concept builds upon its dismissal of the dualities and its potential to invoke ‘a new frame of analysis.’ In this regard, my utilisation of the Anthropocene as a transversal concept operates both on a conceptual and methodological level. While the Anthropocene thesis’s opposition to binary divisions between nature and culture and subject and object identifies its conceptual and epistemological ground, its transdisciplinary perspective catalyses speculative modes of inquiry that challenges disciplinary divisions between Earth sciences, critical-social theories and art and architecture, and identifies its methodological potential. ‘The new frame of analysis’ that the Anthropocene puts forth is one of planetary and expands the conceptual and material frames through which we grasp our lifeworld. In other words, in this dissertation, I investigate the transversal convergence of scientific references, philosophical concepts, and artistic and architectural experimentations through the theoretical model of planetarity. Literature scholars Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru position planetarity in a counter position to the global “understood as a primarily financially, economically, and technologically homogenising force” and emphasise “its relationality model and return to ethics.”³⁵ This opposition to global and their emphasis on ethics draws on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s well-cited formulation of planetarity in *Death of a Discipline*:

“I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines...To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided ‘natural’ space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interest of this globalization in the mode of the abstract as such [...] The globe is on our computers. No one lives there...The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system...Planet thought opens up to embrace an inexhaustible taxonomy of such names [for a radical alterity and intention toward the other]”.³⁶

In an Anthropocenic context, I take ‘the other’ here as nonhuman and inhuman ontologies and pursue “an ethic of interrelatedness”³⁷ in geoaesthetic acts and in the way I read them.

³⁴ Ibid. 100.

³⁵ Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru, “Introduction”, in *Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2015) xvii.

³⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 72–73, quoted in Elias and Moraru, *Planetary Turn*.

³⁷ E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert, “Introduction: Pragmatics of Scale.” in *Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life*, eds. E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 15.

Epistemic Ruptures and Representations: *Las Meninas* and the Emergence of the Figure of Man

As I have stated in the beginning section of this introduction, this dissertation started as a thought experiment, in response to the question of which representations of Anthropocenic thinking in art and architecture can play a similar inaugural role as *Las Meninas* (1656) does in Foucault's analysis in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences* (1970). In broad strokes, Foucault provides a historical analysis of scientific discourse in European culture since the 16th century in which he also outlines the impetus that gave rise to the emergence of human sciences, i.e. sociology, economics, psychology etc. More important for this dissertation is that his analysis includes an account of the modern construction of subjectivity through an archaeological analysis of the emergence of modern scientific discourse. I have utilised his *Las Meninas* analysis as a conceptual and methodological guide and asked what kind of aesthetic manifestations can act as paradigmatic case studies that respond to the epistemic rupture the Anthropocene narrative generates. Foucault positions *Las Meninas* within the threshold between two epistemes, which he identifies as "defin[ing] the conditions of possibility of all knowledge"³⁸ by possessing "a certain code" and/or 'a well-defined regularity' "at a given time, in a given culture".³⁹ The painting acts as an exemplar of the Classical episteme (the 17th and 18th century) but also points forward to the Modern episteme (from the 19th century onwards) that will replace it. My analysis of his reading of *Las Meninas* revealed two relationship mechanisms; between motion and subject positions and between framing devices and power relationships - which I will apply in analysing *La Région Centrale*, particularly. This analysis enabled me to mobilise a methodological framework for interrogating the relationships between epistemic ruptures and conditions of representation and position geoasthetic acts as epochally important which emphasises their potential as historical interventions in pointing towards the emerging aesthetics of the Anthropocene. In other words, the main aim of this dissertation emerges from this analysis, namely to identify representations that hold an equivalent agency to *Las Meninas* in signifying an epistemic rupture and hence through which I explore the epistemic origins of an Anthropocenic aesthetics.

For Foucault, *Las Meninas* presents a configuration that opens up a new space, giving rise to the emergence of human sciences and the birth of 'the figure of Man' upon which this new form of knowledge is founded. He shows how *Las Meninas* reveals the "constitution of an

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order*, 183.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, x.

empirico-transcendental doublet which was called man” who was situated “in the analytic of finitude”.⁴⁰ In other words, this figure of Man as the subject, agent, and centre of knowing creates his own history and recognises himself as coming into being through a time that is readable. My first conceptual departure point for the overarching hypothesis of this dissertation begins at this delineation, this emergence and the centring of the figure of Man in *Las Meninas* as it enables me to interrogate the “Anthropos” problematic in the Anthropocene narrative in relation to this figure of Man. I will expand on this Anthropos problematic in the following chapter, however, at this point, it is important to note that, it is this figure of Man and hence Anthropos that I attempt to deconstruct whilst reading the geoaesthetic acts. I will argue that read through an Anthropocenic lens, each geoaesthetic act points towards the decentring and dissolution of this figure of man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces.

The modern episteme that was grounded upon this figure of Man might define the material and epistemological conditions that led to the Anthropocene as it identifies an amplification of the historical processes that privileged instrumental and calculating reason and its attendant technoscientific modes of seeing, measuring and territorialising that were supposed to result in the mastery of the Earth. As philosopher Rosi Braidotti argues Foucault “linked this humanist ideal to a sovereign notion of ‘reason’ that, since the eighteenth century, has provided the basic unit of reference for what counts as human and for everything European culture holds dear.”⁴¹ The Anthropos rhetoric in the dominant Anthropocene narrative is a reiteration of the same logic, the logic that took the figure of Man ‘as a unit of reference for what counts as human’ as it positions the Anthropos as representative of humanity and technoscientific modes of knowledge production as integral to deal with the Anthropocene problematic. In this regard, Braidotti emphasises the dominance of technoscientific knowledge production and writes that “[t]he boundless faith in reason as the motor of human evolution ties in with the teleological prospect of the rational progress of humanity through science and technology”⁴². And it is this ‘boundless faith in reason’ that is symptomatic of the anthropocentric and technofixer approaches in the Anthropocene debate which I problematise throughout this dissertation.

The second conceptual departure point for the overarching hypothesis of this dissertation, namely the decentring and dissolution of the figure of Man, lies at the end of Foucault’s book,

⁴⁰ Ibid., xx.

⁴¹ Rosi Braidotti, “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism”, in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 22.

⁴² Ibid., 22.

where he looks forward to and anticipates the end of Modernity's anthropocentric episteme figured in the image of man with its well-known face-drawn-in-sand metaphor. Through the figuration of the sea waves splashing on the shore and erasing any drawings on the sand, he points to the possibility of the dissolution of this figure of Man when the epistemological conditions that caused him to emerge "were to disappear as they appeared".⁴³ I take the epistemological shift that the Anthropocene points at as this possibility, this new form of knowledge and juxtapose Foucault's delineation of beginnings and ends with the emergence of the Anthropocene. In other words, whilst seeking and analysing geoaesthetic acts that have potentialities in depicting the process of an Anthropocenic rupture and inauguration of a new space by unsettling prior conditions of representation and formulating new ones, I have juxtaposed this conceptual alignment. This conceptual alignment has become possible mainly because the Anthropocene is a threshold concept,⁴⁴ it problematises beginnings and ends. In this regard, my conceptual approach mainly draws from feminist philosophers who mobilise the Anthropos problematic as a critique of the figure of Man that is emblematic of Western Modernity in the Anthropocene debate.

With regards to the delineation of beginnings, cultural theorist Claire Colebrook argues that the Anthropocene problematic "gives us the opportunity to think about the forces that entered into the composition of the current stratification of the Earth, and how something like 'man' as a hyper-consuming but also self-universalising life-form came into being".⁴⁵ The man she identifies 'as a hyper-consuming but also self-universalising life form' designates the Anthropos as a derivative of the figure of Man, yet this time he is not identified as the subject, agent, and centre of knowing, but rather the primary agent responsible of what political theorist McKenzie Wark defines as the "mass-produced [...] modern ruin" with regards to the Anthropocene.⁴⁶ In other words, the Anthropocene designates a "negative universal history" by problematising human agency as a geomorphic force that led to a progressive collapse.⁴⁷ Therefore, if there is a collective subjectivity depicted by the Anthropocene thesis, it is "generated from destruction and from the recognition of destruction".⁴⁸ This recognition inevitably brings along the question of the end, whether it is the end of humanity or the Modern episteme that prepared the way for this destruction. The potential of the Anthropocene

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Order*, 183.

⁴⁴ See Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁴⁵ Claire Colebrook "Sex and the (Anthropocene) City", *Theory, Culture and Society* 34, no. 2-3, (2017): 41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276416654975>

⁴⁶ McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*. (London: Verso Books 2015), 180.

⁴⁷ Chakrabarty, "The Climate", 222.

⁴⁸ Cohen and Colebrook, "Preface", 9.

narrative lies in this recognition of destruction since it offers “a productive distance to this man, to the modern human conceit” as anthropologist Anna Tsing points out, as it is this man “who was supposed to conquer Nature”.⁴⁹ In this regard, I argue that if there is an end signified by the Anthropocene, it is not the end of the world but rather it is the end of the world as we know it, the world as conceptualised by this figure of Man, -and it has already happened.⁵⁰

With regards to the Anthropocene being as a threshold concept that problematises beginnings and ends, geographer Kathryn Yusoff argues that “the question of the Anthropocene shapeshifts, world making in epochal pronouncements of the “New World” of humanity, world breaking in the formation of the “Ends” of master subjects: Man, History, Civilisation.” The material and epistemological conditions that led to the Anthropocene intertwine at this point, whereby Foucault’s figure of ‘Man’ places himself at the centre of ‘History’ and ‘Civilisation’ and colonises or dominates the other, nonhuman and inhuman ontologies, as well as repressed or marginal human communities. Yet, I argue that the Anthropocene offers a critique of anthropocentric delusions tied in with the instrumental reason and thus challenges the central positioning of “man”, who “is now called to task as the representative of a hierarchical and violent species”.⁵¹ In this regard, Braidotti’s emphasis on the link between the figure of Man and Anthropos and the destabilisation of their central positioning is insightful, as she writes “[n]either ‘Man’ as the universal humanistic measure of all things nor Anthropos as the emblem of an exceptional species can claim the central position in contemporary, technologically mediated knowledge production systems”. Therefore, what the Anthropocene reveals through ‘naturecultures’, geo-bio-socio assemblages or “hyperobjects”⁵² is almost a “reiteration of a feminist problematic”⁵³ and critical posthumanist theory that emphasises the inextricable interconnectivity between human, nonhuman and inhuman.

The recognition of destruction through the Anthropocene problematises “the myopia that allowed us to think of the world as so much matter or ‘standing reserve’”⁵⁴ that led to the progressive collapse. In this sense, “the ‘death of Man,’ announced by Foucault” is important

⁴⁹ Donna Haraway, Noboru Ishikawa, Scott F. Gilbert, Kenneth Olwig, Anna L. Tsing and Nils Bubandt “The Anthropologists are Talking about the Anthropocene”, *Ethnos* 81, no.3 (2016): 541. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1105838>

⁵⁰ Hear: Timothy Morton, “The End of the World Has Already Happened”, BBC Radio 4, podcast Audio. January 2, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000cl66>

⁵¹ Braidotti, “Four Theses”, 22.

⁵² See: Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2013).

⁵³ Richard Grusin, “Introduction: Anthropocene Feminism: An Experiment in Collaborative Theorising” in Richard Grusin (ed.), *Anthropocene Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), viii.

⁵⁴ Claire Colebrook, “We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene”, in Richard Grusin (ed.) *Anthropocene Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 7.

for this dissertation because it “formalized the epistemological and political crisis of the humanistic habit of placing ‘Man’ at the centre of world history”⁵⁵. And I argue that the Anthropocene can be read as a material manifestation of this epistemological and political crisis. In this context, the overarching hypothesis of this dissertation emerges, that my reading of geoaesthetic acts might decentre and dissolve ‘the figure of Man’ in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. They do so through engaging with temporal and material complexities of more-than-human assemblages within the geosocial conjunctures. Before elucidating how I conceptualise geoaesthetic acts in more detail and identify their positioning in relation to the emerging Anthropocene aesthetics, I will provide a brief historical contextualisation of the period between 1968-1972 in order to map connections and continuities between the Anthropocene narrative and the genealogical thread of planetary ideas, the “Whole Earth” imagery, in particular.

The Emergence of the “Whole Earth” Discourse

The dominant Anthropocene narrative suggests partly a holistic and analytical framework for “geosocial formations”⁵⁶ within planetary dynamics and partly a global alarm for human-environment relationships. A key move of this dissertation is to contextualise both assertions within a broader series of developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s, firstly in the conceptual unification of Earth in multiple disciplines and secondly the rising rhetoric of crisis and survival fuelled by the environmental debate. As historians Christoph Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz argue, “the representation of the Earth and its contemporary disarray proposed by anthropocenologists must be taken seriously in two ways. On the one hand, it brings knowledge and warnings that are essential and indispensable, while on the other, it is a product of Western naturalism and the scientific culture of Cold War.”⁵⁷ In this context, I investigate the rise of planetary thinking and geologic imaginaries through problematising the question of the Earth, both as a conceptual and representational issue within the discursive constitution of knowledge. I do so by mapping interconnections between the contemporary Anthropocene setting and the period between 1968-1972 in terms of the rise of planetary aesthetic. In doing so, I reveal that this period was a pivotal time for understanding not only the epistemological conditions that paved the way to the emergence of the Anthropocene narrative, but also the cultural responses towards the premise of a planetary ecological crisis.

⁵⁵ Braidotti, “Four Theses”, 22.

⁵⁶ See: Nigel Clark and Kathryn Yusoff, “Geosocial Formations and the Anthropocene”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 34 (2017): 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276416688946>

⁵⁷ Christoph Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us* (London: Verso Books, 2016), 87.

According to historian John Brooks, throughout the years between 1966-1973, four breakthroughs in life and Earth sciences come to the fore. The new perspectives at issue were: the confirmation of plate-tectonics, the thesis that biological evolution has been interfered with catastrophic geophysical events, the new acknowledgement of the positioning of extra-terrestrial forces in Earth history, and lastly the theory that the subcomponents of Earth operate as an integrated and unified system, as introduced by the Gaia Hypothesis as well as early systems theory.⁵⁸ The understanding of an interconnected and dynamic Earth in environmental and Earth sciences was intertwined with the underlying political motivations of Cold War's scientific-military-industrial complex and diverse responses towards the total view of Earth in cultural movements and public discourses. The rise of Earth sciences was fundamentally supported by military-industrial research within the first decades of the Cold War because its development was of crucial importance "to emerging weapons systems, such as guided missiles, and to the pursuit of anti-submarine warfare"⁵⁹. Conjointly, its sub-disciplines of space science and oceanography were considered strategic fields for national foreign policies, symbolising ultimate technological advancement, and paving the way for planetary-scale control from submarine depths to extra-terrestrial space.

Accompanied by the rise of cybernetics and computer technology after 1945 that again was promoted by military studies and have transformed ecology and systems thinking fields substantially, the first observations of the Earth from space -starting from the launch of Sputnik in 1957- formed the basis of an understanding of a "programmable" Earth,⁶⁰ the Earth as a "cybernetic machine"⁶¹ and led to an "infrastructural globalism".⁶² The systematisation of Earth as a whole through remotely captured imagery and planetary computerisation not only led to advancements in global environmental monitoring, analysis, and forecasting which is implicit in the vocabulary of Anthropocene and/or geocybernetic Earth system analysis such as "planetary thresholds" and "tipping points", but also became a significant tool for environmental governance and military activity.⁶³ As Bonneuil and Fressoz demonstrate, "the view of Earth

⁵⁸ John L. Brooke, *Climate Change and the Course of Global History: A Rough Journey*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 25-8, quoted in Yusoff and Clark's *Geosocial Formations*, 10.

⁵⁹ Ronald E. Doel, "Constituting the Postwar Earth Sciences: The Military's Influence on the Environmental Sciences in the USA after 1945", *Social Studies of Science*, 33, no. 5 (2003): 635-636.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312703335002>

⁶⁰ Marshall McLuhan "At the Moment of Sputnik the Planet Became a Global Theater in Which There Are No Spectators But Only Actors" *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 24, Issue 1 (1974): 49.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00354.x>.

⁶¹ Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 56.

⁶² See: Paul Edwards, *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and The Politics of Global Warming*. (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2010)

⁶³ See: Gerald B. Thomas, James. P. Lester, Willie Z. Sadeh, "International Cooperation in Remote Sensing for Global Change Research: Political and Economic Considerations", *Space Policy* 11, no.2, (1995): 131-141.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0265-9646\(95\)00008-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/0265-9646(95)00008-Z)

as a system lies at the source of modern geology” since the term was applied by Charles Lyell and his predecessor James Hutton in his *Theory of The Earth* (1788), however, the establishment of “the Earth as a system to know and govern as a totality, in all its components and all its functions”⁶⁴ that is also disclosed in the dominant scientific narrative of the Anthropocene debate, is inherited mainly from the Cold-War logic and strategies.

Throughout the period between 1968 and 1972, the understanding of the Earth as a ‘totality to be known’ and ‘governed’ was enmeshed with the upheaval of the rhetoric of ‘totality in crisis’ that was generated from the premise of a global ecological collapse within scientific discourse, and “a new planetary subjectivity”⁶⁵ triggered by the visual media of Earth that is provided by the space race. The period between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, in addition to witnessing an incredible social and political change, involves a heated scientific debate and intensification of cultural movements that both focus on the global environmental crisis and are underscored by an ongoing tension of nuclear fallout. The emerging public perception of the effects of human manipulations on the ecological interconnectedness of the Earth, epitomised in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) that denounces excessive pesticide use, was reinforced by alarming scientific publications such as Paul and Anne Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968) and Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* (1972) that were predicting global ecological disasters based on correlations between parameters such as population growth and resource depletion.

It is of vital importance for this dissertation to point out the relationship between the “Whole Earth” imagery and cultural movements within this context. As the extensive literature on iconic images of “Earthrise” (1968) and “Blue Marble” (1972) illuminate,⁶⁶ the implications of this “techno-sublime imagery”⁶⁷ for cultural movements were multi-faceted and immense (*Figure 2 and 3*). Being one of the first photographs of the whole Earth taken from the moon,⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 57.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁶⁶ See: Denis E. Cosgrove, “Contested Global Visions: One-World, Whole-Earth, and the Apollo Space Photographs”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 84, no. 2 (1994) 270-294; Sheila Jasanoff, “Image and Imagination: The Formation of Global Environmental Consciousness” in *Changing the Atmosphere: Expert Knowledge and Environmental Governance*, eds. Paul N. Edwards and Clark A. Miller. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) 309-337; Ana Teixeira Pinto, “The Whole Earth: In Conversation with Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke”, *e-flux, Journal* 45, May 2013, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/45/60114/the-whole-earth-in-conversation-with-diedrich-diederichsen-and-anselm-franke/>

⁶⁷ Emily Elliza. Scott, “Archives of the Present-Future: On Climate Change and Representational Breakdown”, in *Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary*. ed. James Graham (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016) 133.

⁶⁸ The first ever photograph of the Earth from the distance of the moon was taken by NASA's Lunar Orbiter 1 unmanned spacecraft on August 23rd, 1966.

and “perhaps the most widely reproduced photographs in human history”,⁶⁹ these images catalysed an environmental consciousness and a self-reflexive relationship in a planetary context. They designated a fragile and vulnerable entity floating in space and thus pointed at an idea of a “natural”, unified and balanced world as exemplified within the Gaia Hypothesis, which was appropriated by holistic⁷⁰ and back-to-the-nature tendencies of modern environmental movements. As geographer Dennis Cosgrove points out “seeing the Whole Earth is critical to the imaginative reception of the space images and to the totalising socio-environmental discourses of One-world and Whole-Earth to which they have become so closely attached.”⁷¹ More importantly, these two images identify the beginning of a planetary aesthetic and thus mark a critical historical threshold for this dissertation in terms of excavating the prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics.



Fig. 2 (left): Apollo 11, *Earthrise*, 1968. Photo credit: NASA

Fig 3: (right): Apollo 17, *Blue Marble*, 1972. Photo credit: NASA.

It is also very important to emphasise that the “Whole Earth” view provided by these two images exemplifies an imagery that is a product of “a view from nowhere”.⁷² In this regard, Cosgrove highlights not only the genealogy of this detached and distant viewpoint but also the relationship between this “Apollonian perspective” and the emergence of Western Modernity. He writes that:

[...] images of the globe from a distance sufficient for viewers to grasp its totality long predate the Apollo photographs of the 1960s. Indeed, an Apollonian perspective is implicit in Ptolemaic cartography's positioning of the observer at sufficient distance to see the spherical Earth. The fifteenth-century rediscovery of this mode of terrestrial mapping [i.e. Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*] marks the beginnings of European Modernity. (Figure 4)⁷³

⁶⁹ Denis Cosgrove and William L. Fox, *Photography and Flight* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 86.

⁷⁰ See: Linda Sargent Wood, *A More Perfect Union: Holistic Worldviews and the Transformation of American Culture after World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

⁷¹ Cosgrove, “Contested Global Visions”, 271.

⁷² Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 60.

⁷³ Cosgrove, “Contested Global Visions”, 272.



Fig. 4: “*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*” (1570) by Abraham Ortelius, Aegidius Coppenius, Humphrey Llwyd. Photo credit: Library of Congress Web site

In other words, this Apollonian perspective that enabled “modern ways of imagining the Earth as a totality, including those spaces claimed for militarism and globalization, derive from colonial histories of spatial enclosure”.⁷⁴ A nuanced positioning of the Apollo photographs throughout this genealogy becomes possible when one considers their alignment with the rise of infrastructural globalism or “general cyberneticization of the epistemological-technological apparatuses of Western modernity after 1945”,⁷⁵ as I have mentioned above. As sociologist Jennifer Gabrys argues “[t]he detached and distant view of Earth produces an entity that could seemingly be managed—or programmed. This total view of the planet suggests complete interconnectedness, but also forms of imperial control. It is the product of globality as well as universal science.”⁷⁶ This relationality is important since it emphasises the epistemological conditions, the Western Modernity, through which the Earth as a totality becomes an object for governance.

Yet, what is distinctive about the transmission of these two photographs is that they punctuate the “great reversal from the Earth meaning the ground beneath our feet to the Earth meaning ‘planet’”.⁷⁷ In other words, the conversion from the expansive gaze towards space into our lifeworld itself signifies the beginning of what Peter Sloterdijk refers to as an “inverted astronomy”, that is “looking down from space onto the Earth rather than from the ground up into the skies”.⁷⁸ Yet, their totalisation can also be seen as one of the “the god-tricks” of

⁷⁴ Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “Satellite Planetarity and the Ends of the Earth,” *Public Culture* 26, no. 2 (2014): 261. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2392057>

⁷⁵ Diedrich Diederichsen in Ana Teixeira Pinto, “The Whole Earth”.

⁷⁶ Jennifer Gabrys “Becoming Planetary”, in *Accumulation e-flux architecture*, October 2 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/217051/becoming-planetary/>

⁷⁷ Diedrich Diederichsen in Ana Teixeira Pinto, “The Whole Earth”.

⁷⁸ Peter Sloterdijk (1990) quoted in Wolfgang Sachs, *Planet Dialectics: Explorations in Environment and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

universal science that “promises a vision from nowhere and everywhere” and a form of power that mobilises systematic narrowing and obscuring as Donna Haraway argues.⁷⁹ Within this context, Cosgrove emphasises “seeing as the foundation of knowledge and power” and relates this “distanced, objective and penetrating [gaze]” to “mastering, masculine, and modern”⁸⁰ which is widely discussed in feminist theory. Accordingly, this self-perception through the Whole Earth imagery enhanced techno-managerial impulses that aim for the global management of what Buckminster Fuller popularised as “Spaceship Earth” in 1969.

According to curator Anselm Franke, the visualisation of the whole Earth within the “largest possible frame” marks the beginning of “the disappearance of the outside” and resulted in a “boundless containment, which in the form of the systematic universalisation of digital-network capitalism intended to put an end to the history [...] through replacing the mushroom cloud as the icon of our worldview.”⁸¹ Correspondingly, the images were widely criticised for promoting a detached geopolitical subjectivity that disregards the ongoing struggles for colonial independence and the Cold War reality and thereby supporting the globalist discourse that transcends cultural and political differences.⁸² I position the dominant scientific narrative of the Anthropocene as a derivative or an extension of the same universalistic rhetoric enabled by God’s eye view that is from nowhere and everywhere which is implicit in the “Whole Earth” imagery.⁸³ In this context, Yusoff argues that “[e]ven as the Anthropocene extends its purview over geology within an explicitly politicalized optic on geomorphic processes, it is a ‘view from nowhere’. The God’s eye view is inverted into a lithic-eye-view to produce a geologic commons from below.”⁸⁴ Therefore, in order to critically engage with the Anthropocene problematic, it is important to identify the deficiencies of its generalising, reductionist and universalising tendencies that is closely tied in with the Whole Earth imagery as I contextualise the three geoaesthetics within the Whole Earth imagery.

In this regard, I will give a relevant example from the period between 1968 and 1972. The Californian publication, the *Whole Earth Catalogue* which was first published in 1968 and the

⁷⁹ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *Feminist studies*, 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 584. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>

⁸⁰ Cosgrove, “Contested Global”, 272.

⁸¹ Anselm Franke, “Earthrise and the Disappearance of the Outside” in *The Whole Earth: California and the Disappearance of the Outside*, eds. Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke (Berlin HKW and Sternberg Press, 2014), 14.

⁸² Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24.

⁸³ T.J. Demos, *Decolonising Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 17.

⁸⁴ Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 4.

problems and the responses addressed by the catalogue, are of critical relevance for the Anthropocene discourse and this dissertation. I situate the catalogue between the two tendencies of “back-to-nature romanticism” and “technological determinism” and point out that romanticised views of so-called “nature” and techno-fixer approaches are still valid within the Anthropocene debate. From a wider angle, philosopher Ben Woodard argues that the Earth has been used for “grounding thought instead of bending it”, and the inertness of the Earth is a result of the ontological separation, either as “a thing to be exploited” by “capitalist Cartesianism”, or as “an object of nostalgia” for “neo-pagan Spinozism”.⁸⁵ Both positionings can be exemplified in mainstream responses to Anthropocene situation, while the former relates to techno-fixer approaches (i.e. *Eco-Modernist Manifesto*) which is only a reincarnation of normative and technocratic accounts offered by the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, the latter is replicated through romantic turn away from modernity and technology to “Mother Earth” nomenclature, as the “divine Big other”, in Slavoj Žižek’s appeal.⁸⁶ Therefore, I argue that a historicist account on how the burgeoning modern environmental movements and their concerns fostered the shaping of global governance and neoliberalism on the rise is critical for approaching the Anthropocene discourse, given its universalist dimension and the transhistorical, reductionist and anthropocentric tendencies implied by its dominant narrative into consideration.

This brief historical context helps us to correlate the rise of the “Whole Earth” discourse in scientific and cultural production with the Anthropocene discourse today and enables us to historicise the conceptual and epistemological origins of its main narrative. In addition, it allows us to trace the lineage of the planetary aesthetic that plays a key role in the Anthropocenic imagination. Importantly, this contextualisation provides the background of the ideas around the Earth as a totality and global environmental catastrophism which inform the geoaesthetic acts in their conceptual intentions as well as the cultural and material conditions through which the works came into being.

(An)aesthetics of the Anthropocene

As I have written elsewhere, “[t]he Anthropocene has come to underpin a strong narrative of planetary acceleration, where the asymptote becomes a new aesthetic paradigm to describe

⁸⁵ Ben Woodard, *On an Ungrounded Earth: Towards a New Geophilosophy*, (New York: Punctum Books: 2013), 3.

⁸⁶ Slavoj Žižek, “Ecology against Mother Nature: Slavoj Žižek on Molecular Red”, Verso Books website, 26 May 2015, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2007-ecology-against-mother-nature-slavoj-zizek-on-molecular-red>

massive extinction, brutal resource dilapidation, and irreversible environmental damage.”⁸⁷ Drawing inspiration from media theorist Jussi Parikka’s question of “what sort of aesthetic vocabularies” can be developed when one “interface[s] the geological and the humanmade?”,⁸⁸ I will explore the ways in which the Anthropocene itself becomes an aesthetic constellation and how it is imagined and experienced as “a sensorial phenomenon, the experience of living in an increasingly diminished and toxic world”.⁸⁹ That is to say, the Anthropocene generates, as cultural studies scholar Heather Davis argues, “aesthetic effects—as in aisthesis, or affects produced by our sensorial experience of the environment”⁹⁰ and thus catalyses what could be called an Anthropocenic aesthetic regime. As Mirzoeff put is “[t]he Anthropocene is so built in our senses that it determines our perceptions, hence it is aesthetic.”⁹¹ In this regard, I turn to art and architecture, “as the vehicle of aesthetis” and follow Turpin and Davis in that they are “central to thinking with and feeling through the Anthropocene”.⁹²

My take on aesthesis follows Jacques Rancière, in that “this is not a matter of reception of works of art. Rather, it concerns the sensible fabric of experience within which they are produced”.⁹³ The Anthropocene outlines a specific ‘sensible fabric of experience’ mainly because it is, in a sense, possible to see, hear, touch, smell and breathe the Anthropocene, namely to ‘feel through the Anthropocene’. In this regard, Rancière’s formulation of aesthetics as the “reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible”⁹⁴ plays a key role in my conceptualisation of an Anthropocenic aesthetics and my positioning of the geoaesthetic acts therein. In other words, aesthetics, following Rancière, as the reorganisation and ‘distribution of the sensible’, what can be seen, felt, and experienced, and defining all possibilities of thinking and imagining -including political imagining-, plays an indispensable role in establishing an Anthropocenic imaginary that “address[es] the social and political spheres that are [now] being set in stone”.⁹⁵ ‘Feeling through and thinking with the Anthropocene’ activates an aesthetic mode of thought and that according to Rancière “is much more than a way of

⁸⁷ Çinçik and -Campos, “Postcard Notes”, p: n/a

⁸⁸ Parikka, *A Geology*, 68.

⁸⁹ Davis and Turpin, “Art and Death”, 3.

⁹⁰ Heather Davis, “Life & Death in the Anthropocene: A Short History of Plastic” in Davis and Turpin (eds.), *Art in*, 348.

⁹¹ Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the”, 223.

⁹² Davis and Turpin, “Art and Death”, 3.

⁹³ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (London, New York: Verso 2019), x.

⁹⁴ Jacques Rancière, “Interview with Jacques Rancière”, interview by Rye Dag Holmboe, *The White Review*, no.10, (April 2014),

<https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-jacques-Rancière/>

⁹⁵ Davis and Turpin, “Art and Death”, 3.

thinking about art. It is an idea of thought, linked to an idea of the distribution of the sensible.”⁹⁶ My positioning of geoaesthetic acts in the Anthropocene, as outlining a ‘sensible fabric of experience’, emphasises their potential in terms of ‘reconfiguring’ and distributing an Anthropocenic thought and sensibility.

In that sense, I position the geoaesthetic acts within Rancière’s definition of aesthetics “as an idea of thought, a mode of thought that unfolds about works of art, taking them as witnesses to a question: a question that bears on the sensible and on the power that inhabits the sensible prior to thought, as the unthought in thought”.⁹⁷ That is to say, I argue that the three geoaesthetic acts hold the ‘power’ in pointing to ‘the unthought of thought’, pointing to an Anthropocenic thought before it was even invented. I will expand on the agency of geoaesthetic acts later in this chapter and the following chapter, but at this point, it is important to emphasise that Rancière’s formulation of aesthetics is critically important for this dissertation also because I draw a parallel between his aesthetic regime and Foucault’s epistemes. Rancière writes “[a]esthetics...designates a specific regime of visibility and intelligibility of art, which is inscribed in a reconfiguration of the categories of sensible experience and its interpretation”.⁹⁸ I draw a kinship between Foucault’s epistemes and Rancière’s aesthetic regime because both point to the reformulation of all possibilities of knowledge, the latter emphasising the relationship between sensing, thinking and imagining throughout this configuration. And importantly, this kinship enables me to outline a transition from an Anthropocenic epistemic rupture to an emerging Anthropocenic aesthetic regime.

The most common scholarly thread that comes up with the question of aesthetics in the light of the Anthropocene is the exploration of geologic imagination in visual arts. The entanglement between geology and arts extends back to the 17th century where the notion of the sublime comes forward in the discourse of philosophical aesthetics and literary criticism. As art historians Christine Riding and Nigel Llewellyn write:

On the simplest level, a sublime experience while crossing the Alps is an engagement with landscape and in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, the sublime was associated in particular with human responses to the immensity or turbulence of the natural world, as captured by landscape artists. Consequently, sublime landscape painters, especially in the Romantic period, around 1800, tended to take subjects such

⁹⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 45.

⁹⁷ Jacques Rancière, “Is there a Deleuzian Aesthetics?” *Qui Parle* vol. 14: 2 (2004): 2.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/quiparle.14.2.1>

⁹⁸ Ibid., 2.

as towering mountain ranges, deep chasms, violent storms, rough seas, volcanic eruptions or avalanches...⁹⁹

These depictions reinforce rather classical aesthetic tendencies that emphasise the contrasting scale between humans and the immensity of –so-called- Nature.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the sublime is associated with natural forces. Yet, it also involves the fascination with ruins in alignment with the emergence of archaeology, exemplified in Giovanni Battista Piranesi's carceral imagery in the late 18th century and the acknowledgement of the destructive impact of geophysical forces upon human civilisations of which John Martin's *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1822) is a symbolic example.¹⁰¹ The idea of the sublime, inherited mainly from Edmund Burke's treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), is also depicted in 19th-century landscape paintings that display "places of geophysical uniqueness such as Yellowstone Natural Park or the Grand Canyon."¹⁰² I will avoid getting deeper into the expansive art historical canon that revolves around the notion of the sublime in Western aesthetic discourse, yet I emphasise its beginning here to point out a switch in the association of the sublime from natural forces to human forces. In other words, with the emergence of the Anthropocene, the power that has been attributed to natural or cosmic forces through the notion of sublime becomes rather associated with an "ecocidal sublime" that is identified through the immensity and scale of destructive anthropogenic forces.¹⁰³

In this context, Parikka writes that "this idea of the sublime as the aesthetic of the geological deep time is demonstrated by Rosalind Williams: geological thought but also the 'aesthetic discovery of industrial technology' are supported by this sort of aesthetics in the nineteenth century. Landscape painting goes hand in hand with [the] birth of geology (as a modern discipline and a mind-set)".¹⁰⁴ A similar yet paradoxical alignment is emphasised by Mirzoeff in his discussion on the relationship between Impressionism and Anthropocene (an)aesthetics. One of his examples is Claude Monet's *Impression: Sun Rising* (1873) which "at once reveals and aestheticizes anthropogenic environmental destruction", by depicting the

⁹⁹ Christine Riding and Nigel Llewellyn, "British Art and the Sublime", *The Art of the Sublime*, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-llewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418>.

¹⁰⁰ Parikka, *A Geology*, 68.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰² Ibid., 68-69.

¹⁰³ Tom Cohen, "Trolling 'Anthropos' / Or, Requiem for a Failed Prosopopeia", in *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols*, eds. Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook and J. Hillis Miller (Open Humanities Press, 2016), 21.

¹⁰⁴ Parikka, *A Geology*, 69.

grey smog enhanced by industrial coal use.¹⁰⁵ He writes that “the aesthetics of the Anthropocene emerged as an unintended supplement to imperial aesthetics-it comes to seem natural, right, then beautiful- and thereby anaesthetized the perception of modern industrial pollution”.¹⁰⁶ His analysis is important for this dissertation, as this ‘imperial aesthetics’ identifies both the reversal of the power from natural to artificial in the comprehension of the sublime and the beginning of desensitisation towards ‘ecocidal sublime’.

Such a desensitisation is also experienced in the contemporary Anthropocene context when one considers the wide dissemination of satellite images, revealing ever-expanding urbanisation processes or leftovers from wildfires, and/or wide-angled photographs of Edward Burtynsky or Louis Helbig depicting environmental destruction such as oil leaks or nickel waste tailings from an aerial view (*Figure 5&6*). The ubiquitousness of these depictions anaesthetise one’s senses and induce a certain kind of blindness. While they may be circulated with the intention to induce awe, dread or terror towards the scale of anthropogenic destruction, a sense of “ecocidal sublime”, they fail to raise an Anthropocenic sensibility that calls for ethical and political agencies. In this context, Colebrook argues that “[t]he recuperation of the Anthropocene by way of the sublime has allowed the trace of human blindness and a radically impolitic event to reinvigorate politics.” Therefore, it is important to differentiate between the dominant Anthropocene visuality that is closely engaged with this ‘ecocidal sublime’ and an Anthropocenic aesthetics through which I aim to disentangle the blindness amplified by this dominant Anthropocenic visual imagery.



Figure 5 (left): Edward Burtynsky, “Greenhouses”, Almería Peninsula, Spain, 2010. Photo Credit: Edward Burtynsky website: <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/>

Figure 6 (right): Louis Helbig, “Rainbow Lava”, Alberta, Canada, 2014. Photo Credit: “Beautiful Destruction” website: <https://beautifuldestruction.ca/project/rainbow-lava/>

¹⁰⁵ Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the”, 222.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 220

Visual imagery has been integral to the way the Anthropocene has been understood or conceptualised in mainstream media and scientific discourse. The technological mechanisms that enable data visualisation, high-resolution satellite imagery, and climate models are mainly inherited from the infrastructures of “Whole Earth” imagery, and followed by a series of developments “in a specific political-economical framework, comprising a visual system delivered and constituted by the post–Cold War and largely Western-based military-state-corporate apparatus”.¹⁰⁷ This allegedly self-evident imagery, as architect Laura Kurgan puts it, is “techno-scientific, militarized, ‘objective’”.¹⁰⁸ She problematises these developments as leading to a “cataclysmic shift in our ability to navigate, inhabit, and define the spatial realm”¹⁰⁹ and specifies them as:

the operationalizing of Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites for both military and civilian uses in 1991; the democratization and distribution of data and imagery on the World Wide Web in 1992; the proliferation of desktop computing and the use of geographic information systems for the management of data; the privatization of commercial high-resolution satellites later in the 1990s; and widespread mapping made possible by Google Earth in 2005.¹¹⁰

According to art historian T.J Demos, “this shift has effectively made possible the entrance into the visibility of the Anthropocene”¹¹¹ yet, the dominant Anthropocene visualisations that take the whole Earth as an object of contemplation have ethical and political implications. In alignment with the disputes around the term Anthropocene, mainly focusing on the problematic of the Anthropos -which I will discuss in the following chapter in detail-, he argues that these images might be grasped as “hyper-legible, but in fact, they are far from transparent or direct.”¹¹² Due to their universalising aspects, they conceal uneven responsibilities and unequal vulnerabilities within the ecological catastrophe. As he argues further “[t]he Anthropocene, much like the preceding Whole Earth rhetoric, functions as a universalising discourse: it tends to disavow differentiated responsibility (and the differently located effects) for the geological changes it designates, instead homogeneously allocating agency to the generic members of its ‘human activities’.”¹¹³ In this regard, the dominant Anthropocene visibility and the dominant Anthropocene narrative share the same problematic in that they

¹⁰⁷ Demos, *Decolonising Nature*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Laura Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology and Politics* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2014), 30.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹¹ Demos, *Decolonising Nature*, 15.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

confuse what Latour defines as “the figures of connection with those of totality”.¹¹⁴ As Latour explains further, “[w]hether we are dealing with the idea of the Anthropocene, the theory of Gaia, the notion of a historical actor such as Humanity, or Nature taken as a whole, the danger is always the same: the figure of the Globe authorizes a premature leap to a higher level by confusing the figures of connection with those of totality.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, as I have emphasised at the beginning of this introduction, I position ‘planetary’ in opposition to ‘global’ and look for an ‘ethic of interrelatedness’ in Anthropocene aesthetics. And I attempt to mobilise “an ethics of critical proximity”¹¹⁶ to Anthropocenic events as an antidote to totality.

The correlation between the Whole Earth imagery in the late 60s and early 70s and the dominant visuality of the Anthropocene raises questions on the geopolitics of representation, which is of crucial importance for this dissertation. In this regard, art historian Irmgard Emmelhainz argues that the Anthropocene epoch “implies not a new image of the world, but the transformation of the world into images”.¹¹⁷ This statement brings Martin Heidegger’s 1938 essay “The Age of the World Picture” into mind. He describes the essence of modern times as “man’s domination of the earth by means of his technological will”.¹¹⁸ In this sense, the phrase “world picture” does not mean a picture of the world, but the world conceived and grasped as a picture. And this imagining has to do with the concept of ‘enframing’ – framing the world as if pictured, or a representation for one’s own manipulation which leads to a total image of the Earth as an object to be controlled and governed. In this regard, I ask what kind of representations problematise the dominant technoscientific knowledge production and its anaesthetising visual counterparts and offer new geoaesthetic vocabularies to engage with the Anthropocene problematic.

¹¹⁴ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 116.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹¹⁶ Susan Schuppli, “A Conversation with Susan Schuppli Around the Legal and Aesthetic Agency of Matter”, interview by Benek Çinçik, Tiago Torres-Campos, in Çinçik and Campos (eds), *Postcards from*, p.n/a.

¹¹⁷ Irmgard Emmelhainz, “Images do not Show: The Desire to See in the Anthropocene”, in Davis and Turpin (eds.), *Art in the Anthropocene*, 131.

¹¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” [1938], in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York; London: Harper Row, 1977), 137.

Geoaesthetic Acts

Combining *geo*, referring to both geography and geology, and aesthetics, geoaesthetics is a relatively new term which “began to be used early in the 21st century by scientists, philosophers and artists”, yet each group mobilises the term in a slightly different way.¹¹⁹ That means it is, like the Anthropocene, a concept in the making, thus I argue that it can provide a productive zone where diverse lines of thought can take flight. I will expand on the literature around geoaesthetics in the next chapter, yet at this point, it is useful to note that my take on the term draws mainly from its mobilisation in geophilosophy and visual culture theory. Yet, it is also important to emphasise the reciprocal relationship between geology and aesthetic practices as a beginning point since aesthetic practices were key to the development of geology as a modern science in the 18th and 19th centuries. Drawing on this relationality, geological sciences can be considered as aesthetic practices since they mobilise visual representations for depicting deeper layers of the Earth- layers that can not be accessed by the human body. These representations which involve mainly maps, diagrams and sections reveal “the hidden interior of the Earth”¹²⁰ and have become aesthetic conventions for decoding its material configurations, movements and temporalities. As this dissertation focuses on the conceptualisation and representation of the Earth, this reciprocal relationship between geology and representational practices underlines an important departure point for my conceptualisation of geoaesthetics since it is through this relationality, the Earth, geos becomes legible for human sensorium and hence “becomes an object of understanding”.¹²¹ In other words, the roots of opening up the human sensorium to geologic timescales and forces lie in this reciprocity between geological sciences and aesthetic practices.

As the term geoaesthetics is so recent, it does not identify an established field of inquiry but rather an emerging approach in visual culture theory that is defined through a broad conception of aesthetics.¹²² That is to say, the formulation of geoaesthetics in the Anthropocene opens up ways for a radical rethinking of aesthetics. At this point, it might be worth recalling Rancière’s definition of ‘[a]esthetics as ‘an idea of thought, a mode of thought that unfolds about works of art, taking them as witnesses to a question: a question that bears

¹¹⁹ William L. Fox, “Geoesthetics” in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p:n/a.

¹²⁰ Adam Bobbette and Amy Donovan, “Encountering the Earth: Political Geological Futures?” in *Political Geology: Active Stratigraphies and The Making of Life*, eds. Adam Bobbette and Amy Donovan (Cham: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2019), 352.

¹²¹ Adam Bobbette and Amy Donovan, “Political Geology: An Introduction” in Bobbette and Donovan (eds). *Political Geology*, 11.

¹²² Fox, “Geoesthetics”, p: n/a

on the sensible and on the power that inhabits the sensible prior to thought, as the unthought in thought'. In this regard, I argue that geoaesthetics has the potential to raise the 'unthought in thought' by not simply taking up "the geologic as a theme", but activating "formats, methods, models, ideas, and aesthetic experience in ways that seek to recalibrate 'the human' in relation to 'the geologic'".¹²³ In this light, geoaesthetics offers "a space of experience that holds relations of nonhuman force between phenomena to blur boundaries and cross inhuman timescales".¹²⁴ As Yusoff writes, geoaesthetics "allows a passage into the radically incommensurate time of the geologic and therefore provide a possible site and mode of sensibility for engaging with the temporal and material contractions of the Anthropocene".¹²⁵ In this sense, geoaesthetics contributes to the "widespread turn toward the geologic as source of explanation, motivation, and inspiration for cultural and aesthetic responses to conditions of the present moment"¹²⁶ signified by the emergence of the Anthropocene.

My main intervention in the emerging discourse around geoaesthetics is to consider it as praxis, as an act. First, this intervention signifies my methodological positioning of *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument* in the Anthropocene context. This does not mean that I dismiss the literature that accumulated around these works in disciplinary frameworks (i.e. art historical readings) but rather implies the transdisciplinary gaze I cast upon them, as a necessary attribute for situating the thesis in Anthropocene studies. Second, by describing them as geoaesthetic acts, I highlight the practical agency of *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as epochally important, which implies their potential as historical interventions in shaping geoaesthetics of the Anthropocene. In this sense, through situating them as paradigmatic works that signify the epistemological rupture the Anthropocene accentuates, I explore how they might activate 'the unthought in thought' by identifying a break with a prior system of representation which they undermine and fracture. Consequently, by treating these works as geoeasthetic acts, I interrogate what they do, activate or mobilise in pointing towards an Anthropocene aesthetic, how they reconfigure and distribute an Anthropocenic mode of sensibility and thought.

As I have outlined at the beginning of this introduction, in broad strokes, I position geoaesthetic acts as cultural manifestations which take the Earth (geo) as its subject matter and focal point, engage with it as a 'site, scale and aesthetic condition', and which I contextualise within the

¹²³ Ellsworth and Kruse, "Evidence: Making", 9.

¹²⁴ Kathryn Yusoff, "Geologic Subjects: Nonhuman Origins, Geomorphic Aesthetics and The Art of Becoming InHuman", *Cultural Geographies*, 22, no. 3 (2015): 384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474014545301>

¹²⁵ Ibid., 383.

¹²⁶ Ellsworth and Kruse, "Evidence: Making", 6.

Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. My selection of geoaesthetic acts from this period are not the only works that could be read through an Anthropocenic lens, yet this thesis argues that a contextual analysis and comparative reading of *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* renders not only how the period between 1968-1972 was a pivotal time in the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics, but also offers us new - or rather overlooked- discursive, affective and sensual strategies to deal with the Anthropocene problematic. In particular, I argue that the conceptualisation of subjectivity in these works, their framing of temporality and imagination of scale (materiality) respond to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and earth temporalities that the Anthropocene imagination implies. And these three aspects identify the conceptual components that enable me to crystallise these works as geoaesthetic acts and to argue that as a representational assemblage they foreshadow an Anthropocenic aesthetics.

Outline of the Chapters

I have conducted my comparative reading of the geoaesthetic acts from a critical and feminist perspective and have combined historical, theoretical, archival research methods as well as close readings and visual and architectural analysis. Since this dissertation is positioned within Anthropocene studies, my approach is transdisciplinary and draws on literature in history and philosophy of science, Environmental Humanities, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Film Studies, Art History and Architecture History. In addition, I utilise my disciplinary background in architecture as my methodological toolbox and that necessarily involves mobilising an architectural sensibility towards the Anthropocene both as a narrative and a condition. This utilisation not only enables me to also contribute to Anthropocene Studies from an architectural point of view, namely, in the way I read and analyse Anthropocenic cultural manifestations or events but also point towards establishing a niche field of inquiry which I define as architectural philosophy or philosophy of architecture in an Anthropocenic framework.

Opposing the deficiencies of humanist and anthropocentric ideas of mastery and technoscientific modes of knowledge production, I draw on geophilosophies to contemplate upon the Anthropocene condition and to reflect on geoaesthetic acts. Drawing on Michel Serres, Gilbert Simondon and Deleuze and Guattari -according to whom geophilosophy is invented by Nietzsche- and extending to more contemporary thinkers, feminist geophilosophers like Claire Colebrook, Kathryn Yusoff, Jane Bennett, Elisabeth Grosz and Joanna Zylińska, I discuss co-constitutive couplings, interactions, and intra-actions between

“Earth-as-process” and “material, cultural, and noetic” forms of human existence.¹²⁷ Drawing on Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, I mobilise an ‘ethic of interrelatedness’, and an ‘ethics of critical proximity’ towards the Anthropocenic events of coexistence and coextinction. In methodological terms -as I have mentioned at the beginning of this introduction-, this dissertation cuts through the Anthropocene debate transversally through selected geoaesthetic acts as forms of geologically informed speculative inquiries and establishes a historical thread through which Anthropocenic aesthetics can be traced.

Before I provide an outline of the chapters, I will make a brief note on the logical flow of this dissertation. The outline of this dissertation follows a rather conventional structure, in that I begin with a literature review of the Anthropocene through which I establish my conceptual approach for analysing geoaesthetic acts. Yet, the following three chapters in which I explore the geoaesthetic acts are not sequenced chronologically. The main reason for this is to unfold the nodes that I identify as the origins of the emerging Anthropocenic aesthetics in a sequence that allows me to map what I define as the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics. That is to say, my analysis and reflection on *La Région Centrale* is followed by the *Continuous Monument* both of which in a way prepare the ground for my rereading of *Spiral Jetty*, one that has philosophical implications for developing an Anthropocenic thought and sensibility. And this reading points towards what I call Anthropocene hermeneutics which in a way not only concludes my mapping of the prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics but also allows us to understand the contemporary Anthropocenic cultural-aesthetic setting in a deeper way, as it goes beyond the fables of awakening that one frequently encounters in the Anthropocene debate.

Chapter 1: “Preamble: Debating the Anthropocene Concept”

In this chapter, I will explicate the Anthropocene discourse and map the points where it converges with and diverges from the Whole Earth discourse in the period between 1968-1972 which will outline my points of intervention for identifying *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as geoaesthetic acts pointing towards an Anthropocenic aesthetics. Given the interest in this dissertation on the decentring and dissolution of the figure of Man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces through the epistemological shift the Anthropocene implies by its expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities, and thus its reconfiguration of conceptions of subjectivity, temporality and materiality (scale), there are three key sets of literature needed. In the first section, I will problematise the political implications of the

¹²⁷ Woodard, *On an*, 2-3.

configuration of the Anthropos in the dominant Anthropocene narrative in relation to the decentring of the figure of Man. In the second section, by drawing on critical posthumanist and feminist critique, I will elaborate on the 'ethic of interrelatedness' in opposition to anthropocentric undertakings of the Anthropocene narrative and position the agency of art and architecture as a channel for aisthesis, for mobilising an 'ethics of critical proximity' to the Anthropocene, thereby reconfiguring and distributing Anthropocenic thought and sensibility. In the last section, I will reflect on the emerging literature around the term geoaesthetics, and outline the conceptual approach that draws out the problematisation of subjectivity, temporality and materiality (scale) specifically in an Anthropocenic context, all of which build up the foundation for identifying *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as geoaesthetic acts. In other words, in this preamble, I will develop the conceptual framework for crystallising three conceptual components of geoaesthetic acts through an Anthropocenic lens and identify the positioning of the thesis in the emerging discourse around Anthropocene aesthetics by clarifying my points of intervention for proposing geoaesthetic acts as historical interventions for signifying an Anthropocenic rupture.

Chapter 2: "Technospheric Mediation and Anthropocenic Anxiety: La Région Centrale (1971)"

In this chapter, I position *La Région Centrale* as the first -not chronologically first but rather first in the structure of this dissertation- geoaesthetic act that takes the Earth (geo) as its subject matter and focal point and which I contextualise in the Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. The first and foremost reason for my positioning of the film as a planetary imagination and a geoaesthetic act is Snow's statement that "the subject" of the film is "planetary motion" and *La Région Centrale* is after all a contemplation "about the Earth".¹²⁸ I will argue that *La Région Centrale* as a geoaesthetic act responds to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities posited by the Anthropocene thesis retroactively, through its conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale. In particular, I will place *La Région Centrale* in the 'metamorphic zone' that the technosphere catalyses through specifically engaging with its mode and means of production mechanisms and focusing on the cinematographic frame by attending to its metaphorical, methodological and material implications. In this regard, I will contextualise *La Région Centrale*'s engagement with the switch from human to inhuman through its replacement of human agency and human vision with a machinic one, within the power relationships the technosphere problematises in an Anthropocenic framework. I will

¹²⁸ Michael Snow, "Visions", interview by Simon Field, *Channel 4* (broadcasted on 19 January 1983).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nir7aNK5794>

underscore the material conditions through which the film comes into being and particularly problematise its material kinship with surveillance radar mechanisms of Cold War technology.

I will reflect on *La Région Centrale* by positioning it as a representation that helps us comprehend the epistemic shift that the Anthropocene offers through using Foucault's analysis of *Las Meninas* (1656) in *The Order of Things* (1970) as a methodological and conceptual guide, focusing on the relationship he explores between an epistemic rupture and conditions of representation. I will focus on two relationship mechanisms, which Foucault uses in his analysis and apply them to my reading of *La Région Centrale*. The first one is motion, which is activated by the gaze in *Las Meninas* and the filmic apparatus, *De La* in *La Région Centrale*, both of which introduce a re-positioning of the subject/spectator. The second one is the frame, which establishes the conditions and limits of the image as a representational device. Whereas in *Las Meninas*, the painting is structured through a multiplication of framing devices itself, in *La Région Centrale*, the extreme speed of *De La* leads the frame to activate the edges of the image and itself becomes the matter, anticipating its collapse. Both of these operations lead to new questions about power relations in terms of subjectivity as well as temporality in an Anthropocenic context. In the first section of this chapter, "Beginnings and Ends: Delineating", I will map Foucault's *Las Meninas* analysis in order to reveal the two modes of operations that I will apply in my reading of *La Région Centrale*, and prepare the ground for the emergence of "the figure of Man" in an epistemological sense, that this thesis intends to decentre and dissolve in an Anthropocenic context through reading *geoaesthetic acts*. In the second section, "Centers: Re-positioning", I will show how *La Région Centrale* decentres the figure of Man by focusing on the film's operation of turning human subjectivity into complete technospheric mediation that achieves a non-anthropocentric mode of vision. In the last section, "Dissolution: Self-destruction", I will investigate the filmic apparatus *De La* as an early artistic response to the visual rhetoric of impending planetary algorithmic governance, which is an extension of the military-industrial complex and its related paradigms of techno-atmospheric control. This investigation will then lead me to link the anxious anticipation of self-destruction of *De La* and the dissolution of the frame in the alien choreography of the film with an indication of the end of Foucault's figure of Man as a detached subjectivity from the technospheric processes he initiated. Drawing on Snow's intention of creating "a souvenir"¹²⁹ from the Earth, I will conclude the chapter by positioning the film and its geo-installation *De La* as a future fossil.

¹²⁹ Michael Snow, "La Région Centrale" [1969] in *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow*, ed. Michael Snow and Louise Dompierre (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994) 56.

Chapter 3: An Architectural Model for Total Urbanisation: *The Continuous Monument* (1969)

In this chapter, I reflect on the Italian architectural collective Superstudio's project *The Continuous Monument* which consists of a series of photo-collages depicting the planetary progression of a single monolithic white structure as it encircles the whole Earth. Conceptualised as "a negative utopia with critical intent",¹³⁰ *The Continuous Monument* illustrates an architectural manifestation that according to the Superstudio "realize[s] cosmic order on Earth",¹³¹ and thereby, I argue, crystallising Michael Snow's feeling of "horror at the thought of humanising the entire planet".¹³² In this chapter, I will re-read *The Continuous Monument* through an Anthropocenic lens and position it as the second geoaesthetic act which takes the Earth (geo) as its subject matter and focal point and which I contextualise within the Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. I will analyse *The Continuous Monument* alongside *La Région Centrale*, as another cultural manifestation of planetary imaginations that are mobilised by the Whole Earth discourse and respond to the 'Whole Earth worry' that is characteristic of the period between 1968-1972. In particular, I will argue that like *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* responds to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of Earth and human temporalities posited by the Anthropocene thesis retroactively, through its conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale.

I will argue that by taking the earth 'as a site, scale and aesthetic condition', *The Continuous Monument* foreshadows an Anthropocenic architectural imagination and such an imagination is mobilised by Superstudio's bold yet ironical statement that architecture is capable of realising cosmic order on Earth. I take this statement as a departure point for mapping *The Continuous Monument* in the cultural nexus that I have started to form with *La Région Centrale*, in particular decoding its engagement with the planetary throughout the period between 1968-1972 that is characterised by the conceptual unification of the Earth in multiple disciplines and the rhetoric of crisis and survival fueled by the ecological discourse and environmental movements. While *La Région Centrale* engages with planetary motion and reflects on "the cosmic continuity that just goes without us",¹³³ *The Continuous Monument*

¹³⁰ Adolfo Natalini, "How Great Architecture Still Was in 1966 ... (Superstudio and Radical Architecture Ten Years On)" [1977], in *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations, 1956-76*, ed. by Martin van Schaik and Otakar Mácel (Munich: Prestel, 2005), 186.

¹³¹ Superstudio, Cristiano Toraldi di Francia, Alessandro Magris, Roberto Magris, Piero Frassinelli and Adolfo Natalini, "Superstudio on Mindscapes, *Design Quarterly*, 89, (1973), 28

¹³² Michael Snow "Converging on La Région Centrale: Michael Snow in Conversation with Charlotte Townsend" [1971], in *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow*, edited by Michael Snow and Louise Dompierre [Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994], 59.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 60.

offers an ironical architectural thought experiment on planetary organisation through deploying rhetorical tools such as “*demonstratio per absurdum*”, thereby taking the idea of realising a ‘cosmic order’ through architectural means to its extreme limit. With its strictly unchanging white gigantic presence and total indifference to its environment, *The Continuous Monument* covers the entire globe offering a single and total architectural solution for the Whole Earth which not only parodies the pervasive reach of Modernism in architecture with International Style then, but also, I will argue, points at the homogenising impacts of the dominant technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring and territorialising that are problematised by the critical undertakings of Anthropocene narrative.

Both through its close engagement with the conceptualisation of the Earth as a totality and through its depiction of “forewarning images of the horrors which architecture was laying in store for us with its scientific methods for perpetuating existing models”,¹³⁴ as Superstudio puts it, *The Continuous Monument* problematises architecture’s tight entanglement with Western Modernity and its instrumental and calculating modes of thought as well as its utilisation for capitalism with its extractive and expansive logic at a planetary scale. Within this prism and the overarching hypotheses of the study, I will read *The Continuous Monument* as an architectural figuration or an allegorical representation of the figure of Man. I will argue that *The Continuous Monument* offers an ironical thought experiment on centring this figure of Man coupled with technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring and territorialising and points to its dissolution by gesturing towards its ultimate end through manifesting a “logical extrapolation of ‘oriented history’”,¹³⁵ an idea of a single architecture dominating the whole world. In particular, I will argue that *The Continuous Monument* points towards the dissolution of the figure of Man through its operation of total interiorisation which entraps every human being on the sites it colonises into its unpicturable interior. I will conclude the chapter by arguing that as there are no openings in the structure, *The Continuous Monument* signifies a gigantic mausoleum or a tomb for humanity.

Chapter 4: Geomorphic Aesthetics and Thermodynamic Imagination: *Spiral Jetty* (1970)

In this chapter, I reflect on the artist Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) as a threefold manifestation (earthwork, film and essay) and as the third geoaesthetic act that I contextualise within the Anthropocene. I argue that the work responds retrospectively to the collision of human and Earth temporalities posited by the Anthropocene thesis, through its imagination of scale and frame of temporality. By situating humans as a collective geomorphic force, the

¹³⁴ Superstudio, “Superstudio on”, 17

¹³⁵ Superstudio, “Deserti Naturali e Artificiali”, *Casabella* 358, (1971), 22.

Anthropocene thesis puts an emphasis on “geologic life” and hints at a “re-mineralisation of subjectivities” that ties processes of subjectification to inhuman forces.¹³⁶ As the thesis positions the geologic agency of humans within the designation of a progressive systemic collapse, it denotes the power of dissolution and an understanding of an end in process, more specifically an entropic end. The first claim raises questions regarding the redefinition and repositioning of the human within a radical expansion of time and infinite conditions of connectivity at multiple scales. The second claim problematises our understanding of entropic decline deposited by geologic time. The tripartite *Spiral Jetty* responds to the aforementioned collision through two modes of operation outlined in two parts of the chapter: decentring and dissolving human in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. In the (de)centring part, I explore scale shifts which are exemplified within the fractal recuperation of spiral form and analyse the interplay of diverse temporalities which is the primary source of expression within the expansion of time frames. I analyse the *Spiral Jetty*’s scale shifts that operate as a transversal knot, binding incommensurable orders and emphasise its *sensorial vertigo* created through the helicopter’s rotational movements. After decoding the *Spiral Jetty*’s *sensorial vertigo* within the epochal aesthetics of the Anthropocene, I reflect upon the concept of *historical vertigo*, with a focus on Smithson’s conception of time, his general refutation of historical humanism¹³⁷ and his geologically nuanced positioning within the cosmic anxieties created by the Atomic Age.

In the dissolution part, I investigate how the decentring alludes to the dissolution of anthropocentric notions of subjectivity, through focusing on *Spiral Jetty*’s relationship with entropy and Smithson’s thermodynamic imagination. The entropic nexus between sun, heat and salt crystals forms the conceptual and material spine of the *Spiral Jetty* project. I explore how the *Spiral Jetty* project problematises the notion of the end through positing the differentiation of geologic life along with material dedifferentiation processes of the desert and its conversion into a future fossil. Within this prism, I relate the *Spiral Jetty* film’s crystal sequence where Smithson points at his own dissolution “into a unicellular beginning”¹³⁸ with philosopher Gilbert Simondon’s notion of the crystal as an exemplar of the *processes of individuation*. I argue that as a future fossil, the *Spiral Jetty* dissolves the linear understanding of history, the myth of progress and the figure of Man into a dedifferentiated “world of modern

¹³⁶ See: Kathryn Yusoff, “Geologic Life: Prehistory, Climate, Futures in the Anthropocene.” *Environment and Planning D.: Society and Space* 31, (2013): 779 – 795. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d11512>

¹³⁷ See: Robert Smithson, “A Refutation of Historical Humanism” [1966-1967] in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 336.

¹³⁸ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 149.

prehistory”.¹³⁹ I propose that while the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork is marooned in salt crystals accompanied with archaea that might endure long after the humans are gone, the *Spiral Jetty* poses a processual, non-anthropocentric, and “telescoped” view of an end¹⁴⁰ that is translated by chronogenesis¹⁴¹.

Conclusion: Tracing Geoaesthetic Acts in the Anthropocene

In this conclusion, I will provide a synthesis of the nodes that I have developed in my rereading of *La Région Centrale*, *Continuous Monument*, *Spiral Jetty* as geoaesthetic acts and that constitute my mapping of a speculative prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics. Drawing on this mapping, I will recapitulate my findings in response to the meta-argument of this dissertation, namely how these three preliminary geoaesthetic acts decentre and dissolve the figure of Man in relation to planetary and geologic forces and thereby identifying an Anthropocenic epistemic rupture. I will draw out how this dissertation contributes to Anthropocene studies, specifically, the emerging fields of Anthropocene aesthetics and/or geoaesthetics and will discuss its implications by outlining what its findings say to current thinking about and acting on the topic and pointing to the questions they open up. I will reflect on these questions by offering a brief theoretical discussion on the possibility of a different kind of framing of geoaesthetics in the contemporary context and the problematic of the dissolution of the figure of Man. Through this discussion, I will reflect on what kind of future work could be developed from the consequences of my work, in particular, what lines of inquiry may emanate from my conception of geoaesthetic acts and what questions remain.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 146

¹⁴⁰ Matilde Nardelli, “No End to the End: The Desert as Eschatology in Late Modernity”, Tate Papers, (2014), available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/22/no-end-to-the-end-the-desert-as-eschatology-in-late-modernity>

¹⁴¹ Anne Sauvagnargues, “Crystals and Membranes: Individuation and Temporality”, trans. by Jon Roffe, in *Gilbert Simondon, Being and Technology*, eds. Arne De Boever et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 64.

CHAPTER 1: Preamble: Debating the Anthropocene Concept

In the introduction, I have contextualised the Anthropocene narrative throughout the genealogical thread of the "Whole Earth" discourse that gained impetus in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in order to historicise its conceptual and epistemological origins. As Yusoff notes, the Anthropocene "has been taken up in the world, purposed, and put to work as a conceptual grab, materialist history, and a cautionary tale of planetary predicament".¹ I have traced the lineage of the planetary imagination of the Anthropocene in the conceptual unification of the Earth as a totality in multiple disciplines and in the rise of universalising socio-environmental discourses mobilised by "Whole Earth" imagery in the period between 1968 and 1972. Not only have I suggested that a prehistory of the Anthropocene imagination can be mapped in the rise of the planetary aesthetic catalysed by Whole Earth imagery but also a correlation in cultural responses towards the premise of a planetary ecological collapse can be drawn between the Anthropocene setting and environmental insecurities in the Atomic Age. In this regard, I have argued that the dominant scientific narrative of the Anthropocene is a derivative or extension of the universalistic and totalising rhetoric of the Whole Earth discourse. In other words, I position the planetary imagination of the Anthropocene as a subset of the Whole Earth discourse that gained impetus between 1968-1972. In this chapter, I will analyse Anthropocene discourse and map the points where it converges with and diverges from Whole Earth discourse in the period between 1968-1972 which will outline my points of intervention for identifying *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as geoaesthetic acts pointing towards an Anthropocenic aesthetics.

As is now well-known, the Anthropocene is the geological designation for a new epoch that is characterised by the dominance of human-induced alterations to the Earth System and was introduced to public discussion in 2000 by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer. The basic assertion of the Anthropocene proposition is that; the scale, variety and magnitude of human impact on physical, chemical, and biological processes of the Earth system demand recognition as a formal epoch that is distinct from the Holocene, which started approximately 11500 years ago.² A wide variety of causes, including but certainly not

¹ Yusoff, *A Billion*, 1-2.

² See: Paul Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind", *Nature* 415 (2002): 23. <https://doi.org/10.1038/415023a>; Will Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?" *Ambio* 36 (2007): 614-621. [https://doi.org/10.1579/0044-7447\(2007\)36\[614:TAAHNO\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1579/0044-7447(2007)36[614:TAAHNO]2.0.CO;2); Jan Zalasiewicz et al., "Are we now Living in the Anthropocene?" *GSA Today*, 18 no.2 (2008): 4-8. <https://doi.org/10.1130/GSAT01802A.1>; Jan Zalasiewicz et al. "The New World of the Anthropocene", *Environmental Science and Technology* 44 no.7 (2010): 2228–2231. <https://doi.org/10.1021/es903118j>.

limited to population growth, urbanisation, fossil-fuel burning, agriculture, habitat fragmentation and destruction, the introduction of invasive species, and over-fishing, are listed as anthropogenic processes which result in increasing rates of sedimentation and erosions, extinction of species, and alterations of the chemical composition of the lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere.³ In other words, the term Anthropocene “captures the folding of the human into the air, the sea, the soil and the DNA”⁴ at a planetary scale and demarcates human activities as a geophysical force that is being inscribed in the geologic record of the Earth readable for the future millennia.⁵ The designation of human existence through geologic agency and stratification identifies a switch from ecologically informed planetary subjectivity implied by the Whole Earth discourse to a geologically informed subjectivity and agency in the Anthropocene discourse.

The second main claim of the scientific narrative of the Anthropocene is the heavy emphasis on the disturbance of homeostatic maintenance of the Earth system. This disturbance leads to an emergency call due to the switch from the relatively stable state of the Holocene to the unknown and unpredictable future ushered in by the Anthropocene. As anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose puts it, we are “being overtaken by processes that are unmaking the world that any of us ever knew”.⁶ Or in a similar tone, Sloterdijk writes “[the Anthropocene] indicates the end of any peace of mind in the cosmos, on which historical forms of human being-in-the-world rested.”⁷ The premise of a planetary ecological collapse and the recognition of destruction of the world as one knows inevitably bring the question of the end into the fore, and raise what could be called an Anthropocenic anxiety. And I argue that this Anthropocenic anxiety is an amplification of the ‘Whole Earth worry’ in the period between 1968-1972- catalysed by the alarmist rhetoric in ecological scientific discourse and modern environmental movements as well as the shadow of the Atomic bomb. In this regard, following Claire Colebrook and Cary Wolfe, I reflect on the Anthropocene narrative as “a doomsday device”⁸ that in opposition to the instantaneous annihilation of the nuclear detonation/atomic bomb poses a processual end, or rather a slow and entropic end.

³ See: Zalasiewicz et al., “The New World”, 2228–2231; Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind”, 23.

⁴ Ben Dibley, “The Shape of Things to Come: Seven Theses on the Anthropocene and Attachment”, *Australian Humanities Review* 52, (2012): 141. <https://doi.org/10.22459/ahr.52.2012.10>.

⁵ Zalasiewicz et al., “Are we”, 2228–2231.

⁶ Deborah Bird Rose, “Anthropocene Noir”, *Arena*, 41/42 (2013), 208. As cited in Davis and Turpin (eds.) “Art in the Anthropocene”, 11.

⁷ Peter Sloterdijk, “The Anthropocene: A Process-State at the Edge of Geohistory?”, transl. Anna-Sophie Springer, in: Davis and Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene*, 334.

⁸ Claire Colebrook and Cary Wolfe, “Dialogue on the Anthropocene”, Discussion in Haus der Kulturen der Welt, (23 January 2013). www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLTCzth8H1M

While the International Commission on Stratigraphy is still evaluating the validity of the proposal prepared by the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) as a formal geological time interval,⁹ as readers of this dissertation will be well aware, the Anthropocene hypothesis has stimulated an ever-expanding body of literature and provoked a heated and controversial debate within scientific and cultural discourse, extending well beyond the geoscientific community.¹⁰ As environmental humanities scholar Rob Nixon comments on the rise of the term, the Anthropocene became an “immense, omnivorous idea” that attracts sceptics and enthusiasts “in their interdisciplinary masses”, “into its cavernous maw”.¹¹ The reasons behind the term becoming a “synthetic and semantic virus”¹² and the explosion of the discussions between its advocates and critics from a wide variety of disciplines can be traced mainly in its all-encompassing meta-narrative that involves the invocation of grand concepts such as “humanity”, “planetary boundaries”, and “deep time” and its “moralist-political urgency”¹³ coupled with the vertiginous effects of its apocalyptic imagery.

Despite its conceptual and material messiness and complexity - partly because it is still a narrative and situation in the making-¹⁴ the Anthropocene concept has become a strong narrative of human resource exploitation, planetary thresholds, and environmental urgency and turned into a hermeneutical tool in propositions for understanding “the meaning of the present and the possibilities for the future”.¹⁵ The naming of a historic-geologic novelty as such stimulated, on the one hand, an epistemological shift, ‘a counter-Copernican revolution’ as Latour pointed out, and thus a progressive scholarship that approaches the Anthropocene idea as a generative opportunity for unsettling conventional conceptualisations of the relationships between nonhuman, inhuman, and human and nature and culture, and proposes new imaginative questions for contemplating on the ongoing ecological collapse. On the other

⁹ Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, Working Group on the Anthropocene, Results of binding vote by AWG (21.05.2019), <http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/>

¹⁰ In addition, the term has already been employed in the headlines of mainstream news outlets such as BBC, The New York Times, Newsweek and covers of The Economist and National Geographic; and become an environmental buzzword that is widely used in climate activists’ (e.g. Bill McKibben) and reports and campaigns by environmental groups (e.g. Friends of the Earth). Three scientific journals on the topic have been launched, *The Anthropocene*, *The Anthropocene Review* and *Elementa*; countless academic conferences and art exhibitions with the Anthropocene as their guiding theme have been organised; and an ever-growing number of publications from earth and life sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities have been produced.

¹¹ Rob Nixon, “The Anthropocene: The Promise and Pitfalls of an Epochal Idea”, *Edge Effects* (6.11.2014) <http://edgeeffects.net/Anthropocene-promise-and-pitfalls/>

¹² Sloterdijk, “The Anthropocene”, 327.

¹³ Ibid., 327.

¹⁴ Yusoff, *A Billion*, xiv.

¹⁵ Simon Dalby, “Framing the Anthropocene: The good, the Bad and the Ugly”, *The Anthropocene Review*, 3, no. 1. (2016): 33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019615618681>

hand, it triggered a resistance focusing more on its genealogy that emphasises the questions of how and why it is brought to existence as an ideological construct and political and ethical issues following that.¹⁶ In a similar manner, in the introduction of the dissertation, I have positioned the Anthropocene both as a new epistemological filter/lens through which we, humans see ourselves and pointed out the deficiencies of its universalising rhetoric by historicising its conceptual and epistemological origins in the totalising rhetoric of the Whole Earth discourse between 1968-1972.

Given the interest in this dissertation on the decentring and dissolution of the figure of Man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces through the epistemological shift the Anthropocene implies by its expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities, and thus its reconfiguration of conceptions of subjectivity, temporality and materiality (scale), there are three key sets of literature needed. In the first section, I will problematise the political implications of the configuration of “the Anthropos” in the dominant Anthropocene narrative in relation to the decentring of the figure of Man. In the second section, by drawing on critical posthumanist and feminist critique, I will elaborate on the ‘ethic of interrelatedness’ in opposition to anthropocentric undertakings of the Anthropocene narrative. I will position the agency of art and architecture as a channel for aisthesis, for mobilising an ‘ethics of critical proximity’ to the Anthropocene, thereby reconfiguring and distributing Anthropocenic thought and sensibility. In the last section, I will reflect on the emerging literature around the term geoaesthetics, and outline the conceptual approach that draws out the problematisation of subjectivity, temporality and materiality (scale) specifically in an Anthropocenic context, all of which build up the foundation for identifying *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as geoaesthetic acts. In other words, in this discussion of the theoretical literature, I will develop the conceptual framework for crystallising three conceptual components of geoaesthetic acts through an Anthropocenic lens. I will position the dissertation in the emerging discourse around Anthropocene aesthetics and clarify my points of intervention for proposing geoaesthetic acts as historical interventions signifying an Anthropocenic rupture.

¹⁶ See: Andreas Malm, “The Anthropocene Myth”, *Jacobin*, (30.03.2015), <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/03/anthropocene-capitalism-climate-change/>

1.1. The emergence of the Anthropos: the “Universal Masculinist Figure of Species Man”

A strong resistance to the term “Anthropocene” comes from scholars within social sciences and humanities and revolves around the criticism of western anthropocentrism inherent in its dominant narrative which is mainly rooted in Earth and life sciences.¹⁷ The criticism primarily focuses on the homogenisation of humans through the notion of “Anthropos” and/or species-being and problematises the motivations behind the reduction of human agency and responsibility into a singular and universal unity. Importantly for this dissertation, the conceptualisation of the ‘Anthropos’ in the Anthropocene nomenclature, literally meaning “the age of Man”, holds the conceptual and epistemological danger of reappointing power to “Man” through “the production of a mythic Anthropos as a geologic world maker/ destroyer of world”.¹⁸ And by doing so, it foregrounds the figure of Man once again, this time as “the assumed-to-be protagonist of the Anthropocene” as the “universal masculinist figure of Species Man”.¹⁹ To problematise ‘Anthropos’ is important for this dissertation for two reasons. First, its uncritical undertakings risk dismissing ‘the epistemological and political crisis of the humanistic habit of placing ‘Man’ at the centre of world history’, formalised by Foucault’s anticipation of the death of Man in *The Order of Things* which I position as a key threshold for identifying an Anthropocenic rupture. Second, the Euro-western concept of the Anthropos is a reiteration of the totalising universalistic rhetoric mobilised by the “Whole Earth” discourse that transcends cultural and political differences. Before I go into the main discussion, it is useful to have a brief look at the arguments about the onset of the Anthropocene in geosciences because the search for a global marker that indicates the beginning of the proposed epoch points to the responsible or accountable ‘subject’ in question. Although this is a well-covered territory in the Anthropocene debate, I will briefly outline some of the main scientific formalities regarding the Anthropocene thesis, in order to start deconstructing the Anthropos in the Anthropocene as a “problematic phallogocentric signifier”.²⁰ That is to say in order to decentre the figure of Man and dissolve the “reign of man”²¹ that identifies the meta-

¹⁷ See: Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative”, *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no.1 (2014): 62–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019613516291> ; Nixon, “The Anthropocene”; Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the”; Yusoff, *A Billion*.

¹⁸ Yusoff, *A Billion*, 25.

¹⁹ Affrica Taylor, “Countering the Conceits of The Anthropos: Scaling Down and Researching with Minor Players”, *Discourse* 41, no. 3 (2019): 343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2019.1583822>

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 342.

²¹ Etienne Turpin, “Introduction: Who Does the Earth Think It Is, Now?” in *Architecture in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Design, Deep Time, Science and Philosophy*, ed. Etienne Turpin (Open Humanities Press, 2013), 6.

argumentation of this dissertation, I will identify its reoccurrence and recentring in the -not surprisingly male-dominated and thus gendered-²² scientific discourse as the figure of Anthropos that risks signifying a 'universal masculinist figure of Species Man'.

Although Crutzen and Stoermer's Anthropocene definition has been acknowledged as a ground-breaking scientific discovery today,²³ the Anthropocene thesis is neither the first scientific assertion that situates the human as a geological marker and tries to recognise its power "over the fate of the planet",²⁴ nor the first premonition of a possible end-of-the-world. In fact, the genesis of the concepts that argue human domination in shaping the environment at a planetary scale goes back to the late 19th century. Antonio Stoppani's "Anthropozoic era" (1873), Vladimir Vernadsky, Edouard Le Roy, and Teilhard de Chardin's "noösphere" (1922), William Catton's "Homo colossus" (1980), Andrew Revkin's "Anthrocene" (1992), and Michael Samways's "Homogenocene" (1999) are some examples that can be given in this regard.²⁵ However, when Italian geologist Stoppani introduced a "new telluric force which in power and universality may be compared to the greater forces of earth" and refer to the "anthropozoic era" in 1873,²⁶ his proposition was considered as "unscientific".²⁷ The wide acknowledgement of the very same insight with the Anthropocene definition today can be related with the more obvious results of anthropogenic effects such as global warming which in part is caused by the rising of the world population nearly up to four times since Stoppani's day.²⁸ Sloterdijk, on the other hand, argues that the main catalyst behind the rising career of the term is its message of "moralist-political urgency", namely, the knowledge of humans being "responsible for the inhabitation and business administration of the earth as a whole, ever since their

²² In this regard, Zylinska sharply points out that "[w]hen the Anthropocene Group, a subset of the International Commission on Stratigraphy, first convened in 2014 in Berlin to discuss whether the intensification of human activity deserved to be identified with a new term, "[o]f the 29 scientists the working group listed on its website as members at the time of the meeting, only one was a woman."18 This state of events prompted the Guardian journalist Kate Raworth to suggest: "just call it the Manthropocene." Zylinska, *The End*, 12.

²³ See: Wark, *Molecular Red* and Latour, "Agency in".

²⁴ Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock*, 4.

²⁵ Gisli Pallson et al. "Reconceptualising the 'Anthropos' in the Anthropocene: Integrating the Social Sciences and Humanities in Global Environmental Change Research", *Environmental Science and Policy* 28 (2013): 4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2012.11.004>

²⁶ Antonio Stoppani, "First Period of the Anthropozoic Era", transl. Valeria Federeighi, eds. Etienne Turpin and Valeria Federeighi, in Kruse, and Ellsworth (eds), *Making the Geologic*, 36.

²⁷ Elizabeth Kolbert, "Enter the Anthropocene-Age of Man", in Kruse and Ellsworth (eds), *Making the Geologic*, 29.

²⁸ Ibid. 29. In addition, in his review on Anthropocene's microhistory, geographer Noel Castree suggests that the rise of the term from a neologism to a buzzword could have three reasons: the "visibility" provided by Crutzen's high profile as a Nobel Prize winner and his extensive scientific networks; "the attention from geologists from 2007" cultivated mainly by Jan Zalasiewicz who was the chair of Stratigraphy Commission of The Geological Society; and lastly, the already ongoing interest in meta-concepts in geosciences in recent decades (e.g. James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis's Gaia Hypothesis, 1974). Noel Castree, "The Anthropocene and the Environmental Humanities: Extending the Conversation", *Environmental Humanities* 5 (2014): 237-8. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3615496>

presence on it stopped unfolding in the mode of more or less traceless integration”.²⁹ Yet, as I have outlined in the introduction of the dissertation, the knowledge infrastructures for mapping and measuring the anthropogenic impacts on the Earth as a system, as a whole was established through the advancements in global environmental monitoring, analysis, and forecasting developed by geo-cybernetic Earth system analysis in the period between the late 1960s and early 1970s. That is to say and I reemphasise, in order to trace a genealogy of the emergence of the term Anthropocene, it is important to identify the epistemological conditions through which it came into being.

The boundary between what Sloterdijk referred to as ‘traceless integration’ and “geological institutionalization of humanity as future strata”³⁰ is one of the main discussion points within the geo-scientific debate and involves a wide range of hypotheses. Anthropologists Bruce Smith and Melinda Zeber provide a brief summary of varying propositions on the onset of Anthropocene as:³¹ “the Industrial Revolution” (A.D. 1750–1800) which caused “a global scale atmospheric change” (rise in carbon dioxide and methane),³² “alteration of earth surface by human civilisations” (2000 BP) indicated in “anthropogenic soils/ anthrosols”,³³ “the beginning of agriculture” (8000-5000 BP) which stimulated a global methane increase- due to inefficient wet-rice agriculture in particular,³⁴ and lastly “megafaunal predation and vegetation change” (~13,800 B.P.) which correlates documented increase in *Betula* (Birch) and the rise in regional temperature levels.³⁵ Moreover, a supplementary proposition referred to as “the Great Acceleration”, in which the global growth of human activity (population growth, industrialisation, globalisation) increased dramatically around the early 1950s, and which situates the worldwide spread of artificial radionuclides consequential to the thermonuclear

²⁹ Sloterdijk, “The Anthropocene”, 327.

³⁰ Elizabeth Johnson et. al., “After the Anthropocene: Politics and Geographic Inquiry for a New Epoch” *Progress in Human Geography* 38, no.3 (2013): 454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132513517065>

³¹ Bruce D. Smith and Melinda A. Zeber, “The Onset of the Anthropocene”, *Anthropocene* 4 (December 2013): 8–13 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ancene.2013.05.001>

³² Crutzen, “Geology of”, 23.

³³ Giacomo Certini and Riccardo Scalenghe, “Anthropogenic Soils are the Golden Spikes for the Anthropocene”, *The Holocene* 21, no.8 (2011): 1269–1274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959683611408454>

³⁴ William F. Ruddiman and Jonathan S. Thomson, “The Case for Human Causes of Increased Atmospheric CH₄ over the last 5000 years.”, *Quaternary Science Reviews* 20, no. 18 (2001): 1769–1777. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-3791\(01\)00067-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-3791(01)00067-1)

³⁵ Christopher Doughty, Adam Wolf. and Christopher B. Field, “Biophysical Feedbacks Between the Pleistocene Megafauna Extinction and Climate: The First Human-induced Global Warming?”, *DC: American Geophysical Union Geophysical research letters* 37, no.15 (2010), p. n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2010GL043985>

bomb tests as a primary marker, is accepted as a gear switch in the burgeoning literature on the Anthropocene.³⁶

Even though a growing consensus on “Industrial Revolution” as the “golden spike” of the Anthropocene has been highlighted in geoscience literature,³⁷ the most recent update in the ratification process has been noted in AWG’s latest report in May 2019 as to consider the “Great Acceleration” as the optimal start date.³⁸ Although this proposal that takes the detonation of the first atomic bomb in 1945 as a key indicator for human’s full spectrum dominance in planetary history is useful for my intention to point out a correlation between the ‘Whole Earth worry’ underscored by the Atomic Age and the planetary anxiety caused by the Anthropocene narrative today, it risks concealing “deeper causes and processes”³⁹ of the “routine brutalities of economies of extraction and the legacy of colonial asset-making practices through geology”⁴⁰ that long predate this timeframe. In other words, as Bonneuil and Fressoz argue, this latest consensus “obscures the major rupture, both environmental and civilizational, of the entry into thermo-industrial society based on fossil fuels”.⁴¹ Although the contradictory breadth of the propositions extending over a long time frame contributes to speculative imaginations and imaginative thought experiments the Anthropocene condition catalyses, Kathryn Yusoff argues and I agree that the focus on beginnings could be seen as a distraction from the question of who is this “man” at the core.⁴²

The Anthropos in the nomenclature itself and the descriptions such as humanity or humankind which are positioned as the responsible agent for the phenomena in the dominant narrative, point out the crucial question of who is accountable for this systemic change and stimulate

³⁶ Will Steffen et al., “The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical & Engineering Sciences* 369 (March 2011): 845.

<https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2010.0327> It is also worth noting physical geographers Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin’s “The Orbis Hypothesis” which proposes the year 1610 as the golden spike, referring to the colonisation of Americas and mass death of Native Americans which resulted in a dip in global CO2 levels as an effect of the reforestation following the quasi-annihilation of Indigenous ecologies by Europeans. See: Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (London, UK: Penguin, 2018).

³⁷ See: Erle Ellis et al., “Anthropogenic Transformation of the Biomes 1700 to 2000” *Global Ecology and Biogeography* 19, no.5 (2011), 589–606. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1466-8238.2010.00540.x>; Steffen et al. “The Anthropocene”, 842; Zalasiewicz et al., “Are we”, 2228–2231.

³⁸ Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, Working Group on the Anthropocene, Results of binding vote by AWG (21.05.2019), <http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/>

³⁹ Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock*, 17.

⁴⁰ Yusoff, *A Billion*, 12. She also writes that “It should be noted that the only reason we know anything about geology is because of fossils uncovered through mining and the motivation for the development of geologic knowledge in order to mobilise this extraction frame”, 13.

⁴¹ Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock*, 17.

⁴² Kathryn Yusoff, “Geopower: Genealogy After Life”, Talk at Environmental Humanities Switzerland (13.05. 2015) <https://ethz.ch/en/news-and-events/eth-news/news/2015/07/narrating-the-anthropocene.html>

critical responses to this kind of species-thinking. In other words, the term raises “questions about the constitution of the Anthropos—its variations, divisions, exclusions”⁴³ and inevitably problematises the conception of subjectivity. The Anthropos allegedly signifies the human species and therefore is a universal, homogenising and totalising concept that disregards cultural differentiations as well as multiple singularities. In this regard, Yusoff writes that “[t]o be included in the ‘we’ of the Anthropocene is to be silenced by a claim to universalism that fails to notice its subjugations, taking part in a planetary condition in which *no part* was accorded in terms of subjectivity”.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is hard to dismiss the reappearance of a certain imagination of humanity in the dominant scientific narrative of the Anthropocene that comes into being as the main protagonists reposition themselves and “Western colonial knowledge and extraction” practices representative of humanity, without “relinquishing of the power [they] continue to generate in terms of who gets to formulate, implement, and speak to/of the future”.⁴⁵ As Yusoff argues further, “[t]he colonial assumption for the responsibility for and of the world is articulated anew as the white man’s burden— a paternalism that is tied to a redemptive narrative of saving the world from harm on account of others while maintaining the protective thick skin of innocence”.⁴⁶ In other words, the Anthropos that is signified by the dominant scientific narrative of the Anthropocene, what Yusoff also refers to as “White Geology”⁴⁷ is unsurprisingly white, male and Western and can be read as a reincarnation of the figure of Man, as the ‘universal masculinist figure of Species Man’.

In this regard, “the resolutely masculinist, Euro-western concept of the Anthropos narcissistically presume[s] to be the universal signifier of humanity”,⁴⁸ yet it is precisely this self-positioning I problematise and aim to decentre and dissolve in relation to planetary and geological forces, whilst positioning *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as geoaesthetic acts for identifying an Anthropocenic rupture. In this specific context, I follow Colebrook’s differentiation between species and Anthropos in that “the Anthropos is not the species. It’s the portion of the species that thinks of itself as a species. It’s the portion of the species that thinks of itself as humanity”.⁴⁹ This nuance enables me to situate “the figure of Man” as emblematic of Anthropos and problematise the anthropocentrism

⁴³ Yusoff and Clark, “Geosocial Formations”, 5.

⁴⁴ Yusoff, *A Billion*, 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁸ Taylor, “Countering the”, 342.

⁴⁹ Claire Colebrook, “Victorian Studies in the Anthropocene: An Interview with Claire Colebrook”, interview by Peter Adkins and Wendy Parkins, 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 26 (2018):1. <https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.819>

that is inherent in dominant epistemological tendencies of Western modernity that was tackled by Foucault in *The Order of Things*. I will now map some of the tensions in the debate that focuses on the question of Anthropos and discuss its political implications.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's well-acknowledged "The Climate of History: Four Theses" essay is considered one of the first studies from the critical theory that acknowledges Anthropocene as a means of analysis and reflects on species thinking in historical terms.⁵⁰ Mainly, he problematises the difficulties of conceiving human history and natural history in relationship with each other and pinpoints the gap between two calendars of "species history" and "global histories of capital".⁵¹ Though being a postcolonial historian, he argues that "the problematic of globalization" which "reads climate change only as a crisis of capitalist management" is not sufficient for understanding this planetary change.⁵² According to him, it is undeniably true that capitalist industrialisation has led to a "high-energy consuming model of societies" that is the primary cause of the recent "crisis".⁵³ Yet, he claims that the "mansion of all modern freedoms" is built on fossil-fuel use and our relationship with energy has "no intrinsic connection to the logics of capitalist, nationalist, or socialist identities".⁵⁴ Besides, he suggests that not only the cause but also the effects of the planetary predicament are shared collectively. Through giving examples of the droughts in Australia or wildfires in the wealthy neighbourhoods of California, he argues that "there are no lifeboats for the rich and the privileged as opposed to the crises of capitalism".⁵⁵ Consequently, in response to this "collectivity" Anthropocene poses, he calls for a "universal" that "arises from a shared sense of catastrophe" which addresses "a global approach to politics".⁵⁶ I find Chakrabarty's "shared sense of catastrophe"⁵⁷ highly problematic since it is in alignment with 'we are all in the Anthropocene' narrative of the geoscientific community.⁵⁸ Not only does it dismiss a myriad of inequalities in terms of responsibility for environmental degradation, starting from the difference between global North and global South, but it also masks the obvious differences between underrepresented communities and rich and privileged ones in terms of risk exposure, and thereby ignoring issues of environmental justice.

⁵⁰ Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History", 197-222.

⁵¹ Ibid., 212.

⁵² Ibid., 212.

⁵³ Ibid., 206.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 217.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 221.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 222.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 222.

⁵⁸ See: Malm and Hornborg, "The geology"; Nixon, "The Anthropocene"; Mirzoeff, "Visualizing the".

From a similar perspective, in their fierce critique of the Anthropocene narrative, human geographers Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg oppose Chakrabarty's 'universal', and argue that if there is an apocalypse signified by climate change and Anthropocene, it is not universal but "uneven and combined".⁵⁹ Nixon, as well, states that "we may all be in the Anthropocene but we are not in the same way" mainly because of the massive inequalities in access to resources and exposure to risk.⁶⁰ The universal, totalising and reductionist rhetoric one encounters in the dominant Anthropocene narrative that transcends different subject positions is symptomatic of the dominant epistemological tendencies that I have tracked in the lineage of Whole Earth discourse in the introduction. To be more precise, I argue that the roots of this One-Earth rhetoric can be traced back to the rise of an alleged "planetary subjectivity" mobilised by the Whole Earth imagery that depicts the world, as a single, unified, vulnerable entity floating in space, thereby promoting a detached geopolitical subjectivity that disregards the ongoing struggles for colonial independence and the Cold-War reality. In this context, Nixon argues that the "epic vantage point" of species thinking in the Anthropocene builds up a "convergent story" that reduces local, situated, historically present and differentiated human societies into one species notion and thus suppresses "divergent stories of widening inequalities" of the 21st century.⁶¹ In other words, "the grand explanatory species story" of the Anthropocene sidesteps the question of "unequal human impacts, unequal human agency, and unequal human vulnerabilities".⁶² Therefore, I argue that the Anthropos in the dominant Anthropocene narrative is a derivative of the One-Earth and Whole Earth rhetoric that supports the globalist discourse transcending cultural and political differences and conceals more than it reveals.

Malm and Hornborg challenge the dominant Anthropocene narrative from the same position, and point out that the uneven exploitation and consumption of biophysical resources is "a condition for globalized fossil-fuel technology", therefore the claim to hold a species category and its ability to manipulate fire responsible for the current ecological crisis, is "analytically defective".⁶³ In this regard, they oppose Crutzen's offer of the steam-engine as the global trigger for the Anthropocene, through revealing the historical background of its installation and mastery, which is not a story of "some natural-born deputies of the human species" but rather

⁵⁹ Malm and Hornborg, "The geology", 67.

⁶⁰ Nixon, "The Anthropocene".

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Malm and Hornborg, "The Geology", 67.

of the “owners of the means of production” which is “a clique of white British men” in this case.⁶⁴ This reading decomposes the ‘universal masculinist figure of Species Man’ signified by the Anthropos, and underscores that in order to conceive climate change as anthropogenic, one needs to recognise that it is “sociogenic”.⁶⁵ In this context, Latour rightly points out that it is impossible “to unify the Anthropos as an actor endowed with some sort of moral or political consistency, to the point of charging it with being a character capable of acting on this new global stage”⁶⁶ and therefore “[i]t is rather the human as a unified agent, as a simple virtual political entity, as a universal concept, that has to be decomposed into several distinct peoples, endowed with contradictory interests, competing territories, and brought together by the warring agents – not to say warring divinities.”⁶⁷ I agree with Latour in that the decomposition of Anthropos as a universal concept is the necessary starting point for conceptualising the Anthropocene subjectivity in a critical way. In relation to this point, particularly as opposed to the dominant Anthropocene narrative’s universalising, generalising, transhistorical and reductionist tendencies, alternative terms for a more political and historical understanding of the phenomenon were proposed such as the “Capitalocene”,⁶⁸ “Plantationocene”,⁶⁹ “Anglocene”,⁷⁰ and “Technocene/Eurocene”.⁷¹ What these terms share in common is an indication for a specific historical set of socio-political relations, situated against the “depoliticizing meta-abstraction”, the term Anthropocene offers.⁷²

Although I support the political rationale behind these alternate namings, I prefer to use the Anthropocene term as it is because as I have argued earlier, I follow Colebrook’s differentiation between Anthropos and species in that ‘the Anthropos is not the species, it is the portion of the species that thinks of itself as a species, as humanity’. I take this self-positioning as a derivative and symptom of the centring of the figure of Man that Foucault problematised in alignment with the emergence of the Modern episteme. And this is precisely the positioning that I attempt to decentre and dissolve through my conceptualisation of the Anthropocenic epistemological rupture and my proposition of three geoaesthetic acts therein. Both the figure of Man and the Anthropos share this self-alleged representationality for a collective subjectivity

⁶⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁶⁶ Latour, “Facing Gaia”, 109.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁸ Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015), 169-202.

⁶⁹ Haraway et.al. “The Anthropologists”, 556.

⁷⁰ See: Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock*

⁷¹ See: Sloterdijk, “The Anthropocene”

⁷² Dalby et al., “After the”, 448.

named 'humanity'. As Colebrook argues further, "this obsession with humanity is part of what I would call Anthropos. There is a portion of species that thinks of itself as human in terms that are definitely not universal or inevitable. The work that Anthropocene does is that it says that it is caused by humanity, but it's not caused by the species. Those two things need to be marked as different."⁷³ Following this position, my preference in using the term Anthropocene is to point out 'this obsession with humanity' and to problematise the 'universal masculinist figure of Species Man' signified by Anthropos as a redeemed figure of Man. Besides, since it is the Anthropocene's claim of the universal that I position as a derivative of One-Earth and Whole-Earth discourse and historicise its origins in the period between 1968-1972, using the Anthropocene term as it is, has clear advantages for my problematisation of planetary subjectivity in a historical context.

The "depoliticisation" that attends to the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene can be sought mainly in the description of the "Anthropos" as an apolitical geologic force, and the mobilisation of an apocalyptic discourse, both of which supports the "status quo" of existing power relationships.⁷⁴ Protagonists of Anthropocene science literature define humankind as a geomorphological force that "rivals some of the great forces of nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system"⁷⁵ and place it as equivalent to phenomena like meteoric or volcanic activities. According to Malm and Hornborg, this "displacement", the switch of "power to shape planetary climate" "from nature to humans", and its legitimisation through registering this switch as a consequence of an "innate human trait such as the ability to control fire", is a double act. Climate change is "denaturalized" first to be "re-naturalized" next.⁷⁶ Besides, the positioning of the Anthropocene as material unintended consequences of historical processes that were supposed to result in control and mastery of the environment leads to a justification of the continuation of anthropocentric and technoscientific approaches that led to the problem itself. In this light, human geographer Lauren Rickards fears that the Anthropocene could end up like its theoretical cousin "resilience", harbouring regressive neoliberal principles.⁷⁷ Indeed, it is hard to miss many proposals that refer to the situation merely as a technical problem and

⁷³ Colebrook, "Victorian Studies", 9. She argues further and I agree that "I think it's wrong to call it the Capitalocene or the Corporatocene because that's within our narrative of good and evil. But then, if we say it's the Anthropocene and say it's all of us, we don't really mean all of us; we mean those of us who live an affluent, urban, Western lifestyle." Ibid., 8.

⁷⁴ Zylinska, *The End*, 26.

⁷⁵ Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene", 614.

⁷⁶ Malm and Hornborg, "The Geology", 65.

⁷⁷ Lauren Rickards, "Critiquing, Mining and Engaging Anthropocene Science", *Dialogues in Human Geography* 5, no. 3 (2015): 339. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820615613263>

not mention any kind of social and political transformation and therefore amplify the tendency to support politically regressive technoscientific managerial dispositifs.

From a similar angle, Demos points out how “the Anthropocene and its origins are coincident with the global formations of racial and colonial capitalism” and he notes that these formations “become fully instrumentalised by technocratic neoliberalism as the logic of the neoliberal Anthropocene that justifies all manners of disaster capitalism and its technofixes at the time of increasing environmental destruction and racialised social and political violence.”⁷⁸ Therefore a more nuanced and critical understanding of the Anthropocene is only possible by acknowledging that it mainly identifies “a politically infused geology”⁷⁹ and that the notion of the Anthropos risks masking “histories of racism, systemic racial oppression, and inscribed geologic violence”.⁸⁰ As Yusoff puts it “[a]s the Anthropocene proclaims the language of species- life—Anthropos—through a universalist geologic commons, it neatly erases histories of racism that were incubated through the regulatory structure of geologic relations”.⁸¹ In this regard, it is crucially important to emphasise that geological practices which gave rise to the Anthropocene are deeply entangled in political mechanisms of colonial capitalism and therefore an apolitical conception of the Anthropocene is not only highly problematic but risks perpetuating the institutional status quo.

The environmental apocalyptic thought that is tied to the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene mobilises heroic and solutionist approaches that reduce the complex condition into a technical problem. As geographer Eric Swyngedouw argues, believing that the solution or delay of the catastrophe is only ever possible through a techno-organisational fix achieves nothing but the sustainability of a socio-ecologically uneven world.⁸² In its mainstream presentations and many scientific papers, the Anthropocene is mobilised as a teleological concept that inevitably carries biblical undertones. Sloterdijk argues that “we ought to understand the term “Anthropocene” as an expression that only makes sense within an apocalyptic logical framework. Apocalypse means: evidence comes from the end”.⁸³ Yet, this

⁷⁸ T.J. Demos et al., “Visualizing the Anthropocene: Aesthetics and Politics”, *E-flux conversation: Ecology After Nature: Industries, Communities, and Environmental Memory* (01.10 2020), <https://www.e-flux.com/video/351120/visualizing-the-anthropocene-aesthetics-and-politics/>

⁷⁹ Yusoff, *A Billion*, xiii.

⁸⁰ Çinçik and Campos, “Postcard Notes”, p: n/a

⁸¹ Yusoff, *A Billion*, 2

⁸² Erik Swyngedouw, “Anthropocenic Promises - The End of Nature, Climate Change and the Process of Post-Politicization”, Talk at *Society and the Anthropocene Conference*, Cabot Institute, University of Bristol, (24.06 2013). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz2UQrKcwJ8>

⁸³ Sloterdijk, “The Anthropocene”, 330.

apocalyptic framework, the rhetoric of crisis, provides the ground on which saviour and messianic solutions are promoted. In this context, Zylinska points out that in the dominant discourse of the Anthropocene:

[...]there is a very clear sense [...] that the salvation from the Anthropocene's alleged finalism will come from a secularized yet godlike elsewhere: an escape to heavens (i.e. a planetary relocation) or an actual upgrade of humans to the status of Homo Deus. In both of these narratives, Man arrives in the post-Anthropocene New Jerusalem fully redeemed—and redesigned.”⁸⁴

As an example, one can look at Crutzen's path to the solution: “[t]his will require appropriate human behaviour at all scales, and may well involve internationally accepted, large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance, to ‘optimize’ climate”.⁸⁵ Firstly, Crutzen believes that the “Anthropos” who has disrupted the thermostat of the planet holds the power to solve the problem, namely to “optimize the climate”. Secondly, this is going to be realised only through the mobilisation of technoscientific managerial dispositif which is exemplified as geoengineering projects in his statement. International expert institutions, carbon pricing mechanisms, green technologies can be given as examples of the same solutionist approach that risks situating the complex phenomena into circuits of monetisation and commodification.

My problematisation of the apocalyptic undertones of the Anthropocene narrative underscores its mobilisation of technoscientific managerial dispositifs as Promethean solutions and the positioning of the figure of Man as a planetary steward. In this context, Zylinska argues that “the apocalyptic narrative of the Anthropocene also has an ontological dimension: it brings forth a temporarily wounded yet ultimately redeemed Man, who can conquer time and space by rising above the geological mess he has created.”⁸⁶ Yet, and I reemphasise, if there is an end signified by the Anthropocene, it is the end of the figure of Man, it is the end of the conception of the human as “‘the masculine universalist Species-man’”. As Zylinska argues further, “[t]he end of man’ pronounced as part of the current apocalyptic discourse can therefore be seen as both a promise and an ethical opening—rather than solely as an existential threat.”⁸⁷ In the following section, I will explore this ‘ethical opening’ that is enabled by the dissolution of the figure of Man and conceptualise the Anthropocene as a narrative that

⁸⁴ Zylinska, *The End*, 3.

⁸⁵ Crutzen, “Geology of”, 23.

⁸⁶ Zylinska, *The End*, 12.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

emphasises an 'ethic of interrelatedness' through drawing on critical posthumanists and feminist theorists that reveal complexities of nature-culture entanglements such as co-dependency, co-emergence, co-existence and co-extinction, and tackle politics of differences within geosocial orders.

In this context -as another useful transition from the question of Anthropos into the question of ethics-, Heather Davis and Zoe Todd's call "for a tending once again to relations, to kin, to life, longing, and care", "rather than positioning the salvation of Man— the liberation of humanity from the horrors of the Anthropocene – in the technics and technologies of the noösphere"⁸⁸ is insightful. This call is inspired by Sylvia Winter's "unsettling of Man", "the ways in which the concept of Man, which is the 'foundational basis of modernity' serves to deny humanity to many people while also divorcing humans from the Earth".⁸⁹ And I will propose that it is this specific 'unsettling of Man' that identifies the 'ethical opening' through which an 'ethic of interrelatedness' can be mobilised, and a conceptual and a new materialist move towards an 'ethics of critical proximity' can be catalysed.

1.2. From an 'Ethic of Interrelatedness' towards an 'Ethics of Critical Proximity'

In the previous section, I have problematised the re-emergence and recentring of the figure of Man in the conceptualisation of Anthropos as the 'universal masculinist Species-Man', and the mobilisation of apocalyptic narratives for techno-managerial dispositifs that only achieves "perpetuating the heroicism and grandiosity of Man-to-the-rescue scripts".⁹⁰ My critique of the Anthropos focused on the differentiation between species and Anthropos in that, following Colebrook, the Anthropos is not the species, but rather it is the portion of the species that thinks of itself as the species, just as the figure of Man situates himself as representative of humanity. While this differentiation outlines the departure point for decentring the figure of Man through my conception of the Anthropocenic rupture and proposition of geoaesthetic acts, the question of the end that is adjacent to Anthropocene discourse enables me to propose a specific conceptual and material end implied by the Anthropocene as the dissolution of the figure of Man in relation to planetary and geological forces. In other words, following Zylinska,

⁸⁸ Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonising the Anthropocene", *An International E-journal for Critical Geographies* 16, no.4 (2017): 775.

⁸⁹ Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument". *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 (2003): 288.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>

⁹⁰ Taylor, "Countering the", 340.

I mobilise “[t]he end of man’ pronounced as part of the current apocalyptic discourse’ ‘as both a promise and an ethical opening’. In this section, I will elaborate on this ‘ethical opening’ and move away from the gendered discourse of the Anthropocene in the sciences and outline the theoretical framework that will draw out the conceptual components of geoaesthetic acts, namely subjectivity, temporality and scale in the following section. This exploration is important for this dissertation because it will reveal my conception of the Anthropocene through outlining the theoretical landscape that informs my positioning in the debate and underscore my emphasis on ‘ethic of interrelatedness’ as the core value of the Anthropocene and the theoretical model of planetarity- that I have introduced in the introduction of the dissertation. Importantly, it will also provide the ground for my proposal of geoaesthetic acts for mobilising ‘an ethics of critical proximity’ to the Anthropocene. In other words, my exploration of ethics in this section will move from outlining an Anthropocenic ‘ethic of interrelatedness’ towards an ‘ethics of critical proximity’.

In broad strokes, I explore the question of ethics through focusing on the geologic agency of humans and the mode of subjectivity Anthropocene proposition accentuates through its wider usage. According to Yusoff, “the extension of the social into the strata inadvertently produces new modes of subjectification that are geologic”⁹¹ and this “historic geomorphic fusion forces the rethinking of political subjectivity through deep time and inhuman ontologies”.⁹² Not only the re-positioning of the social within the materiality of the geologic but also the knowledge of being an agent in the ongoing collapse trigger moments of self-reflection and propositions and imperatives for future actions. The redefinition and repositioning of the human in this planetary configuration necessarily involve an ethical framework, which is closely tied up with the questions around aesthetics in an Anthropocenic context.

Joanna Zylińska in her book *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*, defines ethics as “a mode of human locatedness” whereby humans acknowledge the “processual and unstable nature” of that “locatedness” and “give an account on the modes of relationality” that arises from being-in and being-with the world.⁹³ She acknowledges the fact that being and relating with others is not unique to human beings but the historical practice of “regulating ways of co-existing and co-emerging with others and providing an account— verbally, experientially, or aesthetically—

⁹¹ Dalby et al., “After the” 453.

⁹² Ibid., 452.

⁹³ Joanna Zylińska, *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*, (Open Humanities Press, 2014), 91.

of these processes” is.⁹⁴ In this light, she formulates ethics as “a historically contingent human mode of becoming in the world, of becoming different from the world, and of narrating and taking responsibility for the nature of this difference”.⁹⁵ Since this kind of ethics stresses ‘giving an account of our difference’ and as well as ‘narrating’ it, it is innately interwoven with storytelling.⁹⁶ According to her, giving an account of this difference involves “working out possibilities for what we will decide, through deliberation, policy work and conflict resolution, to be ways of becoming better in the world”.⁹⁷ She borrows the primacy of ethics over ontology from Emmanuel Levinas and the emphasis on relationality from thinkers she calls “philosophers of entanglement”: Karen Barad, Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti. Her discussion is understandably abstract and she admits it however, the relationship she builds between ethics and politics is highly relevant for this dissertation, as it involves prioritising ethics before politics in the Anthropocene context.

Importantly, Zylinska sees the Anthropocene as an “ethical injunction” and asks for critical, creative and accountable thinking before dealing with any “political work” in which demands are oppositional and burdens are joint. Her minimal ethics is, therefore “the suspension of humans’ epistemological and hence domineering pretensions”.⁹⁸ This emphasis on suspension is critical for this dissertation since it prepares the ethical ground for the “arts of noticing and witnessing”⁹⁹ the realities of the Anthropocene. Besides, again critically important for this dissertation, she posits thinking primarily as a political act for encountering the Anthropocene. Accordingly, she claims that “[critical] thinking is the most political thing we can do with regard to the Anthropocene, before we go and do anything else”.¹⁰⁰ The storytelling aspect of ethics becomes significant because the definition and positioning of oneself in discursive, affective and material unfoldings of nature-culture entanglements is related directly to how the story of the Anthropocene is framed. In this regard, I will elaborate on one specific example from mainstream responses to the Anthropocene in order to contemplate the implications of storytelling in an ethical framework as “it matters what stories tell stories”.¹⁰¹ Besides, following McKenzie Wark’s argument that “the first task of the critique” is “to point

⁹⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁹ See: Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ Zylinska, *Minimal Ethics*, 125.

¹⁰¹ Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Making String Figures with Biologies, Arts, Activisms”, Talk at Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene (30.10.2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHwZA9NGWg0>

out the poverty of these [mainstream] options”,¹⁰² I will position this example as a recurring heroic, masculinist, solutionist approach that one constantly encounters in ecological discourse since the emergence of modern environmental movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Ecomodernist Manifesto released in April 2015 by Breakthrough Institute which is founded by neo-environmentalists Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger in 2003, is a crisp example from a techno-optimist group.¹⁰³ The basic premise of the manifesto is that human ingenuity and technology will overcome the environmental challenges of the Anthropocene. It claims that “a good Anthropocene demands that humans use their growing social, economic, and technological powers to make life better for people, stabilize the climate, and protect the natural world”.¹⁰⁴ They oppose the pessimist apocalyptic discourse revolving around the Anthropocene and express complete faith in a “better” future by “intensifying many human activities, particularly farming, energy extraction, forestry, and settlement”.¹⁰⁵ The definitions in the manifesto such as humans’ “extraordinary powers” is clearly symptomatic of human exceptionalism that is rooted in Western modernity and illustrates an example of utilising the Anthropocene narrative as a reincarnation of western anthropocentrism.

It is important to note that Stewart Brand who was the founder of the *Whole Earth Catalogue* also signed the manifesto, as it is emblematic of the correlation I have drawn between the period between 1968 and 1972 and contemporary Anthropocene discourse in terms of tracking the intensification of normative and technocratic responses towards environmental crisis. The lack of political strategy in Ecomodernists’ claims is obvious; thus, the manifesto sits too well within the post-political frame and techno-managerial discourse which I have discussed in the previous section. Besides, public ethics scholar Clive Hamilton argues that techno-optimists’ position is more than “wishful thinking” and is in relation with the power interests that led the Anthropocene condition itself.¹⁰⁶ He expresses his political concern by revealing the support they get from conservatives who refuse the demands for decreasing

¹⁰² McKenzie Wark, “Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene (On Alexander Bogdanov and Kim Stanley Robinson)”, *e-flux* 63 (March 2015), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/63/60889/molecular-red-theory-for-the-anthropocene-on-alexander-bogdanov-and-kim-stanley-robinson/> - ftn6

¹⁰³ Asafu- Adjaye, John et al. “An Ecomodernist Manifesto”, April 2015, <http://www.ecomodernism.org/>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Clive Hamilton, “The Delusion of the Good Anthropocene”, Clive Hamilton website (17.06.2014) <http://clivehamilton.com/the-delusion-of-the-good-Anthropocene-reply-to-andrew-revkin/>

greenhouse gas emissions, promote the interests of fossil-fuel companies and support geoengineering projects and solar-radiation management in particular.¹⁰⁷ Another correlation between the environmental discourse of the late 1960 and early 1970s and today can be drawn by pointing out a similar concern raised by the Deep Ecology movement, whereby philosopher Arne Naess critiques the techno-capitalist solutions to environmental problems and defines them as shallow environmentalism.¹⁰⁸ In this case, it is worth coming back to Zylinska's formulation of ethics within the Anthropocene context as a suspension that is a caution against "understanding the Anthropocene too well and too quickly [...] knowing precisely how to solve the problems it represents".¹⁰⁹ In this sense, these technofixers, or "command-and-control Anthropocene optimists" in Nixon's words,¹¹⁰ are so assured of their knowledge and mastery that they are impatient to act. Therefore, I position them as a highly problematic example in terms of ethics in an Anthropocenic context. More importantly, they exemplify an extreme version of the figure of Man, the masculinist universal Species-Man that I intend to decentre and dissolve through reading geoaesthetic acts.

The technofixers can be epitomised in the character of "Professor Challenger" in Arthur Conan Doyle's *When the World Screamed* short story (1928), later portrayed in Deleuze and Guattari's fictional persona in "Who does the Earth Think it is?" section in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). Professor Challenger is a stereotype of a rationalist scientist, self-assured of his power and supremacy over nature, and known for his aggressive and dominating behaviours. In the story, the challenger asserts that the Earth is a sea-urchin like living organism, with a hard exterior but soft interior. To prove his point, he carries an experiment in which he drills down into the centre of the earth, namely the mantle. The main motivation behind this excavation is to be recognised by this organism as he announces, "I propose to let the Earth know that there is at least one person, George Edward Challenger, who calls for attention - who, indeed, insists upon attention". The giant creature awakens and screams. The practical outcome of the experiment is not clear, however, it turns the "lunatic" scientist into "the Challenger, the super scientist, Challenger the arch-pioneer; Challenger, the first man of all men whom Mother Earth had been compelled to recognize".¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary". *Inquiry* 1 no.4 (1973): 95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00201747308601682>

¹⁰⁹ Zylinska, *Minimal Ethics*, 124.

¹¹⁰ Rob Nixon, "The Anthropocene"

¹¹¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *When the World Screamed* [1928], (Global Grey ebooks, 2018), 8.

This challenger mentality can be contextualised within the dominant Western culture and thought founded upon the Enlightenment project that prioritises scientific progress and asserts moral universals.¹¹² More specifically, I position this challenger mentality alongside “the modernizing call for the ‘conquest of nature’” that was bound up with “a visualization of the planet as an enemy to be subdued” and paved the way to the Anthropocene condition itself.¹¹³

Yusoff as well aligns the challenger mentality with the identification of Anthropos as she writes: “[t]he dark character of Western scientific reason that Challenger personifies could be seen to have a parallel in the subjectification of the Anthropocene; a subject—Anthropos—capable of challenging geologic forces and probing deep into the standing stock of the earth (or, of making rocks scream).”¹¹⁴ Challenger’s Promethean yet equally pathetic attempt for a recognition by the Earth paradoxically reanimates the Earth as a subject that speaks. Accordingly, in the Anthropocene context, Parikka emphasises how “the earth screams caused by hydraulic fracturing (fracking) [...] points toward what is often neglected in the discourse of geopolitics: geo, the earth, the soil and depth of the crust that leads to the bowels of the earth”.¹¹⁵ The Challenger’s reanimation of the Earth through violence might serve as a rich example for contemplating the power relationships between Anthropos and the Earth, which I have positioned as crucially important for my conception of geoaesthetic acts. As Yusoff rightly points out, “[w]hile Challenger’s attempt to make the Earth scream is a misogynist tale of conquering the geological impotence that the earth has bestowed on mankind, it also exhibits the desire for a reciprocal relation with inhuman nature; one that breaks the asymmetry of the seemingly imperviousness of geology to human activities.”¹¹⁶ In this light, in an Anthropocenic context, it could be argued the extractive forces of petrocapiatalism has foregrounded the agency of the Earth to the extent that it threatens the very presence of humans on it.

The dominant scientific narrative of Anthropocene and the technoscientific propositions to overcome the “civilizational collapse” can be seen as extensions of the modern constitution of man and nature and the dominating position of man within the relationship between the two. Accordingly, not only the etymology of the term Anthropocene itself but also technofixers’ tendency to take humans too seriously, is heavily criticised. As I have outlined in the

¹¹² Braidotti, “Four Theses”, 42.

¹¹³ Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the”, 217.

¹¹⁴ Kathryn Yusoff, “Geosocial Strata”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 34: 2–3 (2017), 107.

¹¹⁵ Jussi Parikka, *The Anthropocene*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p.n/a.

¹¹⁶ Yusoff, “Geosocial Strata”, 107.

introduction of this dissertation, the “Blue Marble” and “Earth Rise” photographs served almost as mirror-images by gesturing towards a problematic universal “we” and amplified a kind of anthropocentric narcissism. In a similar manner, Donna Haraway points at the Anthropocene narcissism through tracking its roots in the same cultural-historical frame and emphasising the agency of nonhuman and inhuman ontologies. She problematises the dominant Anthropocene narrative as “another instance of a kind of Earth that can only exist post-space race and post-Cold War”.¹¹⁷ As she explains, this is “a particular model: a view from space of how the chemical cycles of the Earth are influenced in a really profound way by something you called [...] *Homo sapiens* or Anthropos”.¹¹⁸ So, the dominant Anthropocene narrative is an extension of the view of the world “produced as a human species act”¹¹⁹ and therefore problematic as it is ignorant of the undeniable entanglements between human, nonhuman and inhuman.

In this context, as a ‘philosopher of entanglement’ and therefore as a key thinker in my conception of ethics, Haraway reminds that the contemporary world cannot be conceived only as an act of human species, “rather, it is a situated highly complex systematicity of situated peoples and their apparatuses, including their agricultural critters and other critters”.¹²⁰ As a result, she shares the criticism of Anthropocene as a term; since it stresses out “Anthropos” and “etymologically ignor[es] other species”.¹²¹ She accepts the existence of systemic change due to anthropogenic processes however, she highlights their dependency on “inter/intra-action with other processes and species”.¹²² Therefore relationality is more than a metaphor since multi-species including human entities are bounded by ancestry or genealogy. In other words, becoming is always and already becoming with. In this light, she suggests that the naming of “Anthropocene, Plantationocene, or Capitalocene” is related with “scale, rate/speed, synchronicity, and complexity”¹²³ and places a great importance in questions such as: “when transformation ‘in degree’ turn into a transformation in ‘kind’?” and “what are the bioculturally, biotechnically, biopolitically, historically situated people (not Man) relative to, and combined with, the effects of other species assemblages and other biotic/abiotic forces?”.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Haraway et.al. “The Anthropologists”, 539.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 539.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 539.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 539.

¹²¹ Ibid., 539.

¹²² Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Making String Figures with Biologies, Arts, Activisms”, Talk at Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene (30.10.2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHwZA9NGWgQ>

¹²³ Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin”, *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, (2015): 159. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3615934>

¹²⁴ Ibid., 159.

In this context, she proposes a symbiotic approach and the name Chthulucene -invoking the subterranean, the underworld- which “entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human as humus.”¹²⁵ In order to overcome the insufficiency of “Anthropocene” as a narrative that repeats human primacy and exceptionalism, she stresses the urgency “to make kin with our biotic and abiotic collaborators “sym-chthonically, sym-poetically”.¹²⁶ Her emphasis on multi-species entanglement contributes to my concern of establishing an ‘ethic of interrelatedness’ whilst positioning the Anthropocene as a framework in which I contextualise geoaesthetic acts.

Various schools of thought are in line with Haraway’s “Anthropos” critique and her emphasis on interrelatedness. As Colebrook points out Haraway’s opposition to human exceptionalism in the Anthropocene is an example of “post-liberal feminist resistance to the figure of Man—as subject, agent, and centre of knowing”.¹²⁷ She states that “the figure of “man” who creates his own history and recognises himself as coming into being through a time that is readable - in the geoscientific understanding of the Anthropocene- is bound up with hegemonic conceptions of modernity, and has long been the target of feminist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial critique.”¹²⁸ Besides, the rejection of the primacy of human over nonhuman and inhuman is widely opposed in critical posthumanism, object-oriented ontology and new materialism, all of which provide useful philosophical frameworks for dealing with the Anthropocene problematic in terms of decentring the human from the primary focus of the discourse.¹²⁹ In broad strokes, the common premise of these theoretical movements can be outlined as the claim that any being/becoming is an outcome of a series of dynamic complex relations. Hence, through putting the man at the core of the change, the dominant scientific narrative disturbs these “long-accepted premises of the interrelatedness, symbiosis, and mutually creative becoming of all things”.¹³⁰ Within this context, Haraway argues that due to its human exceptionalism and risk of (methodological) individualism- both of which threatens any good scholarly work- the dominant Anthropocene narrative demands the “literally

¹²⁵ Ibid., 160.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 161.

¹²⁷ Claire Colebrook and Jami Weinstein, “Introduction: Anthropocene Feminisms: Rethinking the Unthinkable” *philoSOPHIA* 5, no. 2, (2015): 167.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 168.

¹²⁹ See: Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009); Graham Harman, “Interview with Graham Harman on the Anthropocene”, interview by Liesbeth Koot and Menno Grootveld, *Sonic Acts Anthropocene Objects, Art and Politics*, 2015 <https://sonicacts.com/portal/anthropocene-objects-art-and-politics-1>;

¹³⁰ Colebrook and Weinstein, “Introduction: Anthropocene”, 168.

unthinkable“.¹³¹ Yet, as I have pointed out previously, the Anthropocene also implies an end, and thus it mobilises an ‘ethical opening’ for decentring and dissolving the self-assured, individuated positioning of the Anthropos.

In this regard, Zylinska argues that the Anthropocene “encapsulates not just ‘peak oil,’ ‘peak red meat,’ ‘peak growth,’ and ‘peak stuff,’ but also, more ominously perhaps, ‘peak man’”.¹³² Yet, the apocalyptic narrative and its attendant tragic worldview that opens up an opportunity for the end of master subjects, ‘Man, History and Civilisation’ -as I have pointed out in the introduction of this dissertation- also mobilises the emergence of the saviour, Promethean man who offers his insistently individuated self as a solution for ‘the geological mess’ he created. As Zylinska argues further:

This supposedly individuated Man remains undifferentiated, both sexually and biologically. Indeed, the Man of the tragic worldview achieves his status at the cost of sacrificing sexual and biological difference that is always more than one. Disavowing his kinship with women and those of non-binary gender, with animals, microbes, and fungi, Man separates from “nature” to emerge standing, proudly erect, yet already threatened with contamination, shrinkage, and evanescence. This disavowal is a condition of the preservation of Man’s self-belief and self-appointed authority, allowing him continued ‘dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth’.¹³³

What the Anthropocene reveals through material evidence unsettles the illusion of the figure of Man’s separation from nature, and dominion over the Earth. Anna Tsing shares Haraway’s criticism of the Anthropocene however sees usefulness in the term in two ways. First, as I have cited in the introduction of this dissertation, it “maintains a productive distance to ‘Man’, the modern human conceit”.¹³⁴ Similar to Colebrook’s differentiation between species and Anthropos, she states “‘Man’ does not mean humans, but a particular kind of being invented by Enlightenment thought and brought into operation by modernization and state regulation and other related things. It is this ‘Man’ who can be said to have made the mess of the contemporary world. It was ‘Man’ who was supposed to conquer nature.”¹³⁵ Second, the potential of Anthropocene lies in its immaturity and multiplicity which overall raises a discussion zone across a transdisciplinary field, activating “critical thinking going on across some of the divisions that existed before”.¹³⁶ In alignment with Tsing’s arguments, I mobilise

¹³¹ Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Making String”.

¹³² Zylinska, *The End*, 4.

¹³³ Ibid., 10.

¹³⁴ Haraway et al. “The Anthropologists”, 541.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 541.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 541.

this productive distance to the figure of Man as this dissertation's departure point and engage with critical thinking that takes place within the epistemic rupture the Anthropocene creates across multiple disciplines. In doing so, I utilise the potentiality of the Anthropocene for casting a transdisciplinary gaze over the geoaesthetic acts.

My positioning of the emergence of Anthropocene as an epistemological rupture draws upon this potentiality, its transversality in opposition to the dualities between nature and culture, subject and object and human and nonhuman/inhuman, and its transversal agency in terms of cutting across disciplinary borders. Latour argues that the term Anthropocene "may become the most pertinent philosophical, religious, anthropological, and [...] political concept for beginning to turn away for good from the notions of "Modern" and "modernity."¹³⁷ Besides, he insists that by offering a "dialectical reconciliation" between nature and society, which can be effectively imagined in the figuration of "a finger running along a Moebius strip", the Anthropocene might be "the most radical term of all for putting an end to anthropocentrism".¹³⁸ Therefore, I mobilise the Anthropocene as a non-anthropocentric concept and as an opportunity to reposition human in the dynamic entanglements that continuously take place in geo-bio-socio assemblages. Coming back to Zylinska's formulation of ethics as 'a historically contingent human mode of becoming in the world, of becoming different from the world, and of narrating and taking responsibility for the nature of this difference', one needs to identify these entanglements or knots of interrelatedness in the first place in order to give an account of the nature of any difference that arises in the process of becoming "human".

Not only how to conceive oneself and the meaning of being a human in this historic-geologic novelty called the Anthropocene, but also how to relate with "others", the non-human and inhuman ontologies through deep time, raises an ethical aporia, the potential of which lies in initiating "conceptual ruptures that bring to the surface the limits of previous modes of thought".¹³⁹ As Jacques Derrida points out, "ethics, politics and responsibility, if there are any, will only ever have begun with the experience and experiment of the aporia."¹⁴⁰ The Anthropocene evidently problematises the human condition throughout relational networks

¹³⁷ Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 106.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 106. Timothy Morton agrees with Latour in that, despite its name, the Anthropocene is an anti-anthropocentric concept, see: Timothy Morton, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Term Anthropocene", *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1, no.2 (September 2014): 262. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2014.15>.

¹³⁹ Ida Nursoo, "Derrida's Politics to Come: Aporetic Cosmopolitanism, Hospitality and Deconstructive Ethics", *Kritikos* vol. 14, (Fall 2017): p.n/a <https://intertheory.org/nursoo.htm>

¹⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 41.

and marks an existential crisis. The need to relate with “others” in a geological framework and to reflect on the existential crisis open up speculative and imaginative questions that necessarily activate aesthetic modes of thought. In this regard, as I have previously pointed out in the introduction of this dissertation I follow Rancière in that ‘the aesthetic mode of thought is much more than a way of thinking about art. It is an idea of thought, linked to an idea of the distribution of the sensible.’ More importantly, a disentanglement/deconstruction of the ethical aporia can only begin with formulating the right questions that point towards an Anthropocenic thought and sensibility. These questions then might open up the ways through which the distribution of an Anthropocenic thought and sensibility can take place.

In this sense, Nixon highlights “a central question” that is “strategic and representational” and asks “how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation driven technologies of our image-world?”¹⁴¹ To put it differently, as I have written elsewhere “if the emergence of the Anthropocene implies an epistemological shift, how might this transform the way we think about representation and, more specifically, its geopolitics?”¹⁴² In order to overcome the ethical aporia, Zylinska offers to respond to these questions through philosophy, storytelling and art.¹⁴³ Turpin and Davis, as well, highlight the necessity to “engage with” and “encounter art”, for dealing with the complicated problems of the Anthropocene “as well as their interconnections and intra-actions”.¹⁴⁴ As they rightly point out “art provides a polyarchic site of experimentation for ‘living in a damaged world’ as Anna Tsing has called it, and a non-moral form of address that offers a range of discursive, visual, and sensual strategies that are not confined by the regimes of scientific objectivity, political moralism, or psychological depression.”¹⁴⁵ In alignment with both positionings, I emphasise the agency of artistic and architectural practices in terms of their potentials for shaping a critical planetary imagination and opening up new modes of thought and sensibilities that are attuned to the Anthropocene.

As I have outlined in the introduction of this dissertation, the Anthropocene is also a sensorial phenomenon in that it can be felt, seen, smelled, touched and thus experienced as an

¹⁴¹ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2011), 3.

¹⁴² Çinçik and Campos, “Postcard Notes”, p:n/a.

¹⁴³ Davis and Turpin, “Art and Death”, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Zylinska, *Minimal Ethics*, 93.

¹⁴⁵ Davis and Turpin, “Art and Death”, 4.

aesthetic regime. That is to say and I repeat, the Anthropocene generates ‘aesthetic effects—as in aisthesis, or affects produced by our sensorial experience of the environment’ and thus catalyses what could be called an Anthropocenic aesthetic regime. Yet as artist Susan Schuppli points out “aesthetics remains a largely overlooked feature in this debate despite the fact that the term designates a condition in which cultural production writ large—terraforming and human industrial activity—is its constitutive force.”¹⁴⁶ Her broad definition of culture is unconventional yet insightful in that it points towards identifying any anthropogenic act as mobilising cultural agency and a reconceptualisation of aesthetics in an Anthropocenic context. More precisely, thinking with and feeling through the Anthropocene forges “new conceptions of the aesthetic, including the ways we observe and make sense of [...] massively entangled nature-culture hybrids”.¹⁴⁷ My conception of aesthetics follows Rancière, as I have briefly outlined in the introduction of this dissertation, in that it identifies the reorganisation and distribution of the sensible, what can be felt, experienced and seen and defining all possibilities of thinking and imagining, including political imagining. And aesthetics, conceptualised as such, plays an indispensable role in establishing an Anthropocenic imaginary that ‘address[es] the social and political spheres that are [now] being set in stone’.

A mobilisation of conceptual and speculative imaginaries on our geologic agency could start with responding to three questions posed by Nixon: “if, collectively, we’re a hurtling hunk of rock that feels, what does that mean for the stories we tell about our species and our place in life on Earth?”, “what are the imaginative and emotional pressures of opening up the human to geological time scales?” and lastly, “how can we begin to internalize our role as Anthropocene actors, to inhabit that role feelingly?”¹⁴⁸ Through activating critical, experimental, and non-instrumental thinking and imagining, artistic and architectural practices hold the potentiality to respond to these and similar questions, and function as a channel for aesthesis, which is of crucial importance for thinking with and feeling through the Anthropocene.

More specifically, I draw on Schuppli’s call for artistic and architectural practices to take “the provocation of learning ‘the arts of living on a damaged planet’ very seriously rather than remaining, as so much artwork also does, in the diagnostic mode— disclosing injustice and

¹⁴⁶ Susan Schuppli, “Dirty Pictures”, in *Living Earth Field Notes from the Dark Ecology Project 2014-2016*, eds. Belina Mirna and Arie Altena. (Amsterdam: Sonic Acts, 2016), 190.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 191.

¹⁴⁸ Nixon, “The Anthropocene”.

documenting ecological crisis but unable to mobilise an ethics of critical proximity to such events.”¹⁴⁹ I argue that my reading of the *Spiral Jetty*, *La Région Centrale* and *The Continuous Monument* as geoaesthetic acts mobilises such ‘an ethics of critical proximity’ to the material and conceptual complexities of the Anthropocene. In order to achieve this mobilisation, I reflect upon the Anthropocene as an ‘ethical injunction’ as argued by Zylinska and follow her discussion on prioritising critical and creative thinking as the most political thing we can do to deal with the Anthropocene problematic. In this manner, I investigate how my selection of the three geoaesthetic acts engage with the “questions about the ethical and political challenges of the dominant modes of technoscientific production in the Anthropocene, modes that are constituted through existing power relationships, subject positions, differences and inequalities”.¹⁵⁰ As I have written elsewhere, I explore their potentials as “new streams of speculative and creative geopolitical imaginaries and forms of collective subjectivities that recalibrate existing value systems and indicate alternatives.”¹⁵¹

1.3. Conceptualising Geoaesthetic Acts in the Anthropocene

As I have briefly discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, pairing geo-referring to both geography and geology- and aesthetics, geoaesthetics is a relatively new term which “began to be used early in the twenty-first century by scientists, philosophers, and artists, although how each group uses the word is slightly different”.¹⁵² Writing in 1997, geographer David Mattless argued that “aesthetics was an important but missing concept in social and cultural geography, and called for geographers to develop an understanding of geoaesthetics as a mutual imbrication of geography and aesthetics”.¹⁵³ An obvious figure who is emphasised in the geography literature with regards to the roots of this pairing is Alexander von Humboldt, who established the foundations of “what his disciple, the biologist and artist Ernst Haeckel, named ecology in 1866 and what in the late twentieth century became known as Earth system science”.¹⁵⁴ The aesthetic practices Humboldt and later geography scholars utilised involve cartography, drawings, prints, and paintings that illustrate the topography of the terrain, the

¹⁴⁹ Susan Schuppli, “A Conversation with Susan Schuppli Around the Legal and Aesthetic Agency of Matter”, Interview by Benek Çiçik, Tiago Torres-Campos, in Çiçik and Campos (eds.), *Postcards from*, p:n/a

¹⁵⁰ Benek Çiçik and Tiago Torres-Campos, Call for Papers for “Postcards from the Anthropocene: Unsettling the Geopolitics of Representation” Symposium, 22-24 June 2017, University of Edinburgh.

¹⁵¹ Çiçik and Campos, “Postcard Notes”, p:n/a

¹⁵² Fox, “GEOAESTHETICS”

¹⁵³ Harriet Hawkins and Elisabeth Straughan, “Conclusion: Reimagining Geoaesthetics” in *Geographical Aesthetics: Imagining Space, Staging Encounters*, ed Harriet Hawkins and Elisabeth Straughnan (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 283.

¹⁵⁴ Fox, “GEOAESTHETICS”

distribution of habitation and movement of species all of which serve as primary tools to present and analyse geographical information. The perception and understanding of geographical information through human embodiment was integral to Humboldt's knowledge-making practices. As geographers Harriet Hawkins and Elisabeth Starughnan note "[f]or his was a thorough embrace of the role of the sensing, experiencing body as a way of knowing the physical world. He did not shy away from aesthetic experience, but situated the researcher's sensing body in the context of scientific instrumentation as part of a series of techniques and technologies for knowing the world".¹⁵⁵

As I have emphasised in the introduction of this dissertation, these aesthetic practices were also integral to the development of geology as a modern science in the 18th and 19th centuries. As geographers Adam Bobbette and Amy Donovan note the representational practices adjacent to geological sciences allow to "make the earth sensible as a story of material transformations that can be registered by the human body, while opening the body outwards to the expanses of geological time."¹⁵⁶ In that sense, they argue further that "the geological sciences are aesthetic practices with conventions and codes for representing the hidden interior of the earth, its movements, and temporality".¹⁵⁷ Thus, if geology is an aesthetic practice then it is also political in the way "through what it makes sensible and what it excludes; how it allows the geos to become an object of understanding; and how the tools through which it achieves that shape and bring into being what can be understood".¹⁵⁸

The political implications of aesthetic practices in making and reproducing knowledge about the Earth began to be underlined also by art historians in the 1960s through their reading of geographical works in the context of European postcolonialism.¹⁵⁹ Bernard Smith, for example, offered a critique of exploration art by pointing out the implementation of the European vision that leads towards a biased understanding of the South Pacific.¹⁶⁰ Art critic William L. Fox argues that "based on Smith's book and other revisionist art histories written in the same vein, geoaesthetics began to be used as an analytical tool of the visual arts as well as the basis for

¹⁵⁵ Hawkins and Straughan, "Conclusion: Reimagining", 294.

¹⁵⁶ Bobbette and Donovan, "Political Geology"

¹⁵⁷ Adam Bobbette and Amy Donovan, "Encountering the Earth: Political Geological Futures?" in Bobbette and Donovan (eds). *Political Geology*, 352.

¹⁵⁸ Bobbette and Donovan, "Political Geology", 11.

¹⁵⁹ Fox, "GEOAESTHETICS"

¹⁶⁰ Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768–1850: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960)

an artistic practice”.¹⁶¹ Besides, Land art and/or Earthworks is considered as a foundational movement in the burgeoning literature on geoaesthetics as these artists’ “engagements with earthy matter explored in relation to particular understandings of soil as well as tectonic forces, foregrounding as they do explorations of animate and vital earthly matters.”¹⁶² More importantly, there is a growing interest in Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* -which I position as one of the three geoaesthetic acts- and his essays in which he contextualises art specifically through a geological understanding, all of which contribute to the foundation for developing a geoaesthetical approach.¹⁶³

Geoesthetics recalibrates the human sensorium to ‘the geologic as a source of explanation, motivation, and inspiration’. A key move in this recalibration is to go beyond “human sensory exceptionalism”¹⁶⁴ and offer a “complex and potentially productive way forward from the limits of the transcendental human agent”.¹⁶⁵ Since the Anthropocene highlights geosocial formations and more-than-human assemblages in multiple scales, geoaesthetics understood in an Anthropocenic context calls for a “radical rethinking of aesthetics” whereby it can be imagined “not as a human attribute or product with its origins in culture but as itself something with inhuman origins and possibilities.”¹⁶⁶ In this regard, Elisabeth’s Grosz’s ontology of art and concept of geopower are foundational for my conception of geoaesthetics. As Yusoff writes, “in Grosz’s terms, art is an art of existence. This is not a narrow understanding of art as a practice that is about taste, cultural accomplishment or a reflection of a society, but an art that is [...] an extraction from the universe and an elaboration on it.”¹⁶⁷ Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz describes art as “a way of experiencing the singularities, the particular qualities of the Earth and its living and unlivable forces, as bodily intensities”.¹⁶⁸ Grosz’s

¹⁶¹ Fox, “Geoesthetics”

¹⁶² Hawkins and Straughan, “Conclusion: Reimagining”, 287.

¹⁶³ See for example: Susan Ballard and Liz Linden, “Spiral Jetty, Geoesthetics, and Art: Writing the Anthropocene”, *The Anthropocene Review* Vol. 6:1-2 (2019): 142–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019619839443> and Simon O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari Thought Beyond Representation*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 98-120.

¹⁶⁴ Sasha Hildegard Engelmann, “The Cosmological Aesthetics of Tomás Saraceno’s Atmospheric Experiments” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2017), 63.

¹⁶⁵ Mark. S. Jackson, “Aesthetics, Politics, and Attunement: On Some Questions Brought by Alterity and Ontology”, *GeoHumanities* 2, no.1,(2016): 17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2016.1165076>

¹⁶⁶ Hawkins and Straughan, “Conclusion: Reimagining”, 288.

¹⁶⁷ Elisabeth Grosz et.al, “Geopower: A Panel on Elisabeth Grosz’s Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30, no.6 (2012): 971. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d3006pan>

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 974.

discussion of art “as an extraction and harnessing of the dynamic forces of the earth”¹⁶⁹ is insightful for this dissertation since it brings the Earth itself and geologic into the foreground of creating and perceiving art. In this regard, as I have written elsewhere “a geoaesthetic contemplation of the problem of representation allows artistic practices and manifestations to result from the materialisation of ‘imperceptible cosmic, biological, and geologic forces of the universe [...] on the body; sensations that allow our becoming-otherwise’”.¹⁷⁰

Grosz’s approach explicitly addresses the geologic as the foundation for all forms of life as she writes “the geological/geographical order is the most tangible and concrete condition for all forms of life, and indeed, for the existence of all terrestrial objects [...] We have tended to imbue life with history, with temporal progress, but we have largely left unthought its geological context”.¹⁷¹ In this sense, she conceptualises geopower as “the capitalisation on the forces of the universe”¹⁷² and describes “the relations between the Earth and its various forces, and living beings and their not always distinguishable forces” as “forms of geopower, if power is to be conceived as the engagement of clashing, competing forces.”¹⁷³ This dissertation capitalises on her conception of art through geopower and hence her provocation on “thinking aesthetics in relation to the nonhuman and inhuman geo”.¹⁷⁴ In this light, I position *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *Continuous Monument* as geoaesthetic acts through focusing on their engagement and entanglement with geopower in their conceptual intentions, their production and distribution mechanisms, and the modes of affection and sensation they catalyse. In order to clarify what this engagement and entanglement with geopower would really mean, I will offer one example from *La Région Centrale*. Michael Snow’s contemplation of planetary motion and his provocative attempt to create a sensual order through which it can “more and more see as a planet does” in *La Région Centrale* is a clear example of the film’s negotiation with geopower¹⁷⁵. This ‘radical rethinking of aesthetics’ through the notion of ‘geopower’ that recalibrates the human sensorium to the geos, to ‘the radically incommensurate time of the geologic’ and to the geologic life necessarily destabilises conventional understandings of core concepts of temporality, subjectivity and materiality. Therefore, I position this destabilisation and thus reconceptualisation of these three concepts as crucially important for establishing the ground for my definition of geoaesthetic acts. In

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, Nigel Clark, Kathryn Yusoff, “An Interview with Elizabeth Grosz: Geopower, Inhumanism and the Biopolitical”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 2-3 (2017):137.

¹⁷⁰ <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276417689899>

¹⁷¹ Grosz et al. “Geopower: A Panel”, 971 as cited in Çinçik and Campos, “Postcard Notes”, p: n/a

¹⁷² Grosz et al, “An Interview”, 132.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 131.

¹⁷⁴ Grosz et al. “Geopower: a panel”, 975.

¹⁷⁵ Hawkins and Straughan, “Conclusion: Reimagining”, 289.

¹⁷⁶ Snow, “Converging on”, 59.

other words, my proposition of *La Région Centrale*, *Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as preliminary geoaesthetic acts, as acts that engage with ‘temporal and material contractions of the Anthropocene’ even before the term was invented, involves a theoretical framework that recalibrates these three concepts. In order to understand how they foreshadow Anthropocene aesthetics, I will now outline the conceptual framework that drew out the problematisation of subjectivity, temporality and materiality (scale) specifically in an Anthropocenic context.

Drawing on Felix Guattari’s “ecosophy” and his account of the human condition as an “aesthetico-existential process”,¹⁷⁶ I read Anthropocene subjectivity through his model of “ethico-aesthetic” paradigm.¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, I turn to artistic and architectural experimentations, as Guattari suggests “shifting the human and social sciences from scientific paradigms towards ethico-aesthetic paradigms”.¹⁷⁸ This shift to ‘ethico-aesthetic paradigms’ is important for this dissertation because it not only points out the limitations of technoscientific paradigms but also aligns well with my emphasis on ‘ethics of interrelatedness’. In this context, I elucidate the comprehensions and inspirations of geoaesthetic acts for re-inventing the “ethico-political articulation... between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity).¹⁷⁹ Guattari’s ecosophy is an essential work for Anthropocene studies and hence for this dissertation in terms of both expanding the understanding of ecology in a relational way and its implications on the conception of subjectivity.¹⁸⁰ Not only does he draw attention to nonhuman and inhuman components in the formation of subjectivity but also emphasises its processual nature. Rather than “subject”, he describes an “interiority” or a “crossroad” where several “components of subjectifications” intersect in “open conflicts” similar to “tectonic plates under continents”, which can be seen as a nod to geologic imagination.¹⁸¹ Importantly, he writes that “vectors of subjectification do not necessarily pass through the individual, which in reality appears to be something like a ‘terminal’ for processes that involve human groups, socio-economic ensembles, data-processing machines, etc.”¹⁸² This understanding of the individual as a “terminal” ceaselessly modified by vectors of subjectification that include both nonhuman and inhuman actants is

¹⁷⁶ Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, transl. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. (1989; reis., London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 56.

¹⁷⁷ See: Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, transl. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis. (1992; reis. London: The Athlone Press, 1995)

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷⁹ Guattari, *The Three*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ Rosi Braidotti, “Critical Posthuman Knowledges” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no.1 (2017): 84. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-3749337>

¹⁸¹ Guattari, *The Three*, 36.

¹⁸² Ibid. 36.

useful for my conceptualisation of an Anthropocenic subjectivity that decentres the human and thus is always and already more-than-human.

The switch from an ecological understanding of the global environmental crisis in the late 1960s and early 1970s to a geological one is important for this dissertation in that it opens up questions on the reconceptualisation of planetary -now geologically informed- subjectivity, not subjectivity per se but processes of subjectification.¹⁸³ Foucault reflects on this nuance when he writes “perhaps we have to recognize the birth of a world where the subject is not one but split, not sovereign but dependent, not an absolute origin but a function ceaselessly modified”¹⁸⁴ which is aligned with Guattari’s conception of subjectivity -since broadly they both are situated in a psychoanalytic framework. According to Yusoff, if the Anthropocene marks an epochal and thereby an epistemological shift, then potentially it would support the critique of conceptual foundations of late neoliberal subjectivity and as a result, the “forms of life tied to and lived through fossil fuels, humanism as an adequate system of thought, and capitalism as the defining plateau of operations”.¹⁸⁵ In this light, I build up the philosophical framework of this dissertation through engaging with the ongoing critique of anthropocentric humanism, and neoliberal and cognitive capitalism by focusing on their uptake on the planetary predicament and taking critical posthumanist conceptualisations of subjectivity into account.¹⁸⁶

The silencing of Earth as a passive, solid, and rigid ground that is only activated by human thought and its subjugation and exploitation as an object for mastery and colonisation through technoscientific interventions, have been problematised particularly through geophilosophies¹⁸⁷ and supported by new materialisms, political ecologies, feminist studies, and multi-actor approaches that emphasise nonhuman, inhuman, and more-than-human with a relational ontology. Yet, when one focuses on the question of Earth itself and the reciprocities between the temporalities, intensities, and magnitudes of geologic and human processes, a conceptual challenge arises. As human geographer Nigel Clark argues, there have been a few decades of convincing demonstrations on how “liveliness”, “vitality”, and “animality” of nature is the “generative ground” for “human becoming” in “social and

¹⁸³ See Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock*.

¹⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, “The Birth of a World”, in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961- 1984)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston (New York: Semiotexte, 1996), 67.

¹⁸⁵ Yusoff, “Epochal Aesthetics”.

¹⁸⁶ See: Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (London: Polity Press, 2009) and Carry Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010)

¹⁸⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari, *What is*, 85-117; and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. Brian Massumi. (1980; reis., London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013) 39-75; Serres, *The Natural Contract*; Woodard, *On an*; Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

philosophical inquiry” which is inspired by the “indeterminate coding of animated biological life” introduced by life-sciences.¹⁸⁸ However a full acknowledgement of “differential force of elemental forces” and “explicit engagements with a nonliving materiality” that deals with the inhuman, inorganic, and geologic which forms the core imperative of Earth sciences, remain rare.¹⁸⁹

Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) provides an exceptional and insightful example in this context.¹⁹⁰ Following Latour, Bennett emphasises the entanglement between human and nonhuman to define the contemporary condition and writes that “modern selves are feeling increasingly entangled, cosmically, biotechnically, medially, virally, pharmacologically, with nonhuman nature. Nature has always mixed it up with self and society, but lately this comingling has intensified and become harder to ignore”.¹⁹¹ Her flat ontology in which nonhuman and inhuman components have equal agency and vitality as human ones, hence they are all actants, is inspiring for this dissertation in terms of writing through or with geologic forces. In this context, Bennett’s figuration of the electrical grid can be acknowledged as an example of an Anthropocenic approach as she writes “the electrical grid is better understood as a volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profit motives, heat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire, and wood – to name just some of the actants”.¹⁹²

In a similar feminist geophilosophical vein to Bennett and also Grosz, Yusoff examines the role of the inhuman in the formation of subjectivity/identity in the wake of the Anthropocene and explores the potential of what geoaesthetics might identify in relation to what she calls geologic life. She writes;

Aesthetics can be considered as a mode of experimentation and intervention within the events of the Earth—rock life, Earth revolutions, geomorphic shifts—and as a space of material communication with the interiority of inhuman forces that experiment with cosmologies of geologic “life” beyond life. In this sense, geoaesthetics is a space of actualization in the formation of subjectivity, but also in the actualizations of the new affectual architectures of geology as a spatial practice that occurs within and between the materiality of bodies as well as the Earth. Thus, geoaesthetics are not primarily

¹⁸⁸ Nigel Clark, *Inhuman nature: Sociable Life on a Dynamic Planet*, (California: Sage Publications, 2011), 22-23.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 23.

¹⁹⁰ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham and London: Duke University, 2010); Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁹² Ibid., 25.

about picturing or representing what life is within a geological context, confirming its affiliations and forms of self-witnessing, but about experimenting with what life can or might be in both its virtual and future anterior modes.¹⁹³

At this point, in order to understand how geoaesthetic acts might offer ‘a space of actualization’ in the formation of an Anthropocenic subjectivity, I will give another example from my reading of geoaesthetic acts. I argue that one can witness such an experimentation with ‘geologic life’ in Robert Smithson’s tripartite *Spiral Jetty* (film, earthwork, essay) although it has not been recognised as such, in the way the earthwork is continuously marooned in salt crystals and points to Gilbert Simondon’s *crystal individuations* through positing the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals as its conceptual and material centre.

The second conceptual component that I propose as foundational for my identification of geoaesthetic acts is the framing of temporality in an Anthropocenic context. By bringing deep time and a planetary scale to the foreground, the Anthropocene requires an expansion of spatial and temporal frames of analysis. Many critics, starting from Dipesh Chakrabarty and Bruno Latour, have called for “a shift in our scale of narration” not only in terms of an expansion but also an entanglement of different temporalities.¹⁹⁴ As Colebrook argues the Anthropocene “require[s] us to shift our scale of narration away from human generations and history to species’ emergence and deep time; it also raises the problem of intersecting scales, combining the human time of historical periods (late capitalism, industrialism, nuclear power) with a geological time of the planet”.¹⁹⁵ The convergence of human and Earth temporalities or “a constant conceptual traffic between Earth history and world history” that we encounter in the Anthropocene debate, as Chakrabarty puts it,¹⁹⁶ raises both challenges and “new imaginative possibilities”¹⁹⁷ in the way we analyse any spatiotemporal configuration or in the way we situate ourselves. As philosophers Michelle Bastian and Thom van Dooren argue, “[h]uman time, geological time and a host of other temporal frames and possibilities confront each other in new ways, with little understanding on our part of how to find calibrations that might allow a reconciliation between them”.¹⁹⁸ Latour, as well, acknowledges that we lack “the

¹⁹³ Yusoff, “Epochal Aesthetics”.

¹⁹⁴ See: Chakrabarty, “The Climate” and Latour, *Facing Gaia*.

¹⁹⁵ Claire Colebrook, “We Have Been Always Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual”, in Grusin (ed.) *Anthropocene Feminism*, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Anthropocene Time”, *History and Theory* 57, no. 1, (2018), 6. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12044>

¹⁹⁷ Michelle Bastian and Thom van Dooren, “Editorial Preface: The New Immortals: Immortality and Infinitude in the Anthropocene” *Environmental Philosophy* 14, no.1, (2017): 5. <https://doi.org/10.5840/envirophil20171411>

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

mental and emotional repertoire to deal with such a vast scale of events” when we confront the Anthropocene problematic.¹⁹⁹

Yet, to think through the Anthropocene is not only about the expansion but also the juxtaposition of multiple temporalities. In this regard, it requires to step away from the understanding of time as a linear progression and rather draw from “conceptions of temporality as a constant reworking and enfolding of the past and the future into the present”.²⁰⁰ The fact that fossil fuels are formed by geologic processes that take millions of years, or that the Anthropocene asks us to imagine future geologists discovering technofossils in stratigraphic layers, are examples of such enfoldings. To think through plasticised rocks, for example, might allow us to understand how “temporalities become entangled with ‘material configurings of spacetime mattering’, and *diffract* across multiple scales and spacetime conditions”.²⁰¹ The convergence of human and Earth histories “problematises our frames of reference when reading, understanding and experiencing these temporalities, as well as the nodes in which they are entangled.”²⁰² Bastian and van Dooren emphasise these nodes as well, and discuss that the new imaginative possibilities lie in

“situating ourselves within complex, multivalent, temporalities. Thinking through the Anthropocene requires much more of us than a simple “zooming out” to explore the larger scales of spacetime often associated with ‘the geological.’ In addition, the Anthropocene is about foldings and pleatings, about simultaneous and contradictory temporalities, about the breakdown and (re)formation of new multitemporal relations”.²⁰³

In this light, this dissertation responds to the expansion and juxtaposition of time-frames/temporalities by both looking for complex multi-temporal relations in the way the geoaesthetic acts deal with temporality and developing concepts such as *historical vertigo* to analyse them. For example, I will show how *Spiral Jetty* film creates a *historical vertigo* through its interplay of diverse temporalities which collapses the prehistoric past into the present by contemplating Robert Smithson’s proposition of “moviola” as a “time machine” that “transforms trucks into dinosaurs”.²⁰⁴ Or, to give another example, in the case of *The Continuous Monument*, I will reveal how Superstudio foreshadows an Anthropocenic thought experiment with their temporal expansion, which can be observed in their statement that claims that their

¹⁹⁹ Latour, “Agency in”, 1.

²⁰⁰ Çiçek and Campos, “Postcards Notes”, p: n/a

²⁰¹ Barad, “Matter Feels” 68, quoted in Çiçek and Campos, “Postcards Notes”, p.n/a

²⁰² Çiçek and Campos, “Postcard Notes, p: n/a.

²⁰³ Bastian and Thom van Dooren, “The New Immortals”, 5.

²⁰⁴ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 150-1.

images were “ways and maps for ancient and future journeys”²⁰⁵ or in placing a Neolithic monument like Stonehenge and a contemporary building like NASA’s Vertical Assembly Building which is emblematic of technoscience under the same category in their storyboard and hence achieving a similar *historical vertigo* to the Spiral Jetty.²⁰⁶ Such juxtapositions support Colebrook’s provocative argument that “[t]he time of politics and the time of the planet, once deemed to be distinct, are now colliding, but not converging.”²⁰⁷ By delving into these knots of diverse temporalities, I aim to respond to Anthropocene’s “imperative” to “write as if the histories of the human and the other-than-human are part of the same intimately interwoven spectrum rather than lying in binary opposition”, as art historian Andrew Patrizio puts it.²⁰⁸

Importantly, such temporal expansions and compressions that I apply and look for in geoaesthetic acts allow me to problematise the question of the end, which in turn points to the inevitable dissolution of ‘the figure of Man’- of which is coupled with its decentring and forms the hypothesis of this dissertation. In this sense, I follow cultural theorist Sylvère Lotringer’s claim that “[t]o think of an art of the Anthropocene without raising the question of collective extinction and death doesn’t make sense”.²⁰⁹ Situating human temporality within deep time allows an “imagination of planetary time without humans”.²¹⁰ As Sloterdijk emphasises, the Anthropocene “inevitably obeys an apocalyptic logic”, whereby “being-towards-the-end remains connected to a return to the present moment”.²¹¹ Thus, the operations of temporal expansion and compression that I map in my reading of the geoaesthetic acts not only lead to a necessary problematisation of the end as an anthropomorphic concept but also prepare the ground for my conceptual projection of the geoaesthetic acts as future fossils, as ‘a future temporality turned back to the present moment’. As Parikka argues “the fossil is in this sense a question about the contemporary that expands across multiple times[...]Notions of temporality must escape human-obsessed vocabulary and enter into a closer proximity with the fossil.”²¹² In this light, to clarify these points with examples, I position the geo-installations of *La Région Centrale* and *Spiral Jetty* as material monuments that can be readable in the far future and reflect on the *La Région Centrale*, *Spiral Jetty* and *Continuous Monument’s*

²⁰⁵ Superstudio, “Superstudio on”, 17.

²⁰⁶ Superstudio, “Deserti Naturali e Artificiali” in *Casabella* 358, (1971):18-22.

²⁰⁷ Colebrook, “We Have Been”, 5.

²⁰⁸ Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 8.

²⁰⁹ Sylvère Lotringer, “The Last Political Scene: Sylvère Lotringer in Conversation with Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin”, in eds. Davis and Turpin, *Art in the Anthropocene*, 373.

²¹⁰ Parikka, *A Geology*, 135.

²¹¹ Sloterdijk, “The Anthropocene”, 337.

²¹² Parikka, *A Geology*, 109 and 135.

conceptual intentions of situating themselves as future fossils, or as Michael Snow puts it, as “souvenir[s]” from the Earth.²¹³

The third and last conceptual component that I identify as foundational for my definition of geoaesthetic act is the concept of materiality with a focus on the issue of scale. The engagement of multiple scales and registers across time and space, from molecular, bacterial, architectural to geopolitical, geological, cosmological in geoaesthetic acts decentre the human and move beyond the understanding of man as “the measure of all things”, which is problematised by critical undertakings of the Anthropocene theory. By requiring thinking daily, seemingly minuscule human activities in relation to their cumulative impacts on a planetary scale, and by revealing a myriad of complex interconnections in geo-bio-socio assemblages across multiple scales, the Anthropocene complicates the notion of scale itself. English studies scholar Timothy Clark refers to this complication as “derangements of scale” and asserts that “the overall force [of the Anthropocene] is of an implosion of scales, implicating seemingly trivial or small actions with enormous stakes while intellectual boundaries and lines of demarcation fold in upon each other.”²¹⁴ Although it seems to refer to a “scalar enormity”²¹⁵ at its most basic understanding, the Anthropocene asks for a continuous move across different scalar registers through time and space. As I have written elsewhere, “[t]o reflect on how and why humans have become a dominant planetary force requires new modes of thinking about the ‘human agency over multiple and incommensurable scales at once’.”²¹⁶ In other words, reflecting on humans’ geomorphic agency that stretches across infinite conditions of scalar interconnectivity poses challenges since it demands us to “rea[d] at several scales at once”²¹⁷. Guattari’s emphasis on scale in response to the ecological crisis is also insightful when confronting the multi-scalar realities of the Anthropocene as he writes “the only true response to the ecological crisis is on a global scale” yet it should “also take into account molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence and desire”.²¹⁸

As opposed to size or dimension, scale is “emergent, relational, and performative”.²¹⁹ As historian Gabrielle Hecht asserts, scale is “about categories: what they reveal or hide, the

²¹³ Snow, “La Région”, 56.

²¹⁴ Timothy Clark, “Derangements of Scale” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, ed. Tom Cohen, (Open Humanities Press, 2012) 148-166.

²¹⁵ Gabrielle Hecht, “Interscalar Vehicles for an African Anthropocene. Waste, Temporality, and Violence”, in *Cultural Anthropology* 33, no.1 (2018): 113. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.1.05>.

²¹⁶ Çiñçik and Campos, “Postcard Notes”, p: n/a

²¹⁷ Clark, *Ecocriticism on*, 108.

²¹⁸ Guattari, *The Three*, 28.

²¹⁹ Hecht, “Interscalar Vehicles”, 115.

ways in which they do (or do not) nest. And it is about orientation: how we position ourselves, what we position ourselves against, and what comparisons such locations do (or do not) authorize”.²²⁰ In this sense, this dissertation benefits from environmental humanities scholar Derek Wood’s notion of “scale variance” which emphasises “disjunctures and incommensurable differences among scales”.²²¹ It refers “to thresholds that constrain biophysical, technological, and social becoming, thresholds beyond which scale effects influence how we observe systems and how they work. These constraints mean different worlds for solar systems, climates, cities, buildings, organs, molecules, or electrons”.²²² Being aware of the ‘scale variance’ requires stepping away from conventional cartographic understandings of scale and moving closer to “non-cartographic concept of scale” in Timothy Clark’s claim which is “not a smooth zooming in and out but involve jumps and discontinuities with sometimes incalculable ‘scale effects’”.²²³ In this sense, I look for the moments where jumps and discontinuities across incommensurable orders become legible in the geoaesthetic acts and superpose differential scales for their analysis.

Following Hecht, in that scale is both “a category of analysis and a category of practice”, I deploy *scaling*- or “interscalar vehicles” in her terms- as a tool of analysis, “as means of connecting stories and scales usually kept apart” whilst reading geoaesthetic acts.²²⁴ And I explore how these geoaesthetic acts imagine and problematise scale as ‘a category of practice’ through an Anthropocenic lens. In this context, I will argue that each geoaesthetic act problematises scale in a novel way and points to a *transcalar* imagination “that involves trying to capture moments in the entanglements between quantum-, nano-, micro-, meso-, macro-, giga-, tera-, and so on”.²²⁵ In order to clarify how they do so, I will provide three examples and conclude this chapter. For instance, I investigate how *Spiral Jetty* offers scale shifts which are exemplified within the fractal recuperation of spiral form from atomic to astronomic, and as such creates a *sensorial vertigo* by deploying spirals as transversal knots of scale. Or in the case of *La Région Centrale*, one witnesses a similar *sensorial vertigo* since the film “becomes simultaneously micro and macro, cosmic-planetary as well as atomic” in Michael Snow’s words, and delivers a *transcalar* journey within the immediacy of the present.²²⁶ And I argue that in the case of *The Continuous Monument*, Superstudio’s

²²⁰ Ibid., 114.

²²¹ Derek Woods, “Scale Critique for the Anthropocene”, *Minnesota Review*, 83 (2014) :135.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/00265667-2782327>

²²² Ibid., 135.

²²³ Clark, “Derangements of”, 149.

²²⁴ Hecht, “Interscalar Vehicles”, 115.

²²⁵ Çiçik and Campos, “Postcard Notes”, p:n/a

²²⁶ Snow, “Converging on”, 59.

experimentation with scale that begins with a small 9 cm² square grid and expands to a planetary scale, challenges the limits of scale in architectural imagination. These radical imaginations of scale in *La Région Centrale*, *Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* not only contribute to this dissertation's intention of decentring the figure of Man but also identify the last conceptual component that I use to reread these works as geoaesthetic acts- alongside their conception of subjectivity and framing of temporality in an Anthropocenic context.



CHAPTER 2: Technospheric Mediation and Anthropocenic Anxiety: *La Région Centrale* (1971)

On September 14, 1970, Canadian artist Michael Snow and Pierre Abbeloos, Joyce Wieland, and Bernard Goussard were dropped by a helicopter on a remote mountaintop about 80 miles north of Sept-Îles in Quebec, in order to anchor a custom-made servo-mechanical monopod which Snow refers to as “camera-activating machine” and a 16 mm camera attached to it, to the ground.¹ This remotely controlled apparatus which Snow named *De La'* could move in every possible direction, “swivel and turn, up and down and in and around on its own axis”,² rotate 360 degrees, and zoom in and out and recorded a 6-hour footage of a topological exploration of the landscape where neither any human being nor “nothing man-made is visible”.³ Michael Snow, the creator of the work, who composed the movements of the apparatus beforehand and looked in the camera only once during recording, edited the 6-hour footage into a 3-hour long film and created *La Région Centrale* in May 1971. The film absorbs us in 17 episodes of plethoric motion through which we explore the various details of the landscape and skyscape and destabilises our sense of gravity due to the filmic apparatus’s constant rotations that result in an interchange between the horizontal and vertical, between the ground and the sky. The slow scanning movements at the beginning of the film turn into fast somersaults and Mobius strip patterns towards the end and leaves us with a dizzying sensation similar to experiencing a *sensorial vertigo*. Our “vertiginous and hallucinatory”⁴ cinematic experience is enhanced by the soundtrack Snow composed for a quasi-synthesiser, which correlates the sine waves and electronic pulses with alterations in the camera’s action.

In this chapter, I position *La Région Centrale* as the first geoaesthetic act that takes the Earth (geo) as its subject matter and focal point and which I contextualise in the Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. As I noted in the introduction of this dissertation, although *La Région Centrale* is chronologically not the first geoaesthetic act in the representational assemblage (*La Région Centrale*, *Continuous Monument*, *Spiral Jetty*) I offer, I begin my mapping of the prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics with this film, since through this reading I will start identifying the nodes that will reoccur in the following chapters. And this re-emergence will enable me to build up a certain complexity that will allow me to point towards a kind of Anthropocene hermeneutics. The first and foremost reason for my

¹ The film is created by Michael Snow.

² Peter Gidal, “Notes on *La Région Centrale*” in *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. Peter Gidal (London: British Film Institute, 1978), 52.

³ Snow, “Converging on”, 59.

⁴ Martha Langford, *Michael Snow: Life and Work*. (Toronto: Art Canada Institute 2014), 22.

positioning of the film as a planetary imagination and a geoaesthetic act is Snow's statement that "the subject" of the film is "planetary motion" and *La Région Centrale* is after all a contemplation "about the Earth".⁵ I will argue that as a geoaesthetic act, *La Région Centrale* responds to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities posited by the Anthropocene thesis retroactively, through its conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale. In particular, I will place *La Région Centrale* in the "metamorphic zone"⁶ that the technosphere catalyses through specifically engaging with its mode and means of production mechanism and focusing on the cinematographic frame by attending to its metaphorical, methodological and material implications.

The technosphere is an Anthropocenic concept introduced by geomorphologist Peter Haff and refers to the systemic expansion and continuation of technology as a geological phenomenon in the Anthropocene. Haff describes the technosphere as a globe-spanning mesh of infrastructural activities (i.e. networks of transportation, information, energy, and media) mobilised by socio-technical forces, which has gained equivalence to other spheres such as the bio-, hydro-, and atmo-sphere.⁷ What makes technosphere useful for situating *La Région Centrale* as a background is firstly its description as a quasi-autonomous global apparatus, of which humans are only a subcomponent and, secondly, its "by default" focus on material interconnections and processes. While the former helps me to contextualise *La Région Centrale*'s engagement with the switch from human to inhuman through its replacement of human agency and human vision with a machinic one, within the power relationships the technosphere problematises in an Anthropocenic framework, the latter allows me to underscore the material conditions through which the film comes into being and particularly problematise *De La*'s material kinship with surveillance radar mechanisms of Cold War technology.

With regards to the technosphere, cultural theorist Erich Hörl points out that, "the autonomization of technology" which positions the human as "even not that of a conductor" but "an element of this complex cybernetic entity" leads to a "post-human condition" in which it is no longer possible to attach notions of "control" and "mastery" to human agency.⁸ The distribution and decentring of human agency as such brings about a "demystification of the

⁵ Snow, "Visions".

⁶ Latour, "Agency in", 16.

⁷ Peter Haff, "Humans and Technology in the Anthropocene: Six Rules", *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no.2 (2014): 127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019614530575>

⁸ Erich Hörl, "Erich Hörl", interview by Continent, *Continent* 5, no.2 (2016): 28.

anthropocentric agency” and “a disenchantment of the anthropocentric illusion”.⁹ In this regard, I will reveal how the posthuman technoscape *La Région Centrale* takes us into illustrates such a ‘posthuman condition’ in two ways. First, I will emphasise how we witness a decentring of the human through experiencing a non-anthropocentric mode of vision and provided by the fact that the film is actually produced by a machine. Second, *De La* turns in cycles at such a speed that it might destroy itself, anticipating a collapse of the frame. The speed pushes the limits of the frame as a container of the image and materialises it. I will relate this anticipation of the collapse of the cinematographic frame to an extent that it becomes matter itself with the dispersal of human agency in the technosphere pointing towards its dissolution and hence an Anthropocenic anxiety.

I will reflect on *La Région Centrale* by positioning it as a representation that helps us comprehend the epistemic shift that the Anthropocene catalyses through using Foucault’s analysis of *Las Meninas* (1656) in *The Order of Things* (1970) as a methodological and conceptual guide, focusing on the relationship he explores between an epistemic rupture and conditions of representation. I will focus on two relationship mechanisms, which Foucault uses in his analysis and apply them to my reading of *La Région Centrale*. The first one is motion, which is activated by the gaze in *Las Meninas* and *De La* in *La Région Centrale*, both of which introduce a re-positioning of the subject/spectator. The second one is the frame, which establishes the conditions and limits of the image as a representational device. Whereas in *Las Meninas*, the painting is structured through a multiplication of framing devices itself, in *La Région Centrale*, the speed of *De La* leads the frame to activate the edges of the image and, in visual studies scholar Kenneth White’s words, itself becomes the matter.¹⁰ Both of these operations lead to new questions about power relations in terms of subjectivity as well as temporality in an Anthropocenic context. While Foucault positions *Las Meninas* as a representation that inaugurates the birth of the modern episteme and “the figure of Man” upon which this episteme is founded, I will situate *La Région Centrale* as one of the geoaesthetic acts that signify an Anthropocenic rupture and points to the decentring and dissolution of this figure of Man.

I will argue that *La Région Centrale* not only foregrounds the visual and sensorial experience of being in the Anthropocene through its mobilisation of a *sensorial vertigo* but also problematises the power relationships within the technosphere and between the technosphere and other components of the Earth System due to *De La*’s paradoxical relationship with

⁹ Ibid., 28

¹⁰ Kenneth White, “Strangeloves: From/De la région centrale, Air Defense Radar Station Moisie, and Media Cultures of the Cold War”, *Grey Room* 58 (Winter 2015): 82. https://doi.org/10.1162/GREY_a_00162

surveillance radars. In the first section of this chapter, “Beginnings and Ends: Delineating”, I will map Foucault’s *Las Meninas* analysis in order to reveal the two modes of operations I have outlined above, and prepare the ground for the emergence of “the figure of Man” in an epistemological sense that this dissertation intends to decentre and dissolve in an Anthropocenic context through reading geoaesthetic acts. In the second section, “Centers: Re-positioning”, I will show how *La Région Centrale* decentres the figure of Man in relation to Foucault’s discussion on the beginning and end of modern subjectivity in *The Order of Things*, by focusing on the film’s operation of turning human subjectivity into complete technospheric mediation that achieves a non-anthropocentric mode of vision. In the last section, “Dissolution: self-destruction”, I will investigate the filmic apparatus *De La* as an early artistic response to the visual rhetoric of impending planetary algorithmic governance which is an extension of the military-industrial complex and its related paradigms of techno-atmospheric control. This investigation will then lead me to link the anxious anticipation of self-destruction of *De La* and the dissolution of the frame in the alien choreography of the film with an indication of the end of Foucault’s figure of Man as a detached subjectivity from the technospheric processes he initiated. Drawing on Snow’s intention of creating “a souvenir” from the Earth, I will conclude the chapter by positioning the film and its geo-installation *De La* as a future fossil.

2.1. Beginnings and Ends: Delineating

In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970), Foucault provides a historical analysis of scientific discourse in European culture since the 16th century. What is significant for this dissertation is that in his comparative analysis he presents a historical account of the modern construction of subjectivity through an archaeological analysis of the emergence of modern scientific discourse. His study attempts to reveal discontinuities in knowledge production and is structured around two breaks between three systems of thought, or what he calls “epistemes”: Renaissance (the 16th century), the Classical (the 17th and the 18th century) and the Modern (from the 19th century onwards). For Foucault, -and this definition is particularly important for this dissertation- an episteme “defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge”¹¹ by possessing “a certain code” and/or ‘a well-defined regularity’ “at a given time, in a given culture”.¹² He aims to “reveal a positive unconscious of knowledge” which differs from the “epistemological level of knowledge (or scientific consciousness)”¹³ in

¹¹ Foucault, *The Order*, 183.

¹² *Ibid.*, x.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xi-xii, Foucault writes: “For, on the one hand, the history of science traces the progress of discovery, the formulation of problems, and the clash of controversy; it also analyses theories in their internal economy; in short, it describes the processes and products of the scientific consciousness. But, on the other hand, it tries to restore

that it also includes “the influences that affected it, the implicit philosophies that were subjacent to it, the unformulated thematics, the unseen obstacles”.¹⁴ This helps him to move towards a “theory of discursive practice” rather than “a theory of knowing subject”,¹⁵ problematic since the subject is to some extent unconsciously determined by its specific socio-historical context. Consequently, epistemes could be regarded as systems of thought or conceptual frames, because they define “the rules that come into play in the very existence of scientific discourse”¹⁶ and delineate the possibilities and limits of knowledge production in any period or context, impacting wider “interaction of beliefs” and “affective valorisations”.¹⁷ Foucault’s definition of epistemes offers a good starting point for my positioning of the emergence of the Anthropocene narrative as an epistemic shift, in the way it unfolds a conceptual frame that outlines a new “theory of discursive practice” challenging dominant anthropocentric conceptions of life worlds as well as the ethico-onto-epistemo-logical divisions between nature and culture, as I have discussed in the previous chapters. More importantly, by starting his book with a forensic analysis of *Las Meninas*, Foucault emphasises the agency of artistic manifestations as epochally important, holding the possibility of signifying a wider epistemic break which outlines the core rationale of this dissertation. In other words, this emphasis has led to the formation of the main aim of the dissertation, namely to identify representations that hold an equivalent agency to *Las Meninas* in signifying an epistemic rupture and hence through which I explore the epistemic origins of an Anthropocenic aesthetics.

Foucault positions *Las Meninas* within the threshold between Classical and Modern epistemes. For him, *Las Meninas* serves as a “synecdoche” for the midpoint between these two epistemes, it acts as “an exemplar of classical episteme” but also “points forward to the modernity that will displace it”.¹⁸ *Las Meninas* identifies a break with a prior system of representation which it undermines and fractures. Put another way, it depicts the process of a rupture and inauguration of a new space by unsettling prior conditions of representation and establishing new ones. In a similar vein to Foucault, art historian William Mitchell argues that

what eluded that consciousness: the influences that affected it, the implicit philosophies that were subjacent to it, the unformulated thematics, the unseen obstacles; it describes the unconscious of science. This unconscious is always the negative side of science – that which resists it, deflects it, or disturbs it. What I would like to do, however, is to reveal a positive unconscious of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse, instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature.”

¹⁴ Ibid., xi.

¹⁵ Ibid., xv.

¹⁶ Ibid., xiv.

¹⁷ Ibid., 398.

¹⁸ Thomas Brockelmann, “The Other Side of the Canvas: Lacan Flips Foucault over Velázquez” *Continental Philosophy Review*, 46, no. 2 (2013), 272-3. <http://10.1007/s11007-013-9265-x>

Las Meninas is a “metapicture”¹⁹ as it reveals the “inextricable weaving together of representation and discourse”.²⁰ In *Las Meninas*, the connection between discourse and representation is established mainly through a superimposition of frames in a conceptual and material sense. In her brief history on the relationship between the conceptual and material understandings of the frame, English studies scholar Rayna Kalas emphasises how the “material innovation” of “the alienable quadrilateral frame” which appears during the Renaissance²¹ turns into “a metaphor of cognition [...] a nascent form of modern subjective consciousness and an index of instrumental reason” in the 20th century.²² Prior to this transition, she notes that “the idea of frame that demarcates the work of art is a product of 18th-century aesthetics”.²³ In this regard, *Las Meninas* not only foregrounds this transition but also plays with the idea of frame as a tool that determines the limits and conditions of both representation and knowledge, by multiplying it. While analysing *Las Meninas*, Foucault builds up relationship mechanisms that are activated by this multiplication of framing devices. For him, *Las Meninas* acts as an epistemic object that presents a game of absence and presence or a “mise-en-abyme of subjectivity”²⁴ in cultural theorist David Carroll’s words. I will now elucidate two relationship mechanisms Foucault outlines in *Las Meninas* that reorganise subject positions and power relationships and that I will later apply in analysing *La Région Centrale*.

In Foucault’s analysis, the first relationship mechanism occurs between motion and subject positions and is mobilised by the gaze that travels in a “virtual triangle” between the painter’s eyes, the void outside the picture and the back of the canvas (*figure 7*).²⁵ This virtual triangle is “commanded” by the painter’s “sovereign gaze”; he looks at a point outside of the painting and projects what he looks at, upon “the surface of invisibility”.²⁶ The spectacle, which we – as spectators – along with the models belong, is also “doubly invisible” because it is “not represented within the space of the painting” and it is “situated precisely in that blind point”.²⁷ The reciprocity of the gaze, this “ceaseless exchange” between the visible and the invisible,

¹⁹ William T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 58.

²⁰ Ibid., 83.

²¹ Rayna M. Kalas, *Frames, Glass, and the Technology of Poetic Invention*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 1.

²² Ibid., 4.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ David Carroll, “The Subject of Archaeology or the Sovereignty of the Episteme”, *MLN* 93, no.4 (1978): 702. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2906601>

²⁵ Foucault, *The Order*, 5.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Ibid., 4.

results in “a play of metamorphoses” between different subject positions: subject-creator (painter), subject-model (two sovereigns), and subject-spectator (us).²⁸ Not only Velazquez but also 7 of the 11 figures in the painting are staring at the invisible void, thus the gazes indicate an invitation for spectators to enter the scene of the representation. In other words, the absence paradoxically entrains a presence. This destabilisation of subject positions which is activated by dynamic interplay of the gazes is strengthened through the cyclic composition of the painting. According to Foucault, the painting represents the whole cycle of Classical representation with its all elements, “with its images, the eyes to which it is offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call into being”.²⁹ Yet and more importantly, the depiction of representation as an act coming into being whenever spectators are looking at it, not only let “representation in its pure form”³⁰ appear for the first time in Foucault’s cultural history, but this configuration also opens up a new space that will be filled up with the emergence of “the human sciences” (i.e. psychology, sociology, anthropology) and the birth of the figure of Man, upon which this new form of knowledge is founded.

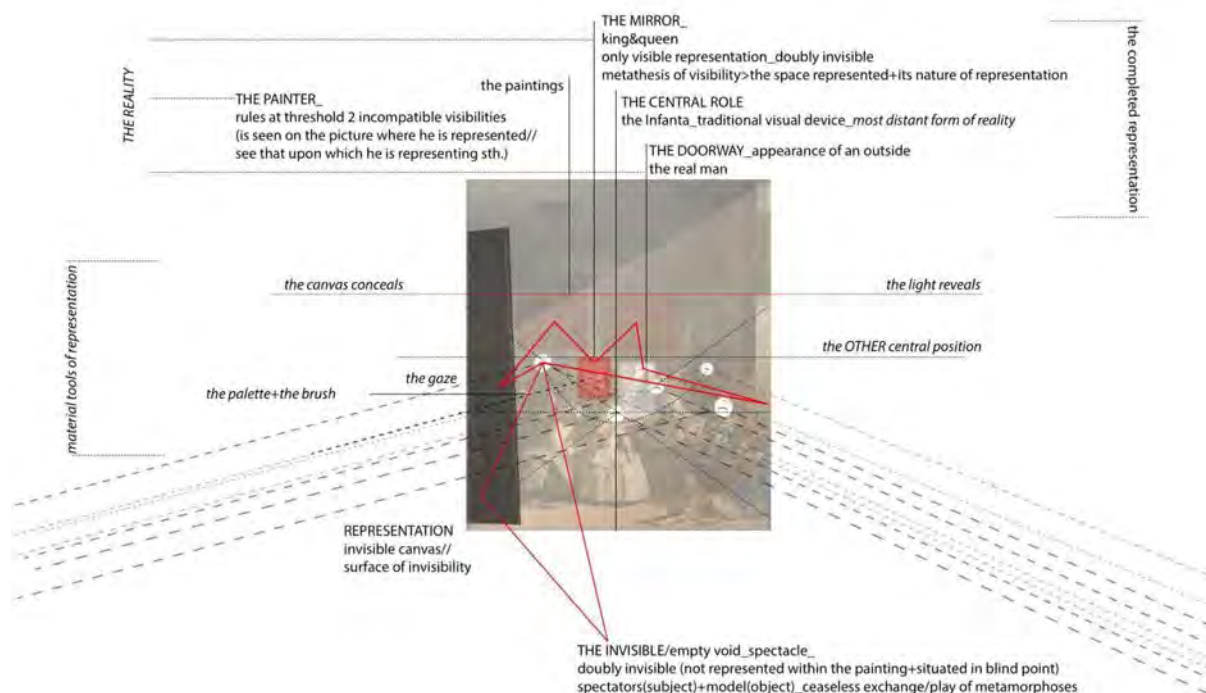


Fig. 7: A visualisation of Foucault’s *Las Meninas* analysis. Image credit: Benek Çinçik

For Foucault, by taking representation itself as its subject matter and opening up the ‘essential void’, *Las Meninas* displaces “the theory of representation” which -was “the universal ground

²⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁰ Ibid., 18.

of all possible orders” in the Classical episteme- was in part based on visible similarities and differences and manifested through static and timeless grids (e.g. taxonomy) and replaces it with the constitution of “man” as the source, centre and subject of Western knowledge positioned within a “profound historicity”.³¹ More precisely, *Las Meninas* eliminates the representation of the subject, the sovereignty it should have resembled from the centre of the painting, where it would have been under the Classical episteme³² and opens “the essential void” which welcomes us, the spectators, who are positioned outside the painting and at the threshold of modernity.³³ In other words, *Las Meninas* illustrates the switch of focus from representation, “an attempt to apply objective methods to study man”, to the representing subject, the “constitution of an empirico-transcendental doublet which was called man” who was situated “in the analytic of finitude”, referring to a time that is readable.³⁴ At this point, it might be worth coming back to the discussions on the onset of the Anthropocene, as they identify a similar yet problematic positioning of “the figure of Man” or Anthropos central in ‘a time that is readable’ through searching its origins in the stratigraphic composition of the Earth. As Colebrook and Weinstein rightly problematise “by asking when the Anthropocene began, we revive a modified version of the time of man; once again, man is placed as the agent of history, albeit unwittingly, and he can look back upon and assess the past of his own making.”³⁵ In this respect, if *Las Meninas* opens up the space through which ‘the figure of Man’ as the centre and the subject of knowledge emerges, then the dominant scientific narrative of the Anthropocene amplifies his central positioning, as I have problematised in the previous chapters and attempt to deconstruct through my reading of geoaesthetic acts.

The second relationship mechanism in Foucault’s *Las Meninas* analysis emerges between the positioning of the framing devices and power relationships and in order to reveal this relationship more legibly, I have taken an architectural section of the representation scene (*Figure 8*). The multiplication of framing devices, namely the canvas, the mirror, the door and lastly the framing of the scene, regulates a new order of power relationships. Art historian

³¹ Ibid., xxv, Foucault writes “It is this configuration that, from the nineteenth century onward, changes entirely; the theory of representation disappears as the universal foundation of all possible orders; language as the spontaneous tabula, the primary grid of things, as an indispensable link between representation and things, is eclipsed in its turn; a profound historicity penetrates into the heart of things, isolates and defines them in their own coherence, imposes upon them the forms of order implied by the continuity of time; the analysis of exchange and money gives way to the study of production, that of the organism takes precedence over the search for taxonomic characteristics, and, above all, language loses its privileged position and becomes, in its turn, a historical form coherent with the density of its own past. But as things become increasingly reflexive, seeking the principle of their intelligibility only in their own development, and abandoning the space of representation, man enters in his turn, and for the first time, the field of Western knowledge.”

³² Ibid., 240.

³³ Ibid., 18.

³⁴ Ibid., xx.

³⁵ Colebrook and Weinstein, “Introduction: Anthropocene”, 168.

Svetlana Alpers shares the view that framing plays a significant role in *Las Meninas* where “self-presentation, social order and the production of art are so prominently displayed”.³⁶ According to Foucault, one of the focal points of the cycle of the representation is the mirror that reflects the subject-models who are the king and the queen.³⁷ They are positioned at the void where we are located, but whereas we are invited to the scene, they are trapped in the mirror. Besides, their pale reflection in the mirror as a result of being located at the far end of the room, makes them “the frailest and the most distant form of all reality”.³⁸ The power switch Foucault posits is enabled both through the positioning of the mirror and Velazquez’s vantage point, namely his decision on the specific positioning of the framing of the painting. The positioning of the framing provides depth and converts the stage of the painting into a volumetric space, where a constant oscillation between inside and outside takes place. The transfer of power flows from inside, the disappearance of the subject, sovereignty who was in classical representation the foundation of the representation³⁹, to the outside, the introduction of the man, the spectator, the new “knower” within the transformation of knowledge. At this point, it is important to remind that Foucault does not discuss the notion of power, as something that is singularised either in the symbolical sovereigns or the spectators since he refuses a general picture of social and political power emerging from a specific centre.⁴⁰ However since the royal couple, the symbolical sovereigns are placed at one of the focal points exterior to the painting, it is certainly their absence from the interior centre that turns the painting into a “spectacle-as observation”.⁴¹ They are the ones who acknowledge the introduction of Foucault’s modern subject, whom he defines as “a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible”⁴² and of which Foucault gives a critical account in the rest of his book. In other words, the multiplication and specific positioning of the frames redistribute power relationships and enables Foucault to introduce the centralisation of knowledge coupled with the figure of Man.

³⁶ Foucault, *The Order*, 40.

³⁷ Ibid., 16.

³⁸ Ibid., 18.

³⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁰ Gary Gutting, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason: Science and the History of Reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.

⁴¹ Foucault, *The Order*, 15.

⁴² Ibid., 347.

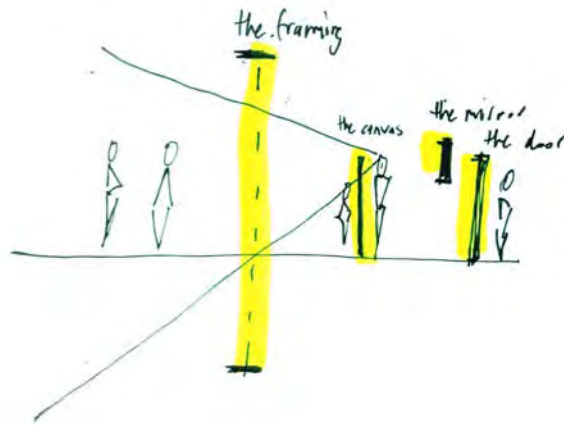


Fig. 8: A sketch of a section from Las Meninas scene. Image credit: Benek Çinçik

As is widely known, at the end of *The Order of Things* Foucault calls into question the fate of this recent invention of “man” which gave rise due to an “effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge” only “a century and a half ago”.⁴³ For him, if this figure of Man is constituted by such an epistemic shift, then it may be seen as only “a new wrinkle in our knowledge” and it may also easily end when “that knowledge has discovered a new form”.⁴⁴ Taking his Nietzschean anti-humanism into account, he looks forward to the end of Modern Age’s anthropocentric episteme and anticipates its end with his well-known face-drawn-in-sand metaphor:

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.⁴⁵

At this point, it is critical to ask whether the introduction of the Anthropocene thesis implies this event, this ‘new form in knowledge’ and could be related with Foucault’s anticipation of the death of modern subjectivity- not only subjectivity per se but also processes of subjectification. As I have outlined in the introduction of the dissertation, the Anthropocene is a threshold concept, problematising beginning and ends and pointing towards the death of ‘master subjects of Man, History and Civilisation’. Coming back to Braidotti’s argument on how Foucault’s announcement of the death of Man illustrates ‘the epistemological and political crisis of the humanistic habit of placing ‘Man’ at the centre of world history’,⁴⁶ I position the

⁴³ Ibid., xxv.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 449.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 449.

⁴⁶ Braidotti, “Four Theses”, 22.

Anthropocene narrative as an epistemic concept that problematises the figure of Man's central positioning in an ethico-onto-epistemo-logical sense by revealing material evidence of the entanglement of human in geo-bio-socio assemblages, as well as by implying his end through underlining the ongoing ecological collapse.

Sociologist Bronislaw Szerszynski as well relates Foucault's anticipation of the end of the figure of Man with the Anthropocene and writes that the event Foucault foresees "in such messianic tones" would not directly be the Anthropocene, but it would help us acknowledge the latter's importance – yet only with a twist.⁴⁷ He asserts that "the fate of 'man' in the Anthropocene is not that he will be erased, but that he will be made immortal, as a trace preserved forever in the rock".⁴⁸ This interpretation follows the lines of geological framing with its emphasis on materiality and consequentialist significations however, although it points at a potential immortality, it is one that establishes itself through an absence. That is to say, the preservation of human presence in the geological strata involves the processes that lead to its extinction. As he argues further, "this becoming geological of the human is a 'denouement' which is both our apotheosis and our eclipse."⁴⁹ Indeed, as I have emphasised in the introduction of this dissertation if there is a collective subjectivity implied by the Anthropocene thesis, it is 'generated from destruction and from the recognition of destruction'. Therefore, Foucault's anticipation of the end of the figure of Man through a possible epistemic transformation can be brought into productive relationships with the Anthropocene, both as a narrative that implies an epistemic rupture and a conceptual end of the dominant ethico-onto-epistemo-logical positionings of the figure of Man at the centre of knowledge production, and as a situation that signifies a literal or material end in terms of his temporality.

2.2. Centres: Re-positioning

"In a primaeval landscape, the filmmaker, like a mysterious spaceman, sets up the technological and programmed movements - vertical, elliptical, horizontal, or combined - of a camera mounted on it, which for the next three [...] hours explore every last stone of the landscape from a fixed position. There is no sign of life."⁵⁰

The introduction of *La Région Centrale* by film historian and curator Amos Vogel, who is also the founder of the avant-garde ciné-club *Cinema 16* in New York, one of the venues where *La*

⁴⁷ Bronislaw Szerszynski, "The End of the End of Nature: The Anthropocene and the Fate of the Human", *Oxford Literary Review* 34, no.2, (2012): 180. <https://doi.org/10.3366/olr.2012.0040>

⁴⁸ Ibid., 180.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 180.

⁵⁰ Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art*, (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1974), 356.

Région Centrale was launched, summarises the durational film well, in the sense that its predetermined structure is its primary concern and a topological exploration of the landscape is its main plot. The film transports us on to a deserted mountaintop near Sept-Îles in Northern Quebec, exemplary of “complete wilderness”, as there is no presence of any human and nothing “man-made is visible”.⁵¹ The film takes us into 17 episodes of dizzying motion, provided by a 16- mm camera that is connected to the camera-activating machine *De La* that dictates the movements of the camera through a pre-composed score Snow made for the film (Figure 9). Between each episode of relentless motion, an X fills the screen gesturing towards a reminder of ‘the central region’, which refers to the English translation of the film’s title. The remote-controlled apparatus *De La* which was bolted to the ground with a steel plate, was commissioned from artist-engineer Pierre Abbeloos, and could be set in every possible motion; horizontally, vertically, and laterally, turn, roll, spin and rotate 360 degrees. The phenomenological experience of being coupled with the filmic apparatus, the “all-seeing machine” in art historian Martha Langford’s words,⁵² is amplified by the soundtrack Snow composed for a quasi-synthesiser, which programmed the camera movements by matching the frequency of sine waves, electronic pulses or beats with camera directions and *De La*’s speed.⁵³ According to Langford “the experience is vertiginous and hallucinatory and defining of the technological sublime”.⁵⁴ This ‘technological sublime’ is my departure point for situating the film within the wider technosphere context. The technospheric relevance of the film lies in the unique combination of its machinic -inhuman- mode of production which was highly innovative for its time and the non-anthropocentric perspectives it offered to the spectators for exploring the landscape.

⁵¹ Snow, “Converging on”, 59.

⁵² Langford, *Michael Snow*, 22.

⁵³ Snow, “Converging on”, 60. Snow explains the relationship between sound and the movement: “Pierre worked out a system of supplying the orders to the machine to move in various patterns by means of sound tapes. Each direction has a different frequency of an electronic sine wave assigned to it. It makes up a layer of tones divided into five sections starting very high, about 10,000 cycles per second, down to about 70 cycles. The speed information is in terms of beats or pulses going from slow to fast. So the sound space is divided up horizontally, which makes it equivalent and synchronous to the eye space in some ways, but in others it’s a foil to it.”

⁵⁴ Langford, *Michael Snow*, 22.



Fig.9: Michael Snow with the Camera Activating Machine, *De La*. Image Credit: Kenneth White, "Strangeloves: From/De La région centrale, Air Defense Radar Station Moisie, and Media Cultures of the Cold War", *Grey Room 58* (Winter 2015): 183.

The film begins with a slow and smooth scanning motion through which we discover the blues skies, the boulders, and the lake surrounding the tundra at noon. Throughout the following episodes, we continue our visual journey that is guided by *De La*'s various movements at differing speeds while meditating on the synth sounds and electronic pulses in tandem with the direction and intensity of movements. As the film proceeds into its third hour, the night falls and light returns, the variations of horizontal, vertical and rotational movements increase and end with fast somersaults and figure-eight patterns (*Figure 10*). The speed blurs the images and converts the components of the landscape into abstract forms, while subjecting us, the viewers, to a loss of visual reference points. Our "psychophysiological limits"⁵⁵ are pushed further due to the "reality of the circular movements"⁵⁶ that results in a deprivation of gravity. Except for the first episode in which we follow a rather conventionally composed pan across a horizon, we frequently come across upside-down horizons due to *De La*'s rotational movements. In other words, the difference between the ground and sky abolishes and the horizontal and the vertical continuously interchange. This is an intended feature of the film as Snow states "the whole film is meant to work on your sense of gravity".⁵⁷ As the primary subject of the film is "planetary motion", its cosmological character is implied through the relentless cycles we are taken into. In this context, it might be meaningful to point out *De La*'s resemblance to the planetary model of an orrery not only through its subject matter of planetary mediation but also in the way it moves, both in an orbit and around its own axis. As

⁵⁵ White, "Strangeloves: From", 184.

⁵⁶ Snow, "Converging on", 57.

⁵⁷ Michael Snow, "The Life and Times of Michael Snow" [1971], in Snow and Dompierre (eds.), *The collected*, 74.

Snow confirms it, “not only does it move in pre-directed orbits and spirals but it itself also turns, rolls and spins”.⁵⁸ Consequently, in Snow’s words, “there are circles within circles and cycles within cycles. Eventually there’s no gravity. The film is a cosmic strip”.⁵⁹ In this regard, I argue that Snow turns the orrery into a surveillance mechanism for image capture, through which this ‘cosmic strip’ is created. More importantly, through this statement Snow highlights the cosmic significance of the film in relation to gravitational planetary forces and allows me to position the film as a unique example of planetary imagination and as a geoaesthetic act. As Snow writes further, with *La Région Centrale* “I’m dealing with planets for one thing, and with gravitation for another”.



Fig. 10: Micheal Snow, stills from *La Région Centrale* in chronological order- time elapsed: 1st column: 1:29, 3:23, 12:03, 13:04, 14:06, 21:50, 23:43; 2nd column: 31:32, 31:46, 33:35, 33:45, 33:50, 33:52, 33:59; 3rd column: 40:09, 40:14, 40:25, 40:46, 41:23, 41:35, 41:57; 4th column: 43:22, 43:31, 44:20, 44:52, 45:10, 46:19, 47:45; 5th column: 57:25, 57:58, 58:25, 58:56, 59:24, 59:56, 60:45; 6th column: 2:43:40, 2:46:45, 2:51:01, 2:53:34, 2:54:35, 2:55:35; 2:58:46

In opposition to the title of the film that was borrowed from a cover of a physics book, being involved in this disorientating visual experience makes us question our centrality

⁵⁸ Snow, “Converging on”, 58.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 58.

apperceptively.⁶⁰ Snow's focus is indeed that tension and is revealed clearly as he writes "if you become completely involved in the reality of these circular movements it's you who is spinning surrounded by everything, or, conversely, you are a stationary centre and it's all revolving around you".⁶¹ This specific tension or apperception through which we engage with the question of centrality indicates a key point for my intervention in situating the film as a geoaesthetic act that points towards the decentring of modern subjectivity through planetary forces. In addition, the *sensorial vertigo* the film takes us into foregrounds the sensorial conditions of being in the Anthropocene, in the way in which it forges a new condition of groundlessness by destabilising the considerations of the Earth as a separate, inert and stable ground, a 'standing reserve' that has been taken for granted. As film critic Annette Michelson argues

[...] this film, in its circling, spiralling, rising, sweeping movements, crossing the distances between peaks, creating, in imperceptible loops through empty skies, reversals of direction which disorient the riveted spectator, seems to question, through kinetic counter-example and disorientation, the "ground" of the Kantian 'view' which founds the modern sense of 'place'".⁶²

Importantly, since this questioning of the centre and loss of the ground are mobilised not through a cognitive engagement but rather through a *sensorial vertigo*, it is exemplary of how *La Région Centrale* offers us affective and sensual strategies to respond to the Anthropocene understood as 'a sensorial phenomenon'.

The film delivers a fluid machinic vision, a disembodied gaze that enhances human vision. As Snow writes, *De La* scans and operates like "a bodyless eye - an eye floating in space".⁶³ Since this disembodied mobility omits any possibility for a corporeal grounding, it not only destabilises but also decentres the viewer. The only exception would be the moon scenes in the middle sequence of the film -around its 1,5 hours-, where we momentarily stop turning as viewers because *De La* seems to stop and the moon oscillates across the screen. Yet, this particular pit-stop gestures towards a correlation between the camera movements or our movements coupled with the camera, and planetary movements or geopower in Grosz's terms. This correlation is intended and emphasised by Snow when he writes "*La Region* isn't only a documentary photographing of a particular place at various times of day but is equally and more importantly a source of sensations, an ordering, an arranging of eye movements

⁶⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁶¹ Ibid., 57-8.

⁶² Annette Michelson, "About Snow", *October 8* (Spring 1979): 122. <https://doi.org/10.2307/778229>.

⁶³ Michael Snow, "The Life", 79.

and of inner ear movements. It starts out here, respecting the gravity of our situation but it more and more sees as a planet does.”⁶⁴ Snow’s experimentation with the question of “how can we see as a planet does?” identifies a key move for this dissertation to place the film within Grosz’s definition of art as ‘an extraction from the universe and an elaboration on it’ and hence underscore its engagement with geopolitics through its interrogation of planetary motion. In this regard, Snow remarks further on the rationale for circular movements as he writes “[a]fter all, the earth, moon, and sun don’t see the ‘up’ and the ‘down’ that we do. I reasoned that I wanted the camera movements to be familial, to be all ‘circular’: or orbital or elliptical, like the planets.”⁶⁵

The challenging of human sensory capacities to the extent that it creates *sensorial vertigo* which might be an expected attribute for opening up human vision to planetary vision and engaging with planetary motion inevitably causes a lack of reference points. For the viewers, the only “reference to human coordinates” would be the “screen’s rectangular frame” and the big yellow X-shaped reel markers that come up against a black screen, between every 17 episodes.⁶⁶ According to Snow “the X fixes the screen [...] it transfers the movement in a different way each time it comes up. And it’s a title, a reminder of the central region - the whole thing is about being in the middle of this - the camera and the spectator”.⁶⁷ At this point, it is important to highlight Snow’s intention of coupling the spectator with the filmic apparatus as it is this specific intention that opens up the question of subjectivity to technospheric forces and catalyses a non-anthropocentric mode of vision. In one of his interviews, Snow emphasises that the film “is entirely made by the machinery (you?). There are no other people but you (the machinery?)”.⁶⁸ This intended rhetorical switch between “you [us]” and “the machinery” and his emphasis on the solitude in which this reciprocal relationship takes place, establish the foundation of turning human subjectivity into complete technological mediation and hence providing a non-anthropocentric mode of vision. Thus, it is this non-anthropocentric vision that enables me to interrogate the film’s reorganisation of subject positions in a technospheric context.

⁶⁴ Snow, “Converging on”, 59.

⁶⁵ Michael Snow, “La Région Centrale” in ed. Gloria Moure, *Michael Snow – Sequences: A History of His Art* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2015), 136-137.

⁶⁶ Emmelhainz, “Images do”, 133.

⁶⁷ Michael Snow “Camera and the Spectator: Michael Snow in Discussion with John du Cane” in Snow and Dompierre (eds.), *The collected*, 90.

⁶⁸ Snow, “Converging on”, 59.

By moving us “in every direction and on every plane of a sphere”,⁶⁹ Snow wants us to identify with what he calls the “ecstatic centre of a complete sphere” which he also refers to as “the absolute centre, Nirvanic zero”, terms that underline the reflexive and cosmological character of the film.⁷⁰ In other words, this ‘cosmic strip’ is a metaphor for a contemplation on our position on the planet. Accordingly, one of the reviewers of the film, Louis Marcorelles writes in 1972 that “Snow catapults us into the heart of a world before speech, before arbitrarily composed meaning, even subject. He forces us to rethink not only cinema but our universe.”⁷¹ Indeed, the lack of any human signs and the insistent topological exploration of the barren landscape and wide skies in the film invite us to connect with elemental forces of the planet, rocks (soil), skies (air), and lake (water). And this connection opens up an imaginative possibility through which we can relate to inhuman forces through deep time and hence experience a cosmological and geologic awareness that points towards an Anthropocenic imagination. In one of his interviews, in response to the question of whether the film invokes a “long view in time back to pre-history”, Snow affirms that invocation by stating that the film depicts “a kind of glacial deposit” and emphasises that “all those rocks, they were put there that way a long time ago”.⁷² Importantly, this invocation identifies an entry point to *La Région Centrale*’s radical framing of temporality, in particular, the temporal expansion that I look for in geoasthetic acts and the Anthropocene comes equipped with- which I will elucidate later on.

If a cosmological awareness is experienced, it is enhanced through what Michelson describes as “hyperbolic visuality”,⁷³ by replacing machinic vision with human vision that is freed from gravitational forces. *La Région Centrale* achieves such a disposition with *De LA*, mainly by subverting the conventional role of the camera as imitating the human eye and radicalising the narrativity of the cinematographic frame by converting “its inherent properties” into the “‘structural’ subject matter of the work itself”.⁷⁴ In other words, the “disembodied mobility of the eye-subject”⁷⁵ is not an effect but rather the very focus of the film and not only the structure but also the subject of the film is defined by the machinic movement of *De La* itself. “It’s not,” Snow notes, “handmade, but rather as if the film were made by the machine. The film seems to come from the machine towards the spectator. The reconstitution is more mental than

⁶⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁷¹ Louis Marcorelles, “La Région Centrale”, *Le Monde*, 28.09.1972

⁷² Michael Snow, “La Région Centrale: An Interview with Michael Snow”, interview by George Csaba Koller *Cinema Canada*, no. 4 (October-November 1972), 55.

⁷³ Michelson, “About Snow”, 120.

⁷⁴ Des O’Rawe, “Towards a poetics of the cinematographic frame”, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 3:1 (2011), 5379. <https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v3i0.5378>.

⁷⁵ Michelson, “About Snow”, 121.

physical. For some films, you think of the cameraman when you see camera movement. He sees for you. Here it is as if you are the cameraman".⁷⁶ So, it is through our ultimate identification with the camera that we can see and move as a planet does.

If we follow the first relationship mechanism I outlined in Foucault's *Las Meninas* analysis, namely frames or framing devices activating relationships between motion and subject positions; the motion engendered by the gaze in *Las Meninas* becomes the velocity mobilised by *De La* in *La Région Centrale*. As White shows in his detailed analysis of *De La*'s means and modes of production, Pierre Abbeloos engineered *De La*'s design based on air-defence precision ranging systems of the Cold War and re-assembled their components, a radar unit and a computer, both directed by automated servomechanisms, into an "inward-directed closed system";⁷⁷ a control box regulating the movements of the robotic arm and camera's motor and zoom, and satellite gear boxes that enable the range of motions (*Figure 11*). Consequently, "[*De La*]'s purpose, by design, was movement alone and velocity was its mission".⁷⁸ Snow's intention was to move *De La* like a radar, thus, its ceaseless speed, to such a degree that it threatens the material unity of the cinematographic frame, enacts an infinitely mobile framing which results in a kinaesthetic mode of vision. As art historian Florian Leitner puts it, the film conveys a "motion gaze", a "non-anthropomorphic way of looking, in which looking and moving becomes inseparable".⁷⁹ Our position as viewers is constantly destabilised as a result of our coupling with the disengaged mobility of the mechanical eye. In other words, drawing on Snow's emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between the 'machine' and 'us', we become the 'bodyless eye floating in space'. The gaze that invited the modern subject into the representation scene of *Las Meninas* turns into the *De La*'s velocity that emancipates the viewers from anthropomorphic reference points yet leading to a challenging destabilisation, and hence decentring of their position in *La Région Centrale*. Besides, by coupling the human eye with the machinic, radar-like surveying eye of *De La* and immersing us in a technological soundscape, *La Région Centrale* turns human subjectivity into complete technospherical mediation and points at the visual rhetoric of impending planetary algorithmic governance, which is an extension of the military-industrial complex and its related paradigms of techno-atmospheric control. In other words, as "[t]he film was made

⁷⁶ Michael Snow, in "Entretien avec Michael Snow," *Michael Snow: Retrospective*, La Cinematheque Quebecoise/Musée du Cinema, 1975, p. 19, as cited in Michelson, "About Snow", 123.

⁷⁷ White, "Strangeloves: From", 187.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 187.

⁷⁹ Florian Leitner, "On Robots and Turtles: A Posthuman Perspective on Camera and Image Movement after Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale*". *Discourse*, 35, no.2, (2014): 268. <http://10.13110/discourse.35.2.0263>

by the planning and by the machinery itself”⁸⁰, *De La*’s ‘bodyless eye’ foreshadows what media studies scholar Matteo Pasquenelli defines as “the eye of the algorithm” that is one of the characteristics of “cognitive Anthropocene” and hence of the technosphere.⁸¹

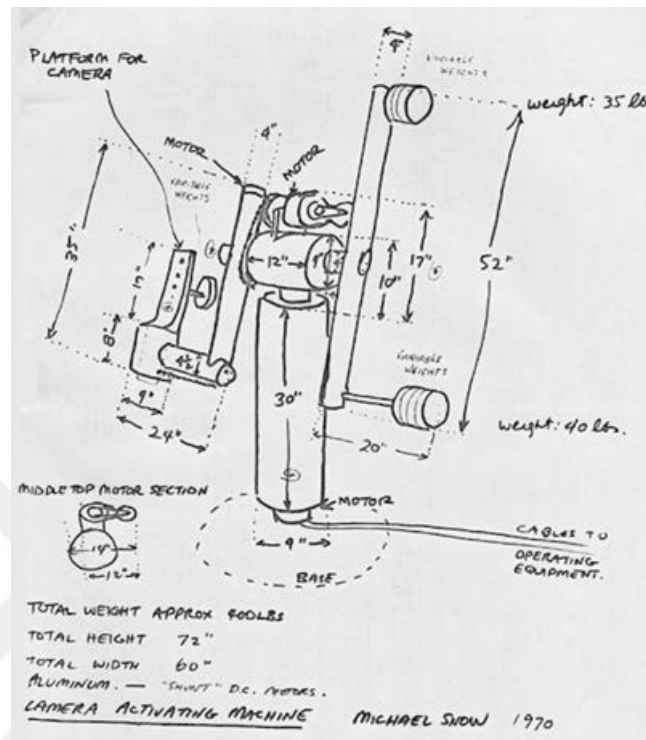


Fig. 11: Michael Snow’s diagram for *La Région Centrale*’s camera activating machine, *De La*, 1970. Image credit: David Tomas, Vertov, Snow, Farocki: *Machine Vision and the Posthuman* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing 2014), 79.

Our destabilisation and decentring as viewers turn into a kind of dispersal into the landscape because of the growing tension between the relentless camera movements and the challenged capacity of the frame to hold and limit what the camera captures, the image itself. According to art historian Thierry de Duve, “*La Région centrale* is extremely centripetal and not centrifugal, as the camera never reaches out to the landscape, it pulls the landscape towards us”.⁸² Yet while we may experience such a pull throughout the first episode where we experience slow-scanning motions, we lose that pull as soon as *De La*’s movement crescendos and disperses our vision towards the landscape. Throughout the last episode, in particular, the accelerated speed of the motion nearly collapses the frame, through which

⁸⁰ Snow, “Converging on”, 60.

⁸¹ Matteo Pasquenelli, “The Eye of the Algorithm: Cognitive Anthropocene and the Making of the World Brain”, (05.11.2014), available at: <http://matteopasquinelli.com/eye-of-the-algorithm/>

⁸² Thierry de Duve, “Michael Snow: The Deictics of Experience, and Beyond,” *Parachute*, 78, (April, May, June 1995), 35.

scaleless, glimmering substances twirl. As White puts it, the motion turns the frame “from mimetic container to aggressive matter, attaining a kind of shimmering substance in projection”.⁸³ It is as if we are reminded of the material limits of the frame while it almost dissolves into the landscape and becomes matter itself. Certainly, for Snow, the film is “all about the frame” as he asserts that “the single rectangle can contain a lot. In *La Région Centrale*, the frame is very important, as the image is continually flowing through it. The frame is eyelids”.⁸⁴ This analogy between the frame and our eyelids exemplifies how he utilises the frame as a metaphorical, methodological and material tool to realise a convergence between epistemological inquiry and cinematic experience. Accordingly, Michelson emphasises this convergence as she writes “[the film]’s mimesis of and gloss upon spatial exploration offer a fusion of primary scopophilic and epistemophilic impulses”.⁸⁵ In this regard, *La Région Centrale* opens up questions on epistemological implications of the cinematographic frame, as *De La* converts the frame into a permeable holder through which the landscape and skies flow and our mobile vision disperses. (Figure 12).

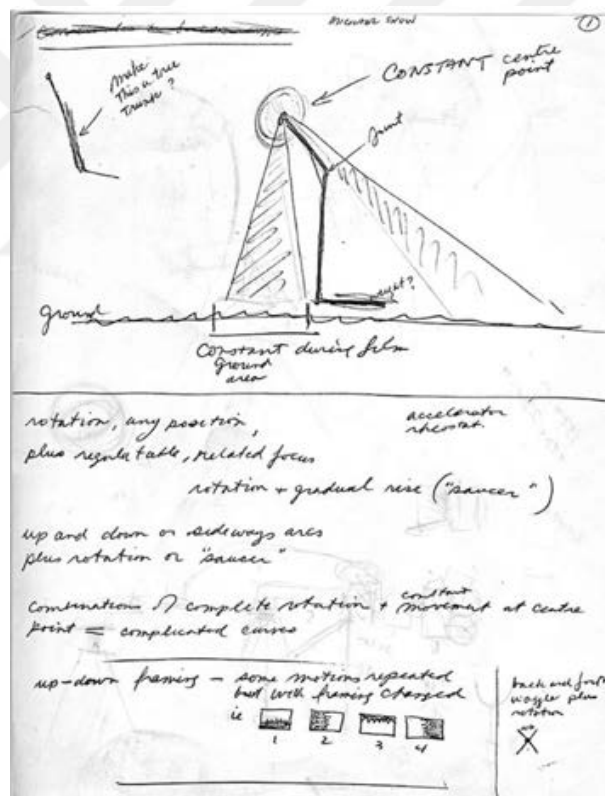


Figure 12: Initial sketches for *La Région Centrale* by Michael Snow. Note the focus on rotation and the four frames at the bottom through which the landscape flows and our mobile vision is distributed. Image credit: Tomas, Vertov, Snow, 94.

⁸³ White, “Strangeloves: From”, 182.

⁸⁴ Snow, “Converging on”, 60.

⁸⁵ Michelson, “About Snow”, 123.

In *Cinema 1- Movement Image* (1983), Deleuze not only celebrates Snow's decentring effects but also claims that it – along with other examples of North American and Canadian experimental cinema-, attains a specific state of perception which he identifies as "gaseous". He writes that "Michael Snow deprives the camera of any centre and films the universal interaction of images which vary in relation to one another, on all their facets and in all their parts [...] Now, if there is any constant factor in this cinema, it is the construction by various means of gaseous states of perception".⁸⁶ Gaseous state of perception is acented and "defined by the free movement of each molecule".⁸⁷ In other words, "the formation of an image" is "defined by molecular parameters"⁸⁸ and the relationships between images obey no centres but the constantly differentiated positioning with one another. In *La Région Centrale*, we experience such a 'universal interaction' while the images flow from the zoom on the rocks to the particles of air. Importantly, Deleuze describes the cinema of the gaseous perception as a "machine assemblage of matter-images"⁸⁹ as it "tends towards a perception as it was before men (or after), it also tends towards the correlate of this, that is, towards an any-space-whatever released from its human coordinates".⁹⁰ In this sense, Deleuze emphasises how *La Région Centrale* moves beyond human embodiment towards an inhuman vision and argues further:

Michael Snow's *The Central Region* does not raise perception to the universal variation of a raw and savage matter without also extracting from it a space without reference points where the ground and the sky, the horizontal and the vertical, interchange. Nothingness itself is diverted towards that which comes out of it or falls back on it, the genetic element, the fresh or vanishing perception, which potentialises a space by retaining only the shadow or the account of human events.⁹¹

In this context, *La Région Centrale* certainly points towards 'a perception as it is before or after man' with its dehumanised landscape and inhuman mode of production and the momentarily spotted shadows of *De La* might be the only 'shadow of human events'. Moreover, according to Deleuze, this emancipation from human agency achieves "a pure perception, as it is in things or in matter, to the point to which molecular interactions extend".⁹² By directing our attention to the camera movements themselves and the material conditions through which the

⁸⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 94-5.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 94.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 136.

⁹¹ Ibid., 136.

⁹² Ibid., 93.

images come into being or are captured, Snow indeed wanted to create “a more purely filmic experience by bringing out the content that is latent in such things as zooms or pans”.⁹³ In this context, a parallel between Foucault’s *Las Meninas* analysis and Deleuze’s *La Région Centrale* reading can be established. While for Foucault *Las Meninas* offers a ‘representation in its pure form’, for Deleuze *La Région Centrale* attains a ‘pure perception’, “engendering a purified, unlocatable, luminous vision”.⁹⁴

La Région Centrale grew from Snow’s intention to make “a gigantic landscape film” equal to “the great landscape paintings of Cezanne, Poussin, Corot, Monet, Matisse and in Canada the Group of Seven”.⁹⁵ Snow was specifically interested in the “expressive possibilities”⁹⁶ of the camera, exploring “the various relationships between camera movement and what is being photographed”.⁹⁷ After his former films *Wavelength* (1967) which was a single camera zoom movement and *Back and Forth* (1969) which consisted only of side to side motion, both of which took place in closed spaces, he wanted to develop this line of work and expand both the variations of the camera movements and the limits of the space. He was aiming for a film in which he would “achieve a unity between the method and the subject” similar to what he describes as how “Cezanne, for instance, produced an [...] incredibly balanced relationship between what he did and what he (apparently) saw.”⁹⁸ More precisely, he states that “what the camera-eye did in the space, would be completely appropriate to what it saw, but at the same time, equal to it”.⁹⁹ That is to say, in *La Région Centrale*, our cinematic experience is equally distributed between the exploration of what is being captured, the landscape and the sky, and the interrogation of the process of capturing which is the movement of the filmic apparatus itself. In this regard, Snow remarks that *La Région Centrale* “should present the clearest dialogue between what one identifies as ‘sky’, for example, and the actual, physical effect on the eye-mind of the projected moving light image”.¹⁰⁰ In opposition to narrative films where the camera essentially imitates the human eye and distracts the viewer from the modes and means of production mechanism, Snow deliberately directs our attention to the process of the making of the film, to the camera movement itself and its impact on our sensory field and hence achieves a dialogue between what we see and how we see it.

⁹³ Michael Snow, “Visions”.

⁹⁴ Maria Walsh, “The Immersive Spectator: A Phenomenological Hybrid”, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 9, no. 3 (2004): 177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725042000307709>

⁹⁵ Michael Snow, “La Région” 53.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁸ Snow, “Converging on”, 57.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 59

Accordingly, the film is considered a classic example of North American and Canadian experimental or structural films of the 1960s and 1970s which according to film critic P. Adams Sitney subvert the traditional understanding of the content in narrative cinema by treating the form, structure, or method as the content itself and grounds upon the exploration of the filmic apparatus as a metaphor for human consciousness.¹⁰¹ Film writer Peter Gidal is in line with Michelson and Sitney and evaluates *La Région Centrale* as “a reflexive system of consciousness, a method and an epistemology”.¹⁰² The tension between the Xs that cut the screen between each episode and seem to momentarily centre us and the dizzying motion that causes a continuous process of decentring, activates a self-reflective process that necessarily opens up epistemological questions around the formation of a centre. In addition, the challenging duration of iterative cycles inevitably stimulates ‘a reflexive system of consciousness’, an inward-looking self, and might be seen as one of apperceptive strategies that is a characteristic of what Sitney describes as “a cinema of the mind rather than the eye”.¹⁰³

Although Snow’s practice spans across a wide range of media (film, sculpture, painting, photography, music) and diverse themes, two of his primary concerns are optical perception and embodied vision. As curator Catsou Roberts writes, “he experiments with ways to frame and re-frame our way of seeing”.¹⁰⁴ Through these experiments, he investigates the relationship between the real and the representation, the process and the mechanism of representation in particular. Following Roberts’s remark further, “with Snow’s work, we experience a shift from represented subject to the representation of its reception”.¹⁰⁵ One of his later works “Flash! 20:49, 15/6/2001” which is a laminated colour photograph can be regarded as a good example that underscores a similar shift, that is the process of the conversion from the real to the represented (*Figure 13*). Throughout the operation of transferring a domestic scene where two people are having a meal, into the surface of the photograph, a wind blows the hairs of the models and drops the glasses on the table, as if this action is caused by the effect of the instantaneous speed of the flash unit. He makes us contemplate the immediate effect of the photographic flash on the interruption of retinal

¹⁰¹ P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: the American Avant-garde, 1943-2000*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2002) 355.

¹⁰² Peter Gidal, “Notes on”, 54.

¹⁰³ Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 348.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, Catsou and Michael Snow, “An Intercontinental Collage, Catsou Roberts and Michael Snow (Interview)”, in *Michael Snow: Almost Cover to Cover*, eds. Catsou Roberts, Lucy Steeds (London: Black Dog Publishing Limited and Arnolfini, 2001), 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

continuity by visualising it as a strong wind. Snow strongly insists on making us aware of the processes of representation itself as an act, not only through catalysing bodily sensations but also by opening up contemplative modes of inquiry whilst experiencing his works. He expresses this concern with regards to camera movements in *La Région Centrale* when he writes “you wouldn’t be thinking of someone’s expressive handling of the thing but perhaps how and why the whole thing got set in motion, what’s behind it”.¹⁰⁶ This contemplation can be related with the convergence of epistemological inquiry and cinematographic experience that enables me to align the material frame of *La Région Centrale* with the conceptual or epistemic frame of the Anthropocene in terms of delineating the conditions and limits of knowledge.



Fig. 13: “Flash! 20:49, 15/6/2001” by Michael Snow, laminated colour photograph on aluminium, 122 x 183 cm. Image credit: The CCCA Canadian Art Database

The convergence of the epistemological frame and the cinematographic frame in *La Région Centrale* opens up the possibility to situate the film within the temporal frame of the Anthropocene and material frame of the technosphere as a paradigmatic work. When the relationship between motion and subject positions in *La Région Centrale* is contextualised in the Anthropocene; the decentring of the human subject both as the creator and the viewer in *La Région Centrale* happens at two levels. First, in the displacement of the human agent from the subjective centre of operations as subject-creator, and second the replacement of machinic vision with human vision. This repositioning can be related to what the Anthropocene paradoxically hints at and what the technosphere problematises. As I have emphasised in the previous chapter, if there would be any subject of the Anthropocene epoch, it would not be

¹⁰⁶ Snow, “Converging on”, 58.

Anthropos but the sum of terraforming assemblages composed of human, nonhuman and inhuman actants, which are interconnected in complex ways and which all share distributed and differentiated agencies as Latour argues.¹⁰⁷ As we identify with *De La*'s dehumanised camera movements and move along with the disembodied eye, we coalesce into the technological apparatus and its frame through which our kinaesthetic vision scatters. This scattering and the film's solely machinic mode of production could refer to the dissolution of the central positioning of the human through its coupling with the technosphere that disenchant the modernist notions of control and mastery attached to the human subject as she/he is only a subcomponent within the quasi-autonomous global apparatus. In addition, this scattering might also point at the trembling of the understanding of the Earth as an inert matter and static background upon which the "man" supposedly at the centre steps. In other words, *La Région Centrale* could take us to Latour's 'metamorphic zone' that 'returns the object and subject to the back to ground' where the 'overanimation' of human as "knower" and the 'deanimation' of nonhuman and inhuman are abolished.¹⁰⁸ In alignment with the dissolution of the binaries between subject and object and nature and culture that the Anthropocene implies, Snow "collapses the distinction between the subject and object", "by using the comprehensive circular movements of which the film is composed", as film critic Bruce Elder points out.¹⁰⁹

By pointing towards this 'metamorphic zone' where there is no gravity and delivering "a posthuman, prosthetic enhancement of vision", the film, as Emmelhainz argues, "foregrounds the conditions of contemporary visibility".¹¹⁰ First, the state of being groundless in the Anthropocene is reflected in the experience of being involved in endless cycles of machinic apparatus, leading to a *sensorial vertigo*, as I have previously mentioned. Second, the centrality of the machinic vision which is an extension of the instrumental calculating thought of technoscientific knowledge production could be related to the algorithmic eye of planetary computation which can be exemplified by the dominance of aerial or satellite views and drones today. Since the film deploys several visual rhetorical tools of surveillance or drone optics such as targeting, sighting, framing and delivers "motor-sensory perceptions" by augmenting the possibilities of the camera with *De La*, it, in Emmelhainz's words, "announces the incipient normalization of perception as augmented reality and data visualization".¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Latour, "Agency in", 15.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁹ Bruce R. Elder, *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture*. (Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2006), 396.

¹¹⁰ Emmelhainz, "Images do", 134.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 133.

The pairing between epistemological orientation and vision can be discussed further through Michelson's suggestion that *La Région Centrale* "extends and intensifies the traditional concept of vision as the sense through which we know and master the universe".¹¹² However, I argue that by constructing *De La* "to correspond to the height of a human male body"¹¹³ yet replacing human vision with its machinic vision, *Snow* simultaneously employs and challenges dominant human-centred visual regimes in *La Région Centrale* and thus forges a questioning of the mastery and control attached to Foucault's "knower", who instrumentalised 'visualisation[s] of the planet as an enemy to be subdued' for 'the conquest of nature'.¹¹⁴ In this regard, Emmelhainz argues that "with *La Région*, machinic vision becomes an epistemological product of a human-centred point of view without stable reference points".¹¹⁵ However, I want to nuance her argument by drawing on Deleuze's previous discussion on the film, and emphasise that it is precisely the lack of stable reference points in *La Région Centrale* that transforms an anthropocentric view into a non-anthropocentric one. In this sense, I argue further that with its cyclic visual composition and inhuman perspectives, *La Région Centrale* transgresses the linearity of what historian Martin Jay terms as "scopic regime of modernity" that is based on "Cartesian perspectivalism"¹¹⁶ and points towards an Anthropocenic visuality.

2.3. Dissolution: Self-destruction

"The frame emphasises the cosmic continuity which is beautiful, but tragic: it just goes on without us."¹¹⁷

Read through an Anthropocenic lens, *Snow's* statement could refer to the convergence of human and Earth temporalities, since he questions the continuity of human presence along with the continuity of the Earth. This statement is in alignment with the rise of ecological awareness in the wider cultural setting tangent to the Whole Earth discourse which I have elaborated in the introduction of this dissertation. Therefore, through this statement *Snow*

¹¹² Michelson, "About *Snow*", 122.

¹¹³ David Tomas, *Vertov, Snow, Farocki: Machine Vision and the Posthuman*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 78.

¹¹⁴ Mirzoeff, "Visualizing the", 217. As is well known, the scientific gaze, coupled with the dichotomy of nature and culture, was enhanced by the Cartesian metaphysics and is a product of what Latour describes as the "instrumental and calculating thought" that forms "the very substance" Western modernity. As discussed in the previous chapter, this techno-scientific mode of seeing has sustained projects for the "conquest of nature" (a nature, that is, which has been externalised) and "a visualization of the planet as an enemy to be subdued".

¹¹⁵ Emmelhainz, "Images do", 133-4.

¹¹⁶ Martin Jay, "Scopic Regime of Modernity", in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988) 4-5.

¹¹⁷ *Snow*, "Converging on", 60.

responds to the rising debate around environmental degradation. In this sense, I consider this statement and *La Région Centrale* as a symbolical reflection on the dissolution of our being in the world as a collective subjectivity, posed by the environmental insecurities that are anchored to ecological debates in the late 1960s and early 1970s and extend into the Anthropocene debate today. According to Adams Sitney, this kind of symbolism is one of the characteristics of Structuralist Cinema where a “Promethean heroism collapses into a consciousness of the self in which its very representation becomes problematic; the quest for a redeemed innocence becomes a search for purity of images and the trapping of time”.¹¹⁸ However, it might be difficult to talk about a ‘purity’ of images in *La Région Centrale* as a significant portion of the film is out of focus and as the frame nearly collapses, both of which are unintended outcomes of material conditions of the film’s production. I argue that this impurity might underscore the tension between the limits of the frame and ‘the tragic continuity’ that flows through it and hence point towards the tension in the relationship between the agency of humans and the Earth. Moreover, the anticipation of the collapse of the frame might hint at the complicated power relationship between humans and the technosphere, and subsequently extends into the tension between the technosphere and other components of the Earth system. In this regard, the frame-power relationship that I have underlined in Foucault’s *Las Meninas* analysis becomes a tension between *De La*’s infinite movements and the frame’s challenge to hold the image in *La Région Centrale*. Being involved in *De La*’s ceaseless cycles is as Snow describes it, is “like eye weight-lifting! It’s muscular”.¹¹⁹ I will reflect on *De La*’s “muscular” continuity as “a metaphor of omniscience and infinitude”¹²⁰ underscoring the technosphere’s agency and temporality and discuss it through its paradoxical relationship with surveillance radars.

Both the story of the making of the apparatus and its location is critical at this point. White reveals that *De La* shared both its location and mechanism with another technological apparatus. *De La*’s infrastructure was derived from World War II-era anti-aircraft technologies selected from military surplus resellers. And very nearby, Canadian Forces Station (CFS) Moisie was in operation as part of the first air defence radar network built by the US and Canadian governments.¹²¹ Snow states that he wanted to convey an “absolute record of a

¹¹⁸ Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 355.

¹¹⁹ Michael Snow, “Michael Snow on *La Région Centrale*”, interview by Charlotte Townsend, *Film Culture* 52 (Spring 1971), 63.

¹²⁰ White, “Strangeloves: From”, 190-2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

piece of wilderness”,¹²² however, at a wider spatiotemporal frame it was not complete wilderness, because as White shows, only fifty miles away Bell Labs was celebrating its own technospheric apparatus as the “arctic eye that never sleeps” (*Figure 14 & 15*).¹²³ According to White, the ‘cosmic continuity’ *De La* was “part of” and ‘the arctic eye that never sleeps’ are both “metaphors of omniscience and infinitude” and “these metaphors of omniscience and infinitude were not matters of fact, but of desire materialized in surveillance apparatuses. Both CAM [*De La*] and CFS Moisie were not just technological but also imaginative systems”.¹²⁴ He argues further that “[t]he CAM [*De La*] and CFS Moisie were materializations of common anxieties and yearnings beyond the purview of the ascribed justifications for their construction. Conception of the technology itself was the purpose. For five days in 1970, the CAM and CFS Moisie spun side-by-side in a coterminous mission of self-regard.”¹²⁵ That is to say, both the mechanisms Snow and CFS use and the ambitions they develop while using these apparatuses cannot be disconnected from what we perceive through them. Although its existential intention was different, *De La* cannot escape being a part of the visual rhetoric of planetary governance, mobilised by the military-industrial complex and its related paradigms of techno-atmospheric control. This emphasis on the material kinship and the spatial proximity of *De La* to CFS Moisie not only provides a deeper critical understanding of *La Région Centrale* but also attends my contextualisation of it within the technosphere that necessarily involves an infrastructural reading.



Fig. 14 (left): Canadian Forces Air Defense Radar Station Moisie, Quebec, February 1967. Photo Credit: Courtesy of ADC Museum.

Fig. 15 (right): Bell Telephone Laboratories, 1959. Magazine advertisement. Image Credit: White, “Strangeloves from”, 191.

¹²² Snow, “La Région”, 56.

¹²³ White, “Strangeloves: From”, 186.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 190-2.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 192.

This infrastructural reading of *De La* can be brought into a productive relationship with McKenzie Wark's notion of "infrastructural unconscious". She writes that "[...] the Anthropocene draws attention to anthropogenic climate change as an unintended consequence of collective human labour. It calls attention not to the psychic unconscious or the political unconscious but to the infrastructural unconscious."¹²⁶ As I emphasised in the introduction of this dissertation, to investigate the Anthropocene is to also investigate the infrastructure that is used to analyse and model it, namely the planetary geo-cybernetic infrastructure through which the Anthropocene narrative itself came into being. In this regard, the 'infrastructural unconscious' implied by the Anthropocene is revealed in part by the processes of the military-industrial complex and the unintended consequences of technoscientific knowledge production. The exploitation of material and energy resources through systems of quantification for anthropocentric self-fulfilling prophecies led to a material stabilisation of these processes, nevertheless implying dead-ends and leading to a dispersal of humans through the technosphere. Therefore, the dispersal of humans through the technosphere in what Wark defined as 'mass-produced' 'modern ruin' can be regarded as the material manifestation of the complicated power relationship between humans and the technosphere. Yet, this dispersal is reciprocal, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey's succinct example reminds us, "the body of every human on the planet now contains strontium90, a man-made by-product of nuclear detonations and forensic scientists use the traces of militarized radioactive carbon in our teeth to date human remains (as before or after the 1954 Bravo shot)".¹²⁷ That is to say, it is "not just the environment that bears the trace"¹²⁸ of these technospheric remnants but also our bodies, therefore, I emphasise once again that being human is always and already being more-than-human. Within this context, drawing on its genetic origins in the war machines, a speculative technospheric reading of *De La* allows me to ask whether *De La*, the "whirling, wheezing, battery-and-gasoline-powered machine"¹²⁹ reveals the 'infrastructural unconscious' of the technosphere, which humans have created but upon which they do not have total control anymore.

La Région Centrale's framing of temporality identifies another key point of intervention for my positioning of the film as a geoaesthetic act. First, *La Région Centrale* is oppressively durational -that is another characteristic of Structuralist Cinema of which Andy Warhol's

¹²⁶ Wark, *Molecular Red*, 180.

¹²⁷ Elisabeth DeLoughrey, "The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific", *Cultural Geographies* 20, no.2 (2013): 179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474012463664>

¹²⁸ Yusoff, *A Billion*, 44.

¹²⁹ White, "Strangeloves: From", 188.

Empire (1964) is a well-known example.¹³⁰ That is to say, the passing of time identifies a key element in the experience of the film. In this context, Emmelhainz argues that due to its lack of “any historical reference” and “a priori meaning”, “the present is experienced as immediacy”, “a pure phenomenological consciousness” in *La Région Centrale*.¹³¹ Second, this immediacy is not felt in short bursts but rather as a long temporality. Snow’s intention was precisely to illustrate a long felt present, as he states that “I am not interested in ‘It’s 3 hours long but it seems like 30 minutes’. I am interested in ‘It’s 3 hours long but it seems like 30000 years’”.¹³² Importantly, I relate this statement directly with the temporal expansion that the Anthropocene implies and argue that this temporal expansion can be identified as another sensual and affective strategy *La Région Centrale* foregrounds in response to Anthropocenic thought and sensibility. As I have previously discussed, *La Région Centrale*’s invocation of ‘a long-view in time back to prehistory’ is mobilised through the dehumanised landscape and our encounter with the elemental forces of the Earth, exemplified in the rocks’ presence as glacial deposits and hence catalysing a contemplation through deep time. According to Sitney, in *La Région Centrale* we are faced with “a paradox of vision where there is no person to do the seeing—as if the lens were God’s eye, or the eye of time.”¹³³ I prefer to choose Sitney’s point on ‘the eye of the time’ rather than ‘God’s eye’ and emphasise that *De La*’s ceaseless cycling invokes a sense of infinitude and implies a positioning of its movements alongside the rotational movements of the planets.

Although film is by definition a movement in time, Snow almost turns temporality into a subject matter in *La Région Centrale*. Accordingly, he writes “I want you to experience the long duration of time because I’m dealing with it. In film you have time to use, it’s not like sculpture, where you have scale, weight - the weight thing in film is temporal”.¹³⁴ In *La Région Centrale* we feel the presence of time that is not defined by cultural parameters but rather through its identification by physics at a universal or even cosmological level. In this regard, *La Région Centrale* tries to visualise the “other” presence, namely Earth’s presence with its posthuman configuration. As Snow states “what was man-made would be the film. The earth would be seen by us, that is the spectators, . . . without us in it. The independent earth metaphorically

¹³⁰ The movie is 8 hours and 5 minutes long and consists of a slow-motion footage of an unchanging view of the Empire State Building. See for example, Douglas Crimp, *“Our Kind of Movie”: The Films of Andy Warhol*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012)

¹³¹ Emmelhainz, “Images do”, 133.

¹³² Michael Snow, “Notes from the Filmmaker” undated, as cited in Tomas, *Vertov, Snow*, 83

¹³³ P. Adams Sitney, *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*, (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 227.

¹³⁴ Michael Snow, “An Interview”, 52.

either before us or after us”.¹³⁵ With this statement, Snows not only emphasises the independence of the temporality of the Earth, which he previously referred to as the ‘cosmic continuity that just goes without us’, but also underscores *La Région Centrale*’s experimentation with a post and/or pre-historical account of the Earth. In other words, by extending to the far future or deep past, *La Région Centrale* foreshadows an Anthropocenic imagination in terms of temporality, and thus enables me to position it as a geoaesthetic act.

Alongside its conception of subjectivity and framing of temporality, the third component that identifies my positioning of *La Région Centrale* as a geoaesthetic act is its imagination of scale. First, Snow confirms *La Région Centrale*’s engagement with the question of scale by writing that it is “scalar”.¹³⁶ Second and more importantly, *La Région Centrale* achieves to deliver a *transcalar* journey within the immediacy of the present and hence strengthens its positioning as a precedent for an Anthropocenic aesthetics. As Snow reflects, “La Région Centrale becomes simultaneously micro and macro, cosmic-planetary as well as atomic. Totality is achieved in terms of cycles rather than action and reaction. It’s above that”.¹³⁷ I consider this simultaneous experience of varying scales from atomic to astronomic as an apt response not only to the infinite conditions of scalar interconnectivity that is posed by the Anthropocene but also its call for reading at several scales at once, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. The *transcalar* journey that *La Région Centrale* takes us into is mobilised through the Mobius loops of the camera and its variation in speed. And these loops across multiple scales enabled by various zooms can be linked with Latour’s statement “[w]hat the Anthropocene adds is much more conflictual, because the Mobius loop of the Anthropocene means that you never know when you are dealing with a piece of carbon dioxide or methane or fish or whatever ‘former’ nature”.¹³⁸ That is to say, just as the Anthropocene reveals inextricable interconnectivities between culture and so-called “nature” across multiple scales which can be imagined through the figuration of a Mobius loop, *La Région Centrale* deploys what I called scaling ‘as a means of connecting [...] scales usually kept apart’. In *La Région Centrale*, as the speed of *De La* converts the elements of the landscape into abstract forms, we lose the sense of scale or when it zooms on the rocks, it gestures towards a visual alignment of the circular forms of the rocks with that of the moon and leads us to build a relationality between differing scales. In this light, since *La Région Centrale* points to knots of scales through its cyclic composition, it exemplifies a *transcalar* imagination that captures

¹³⁵ Micheal Snow, “Recontres Internationales, Paris, 1990; Drafts of lecture on ‘La Région Centrale’ and ‘De La’”, as cited in, Tomas, *Vertov, Snow*, 118.

¹³⁶ Michael Snow, “The Camera and the Spectator: Michael Snow in Discussion with John Du Cane”, in Snow and Dompierre, *The collected*, 88.

¹³⁷ Snow, “Converging on”, 59.

¹³⁸ Latour, “Agency in”, 20.

moments in the entanglements between differentiating scales and that is foundational for identifying an Anthropocenic aesthetics as I have argued in the previous chapter.

The filmic apparatus and the crew were dropped by a helicopter on the surface *De La* was mounted as it was not possible to reach the location through the land. The reason for my emphasis on this type of landing is not to draw attention to the inaccessibility of the spot but rather to point at its contextualisation in the space race period that gave rise to the Whole Earth discourse. Not coincidentally, the film was conceived and shot throughout two years after the fulfilment of Apollo Mission in 1969. Snow indeed responded to that event, as he stated that “[e]ventually the effect of the mechanized movement will be what I imagine the first rigorous filming of the moon surface”.¹³⁹ Certainly, the “geo-ecological characteristics”¹⁴⁰ of the deserted landscape visually resonate with the moon surface. Yet, more importantly, he continues this statement further by pointing out that “[b]ut this will feel like a record of the last wilderness on earth, a film to be taken into outer space as a souvenir of what nature once was. I want to convey a feeling of absolute aloneness, a kind of Goodbye to Earth which I believe we are living through”.¹⁴¹ I highlight this rather melancholic statement because it reveals the relevance of *La Région Centrale* for its positioning as a future fossil, ‘as a future temporality turned back to the present moment’. More specifically, it is precisely Snow’s intention to create ‘a souvenir’ from the Earth that allows me to offer a projection of *La Région Centrale* as a future fossil. At this point, it is meaningful to point out that one of the working titles of the film project during its initiation was “Earth”.¹⁴²

This souvenir is supposed to function as a memento or reminder of what is lost, the wilderness. It becomes possible to contextualise this statement and *La Région Centrale* in the Whole Earth discourse since Snow not only conceptualises the Earth as a totality but also associates it with the wilderness, the Earth understood as a natural world unspoiled by human presence or actions as illustrated in the Whole Earth imagery. Importantly, through this statement Snow points to an end, ‘a goodbye to the Earth’, referring to a state he wants to preserve. Besides, not only he positions the film as a souvenir that reflects the whole Earth -albeit in the process of losing its “natural” state-, but also imagines it as ‘a film to be taken to outer space’ which is symptomatic of the rise of planetary imaginaries catalysed by space travel, Apollo missions in particular. In this regard, *La Région Centrale* follows the cultural formation of a sense of planetary citizenship and the rhetoric of an end in terms of a possible biospheric annihilation

¹³⁹ Snow, “La Région”, 56.

¹⁴⁰ Tomas, *Vertov, Snow*, 90.

¹⁴¹ Snow, “La Région”, 56.

¹⁴² Tomas, *Vertov, Snow*, 77.

underscored by alarming publications in environmental discourse in that period. Therefore, *La Région Centrale* obeys an apocalyptic logic meaning 'being-towards-the-end remains connected to a return to the present moment' which is one of the characteristics of the environmental discourse of its time and extends into the dominant cultural responses towards the Anthropocene. It responds to the presumable end by crystallising the then-present spatiotemporality in the form of a souvenir, or rather as a future fossil.

The melancholy in this statement reflects 'the Whole Earth worry' of the late 1960s and early 1970s which was enhanced by environmental movements and gained a worldwide impetus due to the global impact of the depiction of the Earth as a supposedly natural volatile unity in the Whole-Earth imagery. And as I have emphasised in the introduction of this dissertation, the anxiety caused by the Anthropocene can be seen as a derivative of "the global worry" of the late 1960s and 1970s. Snow confirms his positioning in this cultural context by writing that "[I]like a lot of other humans I feel horror at the thought of the humanising of the entire planet. In this film I recorded the visit of some of our minds and bodies and machinery to a wild place but I didn't colonise it, enslave it."¹⁴³ In opposition to the colonisation of the planet through technocapitalist modes of territorialisation, his technospheric apparatus was intended to be a manifestation of what he calls a "humane use of technology".¹⁴⁴ In this context, he justifies *De La*'s temporary presence on the landscape by writing that "I was really trying to show a place that hadn't been touched by us and to record it in a way, because when everything's covered with concrete, maybe that'll be interesting to see. I hope that never happens, but I mean that was an aspect of it because I'm really interested in the idea of preserving as much wilderness as possible in Canada."¹⁴⁵ Therefore, I argue that *La Région Centrale* becomes a future fossil by preserving what according to Snow is being lost, not only wilderness but also the idea of the Earth as an independent entity separate from technospheric activities.

Although Snow still obeys a logic of separability between nature and culture, he almost points at the inextricable entanglements between geo-bio-techno assemblages by writing that "[i]n complete opposition to what most films convey, this film will not present only human drama but mechanical and natural drama as well."¹⁴⁶ Yet, the 'human drama' cannot be separated from 'technological drama' in *La Région Centrale* since -as I have emphasised previously-, drawing on White, *De La* is a 'materialization of an anxiety and yearning beyond the purview

¹⁴³ Snow, "Converging on", 59.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 59

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 59

¹⁴⁶ Snow, "La Région", 56

of the ascribed justification for its construction'.¹⁴⁷ Its material existence was dependent upon the technological possibilities rising from the aspirations of total control linked to media cultures of the Cold War. In this regard, I position *De La* as a geo-installation not only through its material construction that "spawned from the urgency of total war"¹⁴⁸ but also through its temporary settlement with the intention to invoke a contemplation on the Earth itself.

An emphasis on the relationship between 'the global worry' that plays a significant role in Snow's motivation for creating *La Région Centrale*, and *De La*, as a derivative of war machines -albeit in a material sense-, enables me to problematise *De La*'s hectic movements in an Anthropocenic context. This relationship allows me to position *De La*'s hectic movements as a technospheric manifestation of a specific kind of anxiety, gesturing towards its self-destruction due to its extreme speed of rotation that leads to an anticipation of the collapse of the frame. In this regard, Colebrook and Wolfe's discussion of Anthropocene narrative as 'a doomsday device', of which the nuclear bomb is an example is useful because, in addition to facilitating an apocalyptic imagery that is inevitably tangent to the Anthropocene debate, this term points at the problematic relationship of humans have to their own existence.¹⁴⁹ Colebrook and Wolfe argue that they choose this term because the notion of "device" emphasises the technical mastery that differentiates humans from non-humans in an ontological sense and points at the technospheric agency that has led to the Anthropocene condition itself, yet as I mentioned above while introducing the technosphere, over what humans do not have total control or charge anymore. *La Région Centrale* aimed to be a souvenir that reflects the last wilderness on Earth however could it be rather a future fossil that reflects the story of the figure of Man's dispersal into the technosphere and his becoming inscription into the future through his self-destruction?

If I extend the former question further, could *De La*, starting with its material kinship with the war machines, refer to the 'doomsday device' in regard to the paradoxical self-reflexive relationship humans have with the technosphere, as they are not the conductor but only a sub-component of the quasi-autonomous global apparatus? Philosopher Graham Harman underscores the anxiety caused by the dissolution of the anthropocentric illusion that the technosphere and the Anthropocene point at, as he writes "in the Anthropocene, humans have lost control of that for which they are responsible. Although humans are always by some means involved, the human agency is not the superior power in the world and this leads to an

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 192.

¹⁴⁸ White, "Strangeloves: From", 188.

¹⁴⁹ Colebrook, Wolfe, "Dialogue on".

anxiety”.¹⁵⁰ In this light, towards the end of *La Région Centrale*, as *De La* turns and turns at an extreme speed challenging both its own material unity and of the cinematographic frame, one might ask further: would the anticipation of De-La’s self-destruction and dissolution of the frame in alien choreography, point to this anxiety and indicate the end of Foucault’s “knower”, as a detached subjectivity from the technospheric processes that he initiated?

To conclude, I shall reemphasise the main nodes that emerged through my analysis, allowing me to build up a mapping of a prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics. Following Snow’s initial intention of making a film about planetary motion, *La Région Centrale* indeed takes the Earth (geo) as its subject matter and focal point and thus exemplifies planetary imagination. It responds to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities posed by the Anthropocene with its radical conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale and therefore allows me to position it as a geoaesthetic act. Equally important for the hypothesis of this dissertation is that we can trace the epistemic origins of Anthropocene aesthetics in *La Région Centrale*, as it indeed decentres and dissolves the figure of Man who emerged in Foucault’s *Las Meninas* analysis in relation to planetary forces. However, the planetary force or geopower that *La Région Centrale* engages with is not what is regarded as natural such as the biosphere or atmosphere but rather the technosphere, which is initiated by the figure of Man with the aim of mastery and control over the Earth. Yet, since the technosphere identifies the semi-autonomous planetary apparatus of which humans are not a conductor but rather only a sub-component, *La Région Centrale*’s engagement with the technosphere points toward the complicated power relationships between humans and technosphere, signified by what is also referred to as cognitive or algorithmic capitalism. *La Région Centrale* achieves a decentring of the figure of Man through replacing human vision with machinic vision and turning human subjectivity into complete technospheric mediation. The rotational movements and extreme speed of *De La* induce a *sensorial vertigo* that foreshadows the sensorial conditions of being in the Anthropocene. As these hectic movements challenge the capacity of the frame to hold the image leading to an anticipation of the collapse of the frame, they reflect the dispersal of human agency in the technosphere pointing towards its dissolution and express an Anthropocenic anxiety. In the following chapter, I will continue to pursue this figure of Man’s coupling with the technosphere as expressed in the architectural imagination of Superstudio. Yet, this time, I will read the decentring and the dissolution of the figure of Man through an

¹⁵⁰ Graham Harman “A Talk with Graham Harman on the Anthropocene”, interview with Ingrid Halland Rashidi, (2015) available at: <http://www.backtothesustainablefuture.net/a-talk-with-graham-harman-on-the-anthropocene/>

ironical story of a speculative architectural project that, in Snows' words, 'humanis[es] the entire planet'.



CHAPTER 3: An Architectural Model for Total Domination: *The Continuous Monument* (1969)

Between 1969 and 1971, the Italian architecture collective Superstudio, Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, Roberto Magris, and Piero Frassinelli¹ developed the project *The Continuous Monument* which consists of a series of photo-collages depicting the planetary progression of a single monolithic white structure as it encircles the whole Earth. Conceptualised as “a negative utopia with critical intent”,² *The Continuous Monument* illustrates an architectural manifestation that according to the Superstudio “realize[s] cosmic order on Earth”,³ and thereby, I argue, crystallises Michael Snow’s feeling of ‘horror at the thought of humanising the entire planet’. In this chapter, I will re-read *The Continuous Monument* through an Anthropocenic lens and position it as the second geoaesthetic act -in this dissertation- which takes the earth (*geo*) as its subject matter and focal point and which I contextualise within the Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. First published in December 1969 in *Domus* under the title “Discorsi Per Immaginini” (“Discourses through Images”), *The Continuous Monument* amplified its worldwide circulation through its publication in international design magazines such as *Architectural Design* and *Japan Interior Design* under different titles and in different formats including a storyboard, a series of photo-collages and texts which will be the primary archival material of this chapter. I will analyse *The Continuous Monument* alongside *La Région Centrale* as another cultural manifestation of planetary imaginations that are mobilised by the Whole Earth discourse and respond to the Whole Earth worry that is characteristic of the period between 1968-1972. In particular, I will argue that like *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* responds to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of Earth and human temporalities posited by the Anthropocene thesis retroactively, through its conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale.

I will argue that by taking the Earth ‘as a site, scale and aesthetic condition’, *The Continuous Monument* foreshadows an Anthropocenic architectural imagination- which also indicates a switch in terms of the materials, the medium I look at in the flow of this dissertation, namely from a film to an architectural project, or from art to architecture. And such an architectural imagination is mobilised by Superstudio’s bold yet ironical statement that architecture is

¹ Florence-based architecture collective was founded in 1966 by Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia and later joined by Roberto Magris, Gian Piero Frassinelli. Alessandro Poli and Alessandro Magris joined the group after the Continuous Monument project.

² Natalini, “How Great”, 186.

³ Superstudio, “*Superstudio on*”, 28.

capable of realising cosmic order on earth. I take this statement as a departure point for mapping *The Continuous Monument* in the cultural nexus that I have started to form with *La Région Centrale*, in particular decoding its engagement with the planetary throughout the period between 1968-1972 that is characterised by the conceptual unification of the Earth in multiple disciplines and the rhetoric of crisis and survival fuelled by the ecological discourse and environmental movements. While *La Région Centrale* was engaging with planetary motion and reflecting on 'the cosmic continuity that just goes without us', *The Continuous Monument* offers an ironical architectural thought experiment on planetary organisation through deploying rhetorical tools such as "*demonstratio per absurdum*",⁴ thereby taking the idea of realising a 'cosmic order' through architectural means to its extreme limit. With its strictly unchanging white gigantic presence and total indifference to its environment, *The Continuous Monument* covers the entire globe offering a single and total architectural solution for the Whole Earth. This proposition not only parodies the pervasive reach of Modernism in architecture with International Style then but also, I will argue, points at the homogenising impacts of the dominant technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring and territorialising -that I problematise through engaging with the critical undertakings of Anthropocene narrative.

In this chapter, I will mainly argue that both through its close engagement with the conceptualisation of the Earth as a totality and its depiction of "forewarning images of the horrors which architecture was laying in store for us with its scientific methods for perpetuating existing models",⁵ as Superstudio puts it, *The Continuous Monument* problematises architecture's tight entanglement with Western Modernity and its instrumental and calculating modes of thought as well as its utilisation for capitalism with its extractive and expansive logic at a planetary scale. Within this prism and the overarching hypotheses of this dissertation, I will read *The Continuous Monument* as an architectural figuration or an allegorical representation of the figure of Man. I will specifically propose that it offers an ironical thought experiment on centring this figure of Man coupled with technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring and territorialising. And I will claim that by doing so, it points to the dissolution of the figure of Man, gesturing towards its ultimate end through manifesting a "logical extrapolation of 'oriented history'",⁶ an idea of a single architecture dominating the whole world. In particular, I will argue that *The Continuous Monument* points towards the dissolution of the figure of Man through its operation of total interiorisation. As there are no openings in the structure and no human beings in the scenes *The Continuous Monument* appears, it resembles a gigantic mausoleum or even a tomb for humanity. That is to say, *The Continuous*

⁴ Natalini, "How Great", 186.

⁵ Superstudio, "*Superstudio on*", 17.

⁶ Superstudio, "*Deserti Naturali*", 22.

Monument achieves this total interiorisation by entrapping every human being on the sites it colonises into its unpicturable interior.

In the first section of the chapter, “Spatiotemporal Expansion: ‘Discourses through Images’”, I will focus on the first publication of *The Continuous Monument* in *Domus* in 1969, namely “Discourses through Images” and show how *The Continuous Monument* achieves an expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and points at the collision of human and Earth temporalities that foreshadows an Anthropocenic imagination. Through this analysis, I will emphasise *The Continuous Monument*’s engagement with “the whole earth as a comprehensive site condition”⁷ and introduce the concept of what I call *historical vertigo*, which refers to the superimposition of the prehistoric past and the far future onto the present - and which I will also map in the following chapter on *Spiral Jetty*. In the second section “Natural and Artificial Deserts”, I will offer a close reading of *The Continuous Monument* storyboard, as published in *Casabella* in 1971 under the same title. Following the sequential character of the cinematic storyboard, I will analyse the development of *The Continuous Monument* and the rationale behind its existence and reflect on its cosmic ambitions. I will focus on the desert imagery that not only plays a significant role in the conception of *The Continuous Monument* but also carries significant Anthropocenic ramifications as a recurrent theme that is occupied by the geoaesthetic acts. In the last section, “Postcard from the Capitalocene”, I will underline *The Continuous Monument*’s mobilisation of postcard imagery that amplifies its worldwide circulation and domination and reflect on the potentials of the postcard as an Anthropocenic medium. I will conclude the chapter by reflecting on Superstudio’s engagement with the question of the end and offering a conceptual projection of *The Continuous Monument* postcard collection as a future fossil, positioned alongside *La Région Centrale*.

3.1. Spatiotemporal Expansion: “Discourses through Images”

For those who, like ourselves, are convinced that architecture is one of the few ways to realize cosmic order on earth, to put things to order and above all to affirm humanity's capacity for acting according to reason, it is a "moderate Utopia" to imagine a near future in which all architecture will be created with a single act, from a single design capable of clarifying once and for all the motives which have induced man to build dolmens, menhirs, pyramids, and lastly to trace (*ultima ratio*) a white line in the Desert [...] Eliminating mirages and will-o'-the-wisps such as spontaneous architecture, sensitive architecture, architecture without architects, biological architecture and fantastic architecture, we move towards the "continuous monument": a form of architecture all equally emerging from a single continuous

⁷ Benjamin Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015), 178.

environment: the world rendered uniform by technology, culture and all the other inevitable forms of imperialism.⁸

This is the English translation of the first and last paragraph of the text that accompanied the precedential images and *The Continuous Monument* photo collages in the work's first publication in December 1969 in *Domus* magazine. In order to offer a contextualised interpretation of the text, it is important to outline briefly its relationship with the visuals. This first publication entitled "Discourses through Images" consists of two pages facing one another; the first page is grainy black and white and the following one is a single full-colour glossy image, covering the whole page in a horizontal layout (*Figure 16 & 17*). The first half of the first page reveals seven vignettes placed around the aforementioned text and includes images of selected monuments around the world such as Stonehenge, pyramids, or Roman Aqueducts. The last row of the vignettes -perhaps suggesting a relationality between the two, due to their aligned positioning- were Kaaba and curiously NASA's Vertical Assembly Building (hereafter VAB) which was the largest monolithic cube of that time and could be regarded as a technospheric monument in an Anthropocenic context. The bottom half that is visually separated with the title presents four black and white photo-collages of *The Continuous Monument*. They show a white, strictly geometrical, viaduct-like giant structure extending to infinity in the frames, treating natural and human-made landscapes indifferently with its undifferentiated architecture. *The Continuous Monument*, characterised by its huge tectonic white mass and a black grid covering it, repeats itself almost in an algorithmic way,⁹ appearing at random sites across the world such as in a desert, in a city or next to a highway. The glossy photo-collage on the facing page which covers the whole page and is the most well-known image of Superstudio's oeuvre, reveals present-day New York from an aerial view. The reader is presented with another scene of *The Continuous Monument*, this time almost entrapping Manhattan in its geometrical holes. As the fisheye lens distorts the curvature of the horizon, this enormous architectural edifice extends to the end of the globe and affirms its progression on a planetary scale. At this moment, with the help of the visuals, it is possible for me to contextualise the text in a planetary framework and reflect on the work's engagement with the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities through an Anthropocenic lens.

⁸ Superstudio, "Discorsi per Immagini," *Domus* 481, (1969), 44; English translation in Superstudio, "The Continuous Monument," in eds. van Schaik and Macel, *Exit Utopia*, 126.

⁹ Peter Lang, "Superstudio: Inhabited Space", *DASH, Delft Architectural Studies on Housing* 11 (2018): 49.



Fig. 16: Superstudio, "Discorsi per Immagini", Domus 481 (1969), 44.



Fig. 17: Superstudio, "Discorsi per Immagini", Domus 481 (1969), 45.

At first, it might be hard to grasp the work's "critical gesture" due to the presentation of the text in "a deadpan manner".¹⁰ Yet, as I have emphasised previously since Superstudio positions *The Continuous Monument* as 'a negative utopia with a critical intent' and deploys rhetorical tools such as "irony" and '*demonstratio per absurdum*',¹¹ it is important not to mistake the forthright and didactic tone of the text as a manifestation of an intention for realising the project. To begin with, the highly controversial statement that architecture is capable of realising 'a cosmic order on earth' and this ordering can be attained through reason, not only foregrounds the work's planetary ambitions but also emphasises the role of rationality as the underlying logic for the existence of most monumental architectural structures throughout human history. Following this logic, we understand that *The Continuous Monument* is an 'extrapolation' of the unifying 'motives', this rationality that led to the creation of the most monumental signs of human civilisation, namely 'dolmens, menhirs', and 'pyramids'. And this historical trend is taken to its extreme limit through 'a single design', *The Continuous Monument* traced as 'a white line in the Desert', as the '*ultima ratio*', the final resort. I momentarily highlight the role of the desert here as Superstudio's emphasis on the desert follows its common cultural association with the end, in particular as a landscape that signifies an end, which I will elucidate more deeply in the following section.

The temporal expansion one witnesses throughout this text and the composition of images is rather apparent. First, as Bronislaw Szerszynski and Gerard Delanty point out, the monuments themselves exist "to mediate between human and other temporalities".¹² Thus Superstudio's choice of the monument for the function of the proposal clearly opens up human temporality to Earth temporality and can be regarded as an entry point for bringing *The Continuous Monument* into relation with the collision of human and Earth temporalities posited by the Anthropocene thesis. Second, by placing the seven vignettes of historical precedents such as the pyramids, Stonehenge, Kaaba and a contemporary technospheric building like VAB visually in relation to each other and asking the reader to build a specific relationality between them, Superstudio forces us to develop an architectural thought experiment based on a historical analysis extending through a time frame that goes beyond conventional architectural periodisations. This reading and the search for a common motive behind emblematic monumental structures in the text expresses Superstudio's expansive outlook on architectural history explicitly. More importantly, it reveals Superstudio's novel, almost Anthropocenic

¹⁰ Ross K. Elfine, "Superstudio and the Staging of Architecture's Disappearance", (PhD diss., University of California), 2009, 117.

¹¹ Natalini, "How Great", 186.

¹² Bronislaw Szerszynski and Gerard Delanty, "The Anthropocene Monument: On Relating Geological and Human Time", *European Journal of Social Theory* 20, no.1, (2017): 112.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431016666087>

understanding of the history of architecture, as they place a Neolithic monument like Stonehenge and a contemporary technospheric monolith like VAB under the same category and recontextualise architectural history in terms of human temporality.

In this regard, the positioning of dolmens and menhirs that are built for cosmological mediation and Roman aqueducts that are built for infrastructural purposes and even VAB that is built for space travel under one historical framework may seem contradictory in terms of their functional differentiation. Yet, by intentionally disobeying the periodical and functional categorisation Superstudio achieves two things. Firstly, they broaden the limits of architectural historiography. And secondly, they redefine monuments as architectural structures that could be representative of human temporality in terms of their material presence. Indeed, as one of the members of Superstudio Cristiano Toraldo di Francia reflects, Superstudio conceptualises these structures as “signs of a primitive layer of architecture as objects”.¹³ This idea of looking at architecture as a whole, as ‘a primitive layer’ means removing its cultural layer so that the buildings can be viewed as mere ‘objects’.¹⁴ And therefore, I argue, Superstudio foreshadows an Anthropocenic filter, since the relevant discussions on the positioning of the built environment in the Anthropocene context focus on purely its material aspects rather than the historicity or cultural meanings embedded in the buildings.

Accordingly, Superstudio’s approach has been categorised as “anti-historical ideology”¹⁵ by architectural historian Peter Lang or “extra-historical”¹⁶ by architect Andrea Branzi. While the former can be related to Superstudio’s intentional dismissal of the periodical historicisation of precedential monuments in this analysis, the latter can be related to the expansion of time frames through which the historical analysis takes place. And I re-emphasise that Superstudio’s radical expansion of temporality responds well to the need for the expansion of temporal frames of analysis that the Anthropocene calls for- as I have outlined in the first chapter. On another yet equally important note, both categorisations of ‘extra-historical’ and

¹³ Christiano R. di Francia, “Memories of Superstudio” in *Superstudio: Life without Objects*, eds. Peter Lang and William Menkings (New York: Skira, 2003), 70.

¹⁴ The roots of this architectural historiography can be traced back to Le Corbusier’s 1923 book “Towards an Architecture”, in which he reads monumental structures of the Industrial Age i.e. ships, as an inspiration for his proposition for an architecture based on pure form, stripped from historical ornaments of Eclecticism or Art Deco. In addition, Superstudio explicitly gives reference to Le Corbusier’s *Plan Obus* and *Villa Radieuse* as important for the development of *The Continuous Monument*. See: Cristiano Toraldo di Francia in discussion with Pier Vittorio Aureli, October 24, 2010, in Pier Vittorio Aureli, “Manfredo Tafuri, Archizoom, Superstudio, and the Critique of Architectural Ideology” in *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present*, ed. Peggy Deamer (New York: Routledge, 2014), 142. Also see: di Francia, “Memories of”, 69-70.

¹⁵ Peter Lang, “Suicidal Desires”, in Lang and Menkings (eds), *Superstudio: Life*, 43.

¹⁶ Andrea Branzi, “Notes on No-Stop City: Archizoom Associates 1969-72” in eds. van Schaik and Macel, *Exit Utopia*, 148.

‘anti-historical’ can be linked with what could be called the completely silent facade of *The Continuous Monument* as it takes modern architecture’s rejection of historical ornamentation to an extreme level and in architectural historian Felicity Scott’s words, “challenges architecture’s capacity or willingness to signify at that historical moment”.¹⁷

The temporal expansion in Superstudio’s approach can also be observed in their statement that claims that their images were “ways and maps for ancient and future journeys”.¹⁸ Not only the indication of going backwards to the deep past and going forwards to a far future but also the gesture of bringing these journeys in relation to one another catalyses what I call a *historical vertigo* which engages with the collision of human and earth temporalities mobilised by Anthropocene narrative. Superstudio activates such a *historical vertigo* through relating a monument from the prehistoric past like Stonehenge which can be considered “primitive”, with a building representing the then-contemporary moment and gesturing towards the future like VAB building, which is emblematic of technoscientific knowledge production mobilised by Western epistemologies representing a Promethean or an Apollonian ideology. More importantly, such a *historical vertigo* is fully achieved through Superstudio’s attempt of colliding ‘ancient’ and ‘future journeys’ in *The Continuous Monument*, as they refer to the buildings in Manhattan in their aforementioned New York photo-collage as a bunch of “ancient skyscrapers”¹⁹ in its later published storyboard in 1971. This phrase is an invitation for an imaginative jump into the far future and looking backwards at the contemporary moment. And this speculative jump not only suspends the historicity of the “modern” skyscrapers but also resonates strongly with an Anthropocenic understanding of temporality that indicates an ‘enfolding of the past and the future into the present’, as I have emphasised in the first chapter.

Superstudio’s temporal expansion is supported by a spatial expansion which underscores my claim that they respond to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis implied by the Anthropocene. It also identifies the second component that I propose as highly important for my identification of *the Continuous Monument* as a geoaesthetic act, namely their engagement with scale. The expansion of spatial frames of analysis and intervention to a planetary scale is quite explicit in *The Continuous Monument*, as it travels to one site after another, colonising natural landscapes like a desert or human-made landscapes like a highway, Coke Town, or New York, with its continuous linear structure extending to the ends of the photographic frame and thereby suggesting a world-wide circulation (see: *Figure 16*).

¹⁷ Felicity Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism*, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010), 257.

¹⁸ Superstudio, “*Superstudio on*”, 17.

¹⁹ Superstudio, “*Deserti Naturali*”, 22.

Yet, if there is one image that implies this planetary advance explicitly, it is the glossy photo-collage that depicts the giant infrastructural monument in New York (see: *Figure 17*). As we are looking at the scene from an aerial view from “the southernmost tip of the island of Manhattan looking westward toward New Jersey and beyond”,²⁰ *The Continuous Monument* uninterruptedly stretches its way across from Brooklyn to the end of the globe which is depicted as a curved horizon enabled by the fish-eye lens. And when we relate this image with the four black and white collages on the facing page where *The Continuous Monument* extends to the ends of the photographic frame and thus implying no beginning or end, one is triggered to imagine or sense the potentiality or possibility of *The Continuous Monument* “extend(ing) all over the world” as Superstudio confirms in a previous letter from Graz.²¹

The New York photo-collage implies that the scene is one of the “few moments in the global expanse of this imposing edifice”²² as art historian Ross Elfine writes and adds “its reach is global, its domination of the landscape is total”.²³ Indeed, over the subsequent years, Superstudio added more spots into *The Continuous Monument*’s uninterrupted global itinerary (i.e. an Alpine Lake, Taj Mahal, Colosseum in Rome) and developed the model which they would eventually call “An Architectural Model for Total Urbanisation”²⁴ of which importance I highlight by substituting “urbanisation” for “domination” in the title of this chapter as a recontextualisation of the work through an Anthropocenic lens. This substitution allows me, firstly, to underline the role (modern) architecture plays in the planetary urbanisation processes as one of the material mechanisms that led to the Anthropocene condition itself. Secondly, I argue that *The Continuous Monument* points to the domination of the figure of Man, this time illustrated as the colonising architectural persona who utilises and materialises the epistemological, universal ideals of progress and growth as the core values of Western Modernity and global capitalism. This architectural persona contributes to the expansion of these ideals and values by applying the same architectural model everywhere through disregarding the local differences on the sites he intervenes. In this regard, one of the founding members Adolfo Natalini’s statement that *The Continuous Monument* tells a “story of man’s control over the universe through geometry, philosophy, religion”²⁵ summarises the work’s

²⁰ Elfine, *Superstudio and* 116.

²¹ Superstudio, “Superstudio: Lettera da Graz. Trigon '69”, *Domus* 481, (1969), 49.

²² Elfine, *Superstudio and*, 117.

²³ Ross K. Elfine, “Discotheques, Magazines and Plexiglas: Superstudio and the Architecture of Mass Culture”, *Footprint* 8 (2011): 66. <https://doi.org/10.7480/footprint.5.1.732>

²⁴ The work was originally entitled “The Continuous Monument: An Architectural Model for Total Urbanisation” and was developed as a proposal for an entry for the international competition “Architecture and Freedom” launched by Trigon 69, they won the competition.

²⁵ Adolfo Natalini in interview with Tina di Carlo, in *Sketchbook 12 and The Continuous Monument: Adolfo Natalini*, ed. Tina Di Carlo (Somerset: Drawing Matter, 2018)

cosmic ambitions and engagement with 'control' and mastery. In addition, this statement provides one of the primary links for my intervention of deriving "total domination" from "total urbanisation".

In order to understand how *The Continuous Monument* achieves a planetary expansion, it is important to emphasise the role that the medium plays in the conception, realisation, and distribution of the work. First, as the title of the first publication suggests, if *The Continuous Monument* tells a story of total domination with its envisioned expansion all over the world, it does so through images. Superstudio's attempt to create a discourse through photographic collages of an architectural edifice could be linked with contemporary Earth artist Andy Goldsworthy's remark on his travelling *Arch* work (1997) as he writes "I am constructing this arch in images".²⁶ In a very similar manner, Superstudio also constructs *The Continuous Monument* in images, in particular, in photo-collages that enable a juxtaposition of different spatiotemporalities- as I have argued in the introduction of this dissertation where I introduced OPPO's work that was also a collage. Second, Superstudio utilises the distribution mechanisms of international design magazines, and more important for this dissertation is that they conceptualise these photo collages as postcards that are meant to be sent to the reader. *The Continuous Monument* visits random sites around the Earth and these visits are registered by the medium of the postcards that clearly indicates a planetary infrastructure since the postcard is a cypher for the global network which is the postal system. In an earlier publication Superstudio emphasises not only this arbitrariness in the choice of sites but also affirms the visual resonance of the photo-collages with the postcard imagery as they write "...this enigmatic continuous monument, this continuous monument by "example", we presented a few photographs chosen at random, rather picture-postcardish, and therefore worrying, like all images with "Best wishes from".²⁷ I will reflect on the importance of the postcard imagery in the work in more detail and discuss its relevance as an Anthropocenic medium in the last section of this chapter but at this point, it is important to underscore how Superstudio utilises the global network of the postal system for enabling its worldwide travel as if the postcards are souvenirs sent from the spots on its global route. In other words, *The Continuous Monument* seems to be on the move and through connecting these postcards with one another, we as readers mentally construct its itinerary and thereby imagining its 'worrying' planetary progression.

²⁶ Andy Goldsworthy and David Craig, *Arch*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. 1997), 3.

²⁷ Superstudio, "Superstudio: Lettera", 49.

In this regard, Elfline as well underlines the concept of movement and points out how *The Continuous Monument* utilises it, first through its architectural promise of extending worldwide as a monument on the move, then the implications of photo-collages as the postcard medium as *The Continuous Monument* inserts itself in the global network, and lastly through its wide dissemination through international magazines.²⁸ Consequently, as a subject in motion, *The Continuous Monument* connects spots around the Earth and encircles the whole globe. Superstudio points to *The Continuous Monument*'s ambition of encircling the whole Earth in the second paragraph of "Discourses through Images" text as they write "The Great Wall of China, Hadrian's wall, motorways, like parallels and meridians, are the tangible signs of our understanding of the earth".²⁹ This statement affirms the formal resemblance of *The Continuous Monument* to what one can call infrastructures of connectivity like motorways or The Great Wall of China, and takes their gesture of linear connectivity into its maximum limit by relating them to parallels and meridians, of which *The Continuous Monument* attempts to materialise through encircling the Earth- as we will see more clearly in the later published storyboard.

Evidently, *The Continuous Monument* takes 'the whole Earth as a comprehensive site condition' and thus exemplifies what is loosely classified as planetary architectures that gained impetus in the period between 1968-1972. *No-Stop City* (1969) project which proposes an infinitely extending grid by another Italian architectural collective Archizoom, Buckminster Fuller's well-known book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (1969) and the *Old Man River Project* (1971) which is a proposal for a domed city with a capacity of 125,000 people, and Paolo Soleri's *Archologies* (1969) which offer mega-structural typologies for accommodating very large populations can be given as examples in this regard. These projects are categorised as planetary architecture mainly because they indicate an expansion in (geo)physical territory for architectural intervention with a gesture of covering a large planetary terrestrial surface. Important for this dissertation is that these projects are closely tied in with the Whole Earth imagery. In this regard, as architectural theorist Benjamin Bratton identifies the aforementioned projects are manifestations of "Apollo-era architectural mega-utopianism"³⁰. Indeed, the televised moon landing event had a huge impact on Superstudio's conception of architecture, imagination of architectural territory and modes of representation and led them to develop the planetary engagement of *The Continuous Monument* further into other planetary projects. This engagement is expressed clearly in another planetary project of theirs entitled *Interplanetary Architecture* (1971), where they propose several interventions on the

²⁸ Elfline, *Superstudio and*, 123.

²⁹ Superstudio, "Discorsi per" 44.

³⁰ Bratton, *The Stack*, 179.

moon, of which the “Earth-Moon Highway” is emblematic (*Figure 18*). Their well-known *Supersurface* (1971) which proposes a seamless isotropic grid covering all habitable terrestrial surface suggesting a “constant nomadic living”³¹ is another key planetary intervention that needs to be mentioned in this context (*Figure 19*).



Fig. 18 (left): “Earth-Moon Highway” in “Interplanetary Architecture” (1971) republished in Other Space Odysseys, Greg Lynn, Michael Maltzan, Alessandro Poli (eds) (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2010), 113.

Fig. 19 (right): Superstudio, Gli Atti Fondamentali, Vita (Supersuperficie), Viaggio da A a B, 1971. Image Credit: Cristiano Toraldo di Francia. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/368475/superstudio-migrazioni/>

Before elucidating the relationships between *The Continuous Monument* and these two projects, I will underline the role the Whole Earth imagery plays in Superstudio’s conception of architecture, as I position it as integral for excavating the roots of Anthropocene aesthetics. One of the later members of Superstudio, Alessandro Poli highlights the transformational impact of the moon landing on Superstudio’s architectural imagination as he writes; “[t]he great media event had altered the meaning of architectural project because it had destabilized the scale of architectural relationships, the viewpoint, the perception of time and space, the depth, light, vital space, the concept of energy and especially the mode of representation.”³² This statement clearly expresses the degree to which the event transformed Superstudio’s understanding of architecture on multiple levels; the destabilisation of scale, the perspective, and the modes of representation, all of which in addition to identifying the very main tools for architectural design, gain a whole new planetary dimension. Poli reflects further on this event and provocatively argues that it was not the space that was conquered by humans but rather “[i]t was space that had conquered the earth, restoring the fascination of its true dimension,

³¹ Felicity Scott, “Superstudio”, *Artforum International*, 42, no.7 (2004), 177.

³² Alessandro Poli “Nearing the Moon to the Earth”, *Other Space Odysseys*, Greg Lynn, Michael Maltzan, Alessandro Poli (eds) (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2010), 111.

rather than limiting the imagination; it provided a different way of thinking about architecture, with the same visionary essence that is expressed by Fourier”.³³ So, it was the planetary that had conquered Superstudio’s architectural imagination which was until then earthbound and redefined the very meaning of architecture for Superstudio. Accordingly, he argues further “[i]n this context, from Galileo’s telescope onward, everything is architecture, not only the planets, moon, sun and stars but also the earth-moon highway, the huge transparent domes through which the stars are seen, the shifting of the planets and the footprints of visitors to the moon surface.”³⁴ That is to say, for Superstudio the planetary imagination transforms even what is defined as architecture and leads them to expand the territory of architectural imagination into a planetary context, which allows me to map Superstudio’s projects between 1968 and 1972 as direct architectural responses to the Whole Earth Imagery and as precedents for opening up a horizon through which an Anthropocenic architectural imagination can emerge.

In this regard, with its ambition of taking the whole Earth as its site of intervention, *The Continuous Monument* crystallises the planetary context in which the architectural project was reimagined to such a degree that it would be visible from outer space. As Superstudio writes in an earlier publication in 1969 in a letter from Graz: “a single piece of architecture, to be extended over the whole world, a piece of architecture capable of forming the whole world, [...], a piece of architecture easily recognizable (even by extraterrestrial beings) as the product of a civilisation”.³⁵ This statement expresses *The Continuous Monument*’s imagination of the Earth as a totality that is viewed from space -or rather nowhere as I have discussed in the introduction of this dissertation - and thus is in complete alignment with the Whole Earth imagery. More importantly, it also reveals *The Continuous Monument*’s ambition of total domination since this architectural intervention would be representative of ‘a civilisation’ which is obviously modern and Western, overpowering and eclipsing every other piece of architecture and hence civilisation on the Earth.

By offering a total solution for the whole Earth through architectural means, *The Continuous Monument* reveals several symptomatic conditions of the “Whole Earth” discourse of the late 1960s and early 70s, one of which is the emergence of planetary citizenship in response to Whole Earth imagery’s view from nowhere, as I have outlined in the introduction of this dissertation. In this regard, the planetary subjectivity implied in *The Continuous Monument* foreshadows the universalist and generalising tendencies of the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene in terms of subjectivity. That is to say, I interpret the civilisation that *The*

³³ Ibid., 111.

³⁴ Ibid., 110.

³⁵ Superstudio, “Superstudio: Lettera”, 49.

Continuous Monument signifies through total domination as an architectural manifestation of the Anthropos problematic in that - and I reemphasise Colebrook's statement here- 'the Anthropos is not the species. It's the portion of the species that thinks of itself as a species. It's the portion of the species that thinks of itself as humanity'. To be more precise, 'the civilisation' *The Continuous Monument* signifies is not humanity but rather the Modern Western civilisation or the figure of Man that thinks of itself/himself as humanity. In this context, the architecture 'that is capable of forming the whole world' with *The Continuous Monument* is an architectural manifestation of what Superstudio defined as the 'forewarning images of the horrors which architecture was laying in store for us with its scientific methods for perpetuating existing models'. Through illustrating these forewarning images with *The Continuous Monument*, Superstudio specifically problematises the dominance of technoscientific modes of knowledge production in Western modernity and the utilisation of (modern) architecture for its expansion and domination. And importantly, this problematisation allows me to read *The Continuous Monument* as an architectural allegory of the domination of the figure of Man in an Anthropocenic context.

Such total domination is mobilised through Superstudio's emphasis on "Single Design" as stated in the aforementioned letter and the text in the "Discourses through Images" publication. Superstudio's "Single Design" idea forms the conceptual and material spine of *The Continuous Monument* and since it is an idea that has evolved throughout Superstudio's larger body of work it provides cross readings between *The Continuous Monument* and Superstudio's other aforementioned projects, namely *Interplanetary Architecture* and *Supersurface* in terms of planetary domination. 'Single Design' started with *Histograms: The Tombs of the Architects* (1969) (Figure 20) and continued with *The Continuous Monument* and *Villas* (1969) and extended to *Supersurface* and *Interplanetary Architecture*. The core element or what could be called the geometrical code of the "Single Design" is the homogeneous isotropic grid. More importantly, as Cristiano di Francia emphasises, this grid "could be carried over to different areas or scales".³⁶ It starts with a small grid that occupies 3x3 cm space in *Histograms* and is scaled up to a planetary dimension in *The Continuous Monument*, *Supersurface* and *Interplanetary Architecture*. The grid is "a conceptual speculation"³⁷ as architect Rem Koolhaas puts it, and Superstudio's provocation of scaling the 9 cm² grid up to a planetary scale can be seen as an experimentation with spatial limits and scale in architectural

³⁶ Cristiano di Foralidia, "Histograms of Architecture 1969-1971", accessed May 17, 2019 <https://www.cristianotoraldodifracia.it/histograms-of-architecture-1969-1971/>

³⁷ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), 20.

imagination. And this experimentation, I propose, points towards an Anthropocenic architectural imagination. In this regard, Superstudio's work was crucial in terms of expanding "the territory of architectural imagination"³⁸ as Koolhaas also argues and almost reiterates a similar experimentation in terms of scale with his team in the "Exodus or Voluntary Prisoner of Architecture" (1972) project, of which its formal resemblance and similar engagement with the theme of totality to *The Continuous Monument* is notable (Figure 21).³⁹

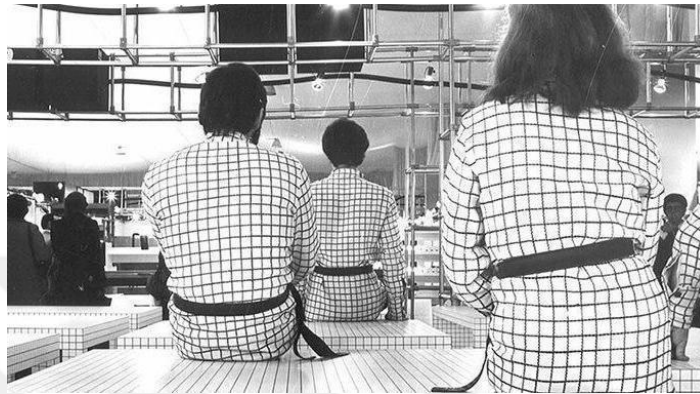


Fig. 20: Superstudio, "Histograms, The Tombs of the Architects", 1969. Image credit: Zanotti website https://www.zanotta.it/ContentsFiles/zanotta_710-quaderna_plus_2.jpg



Fig. 21: "Exodus or Voluntary Prisoner of Architecture: The Strip (Aerial Perspective)", Rem Koolhaas, Elia Zenghelis, Madelon Vriesendorp, Zoe Zenghelis, 1972, Cut-and-pasted paper with watercolour, ink, gouache, (40.6 x 50.5 cm) and color pencil on gelatin silver photograph, Image Credit: MoMa website: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/104692>

³⁸ Rem Koolhaas, "Sixteen Years of OMA," in *OMA-Rem Koolhaas: Architecture 1970-1990*, eds. Rem Koolhaas and Jacques Lucan. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 162.

³⁹ Adolfo Natalini gave a lecture in 1971 in Architectural Association London where significant future architects Zaha Hadid, Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas were in the audience.

Histograms project is significant as a beginning point for scalar experimentation since as Natalini emphasises, it introduces the grid as “three-dimensional diagrams”⁴⁰ that function as a genetic code for the development of *The Continuous Monument*, *Supersurface* and *Interplanetary Architecture* and become the primary tool for total intervention in these projects. One encounters a total interiorisation or what could be called total incorporation with *The Continuous Monument*, as the gargantuan infrastructure reveals no entry or exit points and seems like it evacuates the outside by emptying everything else around it, as there are hardly any human beings on the sites upon which *The Continuous Monument* grounds.⁴¹ In contrast, one witnesses a total expansion with the *Supersurface*, as Superstudio “inscribe[s] their ubiquitous grid, which spreads out across the landscape like a radical attenuation of The Continuous Monument” (see: *Figure 17*).⁴² In the case of *Interplanetary Architecture*, the grid builds up the “Earth-Moon Highway” that connects the Earth to its satellite, which seems like a reconstruction of an umbilical cord, as Superstudio develops the project on the theory that the moon is born out of the Earth (see *Figure 16*). Consequently, the totality is achieved through the “Single Design” and the “Single Design” is defined by the grid.

As is well known, in a wider context, the grid is a symbol of rationality and modernism as art historian Rosalind Krauss argues in her 1979 essay “Grids”:

Yet it is safe to say that no form within the whole of modern aesthetic production has sustained itself so relentlessly while at the same time being so impervious to change[...]There are two ways in which the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art. One is spatial; the other is temporal. In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature [...]In the temporal dimension, the grid is an emblem of modernity by being just that: the form that is ubiquitous in the art of our century, while appearing nowhere, nowhere at all, in the art of the last one. In that great chain of reactions by which modernism was born out of the efforts of the nineteenth century, one final shift resulted in breaking the chain. By “discovering” the grid, cubism, de Stijl, Mondrian, Malevich... landed in a place that was out of reach of everything that went before. Which is to say, they landed in the present, and everything else was declared to be the past.⁴³

Taking the close relationships between modern art and modern architecture into account, exemplified in *De Stijl* movement, Kraus’s analysis can be connected to Superstudio’s engagement with the grid in two ways. First, the grid also functions to declare the modernity of modern architecture. Yet, peculiarly, the *Histograms* project where Superstudio introduces

⁴⁰ Adolfo Natalini, *Sketchbook 12*.

⁴¹ The only exception would be the photo-collages that depict Coke Town and Taj Mahal.

⁴² Scott, “Superstudio”, 177.

⁴³ Rosalind Krauss, “Grids”, *October* Vol. 9 (Summer 1979), 50.

the grid is also called “The Tombs of Architects”. As Christiano di Francia states “with the *Histograms*, Superstudio proposed a deliberate suicide of architecture in the face of its complete absorption by capital”.⁴⁴ The grid through its relentless use in Modern architecture becomes a tool for the worldwide progression of International Style that necessarily involves the processes of architecture’s utilisation as a political technology for colonialist expansion. So, in that sense, the grid, with its possibilities for endless repetition, horizontal and vertical expansion, and more importantly standardisation becomes the primary tool for the pervasive reach of modernism and leads the way to architecture’s ‘complete absorption’ by capital(ism). Besides, through this ‘deliberate suicide’, Superstudio might point to the death of a certain type of architecture that engages with the local conditions of the site as opposed to the grid’s indifference to its environment. Superstudio speculates on the death of architects through the dominance of the grid in architectural practice and its relentless appearance in the built environment and takes this provocation to its extreme limit with *The Continuous Monument*, as it colonises the entire globe through its strictly unchanging grid.

Second, the ‘antirealness’ of the grid provides the conditions for its relentless expansion which disregards the local differences on the site it is laid upon and hence leads to a homogenous territorialisation. In this regard, Koolhaas writes “[t]he grid is, above all, a conceptual speculation [...] in its indifference to topography, to what exists, it claims the superiority of mental construction over reality”.⁴⁵ In an Anthropocenic context, the grid, as the main tool of Cartesian cognitive technologies,⁴⁶ anthropologist Kenneth Olwig argues, “formed the basis for an expansion, a global expansion that ended with overseas plantations”⁴⁷ and hence leading to its variant Plantationocene, that broadly implies the repurposing of the land into a profitable property, through a “radical [ecological] simplification”.⁴⁸ As he reflects further on this process: “[t]hink about enclosure. Enclosure is essentially a way of putting a Euclidian grid on the world. If you think about Euclidian geometry, the line has no width, the dot has no depth, no space, it does not exist. It was a mind construction[...] Then you take this mind construction and put it on the Earth, and you turn it into the basis of enclosure and property.”⁴⁹ In this regard, the homogeneous territorialisation of which the Plantationocene is a name for in a wider context is enabled through the conversion of the grid from a ‘mind construction’ into a spatial

⁴⁴ Toraldo di Francia, discussion, as cited in Aureli, “Manfredo Tafuri”, 142.

⁴⁵ Koolhaas, *Delirious New*, 20.

⁴⁶ Haraway et al. “The Anthropologists”, 559.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 560.

⁴⁸ Haraway, Donna and Anna Tsing, “Reflections on the Plantationocene: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing”, *Edge Effects*, June 18 2019. https://edgeeffects.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PlantationoceneReflections_Haraway_Tsing.pdf

⁴⁹ Haraway et al. “The Anthropologists”, 560.

tool by the dominating agency of the modern (architecture), as parodied in the *Continuous Monument*.

In addition, Natalini's claim that "architecture has more to do with agriculture than design"⁵⁰ provides another link for relating the implications of the grid with the processes of the Plantationocene since the overall grid of modernism as the primary tool for homogenous territorialisation can be read in alignment with the 'radical' 'ecological simplification' processes of the Plantationocene that involves the "substitution of peoples, crops, microbes, and life forms; forced labor; and, crucially, the disordering of times of generation across species, including human beings".⁵¹ In other words, the grid as an organisational tool mobilises reductive processes that convert difference into repetition, multiplicity into singularity and heterogeneity into homogeneity, and this conversion is crucial for understanding the spatial mechanisms that led to the Anthropocene itself.

In the last sentence of the "Discourses through Images" text, Superstudio points at this homogenous territorialisation by stating that *The Continuous Monument* emerges 'equally from a single continuous environment: the world rendered uniform by technology, culture and all the other inevitable forms of imperialism'. That is to say, the single design of *The Continuous Monument* that is formulated through the grid is a response or almost the inevitable result of the homogenising processes of technocapitalist modes of territorialisation. It is, in this context, that *The Continuous Monument* does not differentiate its formal existence. In other words, *The Continuous Monument* is single because the environment it relates to is homogeneous, thus it treats natural landscapes like a desert or urban landscapes like New York indifferently with its unchanging white, gridded enormous presence. Its viaduct-like mass sits wherever it situates itself in a coldly, statically manner and dwarfs everything it relates to in the frame with its gargantuan size. In all spots picked randomly on the Earth, *The Continuous Monument* changes only its orientation and nothing else.

More importantly, as I have previously argued, by depicting no human beings on the scene, it seems like *The Continuous Monument* evacuates the outside, and points to a total interiorisation. The monument reveals no functions, no openings like windows, no entry points like doors, and therefore leaves us with an unpicturable interiority. Through this total evacuation and unpicturable interiority, *The Continuous Monument* freezes the frame and

⁵⁰ Natalini, *Sketchbook 12*.

⁵¹ Haraway and Tsing. "Reflections on", 6. Haraway writes further: "The plantation really depends on very intense forms of labor slavery, including also machine labor slavery, a building of machines for exploitation and extraction of earthlings. I think it is also important to include the forced labor of nonhumans—plants, animals, and microbes—in our thinking."

converts every environment into a deserted landscape whether it is artificial or natural. And it is through this process of freezing that it points to the uniforming processes of Modernity and imperialism and hence to the commodification of the Earth as a whole as problematised by the Anthropocene narrative. As *The Continuous Monument* freezes the scene and suspends any historicity around it, it mobilises a *historical vertigo* and the skyscrapers in a sense become equivalent to the desert. In this regard, *The Continuous Monument* not only manages to illustrate a world that is rendered uniform, but also, I argue, points towards establishing an Anthropocenic filter through which we can view New York as an artificial desert and the skyscrapers as 'ancient' objects. And it is precisely this Anthropocenic filter Superstudio establishes through expanding the spatial and temporal frames of analysis and colliding of human and Earth temporalities that I position as vital for my positioning of *The Continuous Monument* as a precedential geoaesthetic act, signifying the epistemic origins of Anthropocene aesthetics. Now I will provide a close reading of *The Continuous Monument* storyboard through which I will analyse the emergence of *The Continuous Monument* and focus on its cosmological ambitions, its mobilisation of desert imagery and engagement with the question of the end, all of which carry important Anthropocenic ramifications.

3.2. "Natural and Artificial Deserts"

The Continuous Monument storyboard, which was originally created for a film for an American TV company in 1969, was published in *Casabella* in 1971 under the title "Natural and Artificial Deserts", in 4 pages that can be viewed at once, since 2 pages are folded inwards (*Figure 22, 23, 24, and 25*). The 80-framed storyboard appears in 4 columns and 5 rows per page and the drawings which are printed in blue ink are accompanied with small-sized black text -both in Italian in bold and in English. The storyboard illustrates "a peculiar encounter between Pop and Minimalism"⁵² and according to Natalini sits within a doubly critical "mediatory" space "between architecture and the visual arts".⁵³ The preference of the cinematic storyboard which operates at the threshold between visual arts and architecture over other conventional architectural mediums such as detailed orthogonal drawings accompanied by explanatory descriptive texts is part of Superstudio's critical engagement with the disciplinary borders of architecture and their radical approach that challenges and broadens the limits of architecture both on a representational and conceptual level. The reconceptualisation of architecture, as I have emphasised through Poli's previous remark on how planetary imagination converts 'everything' into 'architecture' for Superstudio, inevitably leads the collective to mobilise an

⁵² Scott, "Superstudio", 177.

⁵³ Ibid., 177.

innovative negotiation with the medium through which their architectural ideas were presented or conceived. In this context, their preference of the cinematic storyboard over conventional architectural representations could be traced back to Poli's letter to Natalini in response to the transformational impact of the moon landing event in which he writes "[n]o more pen and ink, pencil or photomontage: we will need the motion of the movie camera"⁵⁴ in order to deal with this transformation.



⁵⁴ Alessandro Poli, "A Letter to Adolfo Natalini", in Lynn, Maltzan, Poli (eds), *Other Space*, 80.

Accordingly, Superstudio's work has been categorised under "conceptual architecture" and "radical architecture" in architectural historiography that mainly emphasise their intentional withdrawal from architectural building practice and their highly critical, imaginative, and speculative projects that promote what is broadly called "paper architecture". In this regard, Natalini states that "[m]etaphor, demonstratio per absurdum, and other rhetorical expedients were all employed to broaden the discussion about architecture. Superstudio's involvement was manifestly didactic: to analyse and annihilate the discipline of architecture by using 'popular' means of illustration and consumer literature".⁵⁵ In other words, for Superstudio rhetorical tools and unconventional media become design tools for broadening the disciplinary borders of architecture. And by doing so, they define architecture as a mode of critical and speculative thinking rather than merely a building practice. This positioning allows me to explore *The Continuous Monument* as 'an allegorical architectural project' by drawing on architect Penelope Haralambidou as she writes:

Often the allegorical architectural project refers to another piece of work or site. The allegorical interpretation reveals an analytical inclination and the project becomes a vehicle for criticism. Allegorical design, therefore, is a critical method, which distances the architect from the construction site and redefines her as a commentator of spatial phenomena better grasped and analysed through drawing and text. A fusion between design and theory, the allegorical architectural project combines creative and critical traits and can be compared to a visual equivalent of literary or critical theory.⁵⁶

In this regard, *The Continuous Monument* indeed becomes a 'vehicle for the criticism' of (modern) architecture and its utilisation for capitalism. Its 'fusion between design and theory' and use of metaphor, irony, and '*demonstratio per absurdum*' provide me with the ground for recontextualising the project through an Anthropocenic lens. More specifically, it leads to my reading of *The Continuous Monument* as an 'allegorical architectural project' that critiques the domination of the figure of Man in an Anthropocenic context.

The playful character of the storyboard is counterbalanced by the didactic tone of the text and led to contradictory interpretations of *The Continuous Monument* as another utopian project of the late 1960s. Yet, Natalini emphasises the project's critical engagement and reflects on these interpretations as he states "[n]aturally there were those who could not see beyond the metaphors and treated everything as yet another Utopian proposition... Too bad for them."⁵⁷ I

⁵⁵ Natalini, "How Great", 186.

⁵⁶ Penelope Haralambidou, "The Allegorical Project: Architecture as Figurative Theory" in *Architecture and Authorship: Studies in Disciplinary Remediation*, ed. Tim Anstey, Katja Grillner, and Rolf Hughes (London: Black Dog, 2007), 118.

⁵⁷ Natalini, "How Great", 186.

reemphasised the conceptual intention of *The Continuous Monument* before analysing the storyboard in detail as it is important to reintroduce the rhetorical tools such as irony, metaphor and *demonstratio per absurdum* that play an integral role in the narrative and development of the story. Importantly, the storyboard format has a comic-strip character that provides the reader with a dynamic sequential reading and a myriad of possible relationships can be drawn between the frames due to the nature of the storyboard, which my reading will benefit from. I will now start my close reading of several rows in the storyboard, focusing on both the images and the text that accompanies them since this reading will further crystallise my proposition of *The Continuous Monument* as a geoaesthetic act that takes the Earth as a site, scale and aesthetic condition and responds to the Anthropocene retroactively through its conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale. My detailed analysis of the images and interpretation of the text line by line will help me to clarify the nodes that build up my mapping of the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics, implying the Anthropocenic epistemic rupture that decentres and dissolves the figure of Man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces.

The Continuous Monument storyboard starts with a frame that brings cosmological imagination in relationship with the scientific revolution as it depicts Johannes Kepler's model of the Solar System from *Mysterium Cosmographicum* (1596) (Figure 26). As is well known, Kepler's law of planetary motion led him to be a key figure in the 17th- century scientific revolution which plays a foundational role in shaping and advancing Western modernity. The text describes this scene in a neutral tone, "Kepler tried to inscribe elementary solids within the orbits of the planet".⁵⁸ This textbook neutrality is the tone that Superstudio uses throughout the whole storyboard and reflects Superstudio's 'manifestly didactic' involvement as previously mentioned by Natalini. The second frame reveals Vitruvius and Leonardo da Vinci's famous inscriptions of man within a geometrical layout and Superstudio writes: "Vitruvius and Leonardo inscribed man within circle, the Indians placed chaos within the mandala."⁵⁹ This frame is important for the dissertation as it illustrates the figure of Man as the measure of all things, of which I give a critical account through reading the geoaesthetic acts. The following frames depict the golden section and a mandala and are accompanied by the text where the attempt to give an order to chaos through geometry is further emphasised. This first row is significant because it outlines the cosmological context in which *The Continuous Monument* will operate. By emphasising the scientific revolution, it implies how humans through reason and its visual counterpart geometry relate to their widest environment, the universe and

⁵⁸ Superstudio, "Deserti Naturali", 22.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 22.

attempt to give order to it or to 'control' it, as Natalini puts it. In other words, it lays the ground through which the technoscientific conception of the cosmos will emerge and dominate the entire planet in the architectural form of *The Continuous Monument*.

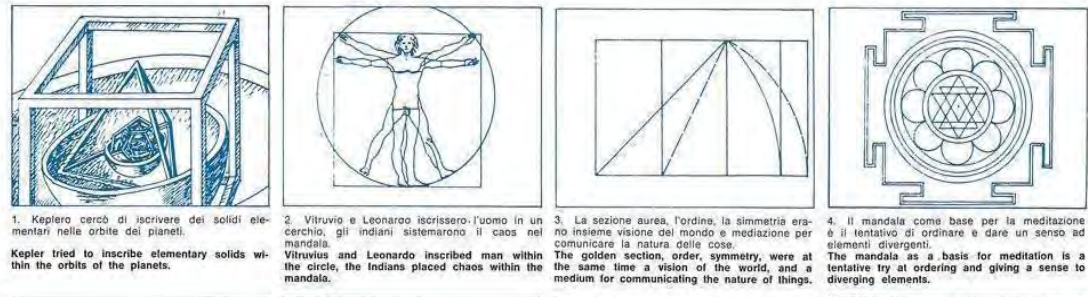


Fig. 26: *The first row of The Continuous Monument storyboard, Superstudio, as published in Superstudio, "Natural and Artificial Deserts", Casabella 358 (1971): 22.*

The second row depicts the figure of Man in three of the four frames (Figure 27). I underline this because it is the almost unsurprising maleness of this figure that is allegedly representative of humans and is symptomatic of the patriarchal codes that are deeply embedded in the sociocultural context Superstudio operates. Coming back to Colebrook's nuanced differentiation on Anthropos which I have reemphasised previously in relation to the 'civilisation' discussion, and recontextualising here, it is this figure of Man that thinks of himself as human, and that Superstudio considers as representative of humanity. And it is specifically this consideration which albeit being highly problematic, enables me to position *The Continuous Monument* as an allegorical representation or an architectural derivative of the figure of Man. The first frame of the second row reveals a square grid juxtaposed on a man's face and indicates the practices of delineating and measuring particularly in a technoscientific mode, and Superstudio writes: "[t]he desire to render the world clear and distinct has left regular paths upon the human face and on the world..."⁶⁰ In the following frame, one recognises Le Corbusier's 'Modulor' and the text concludes the sentence in the former frame: "creating systems based at one and at the same time upon man and geometry (such as Modulor)".⁶¹ The third frame depicts what appears to be gear wheels and Superstudio writes: "[m]an is not the centre of things, he is merely one of the vertices of the infinite polygon that unites the cosmos, the world, reason"⁶² which momentarily makes one think that they offer a critique of the centring of the figure of Man, but one cannot be sure yet. The last frame reveals

⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁶¹ Ibid., 22.

⁶² Ibid., 22.

a man's face in profile and the text follows: "[a]strology connected human destinies and the stars; science is ever revealing further links between the parts and the whole".⁶³

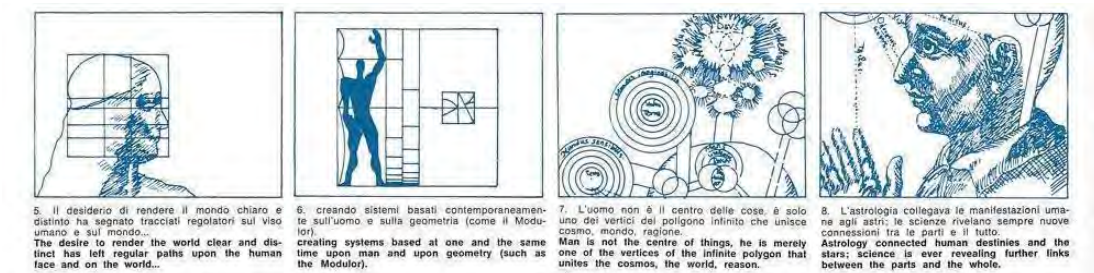


Fig. 27: The second row of *The Continuous Monument* storyboard, *Superstudio*, as published in *Superstudio*, "Natural and Artificial Deserts", *Casabella* 358 (1971):22.

The alignment *Superstudio* draws between the figure of Man and the world and the transition from astrology to science reveal once again their emphasis on the technoscientific understanding of the universe and implies the beginning of what Natalini described as 'man's control over the universe through geometry'. Besides, *Superstudio*'s positioning of the 'reason' as a primary node that forms the nexus between itself, the cosmos and the world, and thereby attaching a transcendental value to it, is symptomatic of what Rosi Braidotti defined as '[t]he boundless faith in reason as the motor of human evolution' and "ties in with the teleological prospect of the rational progress of humanity through science and technology".⁶⁴ Consequently, these two rows outline the close relationship between reason and geometry that plays a foundational role in the technoscientific conception of the Earth and provide the ground for which architecture in the form of *The Continuous Monument* will embrace the grandiose task of 'realizing cosmic order on earth'.

The following two rows depict the historical precedents that were used in the "Discourses through Images" publication (Figure 28). As I have reflected on how this selection of images implies a spatiotemporal expansion of analysis and points to an Anthropocenic architectural imagination in the previous section, I will now focus on the text that accompanies the drawings of these precedents since it reveals the rationale behind *The Continuous Monument*'s emergence and elucidates the historical analysis they have started with the former publication in a more detailed way, leading to an analytical justification for *The Continuous Monument*'s intention, form and scale. A historical analysis of monumental human signs on the Earth leads to a very simple yet strong consequence for *Superstudio* that is the most monumental architectural signs of humanity are characterised by two aspects, they are either "elementary

⁶³ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁴ Braidotti, "Four Theses", 22.

solids" or "continuous lines". The following two frames depict Stonehenge and Pyramid and Superstudio writes: "[e]lementary forms are witnesses to different visions of the world, Dolmen, menhirs, the sacred circle of Stonehenge, ziggurats of Babylon and of the Mayas, the pyramids of Egypt were monuments against death, one way to survive, in recognizing oneself." ⁶⁵ Not only their emphasis on elementary solids as the common form one witnesses with these monuments but also its link with the first frame of the storyboard where Kepler was inscribing elementary solids into planetary orbits points at the intersection between geometry and cosmology, in particular how geometry is used as a mediation between human and the cosmos.

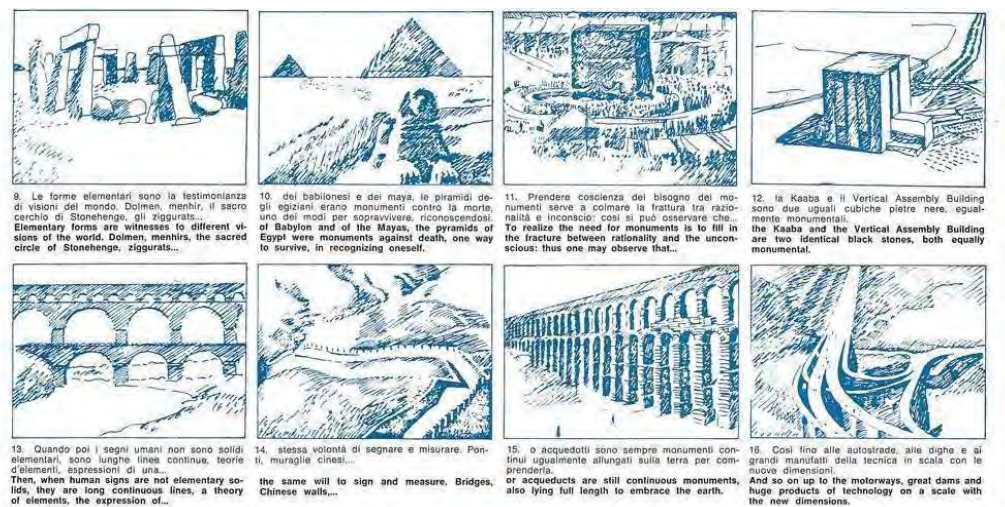


Fig. 28: The third and fourth row of *The Continuous Monument* storyboard, Superstudio, as published in Superstudio, "Natural and Artificial Deserts", Casabella 358 (1971):22.

More importantly, Superstudio highlights that in addition to communicating with planetary elementary forces, these monuments render the human desire to sustain "against death", "to survive", to leave an architectural mark as a self-inscription of the human temporality against Earth temporality, as a recognition of oneself in an Anthropocenic context. In other words, as I have emphasised previously, the monuments exist to mediate between human and Earth temporalities and as cultural theorist Robert P. Harrison points out "[i]nsofar as it builds the worlds we dwell in, architecture transforms geological time into human time, which is another way of saying it turns matter into meaning."⁶⁶ Architecture's transformation of 'geological time into human time' is realised not only through the geometrical configurations that according to Superstudio are 'a vision of the world' but also converting the material deposit of geology into spatial configurations that provide the environmental conditions through which human existence and its cultural legacy can continue. In this regard, I argue that Superstudio points

⁶⁵ Superstudio, "Deserti Naturali", 22.

⁶⁶ Robert P. Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3.

towards an Anthropocenic understanding of monuments since they read them as material manifestations of human temporality that in a sense resist against the ephemerality of the human temporality in the face of Earth temporality, or what Snow previously referred to as ‘the cosmic continuity that just goes on without’ humans.

The storyboard continues with two frames depicting Kaaba and VAB, as almost a continuation of their aligned positioning in “Discourses Through Images” publication, with an accompanying text that emphasises the relationality between the two further: “[t]o realize the need for monuments is to fill in the fracture between rationality and the unconscious. Thus one may observe that the Kaaba and the Vertical Assembly Building are two identical black stones, both equally monumental.”⁶⁷ This observation, in addition to expanding the temporal frames of analysis and thus foreshadowing an Anthropocenic thought experiment as I have argued in the previous section, provides a good example of Superstudio’s utilisation of *reductio ad absurdum*. To be more precise, read through an Anthropocenic lens, by pointing out the formal kinship between two examples from opposite ends, Kaabe signifying religion and therefore ‘unconscious’ and VAB signifying rationality and therefore humanism, Superstudio might point out that although both structures are representative of two contrasting value systems, two different worldviews, they might be equivalent in terms of their potentially ephemeral dominance in cultural history. In other words, as the Anthropocene positions the cultural history throughout deep time, it inevitably neutralises the cultural value attached to any architectural artefact including the most monumental structures of human history.

More importantly, Superstudio’s emphasis on black stones enables me to position the work in relation to Stanley Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) which was made one year before *The Continuous Monument* and had a significant impact on Superstudio.⁶⁸ Felicity Scott emphasises this relationality as well and identifies *The Continuous Monument* as “a kind of Space Odyssey wryly elaborating the ‘logical extrapolation of Oriented history’”.⁶⁹ Indeed, the identification of a religious monument and technoscientific monolith as black stones defines a key intervention in Superstudio’s re-orientation of history. As they write:

We belong to a long history of black stones, rocks fallen from the sky or erected in the earth: meteorites, dolmens, obelisks. Cosmic axis, vital elements, elements reproducing the relationships of sky and earth, witnesses to marriages celebrated, the tablets of the law, final acts of dramas of various lengths. From the Holy Kaaba to

⁶⁷ Superstudio, “Deserti Naturali”, 22.

⁶⁸ Gian Piero Frassinelli, Interview with Craig Buckley August 17.2011. In Craig Buckley, *Graphic Assembly: Montage, Media, and Experimental Architecture in the 1960s*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019). Frassinelli states that the group saw the film repeatedly after it was released in Italy in 1968.

⁶⁹ Scott, “Superstudio”, 177.

the Vertical Assembly Building. A square block of stone placed on the earth is a primary act, it is a testimonial that architecture is the centre of the relationships of technology, sacredness, utilitarianism. It implies man, machines, rational structures and history. The square block is the first and ultimate act in the history of ideas in architecture. Architecture becomes a closed, immobile object that leads to nowhere but to itself and to the use of reason.⁷⁰

The strong statement that 'we [humans] belong to a long history of black stones' and to justify this belonging not only through cultural manifestations such as prehistoric monuments but also planetary forces like meteorites reflects the group's further emphasis on monumental building practice in terms of their intention for cosmological mediation, specifically as a mediation between nature and culture as 'they reproduce the relationships of sky and earth'. Superstudio's trajectory of the black square stone, from Kaaba which is a manifestation of faith or 'unconscious' as Superstudio puts it, to the VAB which is emblematic of rationality and technoscientific progress leading to space travel, resonates strongly with Kubrick's positioning of the black monolith as a key element that links prehistoric times to the space age in *2001: Space Odyssey* -as it comes up in four episodes as a binding element in the film. In this regard, I argue that through situating the black square stone or black monolith in a central position, both works hints at an entwinement of the architectural element of the obelisk and the trajectory of human evolution and thereby foreshadowing an Anthropocenic imagination. In this context, Superstudio's identification of 'the square block as the first and ultimate act in the history of ideas in architecture', as a primary sign of human civilisation establishes the existential and formal ground on which *The Continuous Monument* can arise. In other words, Superstudio derives *The Continuous Monument* from a square block as a punctual element both in existential and formal terms.

In the following row, by depicting emblematic examples of infrastructures of connectivity such as Roman aqueducts, The Wall of China and a highway, Superstudio introduces the second element, the linearity that completes *The Continuous Monument's* formal composition as they write: "[t]hen when human signs are not elementary solids, they are long continuous lines, a theory of elements, the expression of the same will to sign and measure. Bridges, Chinese Walls, or aqueducts are still continuous monuments, also lying in full length to embrace the Earth. And so on up to the motorways, great dams and huge products of technology on a scale with new dimensions".⁷¹ These 'long continuous lines' that 'embrace the earth' prepare the way through which *The Continuous Monument* moves towards a planetary intervention. Importantly, their emphasis on 'a new scale with new dimensions' is evidently a planetary

⁷⁰ Superstudio, "Discorsi", 44.

⁷¹ Superstudio, "Deserti Naturali", 22.

scale and this time the trajectory they draw points directly towards the Anthropocene, in particular, the technosphere as they give reference to geoengineering projects such as dams or global transportation networks such as highways.

After we as readers explore the rationale behind *The Continuous Monument*, the existential and formal trajectory that leads to *The Continuous Monument*, in the last row of the first page we witness the physical emergence of the genetical component of *The Continuous Monument* and read the text that reveals the link to the title of the publication, namely the desert (Figure 29). The desert imagery plays a crucial role in the conception of *The Continuous Monument* and the narrative of the storyboard. More importantly for this dissertation, it is one of the themes or imaginaries that my selection of geoaesthetic acts share in common and therefore constitutes one of the nodes in my comparative reading that builds up my mapping of the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics. While *La Région Centrale* was set on a desert-like barren landscape gesturing towards the moon surface and setting the tone for mobilising a cosmological imagination, *The Continuous Monument* is emerging from a desert. Besides, Superstudio centralises the theme of the desert by naming the story “natural and artificial deserts”.

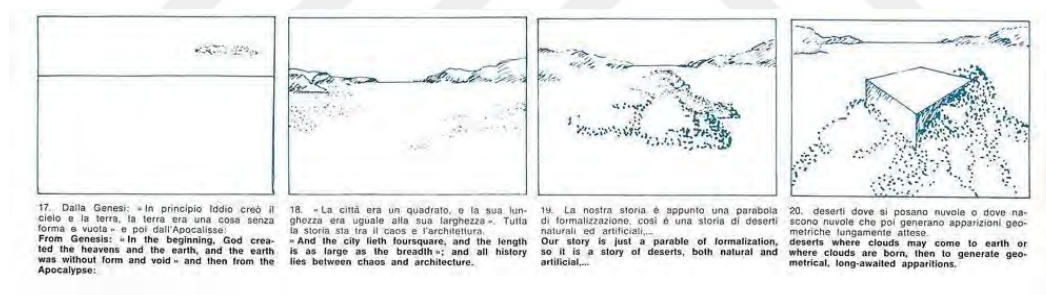


Fig. 29: The last row of the first page of *The Continuous Monument* storyboard, Superstudio, as published in Superstudio, “Natural and Artificial Deserts”, Casabella 358 (1971):22.

Superstudio introduces the desert through a biblical narrative and prepares the way in which architecture in the form of *The Continuous Monument* will engage with teleological and cosmological questions. The first frame shows only a line of horizon with some indication of clouds and in the second frame, some mountains appear over the horizon that might imply the passing of time at a geological scale, what one could refer to as Earth temporality. The text below the two frames involves a direct quote from the Bible: “[f]rom Genesis: ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void’ and then from the Apocalypse: ‘And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth’

and all history lies between chaos and architecture.”⁷² My main point in this reading is that Superstudio positions architecture within a teleological context. And equally important for this dissertation is that *The Continuous Monument* is engaging with the question of beginnings and ends through the desert imagery which leads to another link with the Anthropocene narrative as it is a threshold concept that problematises beginning and ends, whether it is the beginning of the domination of humans over the planet or the end of the world as we know it. Therefore, I argue that Superstudio’s positioning of architecture in a teleological context through the desert imagery aligns well with the consequentialist framing of geology or the apocalyptic logic of the Anthropocene narrative.

The next frame reveals a dust cloud in the desert and is followed by the emergence of the square block which identifies the genealogical component of *The Continuous Monument* and which according to Superstudio refers to the ‘first and ultimate act’ in the history of architecture as previously emphasised. Superstudio writes: “our story is just a parable of formalization, so it is a story of deserts, both natural and artificial, deserts where clouds may come to earth or where clouds are born, then to generate geometrical long-awaited apparitions”.⁷³ This sentence is particularly significant for my recontextualisation of *The Continuous Monument* in an Anthropogenic framework. Re-read through an Anthropogenic lens, the natural deserts ‘where clouds may come to earth’ could be related to global wind systems cycling on and through the deserts all around the Earth, such as Siccoco winds that are born in the Sahara desert region. The artificial deserts ‘where clouds are born’, on the other hand, could refer to the atomic bomb testing sites in the deserts of America where mushroom clouds emerged, or more importantly to the detonations of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 which wiped out almost all forms of life and created an artificial desert.

In this regard, Superstudio states quite boldly in another earlier publication that “[t]he end of architecture is neither to be found in ‘architecture on architecture’ nor in the possible evasions of meta-projects or spiritual retreats. The end of architecture is only a dawn, which we know to be possible by now, with an enormous luminous mushroom.”⁷⁴ Importantly, through this statement, Superstudio engages with the question of the end and repositions architecture within a wider geopolitical context, in particular under the shadow of the Atomic bomb in the Cold War reality. In an Anthropogenic context, the end of architecture that Superstudio points at could be related to McKenzie Wark’s projection of what will be left at the end of “human

⁷² Ibid., 22.

⁷³ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁴ Superstudio, ‘Superstudio: Projects and Thoughts’, *Domus* 479, (October 1969), 38.

time” as she writes: “[o]ur permanent legacy will not be architectural, but chemical.”⁷⁵ In a sense, both projections point to the volatile positioning of architecture in an Anthropocenic context, while the former underlines the instantaneous evaporation of the built environment through war machines and emphasises its conversion into an artificial desert, the latter underscores the degree to which architecture becomes irrelevant as a cultural, “figurative”⁷⁶ form at the end posed by the Anthropocene. Architecture or built environment will sustain its presence only on material terms and turn into unidentifiable particles in a chemical agglomeration, or as Wark puts it, in the ‘mass-produced’ ‘modern ruin’.⁷⁷

In this regard, one of Superstudio’s later works, *The Wife of Lot* (1978) can be read as another manifestation of their engagement with “the inevitable dissolution of architecture”⁷⁸ and can be related to Wark’s projection in terms of the collision of human and Earth temporalities. In this installation that was built for the Venice Architecture Biennale, five salt moulds representing five historical stages of architecture: the pyramid, the coliseum, the basilica, Versailles, and the Villa Savoye “are slowly corroded by drops of water that fall from an intravenous drip apparatus”.⁷⁹ As “they dissolve, they each reveal a symbolic object enclosed within”⁸⁰ and Superstudio writes: “architecture exists in time as salt exists in water”.⁸¹ My main take on this statement is that this chemical process of dissolution strongly resonates with an Anthropocenic imagination in terms of the collision of human and Earth temporalities. The demonstration of the dissolution of architecture can be read in relationship to Wark’s projection on ‘our permanent legacy’ as being ‘chemical’ rather than ‘architectural’ and her further remark that “[a]fter the last dam bursts, after the concrete monoliths crumble into the lone and level sands, modernity will leave behind a chemical signature, in everything from radioactive waste to atmospheric carbon. This work will be abstract, not figurative”.⁸² By dissolving the salt models, representing architecture, in water, representing time, Superstudio indeed points to the inevitable dissolution of architecture and therefore sets up a precedent for an Anthropocenic architectural thought experiment that engages with the dissolution of human temporality in the face of Earth temporality.

⁷⁵ McKenzie Wark, “An Inhuman Fiction of Forces”, in *Leper Creativity: Cyclonopedia Symposium* eds. Ed Keller, Nicola Masciandro and Eugene Thacker, (New York: Punctum, 2012), 40.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁸ Lang, “Suicidal Desires”, 47.

⁷⁹ Simone Menegoi, “Pinksummer” exhibition text, Geneva 28 March 21–June 6, 2014, transl. by Marguerite Shore. Available at <https://www.artforum.com/picks/superstudio-46743>

⁸⁰ Wark, “An Inhuman”, 40.

⁸¹ Menegoi, “Pinksummer”

⁸² Wark, “An Inhuman”, 40.

With the title “Natural and Artificial Deserts”, Superstudio suggests a reading of ‘artificial deserts’ in opposition or in tandem with ‘natural deserts’. This interrelational reading opens up various interpretations of the question of beginnings and ends associated with desert imagery. As is well known, the association of desert with “tabula rasa” implies the conditions through which a beginning might emerge and the emergence of *The Continuous Monument* relies on this association. Superstudio figures the beginning and the end of life through the desert imagery; whereas the natural desert implies a beginning, the artificial one implies an end in their ‘parable of formalization’. However, as philosopher Micheal Marder argues, the desert is “the refashioning of earth in the image of abstract thought”, thus it is a cultural “invention”.⁸³ As he argues further “[t]he desert, then, is a state of mind that levels difference and treats everything as the formally equal and interchangeable parts of the void.”⁸⁴ By starting the story of the emergence of *The Continuous Monument* in the desert, Superstudio indeed refashions ‘the earth in the image of abstract thought’. Not only their use of geometry itself is emblematic of abstract thought but their reliance on the association of the desert with void through which abstract thought can emerge is notable. More importantly, as I have argued in the previous section, by freezing the frame and thus the environment it intervenes, *The Continuous Monument* implies a desertification process, it converts New York, for instance, into an artificial desert. With its unchanging presence, it indeed ‘levels difference’ and ‘treats everything’ as ‘formally equal’. Superstudio’s mobilisation of the desert imagery relies completely on these abstract or metaphorical understandings of the desert and implies a beginning or end solely based on human life, yet, “actual deserts are, of course, awash with differences in terrain and mineral composition.”⁸⁵ In other words, the conception of life and its beginning and end does not go beyond the human in *The Continuous Monument*. This conception enables me to interrogate *The Continuous Monument* as a figuration of the human, in particular, the figure of Man as it centres him. And this figuration of the figure of Man leads to my argument that if *The Continuous Monument* points to an end, it is the end of the figure of Man - which I will discuss further in the next section of the chapter.

The following two pages are important because they illustrate a detailed journey through which *The Continuous Monument* appears in its final form, as “a white line in the desert”.⁸⁶ ‘The long awaited’ geometrical cube that emerged from the desert in the last frame of the first page, takes its course and disperses into smaller parts, all of which carries with them “the genetic

⁸³ Micheal Marder, “Desert is a State of Mind Cast over the Earth: The Indifference of Abstraction”, *Cabinet* 63, (Spring 2017), <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/63/marder.php>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Superstudio, “Deserti Naturali”, 24.

message of its ordered race”⁸⁷ and thus will bring ‘cosmic order on earth’. Then, the storyboard takes us into “a Car Journey to a Drive-in Museum of Architecture” which Superstudio also calls “Souvenirs from a Journey into the Realms of Reason”.⁸⁸ This journey compresses architectural history into a few frames where “ancient monuments” are superposed on “machines’ steel framework and statues” and ends at “the architecture of reason”.⁸⁹ This compression evokes a *historical vertigo* once again yet, Superstudio ironically resolves it through our arrival “at the temple of reason” which holds the banner “[i]n historical perspective, Reason dominates it all”.⁹⁰ Ending this playful journey with this bold yet ironical statement, not only brings rationality to the foreground once again, which *The Continuous Monument* will take it to its ultimate limit, but also provides me with another link for deriving “domination” from “urbanisation”. The storyboard continues with more playful scenes where we witness a transformation of the square block into “apparitions”, “the door”, “the corridor”, “the stone”, and “the walls”.⁹¹ And after what Superstudios defines as “walking in the dark for a long time”, we encounter *The Continuous Monument* in its resolved form.⁹² This triumphant arrival of *The Continuous Monument* prepares us for its next big step and sets the tone for its planetary mission.

The last row of the third page of the storyboard provides the most relevant frames and text for contextualising *The Continuous Monument* within the Whole Earth discourse and allows me to read it as a direct response to ‘Whole Earth worry’ alongside *La Région Centrale* (Figure 30). The first frame reveals the Whole Earth, almost as an illustration foreshadowing the “Blue Marble” image that will be distributed worldwide one year after the publication of the storyboard. I highlight this connection since the text under this frame can be directly linked with the rhetoric of crisis and the rise of the awareness of global environmental degradation that was in part mobilised by the Whole Earth imagery in the period between 1968-1972. As Superstudio writes: “[e]nvisaging the progressive impoverishment of the earth, and now nearby prospect of ‘standing room only’...”⁹³ Similar to Michael Snow, Superstudio responds to the prospect of the impending global ecological collapse raised by alarming publications in ecological debate and environmental movements. Obviously, Superstudio takes the Earth as a totality as its subject matter and its site of intervention and with the phrase ‘the prospect of

⁸⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁹¹ Ibid., 24.

⁹² Ibid., 24.

⁹³ Ibid., 24.

standing room only' they might be giving reference to Paul and Anna Ehrlich's previously mentioned, widely circulated book *The Population Bomb* (1968).

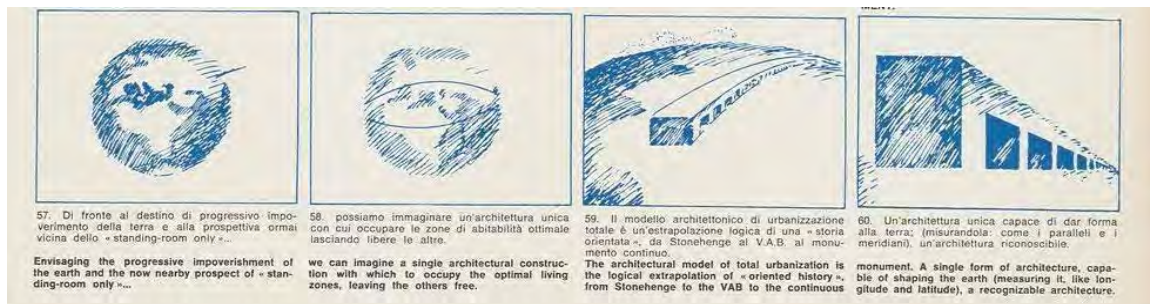


Fig. 30: The last row of the third page of *The Continuous Monument* storyboard, Superstudio, as published in Superstudio, "Natural and Artificial Deserts", Casabella 358 (1971):24.

If this text and this frame that illustrates the whole Earth identifies the design problem for *The Continuous Monument*, then the following frame and the text that accompanies it offers a "total" solution with a very simple intervention. As the frame reveals the same illustration of the whole Earth viewed from nowhere, a single line spans the circumference of the globe, as if it materialises the imaginary line of the equator and Superstudio writes: "we can imagine a single architectural construction with which to occupy the optimal living zones, leaving the rest free".⁹⁴ The total solution for the global ecological catastrophe that is in part caused by overpopulation is illustrated as a line encircling the globe that will incorporate the entire humanity into a single architectural edifice and this complete separation from the environment will 'leave the rest' meaning the other-than-human ecologies 'free'. Peculiarly, Natalini in a later interview, claims that through this separation and incorporation of "all living areas only along two parallels (capricorn and cancer)",⁹⁵ *The Continuous Monument* becomes an ecological project. He states further that "[s]o it was ecological[...]. The concentration of residences and human activity would then leave the earth's ecology undisturbed for a more rational exploitation of land".⁹⁶ In contrast to the irony of *The Continuous Monument* project, this statement reads quite serious and thus reveals one of the contradictions around the work in terms of the ambiguity of its intentions.

In the following frame, we are still looking at *The Continuous Monument's* planetary intervention from space, or rather nowhere, yet we get closer, as it reveals *The Continuous Monument*, this "sublimely overscaled rectangular megalith"⁹⁷ placed on the Earth depicted as

⁹⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁹⁵ Natalini, *Sketchbook* 12.

⁹⁶ Natalini, *Sketchbook* 12.

⁹⁷ Scott, "Superstudio", 177.

a partial globe. The text that accompanies this frame and the following frame where we see the front facade of *The Continuous Monument* and its rear facade rendered through a deep perspective and extending to the end of the frame as if it begins its “the relentless extension”, could be read as a resolution in the story. It identifies *The Continuous Monument*’s planetary mission and contextualises it within the historical analysis that was introduced on the first page, as Superstudio writes: “[t]he architectural model for total urbanization is the logical extrapolation of “oriented history”, from Stonehenge to the VAB to the continuous monument. A single form of architecture, capable of shaping the earth (measuring it like longitude and latitude), a recognizable architecture.”⁹⁸ The oriented history, the didactic journey presented through *demonstratio per absurdum* is now “pushed to reductio ad absurdum”⁹⁹ as *The Continuous Monument* is identified as ‘an architectural model for total urbanisation’. Consequently, I argue that reread through an Anthropocenic lens, *The Continuous Monument* becomes “an architectural model for total domination” since it allegedly is capable of shaping the Whole Earth, measuring it, organising it through a technoscientific intervention that is imposed by the figure of Man. As *The Continuous Monument* starts its global itinerary on the following page and dominates “nature”, “ancient monuments” and “cities” in a row through its strictly unchanging gigantic presence, or as “a [single] design which can be transferred from one area to another, remaining unchanged, an impassible, unalterable image” as Superstudio puts it,¹⁰⁰ it mobilises the agency of postcards to fully achieve its planetary domination.

3.3. Postcards from the Capitalocene

A kind of Space Odyssey wryly elaborating the “logical extrapolation of Oriented history”, the Cartesian form of *The Continuous Monument* spreads from the desert, Holy Kaaba, and Taj Mahal to Coketown, Florence, and New York, each frame or photomontage like a haunting postcard of capitalist development.¹⁰¹

Felicity Scott’s reading refers to the frames on the last page of the storyboard which were also widely published in international design magazines as separate images and documents *The Continuous Monument*’s various visits to random sites all around the world as postcards. The storyboard continues as Superstudio writes under the frame that depicts its first visit to a natural landscape: “NATURE: Some random images, disquieting as all postcards bearing ‘greetings from’”.¹⁰² Superstudio identifies the agency of postcards as ‘disquieting’ or as they previously wrote ‘worrying’ and this leads Scott to read these frames as ‘haunting postcard[s]

⁹⁸ Superstudio, “Deserti Naturali”, 24.

⁹⁹ Scott, “Superstudio”, 177.

¹⁰⁰ Superstudio, “Deserti Naturali”, 25.

¹⁰¹ Scott, “Superstudio”, 177.

¹⁰² Superstudio, “Deserti Naturali”, 25.

of capitalist development', which, in turn, allows me to recontextualise them in an Anthropocenic framework as postcards from the Capitalocene. As I have discussed earlier, Superstudio parodies the pervasive reach of modern architecture through *The Continuous Monument's* relentless use of the grid, and provides a critique of technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring and territorialising by illustrating the 'forewarning images of the horrors which architecture was laying in store for us with its scientific methods for perpetuating existing models'. Yet, it does so through mobilising the agency of postcards, as carrying a 'worrying' message or having a 'disquieting' impact. I highlight *The Continuous Monument's* mobilisation of postcard imagery because of two reasons. First, as I have previously discussed, it signifies the global network of the postal system through which *The Continuous Monument* achieves its planetary progression. Second, it mobilises a specific reciprocity by opening up a channel for a dialogue with the reader, as postcards are meant to be sent to somewhere, sometime or someone. In other words, they have a specific spatiotemporal agency since they travel across time and space. More specifically, as I have written elsewhere,

...postcards exist suspended in a tension between their apparently mundane, harmless, and nostalgic objectification – something out of a Victorian romantic novel, a "retro love letter", or a register of a trip somewhere – and their entanglement within planetary interests and motivations. With their Baradian agency – "an enactment, a matter of possibilities for re-configuring entanglements" – they behave in a hyperobjectian way, phased-spaced and distributed across time and space.¹⁰³

Superstudio mobilises this specific tension between the 'nostalgic objectification' and 'planetary interests and motivations'. This 'Baradian agency', 'this enactment' that mobilises a reconfiguration of entanglements between diverse spatiotemporalities, allows me to emphasise the potentiality of the postcard as an Anthropocenic medium and offer a projection of *The Continuous Monument* postcards as future fossils. Before reading several frames from *The Continuous Monument* storyboard as postcards from the Capitalocene and position them as future fossils, I will underscore its reliance on global infrastructure and its "creative" and "playful" potential as an Anthropocenic medium. As Parikka writes:

I think the creative, playful potential [of the postcard] lies in understanding how it is indeed a figure that is both reliant on a global infrastructure and scale, while manifesting in local interfaces – from postcard as a figure of temporality, the ephemeral project that is addressed to a different place and a different time (think of Derrida) it is also a figure of infrastructure from standardisation (penny post, mail boxes, writing styles and expressions) to transport. Perhaps in many ways it is the sort of "interscalar vehicle" that Gabrielle Hecht talks about when she addresses the Anthropocene: scales are emergent, stated, historical, and performative; 'what happens when we treat

¹⁰³ Çinçik and Campos, "Postcard Notes", p: n/a

empirical objects as interscalar vehicles, as means of connecting stories and scales usually kept apart?¹⁰⁴

In this context, I ask what stories and scales do *The Continuous Monument* postcards connect and what would be their implications as interscalar vehicles? As Parikka further discusses:

From a relatively inconspicuous moment of purchase of a touristic postcard featuring the skyline of Stockholm to its delivery via the logistics routes that once was the national mail service but now is a privatized precarious infrastructural element of labour and transport, the little 4x6 rectangular object of heavy-duty 16-point gloss of minimal communication content functions as the object which performs its own multiscale conditions of existence. It says little, it does a lot: the postcard, upon arrival in its destination in Barcelona, has performed its own little dance of territorial movement, touching issues of infrastructure and labour, meaning and non-meaning, media and technological delivery. It has located itself again, while relying on Europe-wide networks. Perhaps addressing interscalar vehicles is the methodological question and implicit suggestion that ties in such epistemic concepts as the Anthropocene and such mundane media practices as postcards.¹⁰⁵

Read along with this discussion, *The Continuous Monument* indeed touches 'issues of infrastructure and labour, meaning and non-meaning, media and technological delivery.' The postcard is the medium through which *The Continuous Monument* documents its planetary domination. The continuity of *The Continuous Monument* is enabled by its registration as postcards that 'perform their [...] dance of territorial movement'. At this point, in order to crystallise the implications of *The Continuous Monument* postcards in an Anthropocenic framework, I will re-read three frames from the last page of the storyboard as postcards from the Capitalocene and position them as future fossils, as a medium that carries its message from the past into the future. In other words, I will decode their message in an Anthropocenic context and pose Anthropocenic questions that I have developed from my analysis so far. Coming back to my point in disentangling Anthropocene's 'ethical aporia' by posing the right questions in the first chapter-, my questions attempt to raise 'the unthought in thought' and point to the potential of *The Continuous Monument* postcards in reconfiguring an Anthropocenic thought and sensibility and hence strengthen my positioning of *The Continuous Monument* as a geoaesthetic act.

The first postcard is sent from *The Continuous Monument*'s visit to a place in nature (Figure 31). It depicts *The Continuous Monument* sitting over a mountain range by a river. Once again, the gridded oversized monolith extends to the ends of the frame and dominates the

¹⁰⁴ Jussi Parikka, "A Little Dance of Territorial Movement: A Conversation with Jussi Parikka on Postcards and other Logistical Media", interview by Benek Çinçik and Tiago-Torres Campos, in *Çinçik and Campos (eds), Postcards from*, p:n/a.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

natural landscape by cutting the organic lines of the mountain silhouette with its strict orthogonal lines. The artificiality of the infrastructural monument is in strong contrast with what one identifies as nature. Superstudio writes: "or other operations on earth, mountains and sea, always as examples of rational operations, organised and measured".¹⁰⁶ In an Anthropocenic context I ask, could these 'rational operations of organising and measuring the Earth' refer to the colonisation of the geosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere through technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring, and territorialising mobilised by the figure of Man?

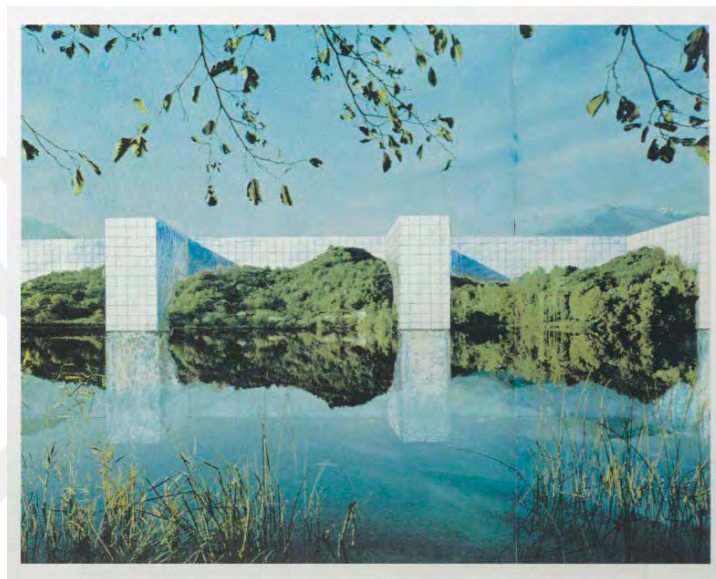


Fig. 31: *The Continuous Monument: on the River. Project, 1969. Perspective: cut-and-pasted paper, colour pencil, oil stick on board (43,8 x 40 cm), Image credit: Terence Riley (ed.), The Changing of the Avant-garde: Visionary Architectural Drawings from the Howard Gilman Collection (New York: Museum of Modern Art, D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2002), 56.*

The second postcard is sent from *The Continuous Monument's* trip to the cities and illustrates *The Continuous Monument* lying in full length next to a highway and Superstudio writes "the autostrada (motorway) is the yardstick for dimension: the first continuous monument" (Figure 32).¹⁰⁷ By identifying the highway which is representative of global transportation networks, as 'the first continuous monument' and as a reference for the scale of *The Continuous Monument*, does Superstudio point toward the technosphere?

¹⁰⁶ Superstudio, "Deserti Naturali", 25.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 25.



Fig.32: Frame no. 68 in *The Continuous Monument* storyboard, *Superstudio*, as published in *Superstudio*, "Natural and Artificial Deserts", Casabella 358 (1971): 25.

And lastly, the third postcard is sent from New York, it is the one that I have analysed in detail in the first section but the text adds another layer of meaning that enables me to emphasise its potential as a future fossil, as Superstudio writes: "[a]nd from the bay we see the New New York arranged by the continuous monument into a great plain of ice, clouds and sky". (Figure 33)¹⁰⁸ This statement affirms the freezing impact of *The Continuous Monument*, the suspension of animation that points towards an end. In other words, New York, symbolising an architectural epicentre of Modernism as well as financial capitalism, becomes a frozen desert where there is no sign of human life.¹⁰⁹ Drawing on the association of ice with death, could this postcard gesture towards the heat death of the universe following the law of entropy?



Fig.33: The last frame of *The Continuous Monument* storyboard, *Superstudio*, as published in *Superstudio*, "Natural and Artificial Deserts", Casabella 358 (1971): 25.

As I have emphasised previously, in all these postcards *The Continuous Monument* sent us, there are no human beings in the scenes and *The Continuous Monument* does not reveal any

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁹ This scene in particular can be related with Franklin J. Schaffner's 1968 film *Planet of the Apes* in which a specific region in New York is depicted as a dead zone.

interiority. *The Continuous Monument* evacuates the outside and incorporates the entire human population into its unpicturable interior, thereby, I propose, maybe even rendering a desire for the disappearance of humanity. In this regard, architectural historian Sander Woertman argues that the Continuous Monument illustrates “a refugee space for humanity”.¹¹⁰ Yet, taking Superstudio’s engagement with the theme of death into consideration,¹¹¹ crystallised in the *New New York* postcard as *The Continuous Monument* ‘arranges the city into a great plain of ice’, an artificial, frozen desert in which the skyscrapers become ‘ancient’, could *The Continuous Monument* be rather read as a giant mausoleum, a postcard rendering a death image of humanity? Since *The Continuous Monument* story centres the figure of Man who considers himself as representative of humanity, then this end would refer not to the end of the world but rather to the end of the figure of Man and his technoscientific conception of the world. Reread through an Anthropocenic lens and as a future fossil alongside *La Région Centrale*, could *The Continuous Monument* postcard collection render “a world become alien through the very [technospheric] processes that were supposed to result in its mastery”?¹¹²

To conclude, in this chapter, I offered a re-reading of *The Continuous Monument* as a planetary imagination and as a geoaesthetic act. As the project takes the Earth (geo) as ‘a site, scale and aesthetic condition’, I argued that it exemplifies planetary imaginations that respond to the Whole Earth imagery and Whole Earth worry. I explored how Superstudio responds retroactively to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and collision of human and Earth temporalities posed by the Anthropocene through its conception of subjectivity, framing of temporality and imagination of scale, and thereby enabling me to position it as a geoaesthetic act. Superstudio’s use of rhetorical tools of irony, *demonstratio per absurdum* and metaphor allowed me to read *The Continuous Monument* as an allegorical architectural project that ironically ‘realizes cosmic order on Earth’ through depicting a single monolithic cold structure encircling the whole globe and entrapping humanity into its unpicturable interior. I proposed this total interiorisation as an epitome of planetary organisation that is imposed by the figure of Man taking Modernism’s mobilisation of

¹¹⁰ Sander Woertman, “The Distant Winking of a Star, or the Horror of the Real” in eds. van Shaik and Macel *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations 1956-1976*, 149.

¹¹¹ In their project “Primary Acts: Life, Love, Education, Ceremony, Death” (1971) where they introduce the Supersurface and offer a separate storyboard for each act, they reintroduce the theme of death. In Death storyboard, Superstudio refers to the Supersurface as a “Cartesian desert” and writes that “[t]he idea of death began to link itself to the absolute image of geometrical emptiness that I had crossed. Architecture and death suddenly coincided. A reason for the perfect order and symmetry, indifference to time and man himself was found.”

¹¹² Mark Dorrian, “Introduction by Mark Dorrian” to Peter Sloterdijk, “Museum—School of Alienation”, trans. Iain Boyd Whyte, *Art in Translation* 6, Issue 4, (2014), pp. 439.

technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring and territorialising to its extreme limit. In alignment with my hypothesis that the Anthropocenic epistemic rupture implies a decentring and dissolution of the figure of Man, I argued that *The Continuous Monument* offers an architectural figuration or an allegorical representation of the figure of Man and offers an ironical thought experiment on centring this figure of Man who relentlessly imposes technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring and territorialising over the whole planet. I claimed that *The Continuous Monument* points to the dissolution of the figure of Man, to its ultimate end through manifesting a 'logical extrapolation of 'oriented history',¹¹³ crystallising an idea of a single architecture dominating the whole world. I proposed that with its total interiorisation that evacuates the outside and incorporates humanity into its unpicturable interior, *The Continuous Monument* could be read as a giant mausoleum of humanity rendering the dissolution of the figure of Man. Through my analysis, I introduced the concept of *historical vertigo* and reflected on the desert imagery both of which identify two of the nodes in my mapping of the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics and will be deepened in my analysis of *Spiral Jetty* in the following chapter.

¹¹³ Superstudio, "Deserti Naturali", 22.

CHAPTER 4: Geomorphic Aesthetics and Thermodynamic Imagination: *Spiral Jetty* (1970)

“Matter is energy, form is information.”¹

“Subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject or object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking begins at the relationship between Earth and Territory.”²

In April 1970, the American artist Robert Smithson poured 6500 tons of basalt rocks and earth over a period of 3 weeks to construct his 460 metres long and 4,5 metres wide, twice coiling enigmatic *Spiral Jetty* at the Rozel Point in the Great Salt Lake in Utah (*Figure 34*). In 1971, he directed his 32-minute colour film *Spiral Jetty* on 16-mm film, composed of sequences of the site under construction and combined with new segments filmed in New York after the earthwork's completion. The following year Smithson wrote his essay “The Spiral Jetty” which was published in the *Arts of the Environment* journal edited by György Kepes for his ‘Vision + Value’ series. In this chapter, I will reflect on *Spiral Jetty* as a threefold manifestation (*Spiral Jetty* earthwork, *Spiral Jetty* film and *Spiral Jetty* essay) and as the third geoaesthetic act -in this dissertation- that takes the Earth (geo) as its subject matter and focal point and that I contextualise within the Anthropocene as a material and discursive framework. I will argue that like *La Région Centrale* and *The Continuous Monument*, *Spiral Jetty* responds to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and the collision of human and Earth temporalities posited by the Anthropocene retroactively, through its radical conception of subjectivity, imagination of scale and framing of temporality.



Fig 34. Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty earthwork, 1970. Image Credit: Holt/Smithson Foundation and Dia Art Foundation/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo: George Steinmetz

¹ Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 78.

² Deleuze and Guattari, *What is*, 85.

The Anthropocene reveals “a particular nexus of epistemic, technological and political-economic coalescence figured in contemporary reality of petro-capitalism”.³ As Davis and Turpin explain, “it is a call [...] to place our industrialized present—a present that consumes time itself—within a temporal frame that is at once evolutionary and geologic”.⁴ In this regard, I will provide a comprehensive exploration of *Spiral Jetty* as a geoaesthetic act and ask what the work can offer in reflecting on ‘our industrial present’ as ‘a present that consumes time itself’. By situating humans as a collective geomorphic force, the Anthropocene thesis puts an emphasis on what Yusoff calls ‘geologic life’ and hints at a “re-mineralisation of subjectivities” that ties processes of subjectification to nonhuman and inhuman forces.⁵ As the thesis positions the geologic agency of humans within the designation of a progressive systemic collapse, it denotes the power of dissolution and an understanding of an end in process, more specifically an entropic end. While the first claim raises questions regarding the redefinition and repositioning of the human within a radical expansion of time and infinite conditions of connectivity at multiple scales, the second claim problematises our understanding of entropic decline deposited by geologic time. In this regard, I will situate the *Spiral Jetty* project within the “epochal aesthetics of the Anthropocene”⁶ as one of the formative works to engage with geologic life and deal with the expansion of temporal and material frames and interdependencies of human and Earth temporalities in two ways. I will link the conception and spatiotemporal positioning of the *Spiral Jetty* with the entropic conditions of the Anthropocene synchronically, while explaining the cultural, aesthetic, and technological conditions in which the work was imagined and realised diachronically.

I will argue that the tripartite *Spiral Jetty* (*Spiral Jetty* earthwork, *Spiral Jetty* film and *Spiral Jetty* essay) responds to the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and the collision of human and Earth temporalities through two modes of operation outlined in two parts of the chapter, namely the decentring and dissolving of human in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces.⁷ This structure sits within my meta-argumentation or hypothesis of my study and follows a similar flow to the previous chapters and thus allows me to enhance my comparative reading of these three geoaesthetic acts. In the first part of the chapter,

³ Turpin and Davis, *Art and Death*, 6.

⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵ Kathryn Yusoff, “Geologic life” 779.

⁶ Yusoff, *Epochal Aesthetics*

⁷ Etienne Turpin argues that one of the reasons that Bataille’s and Smithson’s oeuvres share an affinity is that they both decentre and dissolve human in relation to planetary and geological forces. S. Etienne Turpin, “Aesthetics of Expenditure: Philosophy, Art, and the Infinite Faculty” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 1. In this regard, I argue the notion of decentring and dissolving the human or the figure of Man as an outcome of Anthropocene narrative is valid for the three geoaesthetic acts I discuss in this thesis.

“(De)centring The Spiral Jetty: From Atomic to Astronomic”, I will reflect on *Spiral Jetty*’s operation of decentring of the human, the figure of Man, through its imagination of scale and framing of temporality, and argue that while the former mobilises a *sensorial vertigo* similar to *La Région Centrale*, the latter induces a *historical vertigo* similar to *The Continuous Monument*. After reflecting on the emergence of Smithson’s geomorphic aesthetics and *transcalar* imagery, I will explore the scale shifts in *Spiral Jetty* which are exemplified within the fractal recuperation of the spiral form and analyse the interplay of diverse temporalities which is the primary source of expression within the expansion of time frames. In this regard, I will analyse the *Spiral Jetty*’s scale shifts that operate as a transversal knot binding incommensurable orders and emphasise its *sensorial vertigo* created through the helicopter’s rotational movements in the *Spiral Jetty* film. I will argue that the scale shifts of the *Spiral Jetty* foreground the juxtaposition of multiple temporalities and registers that is crucial for understanding the sensorial conditions of the Anthropocene. After decoding the *Spiral Jetty*’s *sensorial vertigo* within the visual language of the Anthropocene, I will reflect on the *Spiral Jetty* film’s mobilisation of *historical vertigo*, namely the collapse of the remote past into the present with a focus on Smithson’s conception of time, his general refutation of historical humanism,⁸ and his geologically-nuanced positioning within the cosmic anxieties created by the Atomic Age. The first part of the chapter will deepen the concepts of *sensorial vertigo* and *historical vertigo* that I have developed in my reading of *La Région Centrale* and *The Continuous Monument* and prepare the ground for my in-depth analysis of the conception of subjectivity in *Spiral Jetty* that has philosophical implications for my mapping of the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics.

In the second part of the chapter, “Dissolution of an End: Crystallisation of Subjectivities”, I will investigate how the decentring of human alludes to the dissolution of anthropocentric notions of subjectivity through focusing on *Spiral Jetty*’s relationship with entropy and Smithson’s thermodynamic imagination. I will propose that the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals forms the conceptual and material spine of the *Spiral Jetty* project. By focusing on this entropic nexus, I will analyse the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork’s positioning within a larger spatiotemporal frame and reflect on its engagement with planetary change. Whilst exploring the material conditions and cultural resonances of the desert, I will reflect on the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork’s relationship to the neighbouring petrocapitalist facilities such as the oil jetty ruin, military testing sites and the Golden Spike Monument in terms of its engagement with temporality and solar energy. I will explore how the *Spiral Jetty* project problematises the notion of the end through positing the differentiation of ‘geologic life’ along with the material

⁸ See: Smithson, “A Refutation”, 336.

dedifferentiation processes of the desert and thereby converting itself into a future fossil. Within this prism, I will relate the *Spiral Jetty* film's crystal sequence where Smithson points at his own dissolution "into a unicellular beginning"⁹ with philosopher Gilbert Simondon's notion of the crystal as an exemplar of the *processes of individuation*. In this regard, I will argue that as a future fossil, the *Spiral Jetty* dissolves the linear understanding of history, the myth of progress and the figure of Man into a dedifferentiated "world of modern prehistory".¹⁰ I will conclude the chapter by proposing that while the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork is marooned in salt crystals accompanied with archaea that might endure long after the humans are gone, the *Spiral Jetty* poses a processual, non-anthropocentric, and "telescoped" view of an end¹¹ that is translated by chronogenesis¹².

PART I: (De)centring the *Spiral Jetty*: From Atomic to Astronomic

The Spiral Jetty earthwork is situated on the northeast side of the Great Salt Lake which is not only the largest saltwater lake in the Western Hemisphere but also one of the most saline inland bodies of water on Earth. One of the main reasons for Smithson to choose the lake was its red colour. However, the story of the emergence of the red colour provides an interesting starting point for reading *Spiral Jetty*, since it is a strong example of a technospheric transformation within an Anthropocenic frame (*Figure 35*). The First Transcontinental Railroad, originally known as Pacific Railroad that crossed America in east-west direction, was connected through Lucin Cut-off which was built in 1904 and divided the lake into two arms.¹³ In 1959, the trestle structure of the cut-off which enabled a free flow of the brine between north and south arms was replaced with a rock causeway that restricted the circulation between the two ends. Since the three rivers, namely Bear, Ogden, and Jordan were feeding the lake from the south end, the cut-off left the north end with no freshwater supply and led to an extreme level of salinity of 27 per cent. Therefore, the lake is also called America's Dead Sea, which refers to its inhospitality to most life forms and hints at the desert as a form or landscape of the end times. Yet, there is a microbial ecology in the water. This microscopic form of life might not only open up questions on the conception of life itself but also challenge the notion of the

⁹ Smithson, "The Spiral", 149.

¹⁰ Ibid., 146

¹¹ Matilde Nardelli, "No End to the End: The Desert as Eschatology in Late Modernity", Tate Papers, (2014), available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/22/no-end-to-the-end-the-desert-as-eschatology-in-late-modernity>

¹² Anne Sauvagnargues, "Crystals and Membranes: Individuation and Temporality", trans. by Jon Roffe, in *Gilbert Simondon, Being and Technology*, eds. Arne De Boever et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 64.

¹³ Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects" [1968], in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 109.

limits of the desert. In this regard, Robert Smithson's statement that "the desert is more of a concept, rather than nature that swallows up boundaries"¹⁴ is not only in alignment with Marder's previous emphasis that the desert is a cultural invention but also provides a strong departure point for interlinking the *Spiral Jetty* with *La Région Centrale* and *The Continuous Monument* in terms of their engagement with desert imagery- which establishes one of the nodes in my mapping of the origins of Anthropocene aesthetics.

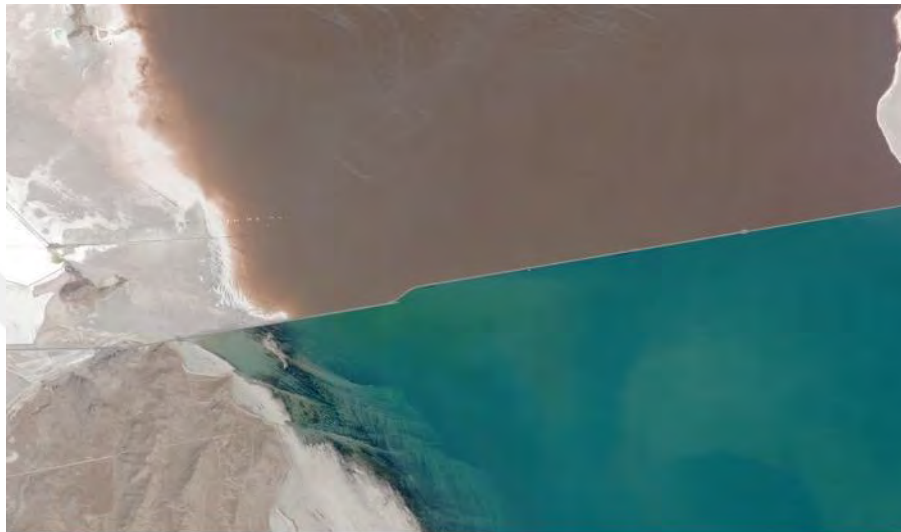


Fig. 35: Aerial view of the Lucin Cut-off on The Great Salt Lake. Image Credit: Google Earth, accessed 14 November 2017.

The rosy hue of the northern part is a consequence of the red pigment that is pumped by halophilic (salt-loving) organisms, namely a certain type of algae and micro-bacteria that thrive in water with a high saline content and archaea that live in salt crystals and can endure for millennia.¹⁵ The interrelationship between the causeway as a human-made construction and the biochemical reaction of the microbial ecology was a point that Smithson was aware of. Although he does not discuss the implications of this interrelationship per se, I mobilise it as a starting point for interpreting the immense web of connectivities and ever-expanding implications that *Spiral Jetty* opens up. In other words, since the work can be read in a rhizomatic way, any starting point is possible. Yet, Smithson opens his essay with a quotation from G.K. Chesterson: "red is the most joyful and dreadful thing in the physical universe; it is the fiercest note, it is the highest light, it is the place where the walls of this world of ours wear the thinnest and something beyond burns through."¹⁶

¹⁴ Before the cut-off, the railroad was travelling north of the lake.

¹⁵ For further information, See Wynne Parry, "Tiny Organisms Turn Great Salt Lake Pink" *LiveScience*, 29 Jan 2013, <https://www.livescience.com/26675-salt-loving-microbes-lake.html>

¹⁶ Smithson, "The Spiral", 149.

Evidently, red is the colour at the end of the visible spectrum of light with the longest wavelength. Chesterton's point about red as the 'highest light' where 'burning' takes place is a meaningful start for the *Spiral Jetty* essay since it connotes a notion of an end caused by the intensity of solar energy. In other words, it might refer to the entropic collapse that is tied to the gradual dissipation of energy and is ultimately connected to the sun. Within an Anthropocenic framework, I relate this quote to the apocalyptic discourse and the rhetoric of alarm, or "the world on fire" as McKenzie Wark puts it.¹⁷ The theme of 'burning' weaves around Smithson's crimson narrative and comes up many times throughout the *Spiral Jetty* essay and the *Spiral Jetty* film which includes a sun sequence and a section that is filmed through a red filter both of which acting as textual and visual counterparts of the red coloured water the earthwork sits upon. In the *Spiral Jetty* essay, Smithson describes the effects of the red filter in the film as "ruby dispersions" and "blood-drenched atmosphere" while dissolving the physical elements of the room into "halations of infinite redness".¹⁸ In addition, Smithson describes the sun as "a flaming chromosphere" whilst enveloping and leading him to have a "sunstroke", causing him to have "red heavens" as the sun "vomits its corpuscular radiations".¹⁹ Although these phrases seem to point to a 'cataclysmic' end, Smithson's cyclical, repetitive understanding of life reveals itself when he links the affective resonance of the red water to the blood of an imagined "antediluvian ocean".²⁰ This link shows that Smithson's designation of an end is interwoven with the question of order.²¹ More importantly, I position his analogy of the 'antediluvian ocean' as the first example of the *Spiral Jetty*'s expansion of temporal and material timeframes that dislocates humans from the dialectics of history and repositions them throughout a geo-cosmological scale.

In order to comprehend the entropic nexus between solar energy and salt crystal formation that establishes the conceptual and material spine of the *Spiral Jetty*, it is critically important to understand the metaphorical and visual positioning of the sun within the film which also provides a starting point for analysing the *centring-decentring* effect that the *Spiral Jetty* instigates. The constant oscillation between decentring and repositioning is activated through rotational movements that exist not only in the form and replication of the spiral within the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork and the *Spiral Jetty* essay but also in the circularity that is built around

¹⁷ Wark, *Molecular Red*, 7.

¹⁸ Smithson, "The Spiral", 148.

¹⁹ Ibid., 147.

²⁰ Ibid., 148.

²¹ In relation to the question of order, Turpin writes: "Smithson pursues a promiscuous collaboration with the destructive force of entropic collapse. Again, we must insist that this pursuit is not one of nihilistic reaction, but, as in Nietzsche, and as in Bataille, one that recognizes the erasure of value as the prerequisite to the articulation of another order, to an order that might be less intolerable than the present". Turpin, "Aesthetics of", 92.

the sun within the *Spiral Jetty* film. As art historian George Baker argues the “circularity” around the sun “sets up the structure of the film throughout”.²² The film starts with a telescopic shot of the sun which is accompanied by an ambient sound identified as a hospital respirator and ends with another constructed, aerial view of the sun that is reflected in the water around and within the earthwork. Smithson describes the last sequence of the film in the *Spiral Jetty* essay as he writes “[h]elicopter manoeuvred the sun’s reflection through the Spiral Jetty as until it reached the centre”.²³ In this regard, if there would be any centre of *the Spiral Jetty* as a representational assemblage, it might have been this juxtaposition.²⁴ However, Smithson’s voiceover in the *Spiral Jetty* film that reads from John Taine’s *The Time Stream* (1931) displaces that possibility of centring by saying that the sun “was not a single flaming star” but “a vast spiral nebula of innumerable suns”.

The film proceeds from a long shot of the sun in which the sun fills most of the screen on a black background to a close-up view that shows solar flares on its surface (*Figure 36&37*). According to philosopher Gary Shapiro, this visual sequence is defamiliarising for the viewer in two ways. First, the black background suggests the nighttime in which the sun is beyond our horizon. Second, the perception of the sun as “a simple, continuous body” is unsettled by explosions implying “disruptions and accidents”.²⁵ Within this respect, Shapiro argues that Smithson’s sun “is not the eternal divinity of Aristotle but the sun of Heraclitus, which is “new each day”.²⁶ More importantly, I argue that this epilogue that shows the conversion of hydrogen into helium gestures towards the understanding of the sun not only as a nuclear bomb or reactor but also the source of the gradual dissipation of heat that points at the inevitable dissolution of the universe following the law of entropy. Both contemplations are in alignment with the thermodynamic imagination the *Spiral Jetty* sets forth and triggers a certain kind of cosmic anxiety. In other words, this epilogue provides an entry point for Smithson’s mobilisation of entropy as an essential notion for understanding planetary change, as an explanatory force applying to both atomic and astronomic scales.

²² George Baker, “The Cinema Model,” in *Robert Smithson: The Spiral Jetty*, eds. Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly, (New York: Dia Center for the Arts with the University of California Press, 2005), 82.

²³ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 149.

²⁴ Gary Shapiro, *Earthwards: Robert Smithson and Art after Babel*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁶ For instance, Smithson writes “The actual disruption of the earth’s crust is at times very compelling, and seems to confirm Heraclitus’s Fragment 124. The most beautiful world is like a heap of rubble tossed down in confusion”, Robert Smithson, “A Sedimentation”, 102.

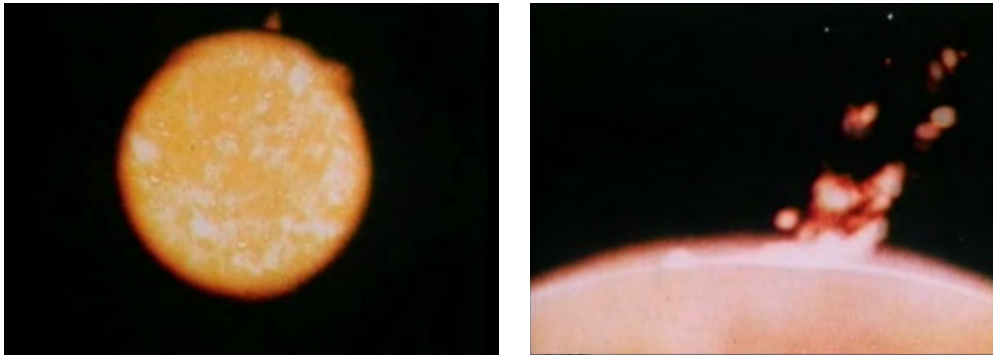


Fig. 36 and 37: Stills from the sun sequence of the *Spiral Jetty* film by Robert Smithson (time elapsed: 00:13 (left), 00:32 (right))

The defamiliarisation in this sun sequence is enhanced further by the disjunction between images and sounds; the apperception of our far distance to the sun which is only defeated by a technological apparatus, namely the solar telescope and the affective closeness of breathing invoked by another technological apparatus, namely the respirator's noise of expansion and contraction. Baker states that this disjunction is resolved through a visual shift from the long shot to the close-up and achieves a "vertiginous connection between what we see and what we hear".²⁷ More precisely, the expansion and contraction sound of the mechanical breathing apparatus becomes "synchronized to a point that it forces us to imagine the sun as the breathing source".²⁸ Importantly, the multi-modal synchronisation between these two orders, namely between the planetary and corporeality of the human body identifies the first scaling effect the film produces. Therefore, the opening sequence of the film not only places us in a cosmic setting but also emphasises the understanding of the sun as our ultimate creative economy and underlines entropy as the driving force for *Spiral Jetty*'s complex preoccupation with process and temporality.²⁹

At the beginning of the sun sequence of the film, *Spiral Jetty* appears as a text on the screen while we hear Smithson's first voiceover that seems to position the work cartographically: "Spiral Jetty, the Great Salt Lake, Roxelder County, Utah". The disconnection between the precise geographical positioning and the continual nuclear fusion of the sun is another example of the 'disjunctive associations of images and sounds' through which "the Spiral Jetty will come to exist".³⁰ The conceptual underpinning of these 'disjunctions' can be sought in Smithson's worldview that negates seeing any existence from a single fraction of time and space and brings the question of centres to the fore.

²⁷ Baker, "The Cinema", 82.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 82. Baker writes "an animate being suspended in a sort of limbo, a space between life and death."

²⁹ Andrew V. Uroskie, "La Jetée en Spirale: Robert Smithson's Stratigraphic Cinema", *Grey Room* 19, [Spring 2005]: 56. <https://doi.org/10.1162/grey.2005.1.19.54>

³⁰ Ibid., 64.

Art critic Jack Flam discusses that Smithson's conception of the universe is related to Jorge Luis Borges's *Library of Babel* (1969) that is "composed of an indefinite and perhaps as infinite number of hexagonal galleries" and foreshadows the crystalline structures Smithson envisaged.³¹ In this regard, Smithson quotes Blaise Pascal's well-known statement that "[n]ature is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose limits are nowhere" frequently in his essays. This quote supports Smithson's rejection of the notion of a fixed centre and affirmation of an ever-expansive understanding of the universe. More important for this dissertation is that Smithson's emphasis on the possibility of positing a centre everywhere and the condition of limitlessness aligns with the representational challenges of the Anthropocene in terms of conditions of infinite interconnectivity and the question of how to centre and frame any subject matter spatially and temporally. In this regard, I argue that the *Spiral Jetty* responds to this Anthropocenic challenge by mobilising scale as a tool to capture material and conceptual snapshots of mobile and temporal centres that bind up radical interconnectivities and thus foreshadows a *transcalar* imagination- which I posited as one of the three identifiers for my definition of geoaesthetic acts.

In addition, a conceptual affinity between Smithson's approach and Georges Bataille's³² identification of two "primary motions of the universe" as "rotation and sexual movement" in *The Solar Anus* (1931) can be drawn.³³ Bataille writes: "if the origin of things is not like the ground of the planet that seems to be the base, but like rotational movement that the planet describes around a mobile centre, then a car, a clock, a sewing machine could equally be accepted as the generative principle".³⁴ In a similar manner, towards the middle of the *Spiral Jetty* essay, Smithson poses a "scale of centres" for the preceding paragraphs and unsettles the reader by mapping out "a shifting set of coordinates" that suggests an ever-changing centrality that moves between inhuman, human and nonhuman actants.³⁵ Smithson writes:

"The preceding paragraphs refer to "a scale of centres" that could be disentangled as follows:

- (a) ion source in cyclotron
- (b) a nucleus
- (c) dislocation point
- (d) a wooden stake in the mud

³¹ Jack Flam, "Introduction: Reading Robert Smithson", in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, xv.

³² The conceptual affinity between Bataille and Smithson has been recently discussed by art historian Margaret Iversen in *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*, [Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007].

³³ Georges Bataille, "Solar Anus" [1931], in *The Accused Share. Volume 1: Consumption*. (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ Smithson, "The Spiral", 150.

- (e) axis of helicopter propeller
- (f) James Joyce's ear channel
- (g) the Sun
- (h) a hole in the film reel." ³⁶

Importantly, *Spiral Jetty* deals with planetary change and favours geomorphological accounts of existence that disdain conceptions of the Earth as a stable and separate ground upon which anthropocentric philosophies are built. In this light, I evaluate the main preoccupation of *the Spiral Jetty* as a response to Bataille's statement that "the basic problem is how to get out of human situation".³⁷ Indeed, Smithson does not privilege the human over nonhuman and inhuman, for instance, he writes that "we are not better than dinosaurs, we are just different".³⁸ As media arts scholar Felicity Colman argues, Smithson "focuses on life in terms of geomorphology wherein all molecular structures coexist" and for him "the function of art is to offer an apperception of the shifts in this morphology".³⁹ In this regard, Smithson encounters the multiplicity of centres and the apprehension of limitlessness through geometry and provides a comprehension of the geomorphological shifts through a repetition of an abstract form, namely the spiral in the *Spiral Jetty*. Through the spiral, he mobilises what he defines as "scale sense" in order to bind disparate elements that are distributed across time and space.⁴⁰ Thus, as art historian Jennifer Roberts writes, in the *Spiral Jetty* one witnesses "a new kind of totalizing pattern, one that manifests itself not across the usual Euclidean space but rather across scale".⁴¹ By drawing connections between various orders such as a nucleus and the sun through the concept of scale itself in the *Spiral Jetty* essay or by situating us in a cosmic setting that invokes both astronomic and atomic orders in the opening sequence of the *Spiral Jetty* film, Smithson not only decentres the human in relation to planetary forces but also foreshadows a *transcalar* imagination, both of which identify my positioning of the work as a precedential geoaesthetic act in my mapping of the roots of Anthropocene aesthetics.

³⁶ Ibid., 150.

³⁷ George Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, transl. by Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books, 1989, 13.

³⁸ Robert Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible" [1973], in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 303.

³⁹ Felicity Colman, "Affective Entropy: Art as Differential Form", *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, no. 11:1 (2006): 175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09697250600798060>

⁴⁰ Robert Smithson, "Four Conversations between Denis Wheeler and Robert Smithson, ed. Eva Schmidt [1969-1970], in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 203.

⁴¹ Jennifer L. Roberts, *Mirror-travels: Robert Smithson and History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 123.

4.1.1. The Emergence of Geomorphic Aesthetics and *Transcalar* Imagery

The origin of the ideas that evolve and converge in the *Spiral Jetty* can be traced back to the year 1966 when Smithson created what he calls his “proto-earthwork” entitled *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* and gave a lecture entitled “Shaping the Environment: The Artist” at Yale University. This lecture led to the beginning of which became known as “Aerial Art” and in this lecture, Smithson discussed the whole city as a crystalline network,⁴² both of which, I argue, foreshadow an Anthropocenic imagination. In addition, both this lecture and *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* can be seen as extensions of Smithson’s initial interest of “working with raw materials in conjunction with abstract geometrical forms” and his artistic advancement from the “‘specific object’ orientation” towards a more relational understanding of art that involves seeing things as a part of wider sensorial conditions.⁴³ *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* indicates the beginning of a “new form of art”⁴⁴ widely known as Earthworks. Earthworks are widely characterised as artworks that are in direct relationship with the ‘landscape’, as manifestations of artists sculpting the land into large-scale mounds or creating marks and excavations in remote wilderness with or without the usage of mechanical earth-moving equipment. More importantly, I position Smithson’s conception of Earthworks as a significant indicator of what Yusoff calls ‘geomorphic aesthetics [...] as a space of inquiry within the apprehension of the Anthropocene’. Accordingly, Earthworks have been referenced as an important marking point for the emergence of geoaesthetics, as I have outlined in the first chapter of the thesis.

Smithson’s *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* combines geological matter with industrial waste and this combination can be read as a conceptualisation of mining ventures within the context of deep time. In other words, I interpret this work as an exemplar of the constellation between deep time, inhuman and human forces, and geologic materialities and even as a conceptual and material nod to the “more-than-human assemblages”, “nature-culture entanglements” or “techno-natures” all of which the critical Anthropocene discourse frequently emphasises. The earthwork (the model) consists of a double square framing; the inner square, namely the ‘pit’, contains tar and is located in the middle of the outer square, a 63,5 cm-deep recessed pool

⁴² Robert Smithson, “Aerial Art” [1969], in Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson*, 116-8.

⁴³ Robert Smithson, “Interview with Robert Smithson/Paul Toner [1970], in Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson*, 234.

⁴⁴ On the positioning of Earth Art, Gilles Tiberghien writes: “although abundantly discussed, the term itself is extremely vague. The word Earth works, credited to Robert Smithson (for example see John Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond*, Contemporary Art in the Landscape), has also been used to designate these artist’s creations. In addition to its very specific origin, this term is too limited to be appropriate to works by Jan Dibbets, Richard Long, or James Turrell. Even Micheal Heizer generally refuses to use it- preferring instead “sculptures”- and Robert Morris’s work cannot be categorized as earthwork either.” Gilles Tiberghien, *Land Art*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 9. On the same matter, Suzaan Boettger writes, “no avant-garde gathering of artists ever announced a movement.” Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (London: University of California Press, 2002), 24.

filled with loose blue gravel from a quarry (*Figure 38*). For Smithson, this work “makes one conscious of primal ooze...This carbonaceous sediment brings to mind a tertiary world of petroleum, asphalts, ozokerite, and bituminous agglomerations”.⁴⁵ In alignment with Smithson’s intention to create “an art that could evoke the farthest reaches of time and the most remote incomprehensible notions of space”,⁴⁶ *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* indeed catalyses a kind of geologically informed consciousness and therefore points towards an Anthropocene aesthetics.

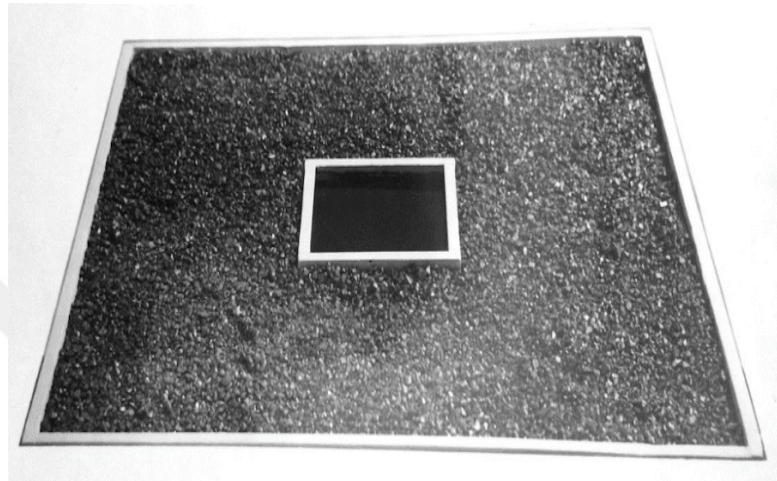


Fig. 38: Robert Smithson, Tar Pool and Gravel Pit, 1966. Maquette, approx. 90 cm² on 63,5 cm high base. Image Credit: Jack Flam (ed.), Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 114.

To put it more precisely, *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* indeed provides ‘an apperception of geomorphological shifts’, one that involves problematising human agency as a geomorphic force that constitutes the main claim of the Anthropocene thesis. Accordingly, in 1969, art historian Lucy Lippard described earthwork artists as “geomorphologists [...] more or less concerned with ecology”.⁴⁷ I will intentionally avoid the widely debated relationship between earthworks and ecological concerns which for the most part focuses on inconsiderate usage of resources in large-scale physical works. The reason for my avoidance ties in with Smithson’s entropic worldview which outlines a sceptical attitude towards environmental movements and their reserved manners.⁴⁸ Within this debate, I follow art historian Suzaan

⁴⁵ Robert Smithson, “A Sedimentation”, 102.

⁴⁶ Flam, “Introduction: Reading”, xix

⁴⁷ Lucy R. Lippard, “Breaking Circles: The Politics of Prehistory” [1973] in *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, ed. Robert Hobbs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 4.

⁴⁸ In his interview with Paul Toner, Smithson states that: “It [Tar Pool and Gravel Pit] could have been scattered-scattering and containment are a dichotomy. Scattering is vitalistic. It doesn’t confront the area of death, or the swinging back and forth between life and death. Most people just overlook one for the other-either life-directed. The life-directed thing upsets the balance. That is one of the problems with the ecological thing, they are doing

Boettger's position in that: "in the late 1960s, ecological issues were not a direct source of Earthworks" but rather "scale consciousness [...] was a more primary source of the Aerial Art that would evolve into Earthworks than was any connection-literal or spiritual- to the earth itself".⁴⁹ As I have outlined in the previous section, 'scale consciousness' was indeed one of Smithson's primary preoccupations and needs to be emphasised in order to theorise his conception of geomorphic aesthetics.

At this point, it might be useful to briefly outline the impact of the wider political and cultural conditions of the late 1960s on the American artistic imagination that gave rise to this specific form of art since this background is inseparable from the cultural and media networks the artists were involved in. In an art historiographical context, Smithson objected to the art criticism of modernist formalist aesthetics that according to him focuses solely on visual forms and positions objective criticism as relatively more important than sensory apprehensions and conceptual, contextual and metaphorical implications of the relevant artworks. In this regard, Smithson argued that "art critics and artists have for a long time considered the shell without the context of the ocean."⁵⁰ With regards to the 'ocean', Boettger provides a critical and expansive analysis of "the social, political and economic" grounds of the 1960s from which the Earthworks emerged. She points to the post-war economic boom which was accompanied by the post-war birth rate and changed the demographic constitution of America dramatically and the political unrest and ethical experimentations in response to the shadow of the Atomic bomb, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, all of which were manifested in activist demonstrations and back-to-the-nature movements.⁵¹ As expected, the youth culture found its expression in the upheaval against established cultural norms and traditional values and prompted a strong desire for innovation. In other words, the 1960s were characterised by "change" or as cultural critic Richard Kostelanetz puts it, "change[...] was in the metaphysics of time".⁵² This desire for change, "this sense of expansive possibilities endemic to sixties"⁵³ was

more to unbalance- someone who gives up eating meat because he is afraid that eating it will cut down the life on earth; but you have to eat, so that death depends on life, and life depends on death." Robert Smithson, "Interview with", 239.

⁴⁹ Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 56.

⁵⁰ Robert Smithson, "Art through The Camera's Eye" [1971], in Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson*, 371.

⁵¹ Boettger summarises the conditions of the sixties and investigates the impact of the economy, the new demography the new importance of sculpture, the increasing importance of large scale, the onset of environmentalism and Vietnam war. See Boettger, *Earthworks: Art*, 27-42.

⁵² Philipp Ursprung cites Kostelanetz in his book *Allan Kaprow, Robert Smithson, and the Limits to Art*, trans. Fiona Elliot (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 5

⁵³ Boettger, *Earthworks: Art*, 32.

also evident in art on almost every level, in “new ways of conceiving of, experiencing, and distributing art”.⁵⁴

Earthworks are widely positioned as examples of post-Kantian and post-minimalist aesthetics and interpreted as an outcome of the critique of institutions and authorities of art, in particular, the museum space within the New York art scene. In this context, Smithson was commenting on museums as “prisons” through which “the civilized man tries to convert us away from fecund stupidity to sterile purity”.⁵⁵ In this sense, Smithson’s critique of established institutions and dominant value systems in art was expressed through what Boettger calls “counter or anti-monuments”, praising the value in “banal” through a “gritty realism”.⁵⁶ Smithson’s influential travelogue entitled “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” (1967) is a succinct example in this context since he positions the desolate and wasted post-industrial landscape, its drainage pipes and scrap metal, in opposition to conventional fine-art sculpture. I mention this work since it, similarly to *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* and later to the *Spiral Jetty*, discloses Smithson’s geologic imagination and interest in entropic processes which is key for understanding his mobilisation of Anthropocenic imagination. Within this context, it is also worth noting his other influential essay *The Crystal Land* (1966) since it reveals Smithson’s Anthropocenic lens as a textual precedent as he writes “[t]he highways criss-cross through the towns and become man-made geological networks of concrete[...]the entire landscape has a mineral presence. From the shiny chrome diners to glass windows of shopping centres, a sense of crystalline prevails.”⁵⁷ Importantly, I read Smithson’s positioning of the highways as ‘man-made geological networks of concrete’ as a strong Anthropocenic reflection since it foreshadows the concept of the technosphere.

“Aerial Art” marks the beginning of Smithson’s experimentation with scale perception and reception and dissemination of art. It also contributes to unsettling disciplinary boundaries of art of the time as Rosalind Krauss positions the post-war American artists of the late 1960s including Smithson within a “historical rupture” and “structural transformation of the cultural field”.⁵⁸ Smithson’s aforementioned lecture triggered his involvement with potential designs for the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. Walter Prokosch who was an attendee at the lecture and

⁵⁴ Lucy R Lippard, “As Painting is to Sculpture: A Changing Ratio” in *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1971), 128.

⁵⁵ Robert Smithson, “Talking with Robert Smithson / Kenneth Baker” [1971] in *Robert Smithson: The Spiral Jetty*, eds. Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly, (New York: Dia Center for the Arts with the University of California Press, 2005), 148.

⁵⁶ Boettger, *Earthworks: Art*, 46.

⁵⁷ Robert Smithson, “The Crystal Land” [1966], in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 8.

⁵⁸ Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, *October*, Vol. 8. (Spring, 1979), 35.

working for the Manhattan architectural and engineering firm Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton offered Smithson the position as an “artist-consultant” for the project’s “preliminary studies and conceptual planning”.⁵⁹ Although Smithson’s and his fellow earth artists, Robert Morris, Sol Lewitt and Carl Andre’s works for the air terminal were not realised on the site, the project led Smithson to develop the term “Aerial Art” that eventually evolved into Earthworks. These artworks were displayed in “Earth Works”, an exhibition organised in October 1968 in Dwan Gallery in New York. Smithson took the term “Earthwork” from the title of a 1965 dystopian science fiction novel by Brian W. Aldiss. More importantly, the airport project helped Smithson to conceptualise “Aerial Art” and crystallise his ideas of “scale consciousness”, “surd” and “Site-Nonsite dialectics” that are crucial for understanding not only the (de)centring effects of the *Spiral Jetty* but also its multi-modal dissemination as a representational assemblage.

Whilst developing “Aerial Art”, Smithson’s ongoing preoccupation with limits of representation in terms of scale found its expression through the expansion of sites and extension of viewing distances. In other words, Smithson explored the potentials of aerial view enabled by air travel to offer an expansion and compression of space through its disclosure of scalar interconnections. Smithson was preoccupied with the airport as an “idea” rather than “simply a mode of transportation”⁶⁰ and emphasised ‘scale’ and ‘perception’ in the development of the project.⁶¹ Smithson was deeply intrigued by the scaling effects and the transformative potentialities of aerial view on the conception and reception of art. At the beginning of his “Aerial Art” (1969) essay, Smithson reflects on the “new landscape” of air terminal and how “this artificial universe” offers a new zone of experimentation for artists as he writes: ⁶²

Art today is no longer an architectural afterthought, or an object to attach to a building after it is finished, but rather a total engagement with the building process from the ground up and from the sky down [...] Just as our satellites explore and chart the moon and the planets, so might the artist explore the unknown sites that surround our airport. The future air terminal exists both in terms of mind and thing. It suggests the infinite in a finite way. ⁶³

It is clear from this passage that Smithson attempts to reconceptualise art in relation to the visual potentials enabled by aviation technologies. In this regard, “[t]he expansive space and

⁵⁹ Boettger, *Earthworks: Art*, 52.

⁶⁰ Smithson, “Aerial Art”, 116.

⁶¹ Gilles A. Tiberghien, “Robert Smithson and *Aerial Art*”, in *Seeing from Above: The Aerial View in Visual Culture*, eds. Mark Dorrian and Frédéric Pousin (New York: IB. Tauris, 2013), 277.

⁶² Smithson, “Aerial Art”, 116.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 116.

extending viewing distances”⁶⁴ of the airport not only “brings into existence a perception of ‘perspective’ that evades all our conception of nature” as Smithson argues,⁶⁵ but also foregrounds the site selection of the *Spiral Jetty earthwork*, of the desert, since one of the spatial conditions of the American desert is its “absolute horizontality”.⁶⁶ In addition, the scale shifts brought into view by flight “results in a radical expansion and relativisation of prior frames of reference”.⁶⁷ Accordingly, Smithson argues that “how we should look at art” is “a question that is rarely considered”.⁶⁸ In this regard, “[t]he departure from vision’s anthropomorphic conditioning”⁶⁹ by corporeal detachment from the ground with the aid of a technological apparatus held potentialities for Smithson. He writes that “simply looking at art at eye-level is no solution” and “there is no reason why one shouldn’t look at art through a telescope”.⁷⁰

These considerations led Smithson to conceive of “Aerial Art” in the airport project in two ways. First, the earthworks were going to be seen from the aeroplane as it ascends and descends to and from the airport. They were intended to be positioned on the fringes of the airfield, in “clear zones”, the areas between runways that are free from buildings and infrastructural facilities such as utility wires.⁷¹ The works were to be positioned “close to the ground level” or in the ground as in Sol Le Witt’s buried cube example.⁷² Smithson described “Aerial Art” as “the idea of getting above in an aeroplane and viewing things in that way, and it was the only term that I could think of. It is a kind of rubric, but at the same time it connotes a certain kind of scale consciousness that I wanted to get across.”⁷³ The ‘scale consciousness’ that Smithson emphasises and that is maximised by the experience of being on a plane is important as a beginning point since it foregrounds the scale shifts of the *Spiral Jetty* project (the earthwork, the film, the essay). Second, the works were going to be exhibited within an interior of an interior, as Smithson writes in his “Aerial Art” essay: “a gallery or ‘aerial museum’, that would provide visual information about where these aerial sites are situated. Diagrams, maps,

⁶⁴ Boettger, *Earthworks: Art*, 52.

⁶⁵ Smithson, “Aerial Art”, 116.

⁶⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, transl. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), 2.

⁶⁷ Mark Dorrian, *Writing on the Image, Architecture, The City and the Politics of Representation*, (New York: IB. Tauris, 2015), 66.

⁶⁸ Smithson, “Aerial Art”, 117.

⁶⁹ Dorrian, *Writing on*, 66.

⁷⁰ Smithson, “Aerial Art”, 117.

⁷¹ Boettger, *Earthworks: Art*, 54.

⁷² Smithson describes Le Witt’s earthwork as: “His proposal is non-visual and involves the sub-stratum of the site. He emphasises the “concept” of art rather than the “object” that results from its practice. The precise spot in the site would not be revealed- and would consist of a small cube of unknown contents cast inside a larger cube of concrete. The cube would then be buried in the earth.” Smithson, “Aerial Art”, 118.

⁷³ Smithson, “Four Conversations”, 210.

photographs, and movies of the projects under construction could be exhibited.”⁷⁴ Smithson named these works “Nonsites” which is important since this term will identify the position of the *Spiral Jetty* film and the *Spiral Jetty* essay in relation to the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. Smithson describes “Nonsites” as abstract containers of the “scattered” information of the “Site”.⁷⁵ In this regard, “nonsite” is a displacement, yet one that reveals a problematic continuity of “Site’s presence, its “subtraction”.⁷⁶ Importantly, “Nonsites” came out of Smithson’s interest in “mapping situation” and his comprehension of limits which eventually sets up “a dialectic” with “Sites” in terms of centres and scale sense. In his conversations with Dennis Wheeler, Smithson reflects on how he developed “Nonsites” whilst working on the project in air terminal site:

The Nonsites came as a result of my thinking about putting large-scale earthworks out on the edge on the airfield, and then I thought, how I can transmit that into the centre. The terminal was there, yet there was no evidence of these things out there, so I thought of putting television out there and transmitting these things back in, and telescopes. That became a kind of miniature universe, that sort of fit into my concerns of mapping.⁷⁷

The encounter with the ‘Nonsites’ as “a container within the container”⁷⁸ makes the viewer aware of the dialectic between ‘Sites’ and ‘Nonsites’ not only in terms of the tensions between the interior and the exterior but also the “context and discontext” as Wheeler points out.⁷⁹ In this regard, Smithson explains that “because the site isn’t there you are confronted with both mental and physical manifestation that purports not to be there”.⁸⁰ Smithson elaborates further:

The Site operates as a periphery as opposed to the concentrated centrality of the Nonsite. So you get this kind of back-and-forth situation between a visible presence that really has nothing to do with what it comes from and yet there is this relationship; I think this is where external world invisibly invades visible abstraction and that sort of sets off the dialectic. Then the dialectic begins to seek its convergence.⁸¹

Yet, this ‘convergence’ is one that is never met since Smithson is aware of the limits of representation and mapping. In this regard, as film studies scholar Andrew Uroskie argues

⁷⁴ Smithson, “Aerial Art”, 117.

⁷⁵ Robert Smithson, “Talking with”, 148.

⁷⁶ Robert Smithson, “Earth / Thomas W. Leavitt” [1969], in Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson*, 178.

⁷⁷ Smithson, “Four Conversations”, 211-2.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 203.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 203.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 203.

⁸¹ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 148.

“Nonsites” are “maps that showed you how to get nowhere”.⁸² Uroskie’s suggestion that Smithson’s “Nonsites” are “anti-maps” is relevant because Smithson was proposing “Nonsites” to reveal their limitations. In this context, Smithson writes:

It was highly artificial and purely mental, and sort of spun out into convergences that couldn’t converge, and polarities that never quite met but were in correspondence with each other, the enantiomorphic idea, the mirror images, the whole thing. All these different kinds of degrees of abstraction became a kind of wreck of precision, it went out on tangents; these kinds of spiralling progressions that I did. It was all a sort of product of a kind of jeopardized map making...⁸³

In relation to the key questions arising from the paradoxical relationship between “Site” and “Nonsite”, this ‘jeopardized map making’, Turpin argues that “the play of expectations that these questions undermine are fundamental in creating a tension between apprehension and loss, between focus and ambiguity”.⁸⁴ In the *Spiral Jetty* project as the pinnacle of Smithson’s ‘spiralling progressions’, Smithson summarises his dialectic of Site-Nonsite as a footnote to the *Spiral Jetty* essay:

- Site-Nonsite
1. Open Limits -Closed Limits
 2. A Series of Points-An Array of Matter
 3. Outer Coordinates- Inner Coordinates
 4. Subtraction-Addition
 5. Indeterminate-Determinate
 6. Certainty-Uncertainty
 6. Scattered -Contained
 - Information Information
 7. Reflection-Mirror
 8. Edge-Centre
 9. Some Place-No Place
 - (physical) (abstract)
 10. Many-One⁸⁵

This list underlines the dialectic that Smithson tries to point out with the relationship between ‘Sites’ and ‘Nonsites’. Following this footnote, Smithson explains what he calls “the Range of Convergence” that this dialectic mobilises. He writes:

The range of convergence between Site and Nonsite consists of a course of hazards, a double path made up of signs, photographs, and maps that belong to both sides of the dialectic at once. Both sides are present and absent at the same time. The land or ground from the Site is placed in the art (Nonsite) rather than the art placed on the ground. The Nonsite is a container within another container – the room. The plot or

⁸² Uroskie, “La Jetée”, 68.

⁸³ Smithson, “Four Conversations”, 211-2.

⁸⁴ Turpin, “Aesthetics of”, 149.

⁸⁵ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 153.

yard outside is yet another container. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional things trade places with each other in the range of convergence. Large scale becomes small. Small scale becomes large. A point on a map expands to the size of the land mass. A land mass contracts into a point. Is the Site a reflection of the Nonsite (mirror), or is it the other way around? The rules of this network of signs are discovered as you go along uncertain trails both mental and physical.⁸⁶

These footnotes reveal Smithson's emphasis on 'scale sense' as one of the dimensions that underlies the uncertainties and ambiguities the "Site-Nonsite" relation triggers. More importantly, the scaling effect that is exemplified in his argument on how a point on a map expands to the size of the land mass and how the latter contracts into the former, opens up imaginative possibilities for encountering the multi-scalar realities of the Anthropocene aesthetics. The multi-scalar dynamics that operate within this 'range of convergence' is rooted in Smithson's fascination with Pascal as a figure who according to him "was always troubled by these actual scale problems" and positioning of scale as "one of the key issues in terms of art".⁸⁷ In philosopher Gilles Tilberghien's words, "the issue of scale (as it is brought into play by the aerial view) is the key indicator of the imaginative constitutive relationship to the world of perception" for Smithson.⁸⁸ Smithson reflects on this issue further as he writes "[e]very art is really a miniature you can reverse it. You can look at a grain of sand as a gigantic boulder; it's just how you want to view it in terms of your scale sense..."⁸⁹

Smithson's interest in the interplay between scales which is brought into a radical dramatisation through the aerial view was also tied in with his disinterest in a "universe based on empirical facts" and his emphasis "on one's own experience".⁹⁰ In this regard, Smithson argues that the universe has endless "points of convergence" which are perceptible through one's own 'scale sense'.⁹¹ This argument can be traced back to his concerns with crystalline forms and his problematisation of mapping. Smithson writes that his preoccupation with crystalline forms involved

the moving or the mapping of basic chunks of mineral to considering the grid on the globe. You lay a grid on the globe the same way you lay a grid on the crystal, so you're really extending the abstraction that way...You run those latitudes and longitudes through and you have the points of convergence. So what I did was, I abstracted this situation in terms of my own experience...⁹²

⁸⁶ Ibid., 153.

⁸⁷ Smithson, "Four Conversations", 207.

⁸⁸ Tilberghien, "Robert Smithson", 283.

⁸⁹ Smithson, "Four Conversations", 207.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 211.

⁹¹ Ibid., 210.

⁹² Ibid., 210.

Smithson points out the same problematic explicitly when he writes that “mapping the Earth, the Moon, or other planets is similar to the mapping of crystal”.⁹³ More importantly, I interpret Smithson’s awareness of the discontinuities and connectivities of differing orders in a Pascalian sense as a critique of Erwin Panofsky’s notion of scalar “anthropocracy”⁹⁴ that is based upon an “anthropometric determination of the ‘objective’ dimensions”.⁹⁵ In other words, I read Smithson’s scale critique as a critique of rationality that sets forth “man” as the measure of all things and thus enables me to identify Smithson’s problematisation of scale as a radical example within the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics.

The disjunctions between sensory apprehensions and logical orders led Smithson to emphasise the notion of “surd” in relation to the issue of scale. At the same time-period he was reflecting on *Aerial Art*, he produced the *Alogon* (1966) series which consisted of several stainless-steel modules installed in an identical configuration in sequential scales (*Figure 39*). “Alogon” refers to the Greek term for “unnameable, irrational number” which Smithson references in his *Alogon* series as he writes: “Alogon is something that suspends rationality. There are three Alogon works, and they represent a kind of a break with logic, the break with Gestalt”.⁹⁶ In this regard, Tiberghien argues that Smithson’s notion of scale “has to be considered alongside the mathematical notion of incommensurable” and “scale as opposed to size cannot be put into relation with anything and sends us back in a state of incommensurability: the ‘surd’ situation”.⁹⁷ A similar disjunction between rationality and visual perception, the “surd” state arises during the aeroplane’s take-off and landing as Smithson writes “[t]he rational structures of buildings disappear into irrational disguises and are pitched into optical illusions. The world seen from air is abstract and illusive.”⁹⁸ This dynamic between the rational and irrational activated by the aerial view is important because the same break with logic will take place in the *Spiral Jetty* project as Smithson writes: “[i]n the Spiral Jetty the surd takes over and leads one into a world that cannot be expressed by number or rationality”.⁹⁹

⁹³ Robert Smithson, “Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site” [1966], in Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson*, 54.

⁹⁴ Art historian Yates McKee writes: “Panofsky’s phrase ‘anthropocracy’ first used in his discussion of the mathematicization of space in linear-point perspective, has an undeniable ominous tone, especially considered in light of contemporary ecological crises on a planetary scale.” Yates McKee, “Review: Art History, Ecocriticism, and the Ends of Man”, *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no.1 (2011): 125. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kcr010>

⁹⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 25.

⁹⁶ Smithson, “Four Conversations”, 199.

⁹⁷ Tiberghien, “Robert Smithson”, 281.

⁹⁸ Smithson, “Aerial Art”, 117.

⁹⁹ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 147.



Fig. 39: Robert Smithson, "Alogon #2", 1966. Painted steel, ten units. Overall approximately 89.5 x 823.5 x 88.9 cm. Image Credit: MoMa website, Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81087>.

Both *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* and *Aerial Art* can be seen as the pre-configurations of the concepts that informed and led to the *Spiral Jetty* project. Besides, they are both examples of Smithson's initial interest in 'working with raw materials in conjunction with abstract geometrical forms' and his departure from the 'specific object' orientation in the conception, production and distribution of art. More importantly, while *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* identifies the emergence of Smithson's geomorphic aesthetics, *Aerial Art* led to the development of the ideas that will catalyse the *transcalar* imagination that the *Spiral Jetty* sets forth. And both the geomorphic aesthetics and *transcalar* imagination that one encounters in the *Spiral Jetty* allow me to situate the work as a formative work within the prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics.

4.1.2. Sensorial Vertigo: Spirals as Transversal Knots of Scale

Smithson's encounter with the Great Salt Lake and the birth of the spiral form of the jetty that will be composed of "mud, salt crystals, rocks, water" which Smithson repeats in a hymn-like fashion throughout *the Spiral Jetty* essay and the film, involves an oceanic "dedifferentiation" process which he derives from art theorist Anton Ehrenzweig.¹⁰⁰ Within this encounter, a "surd" state where "alogical undermines the logos" arises, as Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay.¹⁰¹ The encounter process engages negotiations with the physical and material conditions of the site which Smithson draws from artist Tony Smith's description of the state of his mind in the "primary process of making contact with matter".¹⁰² When transposed into

¹⁰⁰ Smithson writes: "Smith is describing the state of his mind in the "primary process" of making contact with matter. This process is called by Anton Ehrenzweig "dedifferentiation" and it involves a suspended question regarding "limitlessness" (Freud's notion of the oceanic) that goes back to *Civilization and its Discontents*". Smithson, "A Sedimentation", 103.

¹⁰¹ Smithson, "The Spiral", 147.

¹⁰² Smithson writes: "At the low levels of consciousness the artist experiences undifferentiated or unbounded methods of procedure that break with the focused limits of rational technique. Here tools are undifferentiated from

the Anthropocene discourse, I interpret Smithson's engagement with the site as a differentiation by the Earth that produces an "affectual infrastructure" as Yusoff suggests.¹⁰³ More importantly, I argue that Smithson's approach to scale problem in the *Spiral Jetty* might be seen as a precursor of the critique of "scalar anthropocracy" that falls short in interpreting humans' geomorphic agency that stretches across the infinite conditions of scalar interconnectivity that the Anthropocene reveals. In relation to *Spiral Jetty's* problematisation of scale that is brought to the fore as one of its exigencies by the Anthropocene debate, I will use Derek Woods's "scale critique"¹⁰⁴ and Timothy Clark's "derangements of scale".¹⁰⁵ I will relate *Spiral Jetty's* scale shifts that take place within the fractal repetition of spiral form to Wood's dialectic notions of the "scale variance"¹⁰⁶ and "scale invariance".¹⁰⁷ I will argue that while Smithson's notion of "scale uncertainty"¹⁰⁸ could be read as a nod to 'scale variance', the fractal multiplication of spirals that achieves a totality could be connected to 'scale-invariance'.

I will begin with the emergence of the spiral form of the jetty. Smithson writes at the beginning of the *Spiral Jetty* essay, "I thought of making an island with the help of boats and barges, but in the end I would let the site determine what I would build..."¹⁰⁹ His earlier sketches indicate that this switch had taken place as well (*Figure 40&41*). In the *Spiral Jetty* essay, Smithson describes the process that led to the emergence of the spiral form as:

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. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense

the material they operate on, or they seem to sink back into their primordial condition[...]At this point I must return to what I think is an important issue, namely Tony Smith's "car ride" on the "unfinished turnpike". "This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art". He is talking about a sensation, not the finished work of art; this doesn't imply that he is anti-art. Smithson, "A Sedimentation", 103.

¹⁰³ Yusoff writes: "The task of geomorphic aesthetics is to think these new duration and material recombinations as an unthought affective infrastructure that subtends the architectures of materiality and resource distribution that themselves inscribe the planetary present of global-world-space." Yusoff, "Epochal Aesthetics".

¹⁰⁴ Woods, "Scale Critique", 133-142.

¹⁰⁵ Clark, "Derangements of", 148.

¹⁰⁶ Woods, "Scale Critique", 133

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 137.

¹⁰⁸ Smithson, "The Spiral", 147.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 147. Smithson's description of the emergence of the spiral as an "epiphanic encounter" in the *Spiral Jetty* essay is, in fact, a reconstruction. As the interviews with the contractor Bob Philipps reveal, the earthwork was indeed constructed as an island first, and then Smithson wanted to convert it into a spiral jetty which was realised in three weeks. As Fernando Rubio in his study on the material production of the *Spiral Jetty* points out: '...the jetty did not emerge on an epiphanic encounter with the Salt Lake, but through a rather laborious process which involved different unexpected detours'. Fernando D. Rubio, "The Material Production of the *Spiral Jetty*: A Study of Culture in the Making", *Cultural Sociology* 6, no.2, (2006): 156.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975512440226>

roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty. No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence. My dialectics of Site and Nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the mainland oscillated with waves and pulsations, and the lake remained rock still. 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.¹¹⁰



Fig. 40 (right): *The J-shaped jetty*. Photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni. Reprinted with permission: © Estate of Robert Smithson, New York /DACS London, 2007. Image Credit: Fernando D. Rubio, "The Material Production of the Spiral Jetty: A Study of Culture in the Making", *Cultural Sociology* 6, no.2, (2006): 153

Fig. 41. (left): *Sketches of the Spiral Jetty*, circa 1970. Reprinted with permission: © Estate of Robert Smithson, New York /DACS London, 2007. Image Credit: Rubio, *The Material*, 154.

In this passage, Smithson positions his sensory perceptions against a predetermined abstract apprehension. The lake's absolute horizontality provides open horizons alongside the curvilinear lines of the surrounding hills that are reflected in the lake. And this sensory revelation inspired Smithson to work with the spiral form. In other words, the rotational aspects of the site laid the foundations of a geometrical form that according to Smithson would 'expose' this 'gyrating space'. In this regard, Smithson explains that at the site "you are dealing with an expansive horizon that tends to circulate, and you get this sense of spiral centrifugal phenomena".¹¹¹

However, Smithson's earlier works such as *Aerial Map* (1967) and *Gyrostatis* (1968) reveal that he had been already preoccupied with the spiral form. The *Aerial Map* that was developed for the Air Terminal Site is a flat spiral composed of geometric components that would be

¹¹⁰ Smithson, "The Spiral", 146.

¹¹¹ Smithson, "Talking with", 156.

visible through an aerial view, while *Gyrostatis* is a standing triangulated spiral (Figure 42 & 43). Accordingly, Smithson emphasised both works as relational to the *Spiral Jetty*. In a wider framework, it is worth considering how Smithson's obsession with entropy might relate to his experimentation with spiral form. As art critic Tom Holert writes: “[s]pirals and whirlpools are the negative pathos figures in this aesthetic of decay. Whirls and spirals play a key role in Smithson's work. They are, quite literally, the code mediating between circularity and nomadic vectorality, just like related meandering, labyrinthine, and pyramid structures”.¹¹² Smithson will indeed mobilise the associations of the spiral as a form that reverberates ‘an aesthetics of decay’ in the *Spiral Jetty* which I will reflect on in more detail later in the chapter.

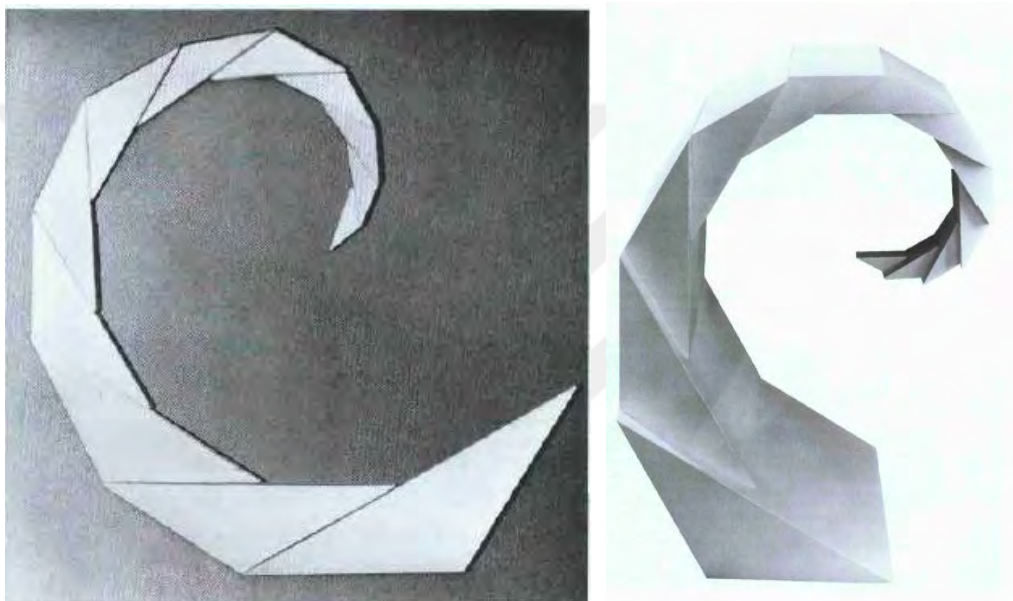


Fig. 42 (right): Robert Smithson, *Aerial Map Proposal for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport*, 1967. Mirrors (178 x 127 cm) Image credit: Image Credit: Flam (ed.), Robert Smithson, 118.

Fig. 43. (left): Robert Smithson, “*Gyrostatis*”, 1968. Steel and paint, (187 x 137.5 x 99.7 cm). Image Credit: Flam (ed.), Robert Smithson, 137.

As a thought and physical form, the spiral is a cross-cultural motif that can be traced back to a wide range of cultural productions throughout human history, from the earliest rock inscriptions in American south-west, to Ancient Greece, from Classical, Medieval, Early Modern, Romantic to the 20th-century art and literature. English studies scholar Nico Israel states that spiral is “apparent in cultural forms of ‘non-Western’ peoples, from Hindu or

¹¹² Tom Holert, “Political Whirlpools and Deserts: Michaelangelo Antonioni, Robert Smithson and Michael Snow”, *Medien, Kunst, Artz*, Art and Cinematography, Deserts of the Political (2004), Available at: http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/art_and_cinematography/deserts_of_the_Political/

Buddhist mandalas of the Far East to Mayan and Hopi architecture in the Americas”.¹¹³ While at its most general, Earthworks’ connection with Megalithic Art and Pre-Columbian civilisations has been debated,¹¹⁴ I will focus on *Spiral Jetty*’s preoccupation with spiral form in terms of scale shifts, rather than its primitive connotations. However, in order to emphasise the issue of scale, it is useful to briefly note two examples of the use of spiral within archaic and prehistoric civilisations, one as a geoglyph in a geo-astronomical site and the other one as an ancient megalith. The spiral geoglyphs of Nazca Lines in Peru (200-600 AD) which can only be fully comprehended through an aerial view and the spiral rock inscriptions in Newgrange Monument in Ireland (3200 BC) are identical in their use of the spiral, yet radically different in terms of the scale of the spiral form (*Figure 44&45*). I relate both examples to the *Spiral Jetty* as a beginning point as it will allow spirals of “radically different scales to enter into a new kind of imaginative transaction with one another”¹¹⁵ and Smithson will enhance this ‘transaction’ as much as visual and technological conditions allow.

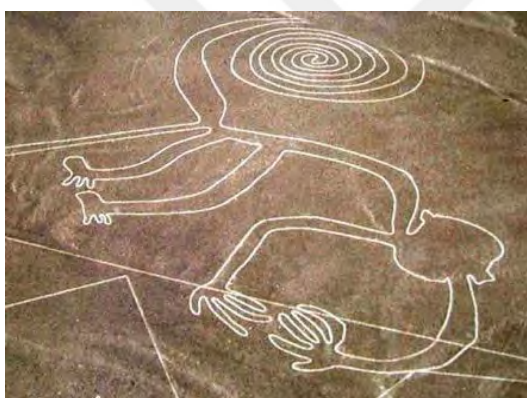


Fig.44 (right): The Nazca Lines. Aerial view of Nazca Monkey. Image credit: Wikipedia: Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazca_Lines#/media/File:Nazca_monkey.jpg

Fig. 45 (left): The Newgrange Monument Kerbstone K1-The Entrance Stone. Image credit: Wikipedia: Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newgrange#/media/File:Newgrange,_Meath.

¹¹³ Nico Israel, *Spirals: The Whirled Image in Twentieth-Century Literature and Art*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 2.

¹¹⁴ As an example, Krauss’s statement can be given: “As the 1960’s began to lengthen into the 1970s and ‘sculpture’ began to be piles of thread waste on the floor, or sawed redwood timbers rolled into the gallery, or tons of earth excavated from the desert, or stockades of logs surrounded by fire pits, the word sculpture became harder to pronounce-but not really that much harder. The historian/critic simply performed a more extended slight-of-hand and began to construct his genealogies out of the data of millennia than decades, Stonehenge, the Nazca Lines, the Toltec ball courts, Indian burial mounds- anything at all could be hauled into court to bear witness to this works’ connection to history and thereby legitimize its status as sculpture. Of course, Stonehenge and the Toltec ball courts were just exactly not sculpture, and so their role as historicist precedent becomes somewhat suspect in this particular demonstration.”, Krauss, “Sculpture in”, 33.

¹¹⁵ Dorrian, *Writing on*, 66.

Smithson's repetitive use of spiral as a static and dynamic form not only traverses microscopic and macroscopic visual scales but also finds expression in auditory dimensions. Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay that the scalar perception of spirals in the *Spiral Jetty* creates "a sense of scale that resonates in the eye and the ear at the same time".¹¹⁶ In his conversation with Kenneth Baker, Smithson states that: "[t]he ear resonates and the eye reflects, so it's possible to get these two going together. Also when you are on the Jetty, you experience it in terms of the sounds around it, like the lapping of the water, a continual lapping and rippling and the wind has a kind of resonating, droning, primordial sound".¹¹⁷ Smithson's imagination of the wind as resonating a 'primordial sound' exemplifies his concern on evoking 'the farthest reaches of time' through his artworks and foreshadows an affective strategy in response to the question of how to relate to inhuman ontologies through deep time that the Anthropocene implies. Importantly, the activation of the relationship between these two senses points to Smithson's multi-sensorial approach which, I argue, is critically important for envisioning an Anthropocenic imaginary.

In the *Spiral Jetty* essay, Smithson writes that the *Spiral Jetty* "echoes and reflects Constantin Brancusi's well-known portrait of James Joyce, as 'a spiral ear', a spiral adjoined by a vertical line", "because it suggests both a visual and aural scale at the same time".¹¹⁸ In addition, Smithson's simultaneous engagement with the visual and auditory dimensions can be seen as an attempt to bring two incommensurable orders in terms of physics in relation to one another. While they are both corporeal and anthropomorphic, the former is activated through light and the latter is mobilised through sound. Importantly, Smithson reflects on the potential implications of this simultaneous corporeal stimulation as he continues to write in the *Spiral Jetty* essay: "[h]ere [*the Spiral Jetty*] is a reinforcement and prolongation of spirals that reverberates up and down space and time".¹¹⁹ This statement exemplifies how Smithson activates the spiral as a dynamic form as reverberating 'up and down space and time' through using the scale as a conceptual and material tool. In this regard, he explicitly reveals *Spiral Jetty*'s scale shifts and his mobilisation of scale uncertainty, as he writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay:

The scale of the Spiral Jetty tends to fluctuate depending on where the viewer happens to be. Size determines an object, but scale determines art. A crack in the wall if viewed in terms of scale, not size, could be called Grand Canyon. A room could be made to take on the immensity of the solar system. Scale depends on one's capacity to be conscious of the actualities of perception. When one refuses to release the scale from

¹¹⁶ Smithson, "The Spiral", 146.

¹¹⁷ Smithson, "Talking with", 158.

¹¹⁸ Smithson, "The Spiral", 146.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 147

size, one is left with an object or language that appears to be certain. For me scale operates by uncertainty. To be in the scale of the Spiral Jetty is to be out of it. On the eye level, the tail leads one into undifferentiated state of matter. One's downward gaze pitches from side to side, picking out random depositions of salt crystals on the inner and outer edges, while the entire mass echoes the irregular horizons. And each cubic salt crystal echoes the Spiral Jetty in terms of the crystal's molecular lattice. Growth in a crystal advances around a dislocation point, in the manner of a screw. The Spiral Jetty could be considered one layer within the spiralling crystal lattice, magnified trillions of times.¹²⁰

The sensory perception and the scale sense of the visitor of the earthwork are constantly changing due to not only his/her positioning and viewpoint but also the imaginative associations that arise from 'the actualities of perception'. Yet, the 'totalizing pattern of Spiral Jetty achieved across scale' emerges clearly throughout Smithson's introduction of the spiral as the salt's 'crystal's molecular lattice' which is 'magnified trillions of times' in the earthwork. Therefore, we encounter a scale-invariant spiral at multiple layers in differing orders. In an attempt to expose the replication of spirals that 'reverberates up and down space and time' in the tripartite jetty; on top of salt crystals' molecular logic as well as the form of the jetty itself, one can add the disposition of galaxies and nebulae in the *Spiral Jetty* essay and film. In addition, Smithson points to the "helix" of the helicopter -which is a crucial component in the *Spiral Jetty's* filmic apparatus- as he highlights in the *Spiral Jetty* essay that the word "helicopter" "comes from the Greek *helix*, *helikos* meaning *spiral*".¹²¹ Besides, the flow of the *Spiral Jetty* essay instigates a mental spiralling and Smithson writes that the filmstrip is also "a spiral of frames".¹²²

The overlay of spirals in the last sequence of the *Spiral Jetty* film is critically important for understanding the full implications of Smithson's spiral themed imagery. Throughout this sequence, the image juxtaposes the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork with the reflection of the sun in the water around the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. In other words, the spiralling camera movements of the helicopter above the spiral earthwork position the spiral nebula of the sun onto the centre of the *Spiral Jetty* and thus aligns a myriad of spirals vertically on top of each other. Yet, if the *Spiral Jetty* achieves a totality across scale, it is not only vertical but also transversal and vertiginous since it juxtaposes incommensurable orders, such as the salt crystals and the spiral nebula of the sun. And as I mentioned earlier, at the point the image seems to centre these orders on top of each other, it dissolves into a million spirals. Therefore, this is the point where one could speak of the 'fractal' recursion of spiral form operating as a transversal knot

¹²⁰ Ibid., 147.

¹²¹ Ibid., 148.

¹²² Ibid., 148.

that binds incommensurable orders of magnitude. I read this transversal knot as a nod to Wood's notion of 'scale variance' which means 'the observation and the operation of systems are subject to different constraints at different scales due to real discontinuities'.¹²³ While 'the scale-variance' is exemplified through the juxtaposition of the growth form of salt crystal with the static form of the earthwork jetty itself, this juxtaposition paradoxically resembles the scale-invariant fractals of the Mandelbrot set. In other words, in the *Spiral Jetty*, the 'scale-invariance' is used almost to suggest its 'scale-variance'. The identity of the spiral in differing orders do not suggest a simplification or reduction but rather reveals the complexity and the incommensurability of the orders we observe. In this regard, I see this complex figuration of scale through the spiral as a contribution to Wood's "scale critique" which 'emphasises disjunctures and incommensurable differences among scales'- which I have discussed in the first chapter in regard to Anthropocene's problematisation of scale.

Smithson uses jumps across the orders in which we observe the spiral. For example, in the *Spiral Jetty* film, Smithson cuts from the aerial view of the entire earthwork to "macroscopic still images of the salt crystals that are in the formation process in and around the Spiral Jetty".¹²⁴ In this regard, Smithson's mobilisation of scale in the *Spiral Jetty* can be considered as a 'non-cartographic concept of scale' in Clark's words.¹²⁵ As I have emphasised in the first chapter, in his discussion on the limitations of cartographic notion of scale in comprehending the multi-scalar realities of the Anthropocene, Clark describes the 'non-cartographic concepts of scale' as 'not a smooth zooming in and out but involve jumps and discontinuities' and Smithson's engagement with the scale in the *Spiral Jetty* involves such jumps and discontinuities. Smithson's associative understanding of scale in the *Spiral Jetty* that embraces 'uncertainty' and his activation of multiple registers and scales through the spiral support art historian Emily Eliza Scott's discussion on "the representations that best suit our present moment", namely the multi-scalar reality of the Anthropocene. She writes:

perspectives that are highly situated yet move across registers and scales-both spatial (e.g. the so-called local and global) and temporal (e.g. historical time, evolutionary time, and media time) [...] it is the representations that engage multiple, ultimately incommensurable scales and registers (e.g., the molecular, bacterial, geopolitical, geological, and architectural, visible, invisible, material, speculative, and so on) that best suit our present moment.¹²⁶

¹²³ Wood, "Scale Critique", 135.

¹²⁴ Uroskie, "La Jetée", 72.

¹²⁵ Clark, "Derangements of", 149.

¹²⁶ Scott, "Archives of", 136.

Before entering the *sensorial vertigo* that the *Spiral Jetty* film induces, I will undertake a deeper analysis of *Spiral Jetty*'s scale jumps and shifts that is revealed through a vertical apprehension of spirals across Smithson's selection of images from the earthwork in the *Spiral Jetty* essay. Following Robert's detailed analysis, the set of nine photographs "proceeds in a telescopic progression, each successive image closing the distance to the Jetty, each a closer detail".¹²⁷ The first one is an aerial view, which is the most well-known image of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork taken by Gianfranco Gorgoni under Smithson's direction and shows the entire jetty extending from the shore to the picture plane and rotating back towards its centre (*Figure 46*). This image is followed by two more aerial views which encompass further rotations yet do not reveal the whole spiral (*Figure 47&48*).



Fig 46: Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970. Coil: 1500 ft. long and 15 ft. wide. Black rock, salt crystals, earth, red water (algae). Photographed by Gianfranco Gorgoni. Image Credit: Smithson, "The Spiral", 144.



Fig 47 & 48: Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970. Coil: 1500 ft. long and 15 ft. wide. Black rock, salt crystals, earth, red water (algae). Photographed by Gianfranco Gorgoni. Image Credit: Smithson, "The Spiral", 144.

¹²⁷ Roberts, *Mirror-travels*, 129.

Then we encounter three close-up images of the surface of the jetty which reveal its specific materiality (*Figure 49, 50 and 51*).¹²⁸ One of these photos is a close-up image of the salt crystals. Although one expects this close-up image of the salt crystal to be from the crystals on the rocks of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork, Smithson chooses the most extreme close-up from an ambiguous non-human actant: a macroscopic frame of the crystals covering a tumbleweed (*Figure 52*). This image is positioned next to a long view shot from ground level showing Smithson walking on the jetty (*Figure 53*). In Robert's reading, this sequence activates an "Icarian fall from the general to the particular" while reaching "its forensic endpoint".¹²⁹ Besides, Smithson's tumbleweed image "destabilizes the centre of the spiral by suggesting that the viewer can 'tumble' further into the work and this instability applies at the aerial, or 'upper' end of the photographic series as well".¹³⁰ As exemplified in *Figure 46*, the hills behind the Jetty align in a way that suggests "the arms of an even larger spiral, one that is itself presumably embraced by another, and so on".¹³¹ Or the opposite effect can be observed in *Figure 49* and *Figure 53* as the arms of the spiral resemble "recessing horizons".¹³² Roberts writes that "as the spiral extends all the way down and all the way up the scale of scale", we find ourselves in "an abyss or maelstrom of scale which in its own helical trajectory reiterates the form of the detail itself".¹³³ In this regard, I argue further that the unpredictable and rotational movements of a tumbleweed could imply or hint at our fractalised, spiralling journey up and down throughout scales and prepares us for the vertiginous experience of the *Spiral Jetty* film, which according to Smithson "recapitulates the scale of the Spiral Jetty".¹³⁴



Fig.

49-50-51: Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970. Coil: 1500 ft. long and 15 ft. wide. Black rock, salt crystals, earth, red water (algae). Photographed by Gianfranco Gorgoni. Image Credit: Smithson, "The Spiral", 144.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 130.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 130.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 130.

¹³¹ Ibid., 130.

¹³² Ibid., 130.

¹³³ Ibid., 131.

¹³⁴ Smithson, "The Spiral", 151.

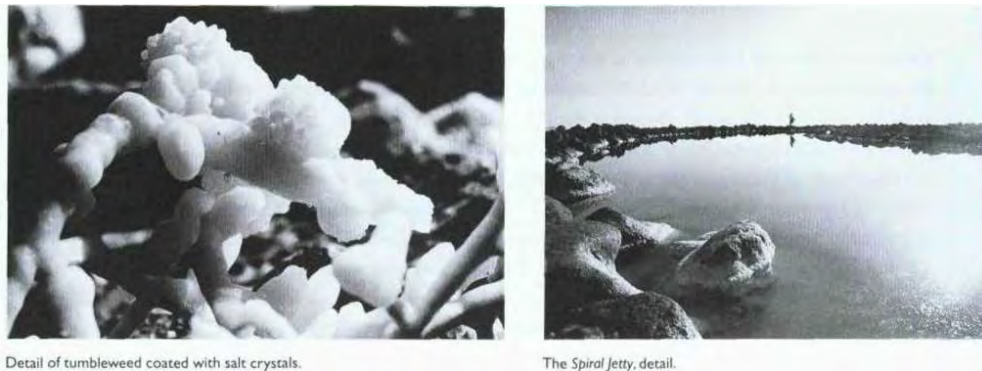


Fig. 52 (left): Robert Smithson, *the Spiral Jetty*, detail of tumbleweed coated with salt crystals. Image Credit: Smithson, “*The Spiral*”, 148.

Fig. 53 (right): Robert Smithson, *the Spiral Jetty*, detail. Image Credit: Smithson, “*The Spiral*”, 148.

The earthwork *Spiral Jetty*’s spiral constellation is low to the ground and its horizontal aspect is stronger than its vertical dimension. As Shapiro argues it is as if “the spiral is squashed or projected on a plane” in the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork¹³⁵. According to Smithson, the physical and mental steps that we take on the *Spiral Jetty* takes us to a ‘surd’ state. This may indicate a preparation for our expedition into the temporal spiralling that we will experience through the film’s *historical vertigo*. In other words, if a verticality is reinforced throughout the experience of the work, it also engages with temporality and brings along a *historical vertigo*. That is to say, Smithson overlays the *sensorial vertigo* of the *Spiral Jetty* on a historical one in order to introduce an alternative understanding of time and history that jeopardises ‘logical purity’. According to Smithson, the ‘logical purity’ finds its expression “in measured lengths that would involve areas, volumes, masses, pressures, forces, stresses and strains”, yet, although the “*Spiral Jetty* could be trapped by a grid of segments”, they “would exist only in mind or on paper”.¹³⁶

In alignment with his statement that ‘in the *Spiral Jetty* the surd takes over and leads one into a world that cannot be expressed by number or rationality’, Smithson uses his own footsteps as an entry point into the ‘surd’ state. Smithson wants his movements to be filmed from a helicopter “directly overhead in order to get the scale in terms of erratic steps”.¹³⁷ The erratic footsteps activate once again a geologic imagination and can be related to the geologic agency of humans that becomes a stratigraphic inscription which is widely discussed within

¹³⁵ Shapiro, *Earthwards: Robert*, 223.

¹³⁶ Smithson, “*The Spiral*”, 147.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

the Anthropocene debate. In other words, this analogy can be read through an Anthropocenic lens since Smithson quotes from A.S. Eddington's "Number, the Language of Science" (1930) in the *Spiral Jetty* essay: "[w]e have found a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown. We have devised profound theories, one after another, to account its origin. At last, we have succeeded in constructing the creature that made the footprint. And lo! It is our own".¹³⁸ This self-reflexive account is an outcome of what Smithson defines as "measurable steps".¹³⁹ Through emphasising the dictionary definition of "scale" (Scale skal n. It or L; *Scala*; L *scala* usually *scalae* pl., l.a. Originally a ladder; a flight of stairs; hence b.a means of ascent), Smithson connects the steps that will descend from horizontal to vertical, from "logic" to "surd", from rational to speculative, from present to past or vice versa. Such a shift can be exemplified through Smithson's speculative yet scientifically informed argument in the *Spiral Jetty* essay as he writes "[f]ollowing the spiral steps we return to our origins; back to some pulpy protoplasm, a floating eye adrift in an antediluvian ocean."¹⁴⁰ I will reflect on this statement in detail in the second part of the chapter but at this point, it is important to emphasise how Smithson's constructs a relationship between the present and the deep past, a transition to our 'origins' and between a *sensorial vertigo* and *historical vertigo* through reflecting on the concept of scale itself.

This jump into 'origins' is followed by Smithson's reflection on his experience of sunstroke in the *Spiral Jetty* essay, which is supported by what I call 'helicopter-hymn' sequence in the *Spiral Jetty* film. The first helicopter sequence within the concluding section of the film links the vertical steps taken into 'surd' and catalyses a *sensorial vertigo* that troubles "the cool rooms of reason".¹⁴¹ This sequence starts with the helicopter and the camera with it rising off the ground and although we expect to see the completed earthwork, we only encounter the partial views of the jetty that "traces only a thin band that seems to cut the film frame into two" (Figure 54 and 55).¹⁴² This 'cutting' not only leaves us with a groundless image which implies the sensorial conditions of being in the Anthropocene and which was also evident in the *La Région Centrale* but also turns "the immense materiality of the stone structure" into "a kind of abstract figure".¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 148.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁴² Uroskie, "La Jetée", 70.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 70.

As the helicopter gains altitude and we expect to situate ourselves and the jetty, the cinematic apparatus starts rotating around the spiral earthwork and Smithson repeats a series of directional coordinates in a monotone voice, in a hymn-like fashion.

“From the centre of the Spiral Jetty

North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

North by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

Northeast by North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

Northeast by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

East by North—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

East by South—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

Southeast by East—Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

[. . .]¹⁴⁴

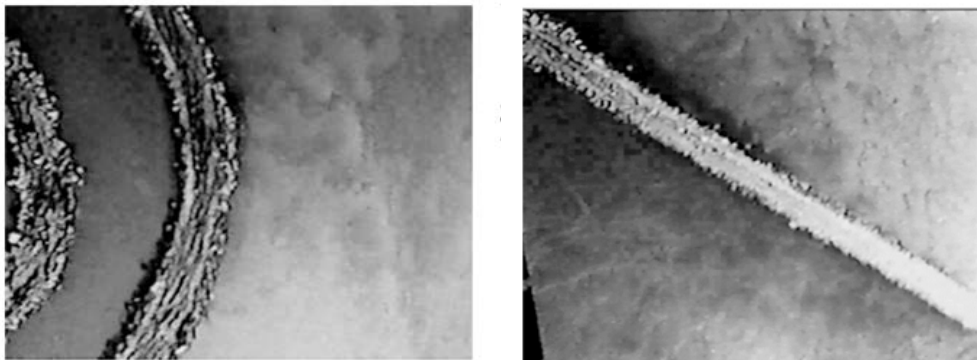


Fig. 54-55: Robert Smithson, stills from the helicopter sequence of the Spiral Jetty film, time elapsed 22:26 (left), 22:33 (right)

In opposition to the expectation of a “compass bearing” leading one to a specific coherent place, these coordinates take us to “nowhere” since it reveals an identical composition of the spiral and “lends a dizzying confusion to the coordinates themselves”.¹⁴⁵ In Turpin’s words, this “repetitive series of directional coordinates are annihilated by *dedifferentiation*”.¹⁴⁶ Since this sequence follows “the dizzying spiral” caused by Smithson’s sunstroke “yearning for the

¹⁴⁴ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 149.

¹⁴⁵ Uroskie, “La Jetée”, 71

¹⁴⁶ Turpin, “Aesthetics of”, 181.

assurance of geometry”¹⁴⁷ in the *Spiral Jetty* essay, it “attacks the sensation of viewing by provoking a desire for some mathematical logic of understanding that it simultaneously denies”.¹⁴⁸ Turpin argues further that this sequence can be read as a critique of “standardization”, more specifically, “the ordinal logic governing the navigable world” through a dedifferentiation of all coordinates.¹⁴⁹ Besides, this sequence adds another layer to the surd-logic tension that Smithson continuously plays with, it perfectly fits in the fractal repetition of the spiral form. As Uroskie writes: “... upon closer examination, its perfectly regular, repeating form spirals into the ever-increasing complexity of a fractal pattern. Ignoring rhetorical and cartographic conventions, Smithson’s progression around the compass is in fact constantly reversing direction and cutting back on itself.”¹⁵⁰ In other words, by repeating the directional coordinates of the filmic apparatus’s movements and what the filmic apparatus reveals over and over again, the former pointing out to technoscientific modes of seeing and navigating, the latter relating to an objective materialist observation, yet by dedifferentiating the differentiating coordinates, Smithson points out to a tension between the static, rational, analytical conception of the navigable world and the dynamic, irrational and sensible experience of the spiral. Importantly, in Ranciere’s terms, this sequence might be read as an attempt to redistribute the sensible as it reveals the inadequacy of the ‘rhetoric and cartographic conventions’ for identifying the complexity of the spiral assemblage that involves a fractal pattern in differing incommensurable orders.

As soon as Smithson’s reading of the coordinates concludes and the earthwork Jetty is finally revealed as a whole, the helicopter starts to loop and in a way, reiterates the spiral on the ground dynamically. This sequence indeed achieves a vertiginous effect, what I called a *sensorial vertigo* which is one of the key points that connects the *Spiral Jetty* film to *La Région Centrale*. Similar to *La Région Centrale*, the horizon is destabilised and we are left with groundless images which foreshadow the sensorial conditions of being in the Anthropocene. Accordingly, Uroskie argues: “[c]ontrary to any natural kind of spatial representation in film, yet curiously akin to what Michael Snow would elevate to a structural principle in *La Région Centrale* the following year (1971), Smithson’s camera twists and distorts our perception such that, even as the *Spiral Jetty* comes into view, our own position in relation to the work seems as uncertain, as muddy as ever”.¹⁵¹ Accordingly, Smithson’s description of the equation that

¹⁴⁷ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 148.

¹⁴⁸ Turpin, “Aesthetics of”, 181.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 182.

¹⁵⁰ Uroskie, “La Jetée”, 71.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 71.

he proposed for 'the scale of centres' in the *Spiral Jetty* essay is also "a muddy spiral".¹⁵² In this regard, the film enables Smithson to extend that 'muddy spiral' equation into the destabilisation of rhetorical and cartographic conventions and reveal an "entropic subsumption of meanings"¹⁵³ and this extension is represented in the moving image as a *sensorial vertigo*.

In order to connect *Spiral Jetty's sensorial vertigo* to a *historical* one, Smithson's description of "the movieola" as "a time machine"¹⁵⁴ in the essay provides a significant starting point. The cinematic apparatus induces a *historical vertigo* and represents 'the spiral steps' temporally. It transfers or translates the temporal steps, the *historical vertigo* into the spiralling sequence of the film where the *sensorial vertigo* reaches its crescendo. In other words, Smithson's 'spiral steps' that introduces a *sensorial vertigo* in our experience support the *historical vertigo* that the film evokes.

4.1.3. *Historical vertigo: The Collision of Human and Earth Temporalities*

...The movie began as a set of disconnections, a bramble of stabilized fragments taken from things obscure and fluid, ingredients trapped in a succession of frames, a stream of viscosities both still and moving. And the movie editor, bending over such a chaos of 'takes' resembles a palaeontologist sorting out glimpses of a world not yet together, a land that has yet to come to completion, a span of time unfinished, a spaceless limbo on some spiral reels. Film strips hung from the cutter's rack, bits and pieces of Utah, out-takes overexposed and underexposed, masses of impenetrable material. The sun, the spiral, the salt buried in lengths of footage. Everything about movies and moviemaking is archaic and crude. One is transported by this Archeozoic medium into the earliest known geological eras. The movieola becomes a 'time machine' that transforms trucks into dinosaurs. Fiore pulled lengths of film out of the movieola with the grace of a Neanderthal pulling intestines from a slaughtered mammoth. Outside his 13th Street loft window one expected to see Pleistocene faunas, glacial uplifts, living fossils, and other prehistoric wonders. Like two cavemen we plotted how to get to the Spiral Jetty from New York City. A geopolitics of primordial return ensued [...] The movie recapitulates the scale of the Spiral Jetty[...]Adrift amid scraps of film, one is unable to infuse into them any meaning, they seem worn-out, ossified views, degraded and pointless, yet they are powerful enough to hurl one into a lucid vertigo...¹⁵⁵

The *Spiral Jetty* film achieves a *historical vertigo* through its interplay of diverse temporalities which collapses the prehistoric past into the present. This invokes a post-apocalyptic future and sets another precedent along with *The Continuous Monument*, as a geoaesthetic act that responds to the collision of human and Earth temporalities that the Anthropocene discourse

¹⁵² Smithson, "The Spiral", 150.

¹⁵³ Turpin, "Aesthetics of", 181.

¹⁵⁴ Smithson, "The Spiral", 150.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 150-2.

emphasises. In this regard, I position Smithson's proposition of 'moviela' as a 'time machine' that 'transforms trucks into dinosaurs' as a retroactive response to the central question of the Anthropocene discourse on how to relate to inhuman ontologies in deep time. More importantly, Smithson implies the end of the human, the figure of Man by pointing out the collapse of the dinosaurs in the remote past. I will reflect upon the *Spiral Jetty* film's *historical vertigo* through focusing on Smithson's "stratigraphic conception of time"¹⁵⁶ that positions time "as a substance based aesthetic ontology" in Jussi Parikka's words.¹⁵⁷ Both interpretations are related to Smithson's general refutation of historical humanism that is based on a linear and teleological understanding of time and his specific positioning in response to the cosmic anxieties of the Atomic Age. In this regard, according to Shapiro, Smithson posits a Nietzschean conception of time, time as "eternal recurrence".¹⁵⁸ The film has a triadic structure and I follow Uroskie's formulation of its schematisation: "the mapping/unmapping of the Site", "the building/unbuilding" of the jetty and lastly "the surveying/invisibility" of the completed work. I find this structure useful because its dialectical formulation aligns with Smithson's 'Site-Nonsite' dialectics in the way in which "each stage confronts its own impossibility in turn".¹⁵⁹ Yet, I reformulate the triadic structure as; "(de)centring the Spiral Jetty", "(de)materialising the Spiral Jetty", and "dissolving-crystallising the Spiral Jetty".

The (de)centring section of the film begins with the sun sequence which I have reflected in the first section of the chapter. In the following sequences of the (de)centring section of the film, Smithson introduces a *historical vertigo*, firstly through using the cinematic apparatus for distributing "the agency of time", and secondly through employing the "cut" technique, which is a nod to Russian avant-garde cinema and/or to the surrealist films of Buñuel according to artist Michael Ned Holte.¹⁶⁰ The cut as "a shock to the thought"¹⁶¹ enables the viewer to travel through time, or through what Smithson defines as 'a set of disconnections, a bramble of

¹⁵⁶ Uroskie, "La Jetée", 72-4.

¹⁵⁷ Jussi Parikka, "Earth Forces Contemporary Land Arts, Technology and New Materialist Aesthetics", *Cultural Studies Review* 21, no.2 (2015): 54. <https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v21i2.4317>

¹⁵⁸ Shapiro writes: "It was Nietzsche, of course, who announced the thought of eternal recurrence and who was being fervently read and reinterpreted in the 1960s by European philosophers seeking a counterbalance to modernity and especially to Hegelian conceptions of time and history. Smithson never explicitly addresses the thought of eternal recurrence, but his indebtedness to [Eric Temple Bell (John Taine) and specifically to Bell's conception of time leaves no doubt that he found a great appeal in this radical alternative to evolutionary and progressive temporality, whether that temporality is deployed in biology or in art history's construction of a canonical succession of styles proceeding meaningfully out of one another". In this regard, Shapiro interprets Smithson's conception of time as having two aspects: "...two conceptions of time in Smithson and his sources: that of eternal recurrence (in the background) and the theory of entropy". Shapiro, *Earthwards: Robert*, 27-28.

¹⁵⁹ Uroskie, "La Jetée", 69.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Ned Holte, "Shooting the Archaeozoic: Robert Smithson's Adventures in Time Travel on the Road to Rozel Point", *Frieze* 88, (3 Feb 2015) <https://www.frieze.com/article/shooting-archaeozoic>

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

stabilized fragments'. I argue that the *historical vertigo*, the collision of varied temporalities is mobilised through multiple operations such as expansion and compression, extension and contraction, and juxtaposition or overlay of visual-temporal frames, of what Smithson describes as 'ingredients trapped in a succession of frames, a stream of viscosities both still and moving'. The 'ingredients' Smithson uses for the 'lucid vertigo' are not only visual materials but also his voiceover, the soundtrack, and his essay, all of which support the visual imagery and throw us into 'a span of time unfinished' and 'a spaceless limbo'. In this regard, Smithson's cinematographic approach reiterates his description of stepping on the earthwork Jetty as activating 'a sense of scale that resonates in the eye and ear at the same time'. The multi-modal 'scale sense' mobilised by the *Spiral Jetty* film aims for what Smithson described as a 'reinforcement and prolongation of the spirals that reverberates up and down space and time'.¹⁶² In this regard, as an entry point to the question of how the *Spiral Jetty* film achieves such a *historical vertigo*, it could be stated that the film triggers a myriad of 'fluctuating resonances' in terms of imagination of temporality through exploiting what Smithson defined as 'the generative power of both visual and auditory scale'.

Going back and forth from the past to the present -or vice versa-, is enhanced by what Smithson defines as a "cosmic rupture",¹⁶³ through the "road" scenes that structure the (de)centring of the *Spiral Jetty* section of the film. "Point-of-view shots taken from a moving vehicle",¹⁶⁴ showing a stretch of dirt road that "rushes to and from" the site in Utah, moves us back and forth and (dis)connects the five sequences that were shot in the East after the earthwork was built, more specifically in New York that Smithson describes as "urban desert".¹⁶⁵ It is important to briefly note that this description, in addition to the mobilisation of a *historical vertigo*, provides another link between the *Spiral Jetty* and *The Continuous Monument*, in particular Superstudio's discussion on artificial deserts, as exemplified in New New York collage.

The road takes us from the telescopic shot of the sun to the scattering pages in a New Jersey Quarry, from the map that highlights deformed shorelines of the Ancient Bonneville Lake, to a stack of books laid on top of a mirror, and to the Hall of Late Dinosaurs in the American Museum of Natural History, before finishing with a sequence of shots of different maps, including a Jurassic Period map, a roadmap and U.S. Geological survey map (*Figure 56*).

¹⁶² Smithson, "The Spiral", 147.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 152.

¹⁶⁴ Holte, "Shooting the".

¹⁶⁵ Smithson, "The Spiral", 150.

Smithson describes the (dis)connections reinforced by the road in the film as he writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay: “[a] road that goes forward and backwards between things and places that are elsewhere. You might even say that the road is nowhere in particular. The disjunction operating between reality and film drives one into a sense of cosmic rupture”.¹⁶⁶ This statement identifies not only Smithson’s mobilisation of the metaphorical implications of the road as something that spatially links or binds specific locations, but also implies a journey through different temporalities. In other words, in the *Spiral Jetty* film, the road takes us into a journey through various spatiotemporalities which eventually leads to a ‘cosmic rupture’.



Fig. 56: Robert Smithson, still from the road sequence of the *Spiral Jetty* film, time elapsed:00:59.

The road that is ‘nowhere’ and travels between ‘worn-out, ossified views’ and ‘degraded and pointless’ ‘scraps of film’, indeed throws us into a ‘cosmic rupture’, not only between reality and film but also between the past and the present. A state of disequilibrium rises from this ‘cosmic rupture’ and “frees the viewer from the dialectic of history”.¹⁶⁷ This emancipation from ‘the dialectic of history’ is in alignment with Smithson’s cosmic view of time. If we look for or assume any ‘coherence between disparate elements’ between the five sequences, it is found in the ‘geopolitics of the primordial’ in Smithson’s words and I position this emphasis as one of the strongest links to an Anthropocenic imagination. In addition, Smithson states that “the consciousness of distant past absorbed the time that went into the making of the movie”.¹⁶⁸ Important for this dissertation is that Smithson continuously repositions the immediacy of the present within the context of the deep time and thus foresees an Anthropocenic understanding of temporality.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 152.

¹⁶⁷ Gabriel Jennings, “On the Horizon”, in *Abstract Video: The Moving Image in Contemporary Art*, ed. Gabriel Jennings (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 6.

¹⁶⁸ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 150.

Following the road that takes us visually and sequentially forward from the sun sequence, the film cuts into a long shot of an eroded cliff that is located in Great Notch Quarry in New Jersey. We witness sheets of white paper blowing across the face of the cliff, while we hear a high tempo clicking of a clock (*Figure 57*). While our eyes follow the fall of scattering pages, we hear Smithson reading a quote from a geological textbook: “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...”¹⁶⁹ Towards the end of Smithson’s voiceover, the film cuts to a medium shot showing these sheets fall upon a “dried out, cracked” earth (*Figure 58*).¹⁷⁰ The last cut takes us into a close-up where we realise that the pages were ripped from an old atlas, scattered on the ground, on what Smithson defines as a “cracked mud puzzle” (*Figure 59*).¹⁷¹ Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay that he wanted “to treat [the aforementioned] quote as a fact” and asked Nancy Holt to shoot “the earth’s history” in one minute.¹⁷² This sequence is the beginning of Smithson’s experimentation with the positioning the human temporality in relationship to Earth temporality, which he will further explore in the upcoming sequences of the *Spiral Jetty* film. In this regard, two years before the *Spiral Jetty* project, Smithson wrote in “A Sedimentation of Mind: Earth Projects” (1968) essay that “[t]he strata of the earth is a jumbled museum...When one scans the ruined sites of pre-history one sees a heap of wrecked maps that upsets our present art historical limits”.¹⁷³ Through this statement, Smithson seeks to destabilise the limits of historical periodisations that are dominant in humanist schools of thought. More importantly, this destabilisation points out a kind of a myopia in terms of the conception of temporality that the Anthropocene thesis will problematise 32 years after Smithson’s foreshadowing filmic experimentations that respond to the collision of human and Earth temporalities.



Fig. 57-58-59: Robert Smithson, Stills from the Spiral Jetty film, scattered pages sequence, time elapsed (left to right): 01:05, 01:37, 01:54.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷² Ibid., 151.

¹⁷³ Smithson, “A Sedimentation”, 110.

In this regard, the falling atlas pages can be seen as a visually dynamic contribution to ‘the heap of wrecked maps’ which refer to a certain form of cultural sedimentation directly related to human temporality. The temporality of the Earth, on the other hand, might be visualised through this “dried-out, cracked mud puzzle”.¹⁷⁴ With this scene, Smithson might be giving reference to the cover of the Brian Aldiss novel *Earthworks* that had been used as one of the posters of the first “Earthworks” exhibition that took place three years ago in New York. Besides, the wind that blows the ‘ripped pages’ in the sequence can be counted as another layer of temporality that belongs to planetary forces. This sequence implies an expansion of time frames through the conversion of the stratigraphic metaphor that comes from the geological textbook into a literal and visual one that represents the Earth’s history. The compression of the ‘earth’s history’, on the other hand, is evidenced through the time-length of the scene which lasts exactly one minute. Moreover, Smithson’s entropic approach can be observed subtly “while sheets of a book fall to the earth in a kind of sedimentation, Smithson’s voiceover suggests this sedimentation is diffuse, scattered and to an extent, irrecoverable”.¹⁷⁵ The ripped and scattered atlas pages are proportionally similar to the pieces of the mud-puzzle in terms of size and the fast-paced clicking of the clock suggests a “forward progression of time”.¹⁷⁶ And I argue that this audio-visual alignment invokes a sedimentation process that is entropic and offers a strong retroactive response to the collision of human and Earth temporalities implied by the Anthropocene.

In the following road scene that will take us to the next sequence, we move forward but we are looking back to where we come from, perhaps invoking the immediate past. In this regard, Uroskie argues that “[t]he road depicts a transaction with the past”, that is “one of phenomenal experience of both present and future”.¹⁷⁷ In this hypothetical recent past, the camera slowly zooms onto a map juxtaposing a distant past with the present, while we hear a much slower paced ticking of a clock, “giving rise to a more contemplative mood, the experience of time on a more expansive scale”.¹⁷⁸ Throughout the first visual pun, the close up reveals the legend that identifies “Existing lakes” and “Area of Ancient Lake Bonneville” (*Figure 60&61*). We hear Smithson’s voiceover reading from a geological guidebook, while the camera pans towards the centre of the visual frame:

¹⁷⁴ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 151.

¹⁷⁵ Uroskie, “La Jetée”, 65.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 65.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 65.

[t]he notion that the lake must be connected to the Pacific Ocean, by a subterranean channel at the head of which a huge whirlpool threatened the safety of lake craft, was not dispelled until the 1870s-long after they should have known better. As a matter of fact, eye-witnesses reported the location of the whirlpool about midway between Freemont and Antelope Islands.

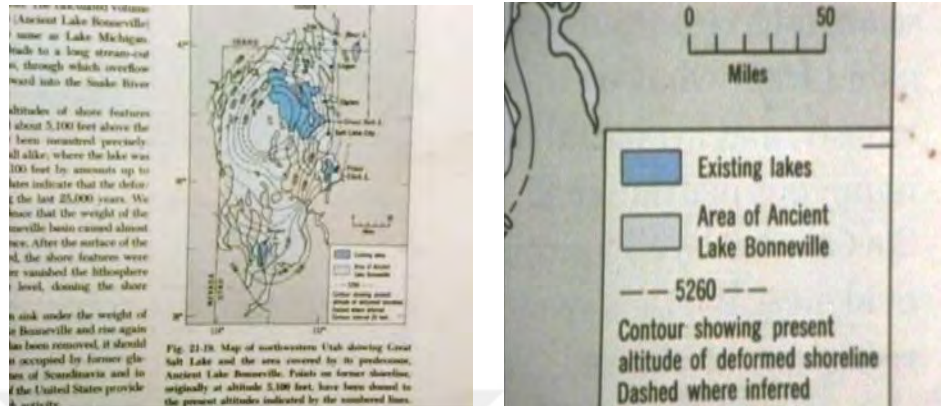


Fig. 60 & 61: Robert Smithson, stills from the *Spiral Jetty* film, “Ancient Lake Bonneville” map sequence. time elapsed: 02:27 (left) 02:40 (right).

We witness the “temporal borders” of this mythic “whirlpool” “spreading out beyond its border”¹⁷⁹ which Smithson believes to be inadequately mapped. In other words, through the visual representation of dashed lines, whilst still in our “contemplative mood”,¹⁸⁰ we sense the presence of the deep past in the present. The “insistence” of the prehistoric past in the present is visually invoked through an “invisible sedimentation”.¹⁸¹ More importantly, the spiral form comes forward again, this time in the “mythopoetic” form of the whirlpool,¹⁸² whose centre turns out to be where earthwork Jetty is spatio-temporally located (*Figure 62*). This positioning can be related to the epilogue of the film, namely the textual positioning of *The Spiral Jetty* onto the screen before the telescopic shot of the explosions on the sun. In this regard, this stage of the (de)centring the *Spiral Jetty* film can be considered as the second step in our ‘Icarian fall’ starting from the sun. This sequence induces a *historical vertigo* once again through the dual operation of expansion and compression of time frames. While the haunting of the spiral that comes into our apperception through the ancient whirlpool is an expansion of time frames which invokes a sense of temporality of the Earth, the then-present map which is overlaid on the invisible past and is threatened by the whirlpool reminds us of the temporality of the human.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.,66.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.,65.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.,66.

¹⁸² Ibid.,66.



Fig. 62: Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, “Ancient Lake Bonneville” map sequence, time elapsed: 03:15.

As the road goes forward again, we are now aware that the journey won’t take us any specific time or place, but rather juxtapose multiple spatiotemporalities. The film cuts to a static image of a stack of books, which are lying horizontally on top of each other on a mirror surface. The books are entitled *The Lost World*, *Mazes and Labyrinths*, *The Realm of Nebulae*, *Sediments* and *The Day of the Dinosaur*, of which titles become “distorted reflections”¹⁸³ in the lower half of the visual frame and carry significant Anthropocenic ramifications (Figure 63). This time we hear a Geiger counter which invokes again a sense of threat to our present through “registering the invisible background radiation of the site” or “the earth’s resonant activity”.¹⁸⁴ In this regard, Israel points at a spatiotemporal relationship between the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork and *Thiokol Propulsion Plant* which was located in a 22 miles radius around *Spiral Jetty* earthwork and “where during the 1960s and 1970s, LGM-30 Minuteman intercontinental nuclear missiles were built”.¹⁸⁵ Israel relates the plant’s proximity to the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork to ‘the earth’s resonant activity’ during the Cold War and Vietnam War and interprets the invocation of this “symptomatic twist and turn” as a “sharp-blade[d] critique” of “a particular war”.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ibid., 67.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹⁸⁵ Israel, *Spirals: The*, 185.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 185.



Fig. 63: Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, books laid on a mirror sequence, time elapsed: 04:07.

The connection between the Geiger counter and the books can be transposed into the Anthropocene discourse through the connotation of an existential danger, either by the sun itself or the nuclear weapons created by humans. Either way, the Geiger counter becomes an overlay on the image and adds a temporal depth that is aurally registered and points to the temporality of the Earth. Yet, the image problematises our sense of human temporality through the “uneasy resting” of the books that are emblematic of a cultural sedimentation, on the mirror surface which is fragile and thus points to volatility of the ground that humans take for granted.¹⁸⁷ In other words, the unearthing of the ground through depicting the materiality of the glass could be read as a disturbance of the cultural sedimentation representative of human temporality. Importantly, this positioning destabilises “the historic and geological foundation-a foundation that itself seems less a support than a distorted mirror”.¹⁸⁸ Smithson responds to this tension through his short voiceover with the Geiger counter at the background, as he reads the title of the book that lies on the top -perhaps with a nod to the stratigraphic constellation of geology through the horizontal orientation- “The Lost World” and implies a certain kind of erasure. The title “seems to stand in for the whole”¹⁸⁹ and the whole sequence achieves to point at the collision of Earth and human temporalities through another multimodal sensory juxtaposition. The sound or temporality of the Earth expressed via the Geiger counter is overlaid on the human temporality visually represented as books on the glass surface, and this overlay induces an existential anxiety with regards to the continuity of cultural sedimentation and hence the human temporality.

¹⁸⁷ Uroskie, “La Jetée”, 67.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 66.

We are moving forward again, at a high speed that echoes speed record tests which are conducted in the Bonneville Salt Flats, located very close to the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. Bonneville Salt Flats is a kind of geological and genealogical sibling of the Great Salt Lake, as both formations are residues of the Ancient Lake Bonneville and are part of the Great Salt Lake Desert. Throughout this ride, we are left in the dust, looking backwards. Soon after we encounter a red-filtered screen which is filled with bones that are laid in glass cases. The bones belong to a prehistoric time, to dinosaurs, of which Smithson's 'movieola' will turn into 'trucks' soon (*Figure 64*). Smithson describes the effect of the red filter on the image as "powdered blood" in the *Spiral Jetty* essay.¹⁹⁰ Throughout this sequence, Smithson's engagement with entropy comes to the foreground. The red filter curiously reminds one of Michael Snow's films, *Wavelength* (1967), and although Smithson gives credit to Snow for introducing the red-filtered view,¹⁹¹ Smithson uses spiral movements in this sequence rather than a static camera continuously zooming. Smithson reads Samuel Beckett's 1958 novel *The Unnameable* over the sound of an "echoing metronome" which invokes "eering, echoing footsteps".¹⁹²

Nothing has ever changed since I have been here. But I dare not infer from this that nothing ever will change. Let us try to see where these considerations lead. I have been here, ever since I began to be, my appearances elsewhere having been put in by other parties. All has proceeded, all this time, in the utmost calm, the most perfect order, apart from one or two manifestations the meaning of which escapes me. No, it is not that their meaning escapes me, my own escapes me just as much. Here all things, no, I shall not say it, being unable to. I owe ... existence to no one, these faint fires are not of those that illuminate or burn. Going nowhere, coming from nowhere ...

¹⁹⁰ Smithson, "The Spiral", 152.

¹⁹¹ Smithson writes about Michael Snow's *Wavelength* and reveals his interest in *La Région Centrale*: "Michael Snow's *Wavelength* could be seen as a documentary of a single photograph of the ocean: the length is in the slow zoom shoot, that advances through a series of pulsations and color disturbances [...] the ocean dries up in a photograph. It is interesting to see Snow now moving into the actual landscape with a delirious camera of his own invention". Smithson, "Art Through", 374.

¹⁹² Uroskie, "La Jetée", 67.



Fig. 64: Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, “Hall of Late Dinosaurs” sequence, time elapsed: 05:19.

We are ‘going nowhere’ and ‘coming from nowhere’. In contrast to the intense sense of warmth implied by the red filter, there is kind of a frozen quality in this description. What Smithson refers to as ‘an utmost calm’ and ‘the most perfect order’ in the quote may point to a crystalline, frozen condition manifested through fossilised inhuman pieces. This frozen quality is enhanced through the choreographed skeletons in glass boxes, the types of what Smithson defines as “specimen squeezed flat by the weight of the sediment”¹⁹³ (Figure 65). The effect of the red-filtered moving camera on “bones, glass cases, armatures” “brings forth a blood-drenched atmosphere” as Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay.¹⁹⁴ Taking Smithson’s engagement with entropy into consideration, I read the dinosaur skeletons in the museum, which is another cultural and spatial confinement that implies human temporality, as a manifestation of a certain kind of necroaesthetics. In this regard, the necroaesthetics this sequence points at can be related to Robert Harrison’s argument that “[n]onhuman species obey only the law of vitality, but humanity in its distinctive features is through and through necrocratic.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 152.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 152.

¹⁹⁵ Harrison, *The Dominion*, ix.



Fig. 65: Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, “Hall of Late Dinosaurs” sequence, time elapsed: 07:35.

Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay that “the interior immensity spreads out throughout the hall [of dinosaurs]”.¹⁹⁶ Smithson pushes the limits of space and time through expanding the spatial scale of the interior into the temporal scale and to “the scale of the universe”.¹⁹⁷ In this regard, Smithson speculatively writes that this interior ‘immensity’ transforms “the lightbulbs into dying suns” (*Figure 66*).¹⁹⁸ Smithson once again challenges the limits of scalar imagination through an associative conception of scale which he believes is inherent in the limitless scale of one’s mind. More importantly, this filmic sequence and Smithson’s description of ‘the lightbulbs’ transforming into ‘dying suns’ in the *Spiral Jetty* essay are clearly informed by entropy and thus underscores Smithson’s thermodynamical viewpoint. In this regard, in the *Spiral Jetty* essay, he continues to write “[b]lindly the camera stalked through the sullen light. Glassy reflections flashed into dissolutions like powered blood. Under a burning window the skull of a Tyrannosaurus was mounted in a glass case with a mirror under the skull. In this limitless scale one’s mind imagines things that are not there”.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 152.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 152.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 152.

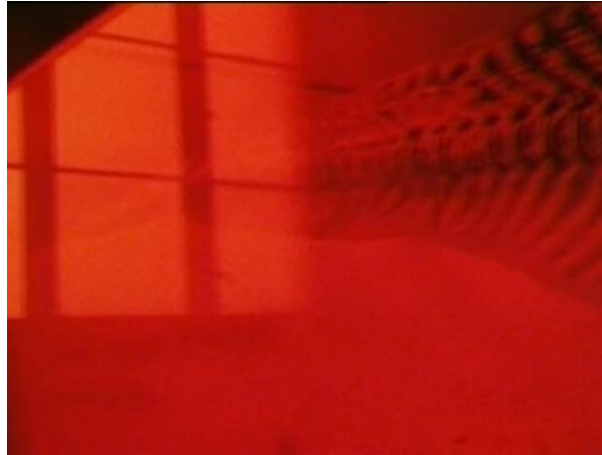


Fig. 66: Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, "Hall of Late Dinosaurs" sequence, time elapsed: 08:06.

'The imagine[d] things' in this 'limitless scale' may invoke Jorge Luis Borges's foreword to his 1967 novel entitled *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, as he writes:

The title of this book would justify the inclusion of Prince Hamlet, of the point, of the line, of the surface, of n -dimensional hyperplanes and hypervolumes, of all generic terms, and perhaps of each one of us and of the godhead. In brief, the sum of all things - the universe. We have limited ourselves, however, to what is immediately suggested by the words 'imaginary beings'; we have compiled a handbook of the strange creatures conceived through time and space by the human imagination.

What Borges refers to as ' n -dimensional hyperplanes and hypervolumes' points to the limitlessness of the 'universe' and is in alignment with Smithson's Pascalian account of the universe, an ever-expanding understanding of the universe of which centres and limits are nowhere, as I have emphasised in relation to the sun sequence of the decentring section of the film. Besides, the 'imaginary beings' which are 'conceived through time and space by the human imagination' in Borges's foreword find its visual convergence in the red Hall of Late Dinosaurs sequence in the *Spiral Jetty* film. This sequence once again mobilises a *historical vertigo* through the expansion and compression of time frames. While the dinosaur skeletons obviously trigger an expansion, Smithson utilises the red filter as a form of entropic compression.²⁰⁰ The juxtaposition of human and Earth temporalities within this sequence not only connotes the notion of extinction but indicates Smithson's destabilisation of conventional understandings of temporality. In this regard, Uroskie compares the usage of red filter in

²⁰⁰Smithson's obsession with dinosaurs can be traced back to his childhood. As Flam writes Smithson "as a kid displays an extra-ordinary interest in Natural History and Art and frequently visits the Museum of Natural History in New York City, where he first saw Charles Knight's paintings of what dinosaurs might have looked like". Besides "at the age of 7, he drew a mural-sized dinosaur for the hallway of his school" and he owned "a collection of live reptiles, snakes, preserved specimens, and fossils in a room in the basement when they moved to New Jersey" Flam, "Introduction: Reading", xxvi.

Snow's *Wavelength* and Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film and writes "while Snow's investigation has typically been considered within the straight line and present tense of phenomenological reduction, Smithson's camera spirals outside of spatial coordinates entirely, seeking an image of heterogeneous yet overlapping sheets of time that each brings about a 'different' present to inhabit".²⁰¹ Indeed, through utilising the red filter as a form of entropic compression, Smithson overlays the temporality of the dinosaurs onto the present, and manifests his understanding of time as 'a substance-based aesthetic ontology'.

Smithson's non-teleological conception of time and in particular his identification of the concept of the future as a cultural construct from the present are revealed in the *Spiral Jetty* essay as he writes: "[t]hese fragments of geology laugh without mirth at time-filled hopes of ecology".²⁰² This description is an ideal starting point for understanding Smithson's unique positioning in response to the existential and environmental anxieties of his time. In other words, this statement exemplifies Smithson's nuanced geologically-informed consciousness in opposition to the dominant ecologically-informed subjectivities that are part of the 'planetary citizenship' mobilised by the "Whole Earth Imagery". As I have discussed in previous chapters, the Whole Earth imagery, the visualisation of Earth as a single, unified system floating in space, which was accompanied by alarming publications in the scientific discourse, raised both an ecological awareness and a sense of cosmic existential anxiety, which Colomina referred to as the 'Whole Earth worry'. In this regard, Smithson's unique switch from the ecological to the geological subjectivity can be traced back to his response to the Moon Landing when he spoke at a symposium "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium" in 1970. He stated that "[p]erhaps, the moon landing was one of the most demoralizing events in history, in that the media revealed the planet Earth to be a limited closed system, not unlike the island in *Lord of the Flies*. As the Earth thickens with blood and waste, as the population increases, the stress factor could bring 'the system' to total frenzy."²⁰³ Through this statement, Smithson completely detaches himself from the positive accounts of the moon landing and "Whole Earth" imagery both in terms of a technoscientific mastery and the romanticised views of the Earth as a totality that catalysed a discourse on planetary stewardship and planetary citizenship as manifested in ecological debates. More importantly, I argue that his point that the 'stress factor' that comes with planetary awareness in terms of ecological limits might bring the whole 'system to total frenzy' foresees the alarming rhetoric that is attached to Anthropocene discourse or what could be called an Anthropocenic anxiety.

²⁰¹ Uroskie, "La Jetée", 67.

²⁰² Smithson, "The Spiral", 152.

²⁰³ Smithson, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium" [1970], in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 135.

The Spiral Jetty as a tripartite work may be seen as paradigmatic of the “eschatological aesthetic” of the 1960s, as Colman²⁰⁴ and cultural critic Matilde Nardelli²⁰⁵ argue. Yet, it differs from the other artistic and architectural manifestations with its emphasis on entropy, utilised almost as a meta-conceptual spine for the *Spiral Jetty* project. For Smithson, “the need to put the man on the moon” was “essentially a personal humanistic approach... anthropomorphic”²⁰⁶ and he criticised the effort as “a kind of forced exuberance”.²⁰⁷ In this regard, Smithson’s positioning is part of his general critique of historical humanism and the myth of progress that was mobilised by the techno-military-industrial complex for space exploration with geopolitical intentions. The technoscientific knowledge production mechanisms within the “future forecast” culture throughout the upheaval of cybernetic studies, not only try to predict and but also govern the future (i.e. subterranean surveying, satellites). In other words, the idea of future as a cultural construct from the present -only as an imagination, since one cannot know what is going to happen but can only guess- is expressed in the forecasting culture which is rooted in the future thinking of the late 1950s and early 60s (i.e. Game Theory and future modelling). These models of the future and the attempt to control the future are extensions of the conceptualisation of the Earth as a ‘totality to be governed’ as I have discussed in the introduction chapter of the thesis. Following Smithson, ‘perhaps, the moon landing’ has already brought the whole system, the human culture to a certain kind of ‘total frenzy’ yet, for Smithson there is only the heat-death of the universe and thus the culture of future forecasting and the attempts to control and govern the Earth are futile.

In this regard, Smithson points to the futility of any attempt to control the future through reversing the entropic processes, as exemplified within environmentalist movements such as recycling,²⁰⁸ as he writes: “[h]ere we go again, creating objects, creating systems, building a better tomorrow. I posit there is no tomorrow, nothing but a gap, a yawning gap. That seems sort of tragic, but what immediately relieves it, is irony, which gives you a sense of humour. It

²⁰⁴ Colman, “Affective Entropy”, 172.

²⁰⁵ Nardelli, “No End”.

²⁰⁶ Smithson, “Four Conversations”, 211.

²⁰⁷ Robert Smithson, “Conversation with Robert Smithson” [1972], interview by Bruce Kurtz, in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 268.

²⁰⁸ In one of his interviews Smithson stated that “Now, I would like to get into an area of, let's say, the problems of waste. It seems that when one is talking about preserving the environment or conserving energy or recycling one inevitably gets to the question of waste and I would postulate actually that waste and enjoyment are in a sense coupled. There's a certain kind of pleasure principle that comes out of preoccupation with waste. Like if we want a bigger and better car we are going to have bigger and better waster productions. So there's a kind of equation there between the enjoyment of life and waste. Probably the opposite of waste is luxury. Both waste and luxury tend to be useless.” Robert Smithson, “Entropy made Visible” [1973], interview by Alison Sky, in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 303.

is that cosmic sense of humour that makes it all tolerable”.²⁰⁹ This idea of a future as ‘a yawning gap’, this ‘irony’ and in particular this ‘cosmic sense of humour’ that Smithson calls for is one of the most original contributions that Smithson makes not only to the cultural context he was positioned, in particular the “Whole Earth Worry,” but also to the Anthropocene debate. That is to say, his proposition of mobilising ‘a cosmic sense of humour’ identifies a unique precedent of a discursive strategy to deal with the Anthropocene problematic, in particular the cosmic anxiety that comes with the apocalyptic discourse. Besides, this statement explains why ‘geology’ would ‘laugh without mirth at time-filled hopes’ of ecology. It is a good example of Smithson’s entropic understanding of the universe and his repetitive and cyclical conception of time which affirms his belief in a possible systemic collapse. This is another reason why the *Spiral Jetty* cannot be discussed in an ecological context and underlines Smithson’s specific positioning as a precedent for the switch from ecologically informed subjectivity to a geologically informed one.

The dinosaur sequence achieves a strong sense of *historical vertigo*, almost doubling the *sensorial vertigo* that Smithson describes in the essay, this time in relation to the sunstroke. Smithson writes:

On the slopes of Rozel Point I closed my eyes, and the sun burned crimson through the lids. I opened them and the Great Salt Lake was bleeding scarlet streaks [...] My eyes became combustion chamber churning orbs of blood blazing by the light of the sun. All was enveloped in a flaming chromosphere [...] Swirling with the incandescence of solar energy were sprays of blood. My movie would end in sunstroke.²¹⁰

In the *Spiral Jetty* essay, Smithson also states that “perception was heaving, the stomach turning, I was on a geologic fault that groaned within me”.²¹¹ ‘The geologic fault’ that groans due to his sunstroke is a result of a suspension of consciousness and is carried into the red dinosaur sequence where the spiralling movements of the camera carry along the ‘the geopolitics of primordial’. By drawing on the thinking of structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, Smithson states that the Jetty had morphed from the “anthropological” into the “enthropological”.²¹² Through this transition, Smithson emphasises his non-teleological approach based on a “geological time scale that implies eons not millennia” and sets the *Spiral Jetty* as a foundational work in the prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics.²¹³ Israel

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 302-3.

²¹⁰ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 148.

²¹¹ Ibid., 148.

²¹² Robert Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms is a Cruel Master” [1971], Interview by Gregoire Müller, in Smithson, *Robert Smithson*, 256-7.

²¹³ Lynne Cooke, “A Position of Elsewhere”, in Cooke and Kelly (eds.) *Robert Smithson*, 59.

supports the idea of *the Spiral Jetty* as being a formative work within the context of the Anthropocene as he writes: “The Spiral Jetty film, preoccupied as it is with geologic prehistory and sci-fi futurity, both of which complicate what Smithson called “man-centred” historicism, made this historical perspective crystal clear decades before current discussions about the “Anthropocene” emerged”.²¹⁴ That is to say, through colliding the ‘geologic prehistory’ with a ‘sci-fi futurity’, Smithson was already theorising the Anthropocene as a temporal device that shifts perspectives. The sci-fi futurity is implied through not only the red filter which invokes Smithson’s ‘enthropology’ but also the soundtrack of the film which varies between the noise of the respirator, a metronome, a Geiger counter and fast and slow-paced ticking of a clock which enhances the expansion and compression of temporal frames.

As the film continues, the road takes us forward for the last time and once again ties us to the “sheets of past”.²¹⁵ The overlay of ‘sheets’ of the past on the present is represented through a sequence of maps, which eventually introduces the spatiotemporal positioning of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. Before concluding this sequence where we witness spatial and temporal juxtapositions, it is significant to reemphasise the positioning of the road as a whole within the film. According to Uroskie, the road “functions as a direct image of time” and it does so “in the way in which this time functions like a spacing or layering between what Deleuze might call ‘sheets of past’ and the way this mnemonic sedimentation functions to perpetually raise, rather than discourage, questions of linkage, teleology and signification”.²¹⁶ Indeed, Smithson creates a relationality between the gesture of going backwards and forwards spatially and weaving around an extended timeframe that problematises our conception of the present. As Uroskie writes further: “Adopting St Augustine’s fine formulation Deleuze writes ‘there is a present of the future, a present of the present and a present of the past, all implicated in the event, rolled up in the event, and thus simultaneous and inexplicable’”²¹⁷. In this regard, Smithson introduces a stratigraphic understanding of temporality that compresses the

²¹⁴ Israel, *Spirals: The*, 7.

²¹⁵ Deleuze writes: “Between the past as pre-existence in general and the present as infinitely contracted past there are, therefore, all the circles of the past constituting so many stretched or shrunk regions, strata, and sheets: each region with its own characteristics...It is true that these regions (my childhood, my adolescence, my adult life, etc.), appear to succeed each other. But they succeed each other only from the point of view of former presents which marked the limit of each of them. They coexist, in contrast, from the point of view of the actual present which each time represents their common limit or the most contracted of them[...]We are constructed in memory: we are simultaneously childhood, adolescence, old age and maturity[...]These are the paradoxical characteristics of a non-chronological time: the pre-existence of a past in general; the coexistence of all the sheets of past; and the existence of a most contracted degree”, Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: Time-Image* (1985; reiss.Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press: 1997), 99.

²¹⁶ Ibid.,67.

²¹⁷ Ibid.,67.

prehistoric, the present, and future into one another and invites us to “inhabit multiple ‘presents’ existing outside of any overarching chronology”.²¹⁸

In the last sequence of the (de)centring section of the *Spiral Jetty* film, the ‘multiple presents’ that we are ‘invited to inhabit’ begins with an “oval map” of what Smithson describes as a “double world” that shows “the prehistoric world as coextensive with the world I [he] existed in”.²¹⁹ The sequence takes us to the spatiotemporal positioning of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork in the region in three steps. First, the cut from the road takes us into a map that shows “the geography of Early Part of Jurassic Period” while we hear a mechanical contraption sound made up from synthesisers. The camera zooms in slowly, where we read prehistoric place names such as “Atlantis”, “Tethys”, or “Australis”, juxtaposed on the continents of now, along with graphical notations of black squares and black circles (*Figure 67*). The camera continues to zoom in slowly and pans from “Australis” to “Atlantis” covering North America, invoking a similar mythopoetic layer to the ‘Lake Bonneville’ sequence. This time we visually encounter a “lost” island, as Smithson’s reads some topographical coordinates (*Figure 68*). The sequence takes us into the second step, the U.S Geological Survey Map of which centre indicates the Great Salt Lake (*Figure 69*). The description indicates nothing more than “a plethora of numbers and letters”²²⁰ and may remind us of Smithson’s problematisation of ‘mapping’. Accordingly, Smithson states in his essay “Entropy Made Visible” (1973) that “abstraction rules in a void, pretending to be free of time”²²¹ and this statement might subtly point to the geopolitics of representation in the context of the Anthropocene. In this regard, a consciousness of the distant past or ‘the geopolitics of the primordial’ arises once again when Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay:

[i]n the pan shot one doesn’t see the flesh eaters walking through what today is called Indochina. There is no indication of Pterodactyls flying over Bombay. And where are the corals and sponges covering Southern Germany? In the emptiness one sees no Stegosaurus. In the middle of the pan we see Europe completely under water, but not a trace of the Brontosaurus. What line or color hides the Globigerina Ooze?²²²

²¹⁸ Ibid., 67.

²¹⁹ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 151.

²²⁰ Uroskie, “La Jetée”, 68.

²²¹ Smithson, “Entropy made”, 302.

²²² Smithson, “The Spiral”, 151.



Fig. 67 & 68: Robert Smithson, stills from the *Spiral Jetty* film, “The Geography of Early Part of Jurassic Period” map sequence. time elapsed: 08:38 (right), 09:16 (left).

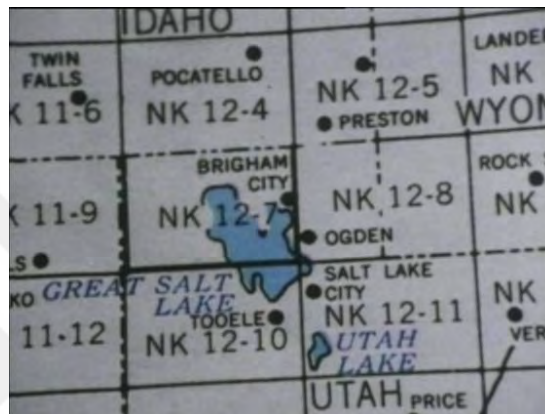


Fig. 69: Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, US Geological Survey Map, time elapsed: 09:31.

These “imagine[d] things”, ‘imaginary beings’ are what Smithson refers to as ‘absent images’ on the map. They are only indicated as black circles and squares, as an abstraction ‘pretending to be free of time’. This ‘double map’ juxtaposes the prehistoric past with the present once again and thus points to the collision of human and Earth temporalities. The abstract notations of black squares and black circles both indicate and hide the ‘hypothetical monsters’ that we should be aware of. As Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay further: “One must be careful of the hypothetical monsters that lurk between the map’s latitudes; they are designated on the map as black circles (marine reptiles) and squares (land reptiles)”.²²³ In this stage of the film, Smithson reads the topographical coordinates with a monotone voice. As we get closer to *Spiral Jetty* earthwork in a larger spatiotemporal frame, a rectangle, Smithson describes the scene in the *Spiral Jetty* essay as: “...we find ourselves looking at a rectangular grid known as NK-12-7 on the border of the map drawn by U.S. Geological Survey showing the northern part of the Great Salt Lake without any reference to the Jurassic Period.”²²⁴

²²³ Ibid., 151.

²²⁴ Ibid., 151.

“The replication of the mythopoetic square in the topographical grid of the surrounding county”²²⁵ and the emptiness of what the coordinates indicate reveals Smithson’s concern on the inadequateness of the maps and underlines his critique on the geopolitics of representation. In the next stage, we travel through a conventional road map. While the camera pans and Smithson continues to read the ‘empty’ coordinates, we pass along the Golden Spike Monument²²⁶, the “Dismantled Railroad”, the Lucin Cut-off and a number of invisible petrocapiatist facilities that surround the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork itself. These landmarks “locate the Jetty among the sedimented historical strata of the region”.²²⁷ The sequence concludes with the spatiotemporal positioning of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork as a point, marked as a new layer, suggesting its then-recent temporality yet, our journey throughout the (de)centring section of the film leaves us in an ‘ambiguous space’, a ‘spaceless limbo’ and amplifies our *historical vertigo* (Figure 70).

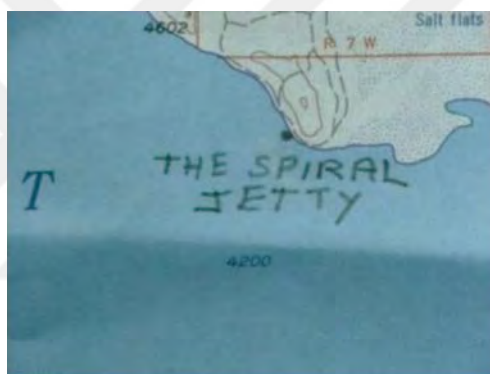


Fig. 70: Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, *Spiral Jetty* marked on a Road Map, time elapsed:10:14

Read through an Anthropocenic lens, the *Spiral Jetty* film, specifically its (de)centring section, introduces Smithson’s stratigraphic conception of time that is based upon both an understanding of time as ‘eternal recurrence’ and ‘substance based aesthetical ontology’. According to Parikka, Smithson does not only problematise historical humanism and the linear understanding of time but offers “a substance based aesthetical ontology that works through the dynamics of erosion, entropy and radical openness of time”.²²⁸ The *Spiral Jetty* film collides human and Earth temporalities through its dual operations of expansion and compression and extraction and contraction of time frames and juxtaposing a variety of spatiotemporalities.

²²⁵ Uroskie, “La Jetée”, 68.

²²⁶ For a good analysis of *Spiral Jetty* in relation to Golden Spike Monument, see Roberts, *Mirror-Travels*:

²²⁷ Uroskie, “La Jetée”, 68.

²²⁸ Parikka, “Earth Forces”, 54.

Since for Smithson “nothing is new, neither is anything old”,²²⁹ if there is any indication of a future, it is one that is defined through entropy. In other words, the ‘sci-fi futurity’ of the film invokes an entropic and ‘post-historical’ future. Consequently, the film offers a temporal depth, which is vertical and vertiginous and even in the form of a spiral. In this sense, through this *historical* vertigo, the *Spiral Jetty* film decentres the figure of Man and points toward its dissolution in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. What follows is not the road but the close-up top view of the brine of the Great Salt Lake along with the meditative sound of lapping water that marks the beginning of (de)materialising section of the film. In the second part of the chapter, I will analyse the (de)materialising and dissolving/crystallising sections of the *Spiral Jetty* film and argue that they dissolve the figure of Man through the entropic nexus between sun, heat and salt crystals.

²²⁹ Robert Smithson, “UltraModerne” [1967], in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 65

CHAPTER 4: PART II: Dissolution of an End: Crystallisation of Subjectivities

In this second part of the chapter, I will reflect on the two following sections of the *Spiral Jetty* film in relation to the *Spiral Jetty* essay and *Spiral Jetty* earthwork through the overarching theme of dissolution and crystallisation. In the first part of the chapter, I have argued that the tripartite jetty decentres the figure of Man in relation to geomorphological and planetary forces. In particular, I have argued that the *Spiral Jetty* achieves a non-anthropocentrism through scaling spatiotemporal frames and binding transversal knots of spirals that create a *sensorial vertigo* and through the juxtaposition of human and Earth temporalities that denotes a *historical vertigo*. Both the middle section of the film which I call (de)materialising the *Spiral Jetty* and the last section of the film which I call dissolving-crystallising the *Spiral Jetty* continue to decentre the human, in particular the figure of Man. Yet, this time they point towards its dissolution through Smithson's materialist approach that engages with temporality as 'a substance-based aesthetic ontology' and activates the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals as a conceptual and material spine. Through mobilising similar cinematographic tools to the first section of the film such as the cut and multi-modal affective strategies, these two sections will dissolve the concept of the human, in particular, the figure of Man in relation to geomorphological and planetary processes that the Anthropocene puts forth.

More importantly, I will argue that Smithson not only dissolves the figure of Man- which *La Région Centrale* and *The Continuous Monument* were also doing- but also gestures towards geologic life through mobilising a thermodynamic imagination which innovatively foregrounds Gilbert Simondon's "*crystal individuations*". In order to be able to reflect on *Spiral Jetty*'s switch from an anthropocentric notion of subjectivities to geologic subjectifications manifested through *crystal individuations*, we might recall Smithson's nuanced geologically-informed individuation in opposition to ecologically-informed ones. At the end of the chapter, I will discuss how the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork problematises the concept of the end itself and reveal how it converts itself into a future fossil by collaborating with 'geopower' and entropy and thereby offering us a complex contemplation on planetary change that foresees an Anthropocenic aesthetic.

4.2.1. (De)materialising the *Spiral Jetty*

The (de)materialisation of the *Spiral Jetty* involves the building process of the earthwork jetty and is visualised in the middle section of the *Spiral Jetty* film and is explicitly discussed by Smithson throughout the *Spiral Jetty* essay. In opposition to (de)centring section of the film, in

which we are thrown in a *historical vertigo*, into ‘a time unfinished’, ‘a spaceless limbo’ through ‘the dirt road’ that takes us ‘nowhere’; in the (de)materialising section, we are in the immediacy of the present and one physical location. This time, the cinematic apparatus records the construction activities in real-time, mostly with low angles resembling a child's eye view.²³⁰ The ‘ingredients’ Smithson uses for this section of his ‘cinematic universe’ are the ‘red water’, ‘machines’, ‘dinosaur images’, and the Earth itself, more specifically the materials that form the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. No human existence except Smithson and a silhouette is recognisable throughout this section, which provides another link to *La Région Centrale* and *The Continuous Monument* in terms of gesturing toward a posthuman configuration. While Smithson maps the positioning of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork in the water, the silhouette controls the pouring of black rocks and earth that constitute the earthwork jetty. Smithson's voiceovers are mostly absent in contrast to the first section of the movie, while the soundtrack is minimal. The real-time sounds of the machines have a disturbing effect on us whilst the calming effect of the sound of the lapping of the water functions aurally as a contrast.

The water not only cuts the sequence eight times with a similar gesture to the roads in the first section but also directs us to the very beginning of crystallisation processes. The water scenes are shot from different angles, in different states (e.g. foams) and under different light conditions, and reveal the red brine that Smithson associates with the ‘primordial seas’ in the *Spiral Jetty* essay. Whilst we visually witness the full-on geomorphic processes enacted by several earth-moving machines, the light and gentle lapping of the water adds a certain kind of temporal layer and ephemerality, similar to the wind in the second sequence of the film. While we view sequences of machines in real-time; digging, excavating, ripping the earth, and loading and dumping materials of the earthwork jetty, the sequence is cut twice as ‘a shock to the thought’, by two still-images of dinosaurs. In other words, Smithson's ‘moviela’ converts machines visually and literally into dinosaurs, which can be interpreted as a dissolution of the technosphere and the enmeshed human within it into extinct beings. And this conversion is (dis)connected through the brine water that will become crystals that will encrust the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork in the future.

At the beginning of the *Spiral Jetty* essay, Smithson states his reasons for choosing the site and reveals the key points for his investigation on the Great Salt Lake. These points are the “desiccation” processes, “micro-bacteria” that give the colour red to the water, and the “icing

²³⁰ It can be added as note that the low eye-level as well as dinosaurs may be seen as a connection to Smithson's childhood. As mentioned earlier, the source of Smithson's obsession with dinosaurs goes back to his childhood, this connection may also inform the low-angle eye level that is explicated as a change in viewpoint based on anthropomorphic conditions.

of iceberg-like masses of salt” and they prepare us for our journey to the site.²³¹ He reveals the logistical processes that were involved in the site selection and writes about his first physical encounter with the red water. Then he describes his voyage to Rozel Point and informs us about the first neighbouring facility to the future *Spiral Jetty* earthwork, namely the “Golden Spike” monument which “commemorates the meeting of the rails of the first continental railroad”.²³² As I have emphasised previously, through an Anthropocenic lens, the railroad belongs to one of the globe-enmeshing transportation structures that constitute the technosphere itself and is the very reason for the intensity of the red colour in the lake.

Smithson continues his voyage to the site in the *Spiral Jetty* essay with the ‘dirt road’ that leads to Rozel Point. As we get closer to the site, Smithson writes about his first visual encounter with Rozel Point from the car: “[a]s we travelled, the valley spread into an uncanny immensity unlike the other landscapes we had seen. The roads on the map became a net of dashes, while in the far distance the Salt Lake existed as an uninterrupted silver band. Hills took on the appearance of melting solids and glowed under amber light.”²³³ Smithson’s transition from ‘the roads on the map’ into ‘a net of dashes’ once again reveals his problematisation of mapping. More importantly, ‘the appearance of melting solid’ that ‘glowed under amber light’ is the first imaginary dissolution Smithson points at in the *Spiral Jetty* essay. Besides, when Smithson describes his arrival at the site, we get a glimpse of the dissolution of petroc capitalist machines that is amplified by the extreme physical conditions of the desert. Smithson reveals his geologic conception of temporality once again as he describes the constellation of machines on the site as fragments of the “world of modern prehistory”.²³⁴ Under a different material composition, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork would be a candidate for being a fragment within this modern prehistoric constellation. Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay:

An expanse of salt flats bordered the lake and caught in its sediments were countless bits of wreckage. Old piers were left high and dry. The mere sight of the trapped fragments of junk and waste transports one into a world of modern prehistory. The products of a Devonian industry, the remains of a Silurian technology, all the machines of the Upper Carboniferous Period were lost in those expansive deposits of sand and mud.”²³⁵

This passage is another literary example of Smithson’s geological imagination as it contextualises the geologic materiality of the modern machines in deep time. It foresees an

²³¹ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 143.

²³² Ibid., 145.

²³³ Ibid., 145.

²³⁴ Ibid., 146.

²³⁵ Ibid., 145.

Anthropocenic lens through the conception of 'modern prehistory' and this conception could be related to what McKenzie Wark defined as 'mass produced' 'modern ruin'. As Smithson continues in the essay, he introduces the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork's structural twin which can be considered as the 'ethico-onto-epistemological' opposite, namely the old (oil) jetty ruin which lies one mile south of the earthwork jetty. The ruined jetty gestures towards the decay of the progress-oriented ideology of petrocapiatalism, as it is surrounded by rusting machines that were used for oil exploitation. Smithson approaches the oil seeps around the old jetty ruin and writes:

Two dilapidated shacks looked over a tired group of oil rigs. A series 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 corrosive salted air. A hut mounted on pilings could have been the habitation of missing link. A great pleasure arose from seeing all those incoherent structures. The site gave evidence of succession of man-made systems in abandoned hopes.²³⁶

Through an Anthropocenic lens, the 'two dilapidated shacks' and the 'tired group of oil rigs' are emblematic of petrocapiatalism. Besides, his description of 'the natural tar pool' can be linked to his proto-earthwork *Tar Pool Gravel Pit* contextually. More importantly, Smithson's imagination of the abandoned 'hut' as 'a missing link' to 'sheets of past' of 'modern prehistory' and conceptualisation of the decaying machines as 'man-made systems in abandoned hopes' offer a critique of technospheric structures mobilised by the exploitative ideology of petrocapiatalism in an Anthropocenic context.

Smithson jumps into the production process of earthwork jetty in the *Spiral Jetty* essay and allows the readers to follow the sequences of (de)materialisation section of the film. Both the *Spiral Jetty* essay and the corresponding section of the film involve material and geomorphological negotiations with the site. The limited use of voiceovers in this section of the film follows the descriptive narrative in the essay and resonates with the neutral tone of the documentary genre. In the *Spiral Jetty* film, following the flow of the red water, we see Smithson's boots walking in the water, on the then non-existent jetty from a low camera angle while we hear him saying: "North of the Lucin Cut-off, the water is red or pink colour, due to algae in brine" (*Figure 71 & 72*). The film cuts from Smithson's 'erratic' steps to the scene where the camera is positioned in the centre position of the non-existent *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. We see Smithson marking the upcoming earthwork diagrammatically by pulling strings from the centre to the red-marked wooden stakes and we hear his voice explaining the

²³⁶ Ibid., 146.

process which he also repeats in the *Spiral Jetty* essay: “[a] string was extended from central stake in order to get the arcs in the spiral”.²³⁷ In the *Spiral Jetty* essay, Smithson describes the process of the conversion of the diagrammatic spiral into a material one and then introduces the silhouette in the movie, Bob Phillips who is the “foreman” and plays a key role in the orchestration of the construction process.



Fig. 71 (left): Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, the water of the Great Salt Lake, time elapsed 10:58

Fig. 72 (right): Robert Smithson, still from the *Spiral Jetty* film, Smithson's boots in the water of the Great Salt Lake, time elapsed 11:11.

The switch from an abstract diagram of the spiral into the materialisation of the jetty begins with the image of a machine that cannot be identified as a whole due to the obscure angle of the camera. The machine moves slowly on partially formed earthwork in a way that Smithson describes as “crawling”. In this regard, in his “Sedimentation” essay, Smithson cites Benjamin Holt’s statement on his invention of the “steam engine” tractor as “[i]t crawls over mud like caterpillar”.²³⁸ After the water cuts into the sequence for the second time in the film, we try to identify the hydraulic excavator of the tractor through the camera that is located behind the bushes as we hear its roaring sounds (*Figure 73*). Then curiously, the film cuts into the first dinosaur image, a still image of three Stegosauruses standing on the edge of a peninsula, that is taken from a children’s book (*Figure 74*). This switch is important because it is where Smithson’s camera visually converts the trucks into dinosaurs, as he has written in the *Spiral Jetty* essay. As the cut reconnects us to the tractor carrying ‘basalt’ and ‘earth’ which will constitute the earthwork jetty, we hear Smithson’s voiceover quoting the geologist A.J. Beardsley’s text, describing the geological composition of the Rozel Point and giving explicit details of the ‘tertiary’ rocks, basalts and limestone that compose the materiality of earthwork and once again mobilises a geologic imagination. The cut from the dinosaur image back to

²³⁷ Ibid., 146.

²³⁸ Smithson, “A Sedimentation”, 101.

the machine visually dissolves the dinosaurs into the machine and might be related to what Smithson had written in his “Sedimentation” essay where he discusses “the processes of heavy construction” as having “a devastating kind of primordial grandeur”.²³⁹



Fig. 73 (left): Robert Smithson, still from Spiral Jetty film, tractor loading off materials, time elapsed: 12:55



Fig. 74 (right): Robert Smithson, still from Spiral Jetty film, an image of Stegosaurus from a children's book, time elapsed: 12:58.

Once again, the film cuts from the heavy machinery imagery to the lapping water and draws us towards the formation of white foam, described by Smithson as ‘gristle’. This is the first indication of crystallisation processes that continuously occur in the Great Salt Lake and that the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork will closely engage with. Soon after, we see the dump truck on a partially built jetty pouring rocks over the water with the black silhouette of Bob Foreman positioned next to it. After another brine cut, this time the sun shining on the water, we begin viewing a sequence of scenes filmed through different angles, in which ‘crawling’ and standing loaders and trucks are dumping basalt and earth to the water. Throughout this sequence, we encounter one scene in which the frame is filled with falling rocks and that evokes an affective state as if it falls on us.

Towards the end of the sequence, we see another caterpillar, namely “Truxcavator” performing its geomorphic actions (*Figure 75*), then the film cuts into another dinosaur image, this time, the *Westlothiana Lizzae* (*Figure 76*). Smithson might reflect on this switch from a manifestation of technology to a dinosaur in his “Sedimentation” essay, while he writes, “[c]ommon shovels, awkward looking excavating devices, what Micheal Heizer calls “dumb tools”, picks, pitchforks, the machine used by suburban contractors, grim tractors that have the clumsiness of armoured dinosaurs, and plows that simply push dirt around.”²⁴⁰ Smithson

²³⁹ Ibid., 101.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 101.

is relating the physical grandeur and the powerful motion of the dinosaurs with human-made machines. He does so by linking the ‘armoured dinosaur’ to the “Traxcavator” which he refers to as a “steel toothed” “ripper”.²⁴¹ This relationality Smithson points at not only exemplifies his speculative notion of ‘geopolitics of the primordial’ but also emphasises his point on ‘we are not better than dinosaurs, we are just different’. By pointing out a similarity between the dinosaurs and technospheric machines, he might gesture towards the inevitable dissolution of the latter which will reiterate the former’s extinction following the law of entropy. In this regard, he writes in his “Sedimentation” essay that “[t]he tools of technology become a part of the Earth’s geology as they sink back into their original state. Machines like dinosaurs must return to dust or rust.”²⁴² While we hear Smithson announcing, “Ripping the Spiral Jetty”, the (de)materialising section of *the Spiral Jetty* film concludes.

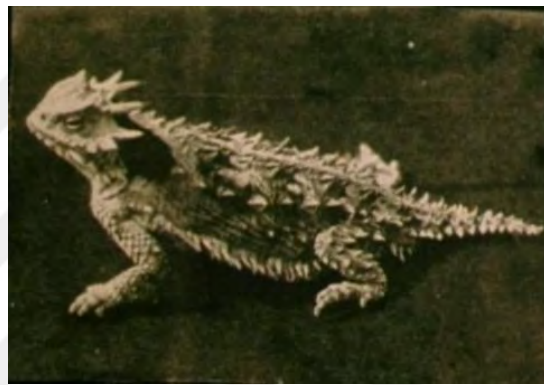


Fig. 75 (left): Robert Smithson, still from *Spiral Jetty* film, Traxcavator ripping the Earth, time elapsed: 19:31

Fig. 76 (right): Robert Smithson, still from *Spiral Jetty* film, an image of “Westlothiana Lizzae”, time elapsed: 19:38

4.2.2. Dissolving / Crystallising the *Spiral Jetty*

After the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork is ripped from the Earth, the third section of the film “dissolving/crystallising the *Spiral Jetty*” begins. Throughout this section, we will gain a clearer indication of the dissolution of the anthropocentric conception of subjectivities as I will propose that the potentialities of “crystal subjectifications” that Smithson points at can be brought into a productive relationship with Simondon’s “theory of individuation” of which the process of “crystallisation” is par exemplar. The last section of the film begins with the helicopter/hymn sequence which I have analysed in the first part of the chapter. The helicopter-hymn sequence introduces a sense of revelation as it reveals the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork as a whole from an

²⁴¹ Ibid., 101.

²⁴² Ibid., 104.

aerial view for the first time in the film. As I have discussed previously, the spiralling movements of the camera create a vertiginous effect, where horizontal and vertical interexchange. As the sky and the ground rotate, we are left without a horizon and groundless and scaleless images follow one another similar to what we have experienced in *La Région Centrale* (Figure 77).



Fig. 77: Robert Smithson, still from *Spiral Jetty* film, *Spiral Jetty* earthwork cutting the frame vertically into two, time elapsed: 30:50

As the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork becomes visible as a whole within a wider geographical frame, we explore its spatial, visual, and perspectival relationships with the surrounding hills, the Great Salt Lake with its differing shades of red, and the mainland where the tail of the jetty connects. Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay- I partially requote here-:

“[o]n the slopes of Rozel Point I closed my eyes, and the sun burned crimson through the lids. I opened them and the Great Salt Lake was bleeding scarlet streaks. My sight was saturated by the color of red algae circulating in the heart of the lake, pumping into ruby currents, no they were veins and arteries sucking up the obscure sediments”.²⁴³

This statement relates to the beginning of the “dissolution-crystallisation” processes which visually manifest themselves as shades of red in the *Spiral Jetty* film. This statement also functions as a textual switch from the ground to the sky, from the real to the imaginative and from the *actual* to the *virtual* in a Deleuzian sense. As the camera ascends with the helicopter, the red water fills the frame and discloses the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. Smithson emphasises the ‘red algae’ circulating in the lake as pumping ‘into ruby currents’, and he ‘virtually’ sees them as ‘veins and arteries’ through which a myriad of unrecognisable sediments flow. The scarlet ‘streaks’ which resemble clouds in the sky at the sunset, destabilise the image further.

²⁴³ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 148.

As the ground and the sky inter-exchange, the image almost turns into an abstract painting resembling the landscape paintings of Paul Cézanne or Claude Monet, to whom Michael Snow wanted to respond by making 'a gigantic landscape film' with *La Région Centrale*.

The helicopter emancipates us from the limitations of human eye-view and similar to *La Région Centrale*, foreshadows the drone optics or satellite imagery that is widely used in dominant Anthropocene visuality. In this regard, the filmic apparatus in *Spiral Jetty*, the helicopter with the camera with it, can be read in relation to the filmic apparatus in *La Région Centrale*, namely the robotic arm *De La* and the camera with it. As I have positioned *De La* as a geo-installation, it could be argued that while the geo-installation was bolted to the ground *La Région Centrale*, in the *Spiral Jetty* film, it takes flight. Through this flight, we encounter wider visual frames with extended perspectives and begin to identify the physical conditions of the Great Salt Lake Desert. While we visually comprehend the physical attributes of the landscape dominated by the lake's 'absolute horizontality', we associate what we see with an absence or near absence of life that comes across widely in cultural and metaphorical understandings of the desert, as I have discussed in the previous chapter on *The Continuous Monument*.

In this regard, philosopher Jean Baudrillard writes in his book *America* (1986) that "travelling" in the desert achieves an "aesthetics of disappearance".²⁴⁴ Baudrillard's car ride through America reminds him of what he calls a "finished form of the future catastrophe of the social in geology"²⁴⁵ and this description foreshadows the Anthropocene thesis. He argues that "in order to understand" the desert's "nuclear form" or this 'future catastrophe', one has to "take the road" and experience it.²⁴⁶ Similar to Smithson, Baudrillard mobilises a geological lens and offers a critique of culture whilst contemplating on the figuration of the desert as an "ecstatic form of disappearance".²⁴⁷ He explains:

For the mental desert form expands before your very eyes, and this is the purified form of social desertification. Disaffection finds its pure form in the barrenness of speed. All that is cold and dead in desertification or social enucleation rediscovers its contemplative form here in the heat of the desert. Here in the transversality of the desert and the irony of geology, the transpolitical finds its generic mental space. The inhumanity of our ulterior, asocial, superficial world immediately finds its aesthetic form here, its ecstatic form. For the desert is simply that: an ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ Baudrillard, *America*, 5-6.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 6.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

The ‘social desertification’ that Baudrillard points at can be related to Superstudio’s experimentation with natural and artificial deserts in *The Continuous Monument*. More importantly, ‘the irony of geology’ can be related to Smithson’s emphasis on ‘irony’, ‘cosmic sense of humour’ and his aforementioned provocative argument that ‘geology laugh[s] without mirth at time-filled hopes of ecology’. Through this statement, Smithson underscored the ignorance of geological time towards the short-sighted anthropocentric notions of temporality. And both Smithson and Baudrillard position the desert as the ultimate landscape for pointing at the irony of geology or entropy.

As the helicopter and the camera with it take off, we begin our sensorial voyage into the aforementioned ‘maelstrom or abyss’ of scale. Before we hear Smithson’s voice-over, the hymn, where the meanings of coordinates become meaningless, we see the shadow of the helicopter which might point at Smithson’s critique of the geopolitics of then-now. Although Smithson was engaging mainly with ‘geopolitics of the primordial’, the shadow of the helicopter might echo the then-ongoing Vietnam War. As Israel hypothesises, the Vietnam War had an “invisibly visible presence in the *Spiral Jetty*, or at least as one layer of meaning among several other sedimented, partially buried layers”.²⁴⁹ In this regard, Israel offers a reading of “the many invocations of blood in the film or essay” under a more “geopolitical light” and argues that the camera’s positioning on the helicopter not only “supplies the film with its breath-taking aerial images of the jetty but is itself only in shadow”.²⁵⁰ As Israel argues further “helicopters, which usually hover and rise and descend vertically, became [in the Vietnam War] a symbol of the impossibility of forward movement [...] Smithson would have been invested in precisely such a notion of spatiotemporal arrest, especially one associated with the helix”.²⁵¹ In a wider framework, since the spiral as a form implies a centripetal force and Smithson is heavily engaged with entropy that implies a death of the universe, he indeed might gesture towards the futility of wars and imply their dead-ends. A critique of war and its machine production were already indicated in the first section of the film, in particular, the roadmap that took us imaginatively close to Thiokol Plant which hosted the production of ballistic nuclear missiles in Cold War context, as Israel argued.

Other relationalities might be built up between the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork’s spatial positioning and technoscientific ventures that utilise the conditions of the desert in a wider spatiotemporal frame. For instance, in the 1980s, not only nuclear missiles but also the defective O-rings for the space shuttle *Challenger* were made in Thiokol Plant. The “Solar Maximum Mission” (1980-1989) was the first NASA sample-return mission since the “Apollo Program” (1963-

²⁴⁹ Israel, *Spirals: The*, 183.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 183.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 183.

1972) that aimed to collect a sample of solar wind particles, yet, this mission tragically ended due to a technical complication. The design flaw caused by the defective O-rings prevented the deployment of the space shuttle's drogue parachute and thus it crash-landed in Florida in 1986. Consequently, some of the solar wind particles were lost or dissolved. Another example for the utilisation of the desert for technoscientific progress can be given from the Bonneville Salt Flats, as the absolute horizontality provides the optimum conditions for the speed record tests. And lastly, and more importantly, the testing of nuclear missiles that takes place in the Salt Lake Desert provides another example for contextualising the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork in a wider and geopolitical context. The Great Salt Lake Desert's immense magnitude without an absence or near absence of human life creates the optimum conditions for the disposal of explosive ordnance, which might be read as a form of military expenditure in Bataille's terms. The fact that one can see and hear the testing of war weapons in the Lakeside Mountains across Gunnison Bay whilst visiting the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork builds up an important relationality between the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork and this manifestation of techno-scientific-military-industrial complex (Figure 78).



Fig. 78: Air Force testing weapons across Gunnison Bay. Westward view of the Lakeside Mountains. Image Credit: Mark Milligan, "Geosights: Rozel Point and Spiral Jetty revisited, Box Elder County, Utah", Utah Geological Survey: Survey Notes 38, no. 2 (May 2016) Available at: <https://geology.utah.gov/map-pub/survey-notes/geosights/rozel-point-spiral-jetty/>

The desert plays a crucial role not only in the conception of the *Spiral Jetty* as a whole work but also in defining the conditions through which the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork comes into being. In other words, the *Spiral Jetty* is in a continuous and close engagement with the desert both in conceptual and material terms. While the conceptual engagement can be recalled through

Smithson's emphasis on the desert as 'more of a concept, rather than nature that swallows up boundaries', the material engagement takes place in *Spiral Jetty* earthwork's thermodynamic mode of operation within the entropic nexus between sun, heat and salt crystals. That is to say, if the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork is in a constant process of becoming, it is enhanced by the extreme physical conditions of the desert. Therefore, the desert theme that we encounter in the previous geoaesthetic acts is amplified to the extent that it defines the ethico-onto-epistemo-logical condition through which the *Spiral Jetty* comes into being.

The Great Salt Lake's extreme thermodynamic conditions, vast magnitude, and open horizontality are emblematic of the cultural categorisation of the desert as a space where limits are tested, including concepts of time and space. The positioning of the helicopter-hymn sequence within the "dissolving/crystallising" section of the film is important as the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork is revealed as a whole in the context of the desert. It expands the spatial frame through which we observe the earthwork and might invite us to contemplate upon the relationship between the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork and other cultural constellations that utilise the extreme physical conditions of the desert. Whether it is the extraction of oil for petrocapiatlsim or the machinery production for interplanetary missions or atomic tests carried out by the military-industrial complex or events such as speed racing organised by entertainment and technological enterprise, the desert is a landscape where spatiotemporal limits are challenged by techno-scientific-military-industrial complex and significant technospheric transformations take place. From Smithson's entropic point of view, all these cultural-material constitutions or geosocial constellations will dissolve, as the desert not only as a concept but also as a landscape 'will swallow up boundaries' due to its extreme thermodynamic conditions. Yet, the question of whether *the Spiral Jetty* earthwork will dissolve or crystallise is open to speculation, which I will explore in the next sections.

4.2.3. Re-mineralisation of Subjectivities: The Emergence of *Crystal Individuations*

Towards the end of the helicopter/hymn sequence, the camera continues its clockwise and anti-clockwise rotations before diving towards the centre of the jetty, where we see Smithson's 'rock-mud-salt crystals-water' constellation from a closer distance. The film cuts into a sequence of still images in which we observe salt crystals in differing proximities and various phases. Except one moving image of the water, we see twelve still frames of salt crystals in formation processes while we once again hear the respirator's sound of expanding and contracting (*Figure 79,80,81,82,83,84,85,86,87*). The sound of breathing links us affectively to the sun sequence at the beginning of the film since both the atomic scale implied by the crystal and the astronomic scale implied by the sun, both of which refer to extremely different

magnitudes of order, are interconnected through an invocation of life suggesting a vitalism. As we get closer to the molecular structure of the crystals, the sound of the respiratory machine momentarily stumbles and suggests a cut in our or crystals' breathing, implying a break with the life-source, which triggers a certain kind of anxiety. As the machine runs again, we hear Smithson's voice reading from a crystallography book "[t]he crystal steps will actually wind itself into a spiral during growth, at the steady state the spiral will appear to rotate. The right and left-handed dislocations give rise to clockwise and anti-clockwise spirals".

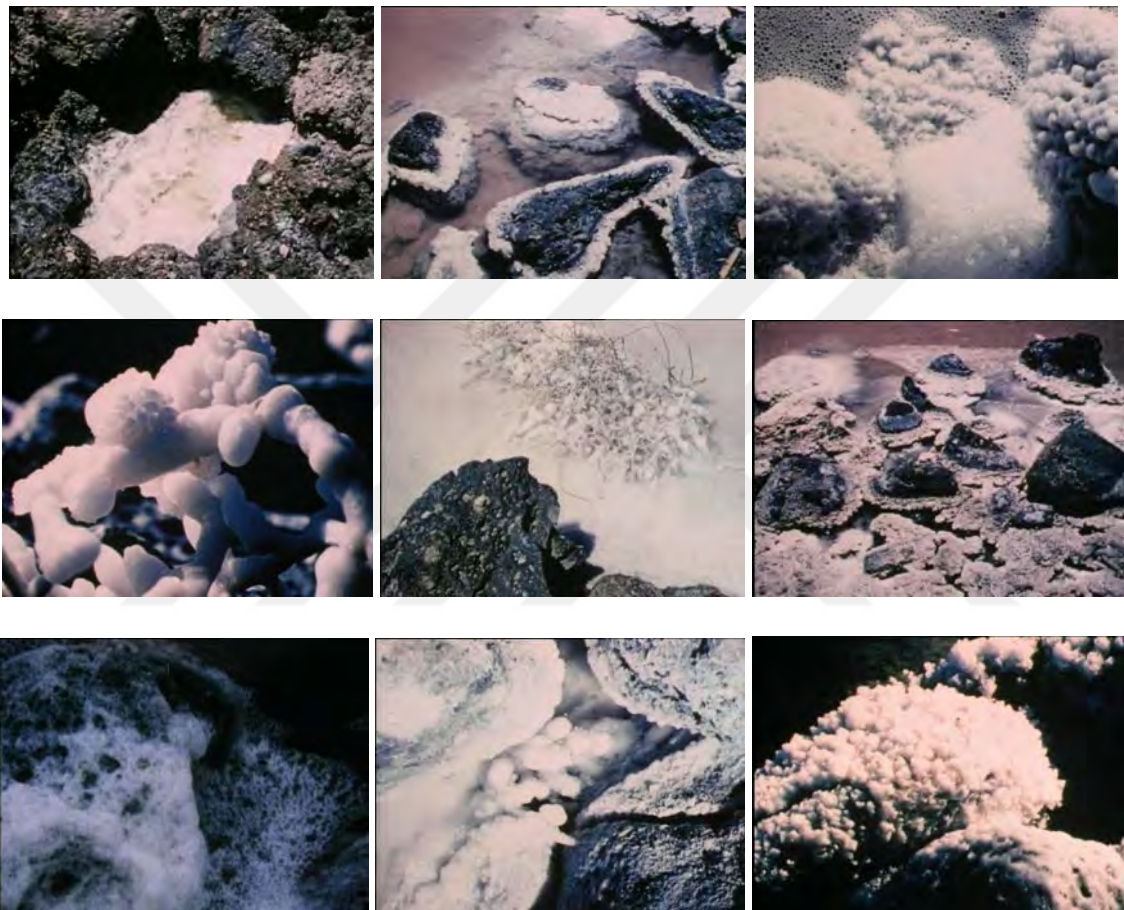


Fig. 79,80,81,82,83,84,85,86,87: Robert Smithson, stills from the crystal sequence of the *Spiral Jetty* film, time elapsed (left to right): 24:39, 24:44, 24:53, 24:56, 25:01, 25:09, 25:16, 25:20, 25:28.

As we are informed about the crystallisation process of the salt and how it grows, we see the same image of the detail of a tumbleweed coated with salt crystals from the *Spiral Jetty* essay, which was positioned next to another image of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. This photographic image reveals the rocks atop water from closer distance, as one of the coils extends to the picture plane and Smithson behind is walking on the earthwork jetty accompanied by his reflection in the water (see *Figure 53*). The paragraph positioned beneath the two images indicates Smithson's experience of sunstroke and can be read as a preparation for the conceptual voyage that Smithson will catalyse through the rest of the film and invite us into an

imaginative, *virtual* state; an altered state of consciousness, an almost unconscious state. In other words, Smithson's 'indeterminate state where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other' when he first encountered the 'spiral centrifugal phenomenon' of the site, might be manifested further through his sunstroke in the *Spiral Jetty* film and essay.

The crystal sequence in the *Spiral Jetty* film and Smithson's emphasis on the crystal's spiral progression due to a dislocation can be brought into a highly productive relationship with Simondon's theory of *crystal individuations* whereby he discusses the process of "crystallisation" as par exemplar for the processes of an "individuation".²⁵² A potential conceptual affinity between Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* and Simondon's theory of individuation is completely undertheorised within the scholarship that has accumulated around the *Spiral Jetty* project and Smithson's oeuvre. At this point, it might be worth noting that the relationship that I draw between the *Spiral Jetty* film's crystal sequence and Simondon's *crystal individuations* might provide a unique contribution not only to the scholarship around the *Spiral Jetty* but also to the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics, in particular, in terms of the imagination of geologic life.

In this regard, I mainly propose that the crystal sequence of the *Spiral Jetty* film, as well as the many invocations of crystal in the *Spiral Jetty* essay, can be interpreted as an artistic response to Simondon's "theory of individuation" through which he offers "the study of the crystal's genesis as a process of individuation".²⁵³ In broad strokes, Simondon's attempt to redefine the constitution of subjectivity involves a switch from the ontology of being to the ontology of becoming. To put it another way, it implies a transition from "the logic of being (ontology of *stasis*)" to "the logic of becoming (ontology of *process*)".²⁵⁴ Simondon's theory of individuation mainly opposes the "ontological privilege" given to "the already constituted individual" by the theories of hylomorphism and atomism.²⁵⁵ Simondon writes that he "aims to understand the individual from the perspective of the process of individuation rather than the process of individuation by means of the individual".²⁵⁶ In other words, Simondon's relational ontology places process and temporality at the heart of individuation and opposes the static understandings of a subject or being, as well as the dialectic opposition between subject and object and matter and form as indicated by Aristotelian division.²⁵⁷

²⁵² Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual", [1964], transl. Mark Cohen and Sanford Kwinter, in *Incorporations*, eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992) 304.

²⁵³ Ibid., 297-319

²⁵⁴ O'Sullivan, "From Geophilosophy", 34.

²⁵⁵ Simondon, "The Genesis", 297-299.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 300.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 300.

At this point, it is important to note that although Simondon distinguishes between “physical beings” and “living beings”, he suggests that the *crystal individuation* as a process of individuation “might be employed as [a] paradigm to characterise individuation in the domain of living beings”.²⁵⁸ As philosopher Anne Sauvagnargues puts it:

“Simondon demonstrates in effect that the individual, whether it concerns a subject or a being of any kind, is never given substantially, but is produced through a process of individuation. He understands this process in terms of problematic “disparation”, that is an act, a relation. The subject is not given, it is constituted through its process of individuation”.²⁵⁹

Simondon’s rejection of the division between subject and object and processual understanding of subjectivity is in alignment with Anthropocenic conceptions of subjectivity as I have discussed in the first chapter. At this point, it might be worth noting that Guattari’s concept of subjectification which I have discussed as a relevant approach for conceptualising an Anthropocenic subjectivity can be seen as a theoretical derivative of Simondon’s *individuation*.

The conceptual affinity between Simondon’s and Smithson’s crystals can be a strong starting point for conceptualising the *Spiral Jetty* project in the Anthropocene, as a project that proposes a “novel assemblage [...] a new image of thought” in terms of subjectivity.²⁶⁰ Through drawing a hypothetical theoretical relationship between Simondon and Smithson, I propose that the *Spiral Jetty* project nods to Simondon’s *crystal individuations* and gestures towards geologic life, a “re-mineralisation of subjectivities” in an Anthropocenic context.²⁶¹ This hypothetical transposition takes Simondon’s compelling positioning of the emergence of crystal as the conceptual and material exemplar for any kind of individuation onto a speculative ground on which our relationships with inhuman ontologies in deep time can be understood in a “diagnostic and creative” way.²⁶² Taking the Anthropocene’s mobilisation of “‘geo’ as a ‘collaborator’ in particular formations of subjectivity, while simultaneously appearing as a benign entity that can be granted as neutral ground” as Yusoff puts it,²⁶³ Smithson’s emphasis on geologic life and *crystal individuations* in particular can be seen as an attempt to ‘re-animate’ the Earth, and thus responds retroactively to Latour’s problematisation of de-animation of the Earth in the dominant Western epistemologies and call for ‘geostories’ in response to the Anthropocene. In this regard, the *Spiral Jetty* film’s crystal sequence can be

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 306.

²⁵⁹ Anne Sauvagnargues, *Art Machines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 62.

²⁶⁰ O’Sullivan, “From Geophilosophy”, 29.

²⁶¹ Yusoff, “Geologic Life”, 775.

²⁶² Sauvagnargues, *Art Machines*, 63.

²⁶³ Yusoff, “Geologic Life”, 783.

read as a 'geostory', a response to the lack of emphasis on the role of inhuman forces in the constitution of subjectivity, conjured by the theory of the Anthropocene. Since the diagnostics of the Anthropocene defines humans as a geomorphological force by attaching geo to the very concept of human, the *Spiral Jetty* project's emphasis on crystals' vitality and engagement with geologic life, with the nonliving materiality concerned with inhuman, inorganic and geologic, can be seen as a precursor of what Elizabeth Grosz defined as geopower, 'the capitalisation on the forces of the universe' and foreshadows an 'aesthetics in relation to the nonhuman and inhuman geo'. In this regard, the philosophical questions that arise from the film's crystals sequence also relate to the question of "geo-ontologies". As Yusoff writes:

I use the term geo-ontologies somewhat differently to signal how the geologic, in its manifestation in the Anthropocene, presents a fracture in the 'geo' that introduces a radically incommensurate temporal signature into ontological questions. Part of this ontological question is located around the mobility of border that is established between the vital and nonvital in accounts of matter..."²⁶⁴

Through visually showing crystal formations on and around the rocks and attaching the sound of breathing to the images, Smithson gestures towards *crystal individuations* and indeed introduces 'the radically incommensurate temporal signature into ontological questions'. Through this multimodal stimulation, he destabilises 'the border between the vital and nonvital' and aligns with Simondon's positioning of the crystal as par exemplar of any kind of individuation, whether it is human, nonhuman or inhuman.

Smithson's and Simondon's fascination with crystals is not unique, as the fascination with crystals can be observed frequently throughout the wider cultural history. In this regard, Sauvagnargues writes that "[a]n individual crystal is [...] formed, whose regularity, transparency and organisation explain the fascination that it has, from the Renaissance to Romanticism, given rise to a physico-chemical structure whose growth can be observed."²⁶⁵ In this context, Simondon argues that "the crystal's genesis would allow us to grasp, on the macroscopic level, a phenomenon that is rooted in those states of the system belonging to the microphysical domain".²⁶⁶ The observable spiral growth form of salt crystal's physico-chemical structure is one of the nodes within the entropic nexus that the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork operates through as a larger system, as we can recall Smithson's statement that '[t]he Spiral Jetty could be considered one layer within the spiralling crystal lattice, magnified trillions of times'. In this context, other agents of the entropic process through which the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 783.

²⁶⁵ Sauvagnargues, *Art Machines*, 61.

²⁶⁶ Simondon, "The Genesis", 304.

operates, are the solar heat and the supersaturated solution of the Great Salt Lake from which the salt crystals emerge.

Yet, according to Simondon, this emergence is conflictual and the “crystal” “individual is not just a result, but a milieu of individual”.²⁶⁷ Simondon describes the ‘individuation of the crystal’ as an event that “reclaims the encounter between a metastable milieu and the singularity that emerges”.²⁶⁸ Smithson, on the other hand, points to a kind of ‘re-mineralisation of subjectivities’ mobilised by his ‘erratic steps’, when he wrote, -and I requote- “[c]hemically speaking, our blood is analogous in composition to the primordial seas. Following the spiral steps we return to our origins, back to some pulpy protoplasm, a floating eye adrift in an antediluvian ocean.”²⁶⁹ From a Simondonian point of view, Smithson’s ‘primordial sea’, namely the Great Salt Lake in which perpetual and infinite individuations take place would refer to the “metastable system that is rich in potentials of form, matter and energy” which “preexist in the system”.²⁷⁰ In relation to Simondon’s ‘metastable system’ which he also describes as “pre-individual being”,²⁷¹ Smithson imagines this ‘pre-individual being’ through his hypothetical sunstroke. Smithson describes his own dissolution through the well-known phrase “Et in Utah Ego” with an explicit reference to death. In other words, the imaginative death and the new beginning that follows it, are implied by Smithson’s experience of the sunstroke on the helicopter. Smithson writes that

“I was slipping out myself again, dissolving into a unicellular beginning, trying to locate the nucleus at the end of the spiral. All that blood stirring makes one aware of the protoplasmic solutions, the essential matter between formed and unformed, masses of cells consisting largely of water, proteins, lipoids, carbonhydrates, and inorganic salts.”²⁷²

Smithson’s identification of ‘the unicellular beginning’ that takes place in the ‘protoplasmic solution’, ‘the essential matter between formed and unformed’ might relate to Simondon’s ‘metastable system’ or ‘preindividual being’. The relationship between Smithson’s own dissolution and ‘the unicellular beginning’ in ‘protoplasmic solutions’ also refers to the dissolution of one order which is human, and the beginning of another one, of crystals and therefore of inhuman. Yet, both orders are outcomes of the individuation processes or rather the ‘milieu of individual’ that take place in Simondon’s ‘pre-individual being’.

²⁶⁷ Sauvagnargues, *Art Machines*, 65.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 60.

²⁶⁹ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 148.

²⁷⁰ Simondon, “The Genesis”, 304.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 304.

²⁷² Smithson, “The Spiral”, 149.

In this regard, Smithson's 'protoplasmic solution', 'the matter between formed and unformed' which he returned through his hypothetical death and gave rise to salt crystals, can be further reconceptualised from a Simondonian perspective as "a metastable being, in disequilibrium" and "involves this state of asymmetrical disequilibrium which accounts for tension and the production of the new".²⁷³ Simondon argues that 'the production of the new', the "catalytic singularity" of the "individual crystal", takes form through a series of transformations catalysed by "transductive tension" or "disparation" in the system.²⁷⁴ What Simondon calls a "disparation" is "the existence of at least two different dimensions, two disparate levels of reality", and is "resolved" through "a resonance between different realities".²⁷⁵ In this regard, Simondon defines "the true principle of individuation" as a "mediation, which generally presumes the existence of the original duality of the orders of magnitude".²⁷⁶ In the case of *Spiral Jetty*, the resonance takes place at the molecular level of the supersaturated liquid and is amplified by an astronomical magnitude of order, namely the sun causing a high density of solar heat. In other words, the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals, catalyses an intense "mediation" of information throughout the operation of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork as a system. This resonance leads to the emergence of the high salinity of water, constantly encrusting salt crystals on the earthwork's rocks and more widely a thick layer of salt crust on the lakebed of The Great Salt Lake.²⁷⁷ Sauvagnargues states that "the crystal furnishes the simplest image" for any individuation that is constituted by transduction".²⁷⁸ Within this context, the constant encrusting of *Spiral Jetty*'s rocks is a manifestation of this 'transduction' and could be read as a manifestation of the "production of the new dimensions".²⁷⁹

Yet, what is also crucial for positioning Simondon's notion crystal in alignment with thirteen still images of crystals and one moving image of supersaturated liquid in the *Spiral Jetty* film is the processual understanding of *crystal individuation*. Smithson's description of 'the essential matter between the formed and unformed' refers to the animated water scene and still images that show the water around the rocks in the *Spiral Jetty* film. Smithson writes in the *Spiral Jetty* essay that "each drop splashed onto the Spiral Jetty coagulated into a crystal.

²⁷³ Sauvagnargues, "Crystals and", 58.

²⁷⁴ Sauvagnargues, *Art Machines*, 59-60.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 64.

²⁷⁶ Simondon, "The Genesis", 304-305.

²⁷⁷ Andrew Rupke and Taylor Borden write that "we found crust up to 1.9 feet thick not far from the shore. Our data, in conjunction with past data and aerial photography, indicate that the salt crust covers nearly the entire lake bed of the north arm. Recent aerial photography shows a white rim of salt all the way around the north arm of the lake, and past data show thick salt in the central part of the lake" Andrew Rupke and Taylor Borden, "More Than a Grain of Salt: The Salt Crust on Great Salt Lake's North Arm" *Survey Notes*, 48, no.3, (September 2016). Available at: <https://geology.utah.gov/map-pub/survey-notes/salt-crust-great-salt-lake/>

²⁷⁸ Sauvagnargues, "Crystals and", 58.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 58.

Undulating waters spread millions of crystals over the basalt”.²⁸⁰ The water drops that splash onto basalts of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork and coagulate into millions of crystals might point to the states of the process of individuation which is a result of a series of transformations in a Simondonian understanding. Accordingly, Sauvagnargues describes Simondon’s conception of *crystal individuation* in four stages: “the crystalline solution at the point of desaturation [...], the introduction of a crystalline seed capable of producing this problematic tension [...], the disparation which precipitates the formation of crystalline individual [...], the emergence of the crystal, as a creative response to the disparation of the system”.²⁸¹ Simondon’s processual understanding of individuation or conception of individuation as a series of transformations challenges “our capacity to theorise change”.²⁸² Since the *Spiral Jetty* project’s main preoccupation is planetary change, the emergence of salt crystals on the earthwork jetty can be read as a creative act that is constituted or translated through temporality. In this regard, Sauvagnargues writes that “the crystal, in being individuated, is temporalized”.²⁸³ That is to say, recontextualised through Simondon’s individuation theory, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork ‘in being individuated is temporalized’.

A reconceptualisation of the *Spiral Jetty* as a tripartite manifestation that responds to planetary dynamics and collaborates with entropy, necessitates the emphasis on the perpetual continuity of the *crystal individuations* upon the earthwork. The encrusting of salt is a result of mediations between different dimensions and levels of reality.²⁸⁴ Throughout the geoaesthetic operation of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork, these mediations occur through cosmic elemental forces such as the sun or ‘solar heat’, air, water, and the earth itself, or geopower in Grosz’s terms. This emphasis enhances the positioning and understanding of Smithson’s multi-partite jetty in the process of *becoming*, that is not only is “the principle of individuation but also the individuation” itself, namely “*ontogenesis*” in Simondon’s understanding.²⁸⁵ In this regard, the individuation of salt crystals identifies a layer of temporalisation of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork itself.

Smithson’s emphasis on *crystal individuation* might catalyse a speculative understanding of the constitution of subjectivity within the context of the Anthropocene. In response to this question of subjectivity, Sauvagnargues’s argument might be insightful, she writes that “vital subjectivity is never anything more than a topological arrangement: a spatial enfolding

²⁸⁰ Smithson, “The Spiral”, 149.

²⁸¹ Sauvagnargues, “Crystals and”, 58.

²⁸² Ibid., 61.

²⁸³ Ibid., 61.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 63.

²⁸⁵ Simondon, “The Genesis”, 305.

translated by a chronogenesis".²⁸⁶ In this sense, the question of subjectivity that is posed by the film's crystal sequence can only be understood within the creative tension between dissolution and crystallisation processes that are not in opposition with one another but together host genetic conditions of possibility. From this perspective, it is impossible to discuss the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork as a finished and static material constellation that either dissolves through entropy enhanced by the Anthropocene or crystallises with the aid of the Great Salt Lake. The creative act of *crystal individuations* on the earthwork jetty complicates notions of dissolution and crystallisation themselves and holds metaphorical and conceptual implications. In this regard, the *Spiral Jetty* project opens up questions in terms of the beginning and end of "life" or even what is defined by "life" by gesturing towards geologic life. In other words, through *crystal individuations*, the *Spiral Jetty* engages with geologic forces or mobilises 'geopower'. Therefore, *the Spiral Jetty* as a tripartite work ties processes of subjectification into inhuman forces and might offer an alternative or novel conception of subjectification as "individuation" within the wider context of the Anthropocene. And this conception problematises the question of the end, both in material and conceptual terms.

4.2.4. Dissolution of the "End": The *Spiral Jetty* as a *Future Fossil*

"There is no longer a centre of significance connected to expanding circles or an expanding spiral, but a point of subjectification constituting the point of departure of the line."²⁸⁷

"After the 'structural film', there is the sprawl of entropy."²⁸⁸

In the final sequence of the *Spiral Jetty* film, the camera proceeds from crystal images to once again the aerial view of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork, yet this time with Smithson on it. The helicopter chases him overhead and clearly gives a sense of 'the scale of [his] erratic steps'. As Smithson sometimes runs, sometimes walks on the jetty, we hear the helicopter groaning and see its shadow again. Once Smithson reaches the centre, the helicopter descends and we notice his spatiotemporal arrest presented as a hesitation. Then the helicopter ascends and the image gradually converts Smithson into the rocks of the *Spiral Jetty* in terms of scale and visual perception. Upon closer examination, both Smithson's dissolution into the rocks and the invocation of a sense of horror in the sequence –with a nod to Alfred Hitchcock's movies–, might point to the dissolution of the figure of Man within the cinematographic frame.

²⁸⁶ Sauvagnargues, "Crystals and", 62.

²⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand*, 127.

²⁸⁸ Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia" [1971], in Flam (ed), Robert Smithson, 137.

In this regard, Smithson's erratic steps can be read as "walking minerals".²⁸⁹ As Jane Bennett writes: "[w]e are 'walking, talking minerals', redistributions of 'oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, sulfur, phosphorus, and other elements of Earth's crust into two-legged, upright forms.'"²⁹⁰ Read through an Anthropocenic lens, this sequence illustrates Smithson as a walking rock and once again foreshadows an Anthropocenic aesthetics.

The interpenetration and coexistence of human and inhuman forces implied by the switch from crystal to erratic steps, recalls Smithson's understanding of the 'function of art' as 'to create an apperception of geomorphological shifts'. This shift also highlights Smithson's positioning in terms of the material and conceptual finitude of the figure of Man posited by Foucault. In this regard, Colman writes:

Smithson would appear to employ a Nietzschean logic through such comments on the anthropocentric situation, one of an inevitable dissolution of humanity, however to address to the subject is not limited to a conception of humanity, or a 'people', rather he focuses on life in terms of a geomorphology, wherein all molecular structures coexist. For Smithson, the function of art is to merely offer an apperception of the shifts in this geomorphology.²⁹¹

In the *Spiral Jetty* project, Smithson continuously gestures towards 'the inevitable dissolution of humanity' by pointing at his own hypothetical death through the sunstroke and emphasising the emergence of salt crystals. In this regard, Smithson's emphasis on the 'apperception of shifts' in the 'geomorphology, wherein all molecular structures coexist' can be understood as part of his "sensorial temporal philosophy" in Colman's words.²⁹² Yet this emphasis can be explored further through Smithson's notion of "abstract geology". "Abstract geology" is an indispensable notion in terms of conceiving the *Spiral Jetty* project as a geoaesthetic act in the Anthropocene. It recasts human thought into the geo-logics through tracing the coexistential relationships between geological processes and cognitive processes of the human. Smithson explains in his "Sedimentation" essay:

The Earth's surface and the figments of the mind have a way of disintegrating into discrete regions of art. Various agents both fictional and real, somehow trade places with each other-one cannot avoid muddy thinking when it comes to earth projects, or what I will call "abstract geology". One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine the cliff of thoughts, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallisations

²⁸⁹ Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan quote scientist Vladimir Vernadsky in *What is Life?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 49.

²⁹⁰ Bennett cites Vernadsky as quoted in Margulis and Sagan, *What is*, 49. Jane Bennett, "Earthling, Now And Forever?" in Ellsworth, Kruse (eds), *Making the*, 244.

²⁹¹ Colman, "Affective Entropy", 175.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 175.

break apart into deposits of gritty reason. Vast moving faculties occur in this geological miasma, and they move in the most physical way. This movement seems motionless, yet it crushes the landscape of logic under glacial reveries. This slow flowage makes one conscious of the turbidity of thinking. Slump, debris slides, avalanches all take place within the cracking limits of the brain. The entire body is pulled into the cerebral sediment, known as solid consciousness. A bleached and fractured world surrounds the artist. To organise this mess of corrosion into patterns, grids, and subdivisions is an esthetic (sic.) process that has scarcely been touched.²⁹³

Smithson provocatively points at a geologic or an Anthropocenic understanding of cognitive processes. In other words, he reconceptualises the processes of thinking in relation to geomorphological forces. In addition, this statement is another evidence of Smithson's formerly discussed understanding of time 'as a substance-based aesthetic ontology but one that works through the dynamics of erosion, entropy and radical openness of time'. In this context, Parikka asks "what is sensation, perception and affect in relation to nonhuman earth?"²⁹⁴ Smithson responds to this question by 'redistributing the sensible' in Ranciere's terms, by recontextualising the cognitive and the affective in a geological, material framework.

Smithson's materialism that finds its form through his 'primary contact with matter' has been widely discussed in the literature in various ways, as "libidinal materialism",²⁹⁵ as "transcendental materialism"²⁹⁶ and as "new materialism".²⁹⁷ I agree with Smithson's positioning within the new materialism framework by arguing that the *Spiral Jetty* as a tripartite constellation is a more-than-human assemblage and a manifestation of Smithson's relational ontology which emphasises *crystal individuation*. In this regard, Colman argues that the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork manifests a certain kind of "rock informatics",²⁹⁸ which relates to Serres's statement that "matter is energy; its form is information".²⁹⁹ The *Spiral Jetty* earthwork indeed posits matter as energy and mediates information through its form. It does so by directly engaging with planetary dynamics, with cosmic forces of air, sun, water and earth. This theatre of individuation in Simondonian understanding finds its temporal expression through the processing of information that operates within the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals. In this regard, Grosz writes that cosmic forces "impinge on, transform, and become the objects for living beings. We can understand these as the coming together, however

²⁹³ Smithson, "A Sedimentation", 100.

²⁹⁴ Parikka, "Earth Forces", 50.

²⁹⁵ Turpin, "Aesthetics of", 16.

²⁹⁶ Roberts, *Mirror-Travels*, 8.

²⁹⁷ Parikka, "Earth Forces", 75.

²⁹⁸ Felicity Colman, "Speculative Data: Creativity and Robert Smithson", Lecture, 3 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4q22kVT7qkk>

²⁹⁹ Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, transl. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 169.

uncomfortable, of an interior milieu with an exterior milieu, an unpulsed organic totality, and vibratory cosmic forces that generate the possibilities of expression and intensity".³⁰⁰ Following Grosz, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork indeed generates various 'possibilities of expression and intensity' through vibrating with the cosmic forces.

'The possibilities of expression and intensity' that the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork has revealed throughout 50 years have changed perpetually through the 'vibratory cosmic forces', leading the jetty to go through various material or formal transformations. These changes can be observed visibly through photos, aerial images, videos and films by artists.³⁰¹ Between 1972 and 2002, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork was submerged in water.³⁰² The level rise of the lake was unexpected and was a consequence of extensive rain (*Figure 88 & 89*). Therefore, the invisible *Spiral Jetty* earthwork, which was "submerged under the lake's viscous red water", "became known primarily through secondary means, that is, through ubiquitous photographs, as well as Smithson's own film and essay, rather than through direct experience".³⁰³ In an interview, Smithson reflects on the various transformations that the earthwork goes through by responding to George Mueller's question: "Have you seen the Spiral Jetty recently?":

R.S: Jetty was under 2 or 3 inches of water...completely submerged...the spiral jetty was almost entirely surfaced and almost entirely encrusted with salt crystal. There were various types of salt crystal growth- sometimes the crystal takes the form of a perfect square. Then, at other times, there is a different kind of mineral that looks like wax dripping on the rocks. Since the water has evaporated, it left the crystals dry, but the day after I visited the Jetty, some huge thunderstorms came in and completely dissolved all the crystals and turned the Jetty back to naked rock. Its mass was intact because it's almost 80% solid rock, so that it held its shape. Yet at the same time it was affected by the contingencies of the nature. (when I was little I used to experiment with mixtures)

G.M: you seem interested in working with combinations of land and water. Is that an important factor in your work?

R.S: Yes, it gives me an opportunity to work with water, land, air, and fire (solar light) as a whole interconnected phenomenon.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 102.

³⁰¹ Tacita Dean's 27-minute film entitled "Trying to find the Spiral Jetty" (1991) is notable from these artistic manifestations.

³⁰² In 1999, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork was donated to Dia Art Foundation for preservation. Although this preservation raises questions and complications in terms of the work's museological relations, conservation aspect and institutional position, I do not focus on these considerations within the scope of this dissertation because I read the earthwork within a larger spatiotemporal frame in alignment with Smithson's engagement with entropy. In other words, the Anthropocenic framework through which I read the work highlights its positioning within the temporality of the Earth (i.e. geopower) rather than within the cultural history meaning temporality of the human.

³⁰³ Cooke, "A Position, 68.

³⁰⁴ Robert Smithson, "...The Earth", 261.



Fig. 88 (left): *Spiral Jetty* earthwork under water. Image Credit: The Salt Lake Tribune website: <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=53288798&itype=cmsid>

Fig. 89 (right) *Spiral Jetty* earthwork under water. Image Credit: The Center for Land Use Interpretation website: <http://clui.org/ludb/site/spiral-jetty>

As I have emphasised previously and as Smithson confirms, the *Spiral Jetty* achieves ‘to work with water, land, air, and fire (solar light) as a whole interconnected phenomenon’. That is to say, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork changes its form continuously through engaging with slow and fast dynamic elemental forces. Therefore, throughout 50 years, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork transformed into various constellations in terms of form and colour. Yet, the formation of the salt crystals has been the dominant visual feature (*Figure 90 and 91*). From this point of view, cultural studies scholar Moritz Ingwersen’s statement that “the end of life is crystalline; it materializes in stone, salt, gold, or ice” might be insightful.³⁰⁵ In this regard, art historian Mark Cheetham states that “[i]n aesthetics, science and art production, the crystal materializes intimations of transparency, of vitalistic transformation or of a purist stability. It powerfully articulates a line or gradation between the organic and inorganic.”³⁰⁶ Although Cheetham and Ingwersen do not study the *Spiral Jetty* project per se, their statements align well with *Spiral Jetty*’s constant emphasis on crystals. In this regard, the crystals that refer to death and solidifying, become a material and conceptual tool to problematise the oppositional tension between solid and liquid, beginning and end, death and life and lastly dissolution and crystallisation in the *Spiral Jetty*. At this point, Serres and Latour’s reflection on this tension might be also insightful as they write:

Everything that is solid, crystalline, strong, that flaunts its hardness, that seeks to resist-from crustaceans to breastplates, statues and walls, saber rattling military types, mechanical assemblages with nuts and bolts- all of that is recoverable archaic and

³⁰⁵ In his discussion on C.G. Ballard’s 1966 novel *The Crystal World*, he uses art historian Mark Cheetham’s notion of “crystal interface”. “Solid-State Fiction: J.G. Ballard and the Crystallisation of Life” in , *Narrating Life – Experiments with Human and Animal Bodies in Literature, Science and Art*, eds. Stefan Herbrechter, Elisabeth Friis (Leiden: Brill, 2016) 73.

³⁰⁶ Mark A. Cheetham, “The Crystal Interface in Contemporary Art: Metaphors the Organic and Inorganic” *Leonardo* 43, no.3, (2010), 250. <https://doi.org/10.1162/leon.2010.43.3.250>.

frozen. Like Dinosaurs. Whereas fluids, most living things, communications, relations- none of that is hard. Fragile, vulnerable, fluid, ready to fade away with the first breath.³⁰⁷



Fig. 90 (left): *Spiral Jetty* earthwork covered in salt crystals. Image Credit: Atlas Obscura website <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/spiral-jetty> Accessed 31 January 2018

Fig. 91 (right): *Spiral Jetty* earthwork covered in salt crystals. Image Credit: Westminster College website: <https://www.westminstercollege.edu/campus-life/centres-and-institutes/great-salt-lake-institute/spiral-jetty>

From Latour and Serres's point of view, the crystal signifies what is solid, stable and dead, while fluid signifies vulnerability along with life. In this regard, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork situates itself within this dialectic between solid and fluid, or between dissolution and crystallisation, and thus problematises the question of the end. More precisely, the *Spiral Jetty* points at a new order, that is of the salt crystals which is vitalistic and alive. I have emphasised at the beginning of the first part of the chapter that a microbial ecology thrives in the Great Salt Lake and on and over the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork. This atomic-scale ecology consists of hydrophilic microorganisms, such as bacteria, algae, and archaea which can live for millennia and thus might endure long after humans dissolve in the end the Anthropocene points at. Therefore, the *Spiral Jetty* problematises the concept of the end itself not only through Smithson's entropic worldview but also his problematisation of anthropocentric conceptualisations of the end. That is to say, the question of the end, like the future, is an anthropomorphic concept that is constructed from the present and this is what Smithson and the *Spiral Jetty* project problematise in the context of the Anthropocene.

For the various reasons I have stated above, various questions regarding the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork's future colour scheme and visibility arise. Will the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork submerge

³⁰⁷ Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Ann Arbor, (1990; reiss. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 122.

again? Will the salt crystals on the lake bed remain in this pinkish colour, as the micro bacteria radiates it? Will it be encrusted with salt crystals once again as the Lucin Cut-off structure has been replaced in 2016 and the water levels between North and South Arm and the salinity level of the North Arm are expected to decrease? Will it turn into a white-on-white relief by the power of solar heat enhanced through anthropogenic climate change? Or will it remain white on a dried-out brown ground, when and if the water levels decrease? That is to say, the ever-changing physical qualities of the earthwork are amplified by cosmic forces such as the sun and the moon that create differing qualities of daylight and weather conditions, (Figure 92 & 93). Not to mention the earthwork's colour and visibility correlation with Anthropocenic conditions and the force of entropy.

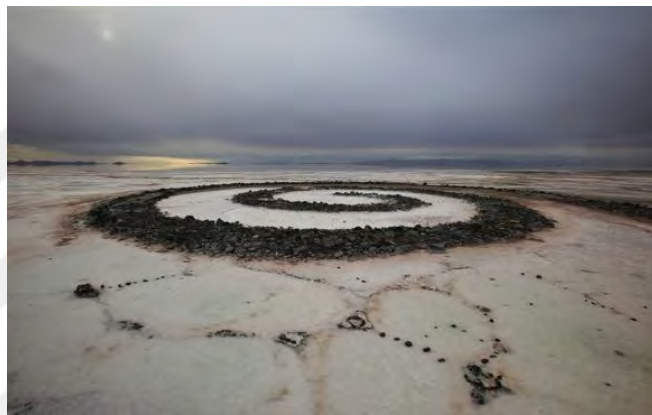


Fig. 92 (left): *Spiral Jetty* earthwork under different weather and desiccation conditions. Photo Credit: David Burdeny, available at: https://www.1stdibs.com/art/photography/landscape-photography/david-burdeny-spiral-jetty-01-great-salt-lake-utah/id-a_2470231/

Fig. 93 (left): *Spiral Jetty* earthwork under different weather and desiccation conditions. Photo credit: The Salt Lake Tribune website <https://local.sltrib.com/eu/>

Taking all these possible variations and the archaea that live in the salt crystals that will endure for millennia into consideration, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork becomes a future fossil and dissolves not only the figure of Man but also the myth of progress, historical humanism and anthropocentric notions of subjectivity. It does so through crystallising itself into a future fossil by entangling itself in the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals.

Architectural critics Alessandra Ponte and Marisa Trubiano ask:

What is *Spiral Jetty*'s perfect geometry memory of, with its complex crystalline formation desired to disappear in a post-apocalyptic landscape? A future scenario that dissolves in a prehistoric, deserted past? Smithsonian's spiral is enigmatic, [just] like the monolith of Stanley Kubrick's *2001; Space Odyssey* (1968) that appears for the first

time in the desert, at the dawn of civilisation, and then again in the space age of spaceships.³⁰⁸

This reading is significant for this dissertation as it relates the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork to the monolith in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey* that points at the entwinement of the architectural element of the obelisk and the trajectory of human evolution as I have discussed in my reading of *The Continuous Monument*. Through this relation to Kubrick's film, both geoaesthetic acts converge in 'their sci-fi futurity' and their positioning of the desert as 'a post-apocalyptic landscape'. A similar posthuman configuration was illustrated in *La Région Centrale*, thus a comparative reading of the three geoaesthetic acts as future fossils becomes possible.

In a similar manner to the positioning of the monolith in Kubrick's film, in his essay "Entropy and New Monuments" (1966) Smithson states that "[t]he first time I saw Don Judd's 'pink plexiglass', it suggested a giant crystal from another planet".³⁰⁹ In this regard, art historian Ann Reynolds argues that

[b]y comparing a work by Judd to a crystal from another planet, Smithson enters Judd into the lexicon of nonbiological metaphors that he was proposing for his own work and the work of many of his contemporaries at the time, but his network of analogies expands further to include the actual crystals he and Judd collected at the Upper Montclair quarry.³¹⁰

Smithson's preoccupation with the crystals allows him to develop his geological lens that can be mobilised on multiple orders, whether on an atomic scale exemplified in salt crystals, or an urban scale where he argues that the city can be read as a crystalline network, or on an astronomical scale 'as giant crystals from another planet'.

Since the *Spiral Jetty* project emphasises *crystal individuations* and places them at its heart of becoming, it points at a crystal becoming and thus dissolves Foucault's figure of Man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. Although Smithson was not referencing Foucault in his writings, anthropologist Alexander Nagel points out a relationship that is of archival importance. He states that Smithson's position was in line with the posthumanism of Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966). In his copy of that book, Smithson underlined a relevant passage from the Introduction:

³⁰⁸ Alessandra Ponte and Marisa Trubiano "The House of Light and Entropy: Inhabiting the American Desert", *Assemblage*, no. 30, (August 1996), 26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171455>

³⁰⁹ Robert Smithson, "Entropy and New Monuments" [1966], in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 10.

³¹⁰ Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, (London: MIT Press, 2004), 79.

Strangely enough, man—the study of whom is supposed by the naïve to be the oldest investigation since Socrates— is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position he has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge. Whence all the chimaeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an “anthropology” understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical.³¹¹

This emphasis confirms that Smithson was critical of historical humanism and anthropomorphic understanding of the universe and therefore, was aware of the limitations of anthropocentric imaginaries. In this regard, Nagel argues that “Smithson saw a way out of anthropocentrism in the recuperation of inanimate and inhuman abstract form, which is to say geometry”.³¹² Indeed, Smithson states that

“[p]ractically the whole history of modernism seems to be full of these kidney and organic writhing shapes. Actually I think there are very few modern artists that are really interesting; even the cubists had a kind of stunted idea of geometry. I think that we have to go outside of modernism to find our coordinates, our language, which is more in the area of geometry”.³¹³

Through engaging with the spiral form and mobilising its metaphorical implications as ‘the negative pathos figure’ in the ‘aesthetic of decay’, Smithson foregrounds ‘the code mediating between circularity and nomadic vectorality’ and activates both a *sensorial* and *historical vertigo* that decentre and dissolve the figure of Man. That is to say, Smithson tried to escape the limitations of anthropocentrism, almost 30 years before the term the “Anthropocene” was invented and thus I identify the *Spiral Jetty* as a tripartite work as a foundational work for understanding the prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics.

The *Spiral Jetty* as a tripartite representational assemblage crystallises itself into a future fossil through providing a contemplative focus on planetary change and offers a harsh geopolitical critique of hypermodernism and the subject of late Liberalism. The *Spiral Jetty* decentres and dissolves the figure of Man through operating as a geo-aesthetic act via the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals. In other words, the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork negotiates with planetary and geomorphological forces and converts itself into a future fossil. Besides, as a tripartite assemblage, it disseminates and multiplies itself through various media networks (i.e. photographs, videos, artworks). Consequently, the *Spiral Jetty* as a tripartite piece achieves

³¹¹ Foucault, *The Order*, xxv.

³¹² Alexander Nagel, “Robert Smithson Removed from the Source”, *RES: Anthropology & Aesthetics* 63/64 (Spring/Autumn 2013): 285. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690994>

³¹³ Smithson, as quoted in Nagel, “Robert Smithson”, 285.

to be a strong geoaesthetic act and a fundamental artwork that precedes the sensorial, visual and conceptual conditions of the Anthropocene.

I will reflect on the points where *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and the *Spiral Jetty* converge as geoaesthetic acts in order to offer a map of the prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics in the next chapter. Yet, at this point, I will emphasise the points where the *Spiral Jetty* as a geoaesthetic act and as a future fossil diverge. While *La Région Centrale* was reflecting on planetary motion, and *The Continuous Monument* was dealing with planetary organisation, *Spiral Jetty* contemplates and engages with planetary change. All three geoaesthetic acts can be identified as the first works to contemplate on the Anthropocene as a “temporal device” that shifts perspectives.³¹⁴ Similar to *The Continuous Monument*, *Spiral Jetty* evokes a *historical vertigo* in response to the collision of human and Earth temporalities. And similar to *La Région Centrale* it induces a *sensorial vertigo* that foresees the sensorial conditions of being in the Anthropocene. Yet, *Spiral Jetty*’s radical conception of subjectivity, in particular, its emphasis on *crystal individuations* adds a deeper philosophical layer to its engagement with the Anthropocene and thus foreshadows what could be called an Anthropocene hermeneutics. It does so by introducing a thermodynamical viewpoint, engaging with geomorphic aesthetics and pointing at geologic life.

I will conclude the chapter by reflecting on *Spiral Jetty*’s problematisation of the end as a future fossil. If the desert is a landscape that signifies death, what kind of an end does *Spiral Jetty* point at? In the final sequence of the *Spiral Jetty* film, Smithson brings the sun as a reflection to the centre of the ground of the earthwork (*Figure 94*). While the geo-installation hovers above the jetty, and reveals its perfect geometry and imaginatively its crystalline formation, Smithson reads from John Taine’s *Time Stream* (1931):

“Gazing intently at the gigantic sun, we at last deciphered the riddle of its unfamiliar aspect. It was not a single flaming star, but millions upon millions of them, all clustering thickly, together like bees in a swarm, their packed density made up the deceptive appearance of a solid impenetrable flame. It was in fact, a vast spiral nebula of innumerable suns.”

This statement clearly refers to a conceptual dissolution of an illusion of one, unified, and predictable understanding of the sun and underscores Smithson’s awareness of entropy that leads him to conceptualise, visualise, and materialise our journey between the crystalline and the cosmic in *Spiral Jetty*. As the image aligns sun’s reflection and the lens flares along the diagrammatic axis of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork, he reads further from Taine’s novel, “[h]e leads us to the steps of the jail’s main entrance, pivots and again locks his gaze into the sun. ‘Spirals,’ he whispers. ‘Spirals coming away...circles curling out of the sun.’” Once again,

³¹⁴ Yusoff, “Geologic Life”, 783.

spirals at differentiating incommensurable orders align and dissolve from cosmic to crystalline or vice versa.



Fig. 94: Robert Smithson, still from the Spiral Jetty film, last helicopter sequence, note the juxtaposition of sun's reflection and lens flares in alignment with the Spiral Jetty earthwork, time elapsed: 33:30

Smithson concludes the *Spiral Jetty* film with a scene from the film's studio, where the spiral reels of the film are placed in front of a large photograph of the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork (Figure 95). The camera slowly zooms in and as we get closer to the reels, 'the sun, the spiral, the salt buried in lengths of footage', the film ends.³¹⁵



Fig. 95: Robert Smithson, still from the Spiral Jetty film, last scene in the film studio, time elapsed: 34:13.

As I have argued previously, *Spiral Jetty* problematises the notion of the end by positioning the differentiation of the earthwork itself and its geologic life alongside the material dedifferentiation processes of the desert. In this regard, Nardelli argues that *Spiral Jetty* poses

³¹⁵ Smithson wanted to project the film in both an underground cave cinema, and on a ferry, that would take a spiralling voyage on the Salt Lake, while the film was screened. These ideas reveal Smithson's experimentation with the cinematic experience.

a non-anthropocentric, non-teleological and “telescoped” view of an end.³¹⁶ *Spiral Jetty* emphasises a processual end that is in alignment with Simondon’s principle of individuation. In other words, when we interpret *Spiral Jetty* as a multi-scalar becoming, the end is translated by chronogenesis. Nardelli argues further that “as either a geophysical or a conjecture reality, the desert was crucial to these newly developing scenarios at the end” and “the Spiral Jetty is an example of an ‘enduring’, ‘immanent’ end”.³¹⁷ This enduring, immanent end is an entropic end, therefore *the Spiral Jetty* as a tripartite work should be considered as a geoaesthetic act that problematises the concept of the end itself through providing a complex interrogation of process and temporality. The *Spiral Jetty*, with its thermodynamic imagination, transcalar imagery and geomorphic aesthetics was already theorising an Anthropocene aesthetics and offers us unique discursive, affective, and conceptual strategies to deal with the Anthropocene problematic.

³¹⁶ Nardelli argues further “At the height of the Cold War, and with the rise of modern environmental movements, the desert came to operate as an exemplary setting – be this an actual place on the map or a conceptual projection – through which the end was imagined or rehearsed”. Nardelli, “No End”.

³¹⁷ Nardelli quotes cultural critic Frank Kermode’s “Sense of Ending” (1967) “Rather than as an event marked by otherness – transcendent and yet-to-come – the end increasingly became thinkable, if not actually possible, as an occurrence that is ontologically and temporally continuous with the world and human history.” Nardelli, “No End”.

CONCLUSION: Tracing Geoaesthetic Acts in the Anthropocene

In this conclusion, I will provide a synthesis of the nodes that I have developed in my rereading of *La Région Centrale*, *Continuous Monument*, *Spiral Jetty* as geoaesthetic acts and that constitute my mapping of a speculative prehistory of Anthropocene aesthetics. Drawing on this mapping, I will recapitulate my findings in response to the meta-argument of this dissertation, namely how these three preliminary geoaesthetic acts decentre and dissolve the figure of Man in relation to planetary and geologic forces and thereby identifying an Anthropocenic epistemic rupture. I will draw out how this dissertation contributes to Anthropocene studies, specifically, the emerging fields of Anthropocene aesthetics and/or geoaesthetics and will discuss its implications by outlining what its findings say to current thinking about and acting on the topic and pointing to the questions they open up. I will reflect on these questions by offering a brief theoretical discussion on the possibility of a different kind of framing of geoaesthetics in the contemporary context and the problematic of the dissolution of the figure of Man. Through this discussion, I will reflect on what kind of future work could be developed from the consequences of my work, in particular, what lines of inquiry may emanate from my conception of geoaesthetic acts and what questions remain.

The research question of this dissertation was which representations of Anthropocenic thinking in art and architecture can play a similar preliminary role as *Las Meninas* (1656) does in Michel Foucault's analysis in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (1970)? Drawing on this analysis, the first aim of this dissertation emerged, namely to identify artistic and architectural works that hold an equivalent agency to *Las Meninas* in terms of signifying an epistemic shift and through which I explore the epistemic origins of emerging Anthropocenic aesthetics. I mainly aimed to reveal a prehistory of emerging Anthropocene aesthetics by offering a critical analysis and comparative reading of *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty*. I reread these works through an Anthropocenic lens and described them as geoaesthetic acts, as works that take the Earth (geo) as its subject matter, site, scale and aesthetic condition and can be contextualised within the Anthropocene both as a material and discursive framework. What follows is the synthesis of my analysis of the representational assemblage that I propose as formative for identifying the Anthropocenic epistemic rupture. I will summarise the points that these preliminary geoaesthetic acts open up in terms of identifying an Anthropocenic rupture and foreshadowing an Anthropocene aesthetics.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, an Anthropocenic imagination involves two main modes of operation, the expansion of spatiotemporal frames of analysis and the collision of

human and Earth temporalities. In this regard, my identification of a geoaesthetic act follows the questions of whether it expands spatial or temporal frames of analysis and whether it responds to the collision of human and Earth temporalities. These two modes of operations led me to identify three conceptual components that I propose as integral for crystallising the works as geoaesthetic acts, namely their conception of subjectivity, their framing of temporality and their imagination of scale. As I discussed in the introduction and the first chapter in detail, the expansion of spatial frames to the planetary and the extension of temporal frames to deep time bring geologically informed subjectivities to the foreground and complicate the notion of scale itself. The collision of human and Earth temporalities along with the expansion of temporal frames of analysis calls for not only an expansive but also a juxtapositional framing of temporality. These three conceptual components determined my selection of *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* among other artworks and architectural manifestations in the period between 1968-1972 and my identification of them as geoaesthetic acts. In methodological terms, I utilised my disciplinary background in architecture as a means for creative thinking. In particular, I implemented architectural research tools such as developing conceptual diagrams for building up this Anthropocenic lens, for identifying the two modes of operations and drawing diagrammatic connections between them and the three conceptual components. Through my critical and comparative reading of the three geoaesthetic acts, I used historical, theoretical, archival research methods and carried out close readings and visual and architectural analysis. Consequently, I argued that their radical conceptualisation of subjectivity pointing towards geologic life (i.e. *Spiral Jetty*) and technospheric mediation (i.e. *La Région Centrale*), their expansive and juxtapositional framing of temporality leading to what I called *historical vertigo* (i.e. *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty*) and their novel imagination of scale which I described as *transcalar* (i.e. *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty*), all identify a break with a prior aesthetic regime - in Rancière's terms - and point towards an Anthropocene aesthetics before the term Anthropocene was invented. In other words, I argued that these three geoaesthetic acts were already theorising the Anthropocene, thus leading me to position them as foundational works for identifying the epistemic origins of emerging Anthropocene aesthetics.

Drawing on Foucault's analysis of *Las Meninas* as a representation that foreshadows the Modern episteme, giving rise to the emergence of the figure of Man, and his anticipation of the death of the figure of Man at the end of *The Order of Things*, I posited *La Région Centrale*, *Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as a representational assemblage that similarly decentres and dissolves this figure of Man and thus identifies an epistemic rupture from the Modern to the Anthropocene. This framing analysis led me to constitute the structure of the chapters through which I analyse these three geoaesthetic acts in a similar way, namely

around the decentring and the dissolution of the figure of Man. As one of the reasons for my selection of these three works were their different characteristics which had the potential to work well together as a representational assemblage, the similar structure of the chapters enabled me to reveal the distinctiveness of each geoaesthetic act in terms of how it decentres and dissolves the figure of man in relation to planetary and geomorphological forces. By bringing their nuances together, I provided a wider perspective for mapping a conceptual landscape of preliminary geoaesthetic acts and excavating the roots of emerging Anthropocene aesthetics.

I argued that *La Région Centrale*, through its contemplation of planetary motion and deep engagement with the technosphere, decentres the figure of Man by replacing human vision with machinic vision and turning human subjectivity into technospheric mediation. Being coupled with the ceaseless cycles of the filmic apparatus not only throws us into a sensorial vertigo but also achieves a non-anthropocentric mode of vision and point towards a posthuman subjectivity. Through its exploration of a dehumanised landscape and our encounter with the elemental forces of the Earth, exemplified in the rocks' presence as glacial deposits, the film invokes 'a long-view in time back to prehistory' and hence a contemplation through deep time. I proposed that the film introduces a *transcalar* imagery by offering a simultaneous experience of varying scales from atomic to astronomic. I claimed that, as the extreme speed and rotational movements of the cinematographic apparatus led to an anticipation of the collapse of the frame, the film reflects the dispersal of the figure of Man into the technosphere, which he created with the aim of mastery of the Earth but over which his total control has been lost. In particular, I investigated the filmic apparatus *De La* as an early artistic response to the visual rhetoric of impending planetary algorithmic governance which is an extension of the military-industrial complex and its related paradigms of techno-atmospheric control. This investigation led me to link the anxious anticipation of self-destruction of *De La* and the dissolution of the frame in the alien choreography of the film with an indication of the end of Foucault's figure of Man as a detached subjectivity from the technospheric processes he initiated. Consequently, I argued that *La Région Centrale* points to the dissolution of the figure of Man in a self-destructive manner, expressing an Anthropocenic anxiety.

In the case of *The Continuous Monument*, I argued that Superstudio tells an ironical story about planetary organisation. I read the work as an allegorical architectural project that centres the figure of Man coupled with technocapitalist modes of seeing, measuring, and territorialising and dominates the whole Earth through an architectural edifice that encircles the globe. I reflected on how *The Continuous Monument* takes the idea of a single architecture dominating

the whole world to its extreme limit through manifesting a 'logical extrapolation of oriented history'. Superstudio's reorientation of history from prehistoric monuments to technospheric buildings demonstrates a radically expansive outlook on architectural history and human temporality and induces a *historical vertigo* that is a manifestation of an expansive and juxtapositional framing of temporality. I positioned Superstudio's experimentation with scale that begins with a small 9 cm² square grid in the *Histograms* project and expands to a planetary scale in *The Continuous Monument* as a challenge of the limits of scale in architectural imagination. I explored how *The Continuous Monument* points to the dissolution of the figure of Man by evacuating every human being on the sites it intervenes. In particular, I argued that this dissolution was expressed in the total interiorisation of the colossal monument as it entraps the whole of humankind into its unpicturable interior and the suspension of animation as it freezes every environment it grounds upon, turning them into artificial frozen deserts. In a provocative manner, I proposed that as there are no openings in the structure, *The Continuous Monument* might signify a gigantic mausoleum or a tomb for humanity.

Lastly, in my reading of the *Spiral Jetty* as a tripartite work (*Spiral Jetty* earthwork, *Spiral Jetty* film, *Spiral Jetty* essay), I argued that it, with its complex negotiation with planetary change, decentres the figure of Man through mobilising both a sensorial and *historical vertigo*. The former is achieved through its *transcalar* imagination exemplified within the fractal repetition of the spiral form that operates as a transversal knot, binding incommensurable order from atomic to astronomic. The latter is expressed in the collapse of the remote past into the present and the juxtaposition of human and Earth temporalities that are mobilised by Smithson's general refutation of historical humanism and his geologically nuanced positioning within the cosmic anxieties created by the Atomic Age. Furthermore, I claimed that *Spiral Jetty's* intense relationship with entropy and mobilisation of a thermodynamic imagination point towards the dissolution of the figure of Man. I proposed that the project dissolves anthropocentric notions of subjectivity by positing the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals as its conceptual and material centre. In particular, I related the *Spiral Jetty* film's crystal sequence where Smithson reflects on his own dissolution 'into a unicellular beginning' to Gilbert Simondon's notion of the crystal as par exemplar of the processes of individuation. I argued that *Spiral Jetty* engages with 'crystal individuation' that posits the genesis of the crystal as 'a paradigm to characterise individuation in the domain of living beings' and hence points towards the remineralisation of subjectivities and geologic life. By doing so, I claimed that the *Spiral Jetty* introduces a non-anthropocentric conception of subjectivity and dissolves the linear understanding of history, the myth of progress and the figure of Man into a dedifferentiated 'world of modern prehistory'.

Since I interlinked the “Whole Earth worry” in the period between 1968-1972 and the contemporary Anthropocene anxiety and explored the question of the dissolution of the figure of Man, I problematised the question of the end – which constituted one of the objectives of the dissertation. This problematisation led me to offer a comparative reading of geoaesthetic acts as future fossils, ‘as future temporalities turned back to the current moment’. While Snow imagined *La Région Centrale* to be a souvenir from the Earth that reflects the last wilderness on Earth, I asked whether it rather encapsulates the anxiety that comes with the loss of the idea of the Earth as an independent entity separate from technospheric activities. In particular, I asked whether *La Région Centrale* as a future fossil reflects the story of the figure of Man’s dispersal into the technosphere and his becoming inscription into the future through his self-destruction. In the case of *The Continuous Monument*, drawing on Superstudio’s conceptualisation of their photo collages as postcards, I reread several frames in the storyboard as postcards from the Capitalocene and positioned them as future fossils, carrying their message from the past into the future. I decoded their message in an Anthropocenic context and posed Anthropocenic questions, such as in response to their New New York collage. As New York, an architectural epicentre of Modernism as well as financial capitalism, becomes a frozen desert where there is no sign of human life, could this postcard render a sci-fi futurity and gesture towards the heat death of the universe following the law of entropy? Lastly, I explored how the *Spiral Jetty* project problematised the notion of the end through positing the differentiation of geologic life along with material dedifferentiation processes of the desert and converting the earthwork into a future fossil. I proposed that while the *Spiral Jetty* earthwork is continuously marooned in salt crystals accompanied with archaea that endure long after the humans are gone, the *Spiral Jetty* project poses a processual, non-anthropocentric, and ‘telescoped’ view of an end that is translated by chronogenesis, what Sauvagnargues describes as “the instantiation of a temporality that hems in its wake the outskirts of the living”.¹ In other words, by drawing our attention to the entropic nexus between sun, heat, and salt crystals, and therefore situating itself within the dialectic between solid and fluid, dissolution and crystallisation, and life and death, *Spiral Jetty* dissolves the end as an anthropomorphic concept.

My comparative reading of the three geoaesthetic acts as potential future fossils demonstrated different negotiations with the concept of the end itself and problematised it as an anthropomorphic concept. This is significant because it can help us to reflect on the engagements with the question of the end in Anthropocene debates and Anthropocenic cultural manifestations in a more critical way. As the concept of the future and the imagination

¹ Sauvagnargues, “Crystals and”, 66.

of the end are culturally constructed from the present, looking back at these cultural imaginings of the end in the period between 1968-1972 where similar anxieties concerning the possible end of the world were present, provides a critical and productive distance towards current apocalyptic scenarios that come across frequently in the Anthropocene debate. First, my problematisation of the end as an anthropomorphic concept through the geoaesthetic acts, such as the continuity of geologic life in *Spiral Jetty* that outlives the human temporality, challenges the teleological finality that is implied by the apocalyptic scenarios. Second, as I built up a correlation between the cultural conditions that shape the imagination of the end in the period between 1968-1972 and the contemporary Anthropocene setting, exemplified in the relationship between the 'Whole Earth worry' and Anthropocenic eco-anxiety, I offer a perspective through which the contemporary Anthropocene discourse around the end of the world could be seen as a derivative and amplification of the imaginings of the end in the Whole Earth discourse. For example, Snow's intention to convey a feeling of 'a kind of Goodbye to the Earth' which he believes that they were living through with *La Région Centrale* not only resonates strongly with the contemporary discourse around the end in the Anthropocene debate but also reminds us that if there is an end, it is not a point in the future but rather a cultural imagination that is tied to the present moment and is not instantaneous but processual.

Through developing these concluding arguments, I explored how the three preliminary geoaesthetic acts offer new or rather overlooked aesthetic, discursive and sensual strategies to engage with planetary imagination and deal with the Anthropocene problematic. I demonstrated how they developed insightful geoaesthetic vocabularies through which to explore the relationship between the Earth and humans, introduced radical and innovative ways of conceptualising and representing the Earth and pointed towards geologic life. For example, *La Région Centrale* experimented with creating a sensorial order through which we can see as a planet does. The relentless cycles of *De La* threw us into a sensorial vertigo and foreshadowed the visual and sensorial conditions of being in the Anthropocene, of being groundless and losing the sense of scale, in particular. *The Continuous Monument* offered an Anthropocenic framing of temporality through which we can see the urbanscape of Manhattan as a 'bunch of ancient skyscrapers'. The *Spiral Jetty* film explicitly signalled geologic life by attaching the respirator's sound of breathing to the images of salt crystal formation and pointed towards crystal individuations, challenging anthropocentric notions of subjectivity. My rereading of these works as geoaesthetic acts is important mainly because through this rereading we begin to understand the origins of the Anthropocene aesthetics. Although an emerging Anthropocene aesthetics can be loosely identified, a genealogical study that tracks its epistemic origins has not yet been undertaken. In this regard, this dissertation contributes to Anthropocene studies, in particular, to the literature on the emerging fields of Anthropocene

aesthetics and/or geoaesthetics in a novel way, since excavating the roots of this emerging Anthropocenic aesthetic regime provides a deeper and more critical understanding of the current Anthropocenic cultural-aesthetic context. For example, my contextual readings challenged the fables of awakening that appear frequently in Anthropocene discourse, such as the claim in the dominant Anthropocene narrative that we are at a historical threshold where we “are the first generation with the knowledge of how our activities influence the Earth system”². By focusing on the “Whole Earth” discourse in the period between 1968-1972 where there was a growing number of alarmist publications on the environmental future of the planet coupled with the rise of the modern environmental movements and exploring the responses to the ‘Whole Earth worry’ in geoaesthetic acts, I demonstrated how planetary environmental degradation was already debated both in scientific communities and cultural-aesthetic manifestations.

This dissertation revealed the period between 1968-1972 as a pivotal time for mapping the epistemic origins of Anthropocene aesthetics. Through my discussion in the introduction and first chapter, I argued that the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene is a derivative of the Whole Earth discourse and in particular that the planetary aesthetic that the dominant Anthropocene visibility brings forth can be traced back to the Whole Earth imagery. Contextualising the Anthropocene narrative in this historical framework is significant because it helps us understand the epistemological conditions through which it comes into being. This genealogical account does not oppose the historic-geologic novelty of the Anthropocene but highlights how it is built upon and rearticulates earlier scientific discourses and cultural imaginations. It allows us to understand how the generalising, universalising and reductionist tendencies in the One-Earth and Whole- Earth rhetoric found their way into the dominant Anthropocene narrative and how the view from nowhere in the Whole Earth imagery is reproduced and amplified through the dominant Anthropocene visibility, such as the wide dissemination of high-resolution satellite imagery. Unfolding the history of this universalising logic is an important starting point for reflecting critically on the Anthropocene narrative and for problematising the geopolitics of representation, in particular, to disentangle the anaesthetising impacts of the dominant Anthropocene visibility through the geoaesthetic acts. The emphasis on the relationship between Whole Earth discourse and Anthropocene narrative is not entirely new, as, among others, T.J. Demos has noted it. Yet, I expanded on the interconnections more deeply, as exemplified in the correlation I drew between ‘Whole Earth

² Will Steffen *et al.* “The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship”, *Ambio* 40, n. 739 (2011): 757. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-011-0185-x>.

worry' and Anthropocene anxiety or between the technofixer approaches one encounters in *The Whole Earth Catalogue* and *Ecomodernist Manifesto*. In other words, my historicist account on the epistemological origins of the Anthropocene narrative between 1968-1972 showed how similar concerns and responses towards the premise of a planetary ecological collapse were apparent. Therefore, this genealogical account also allows us to build a more critical understanding of the cultural responses towards the current planetary predicament and to underscore the ethical and political deficiencies of the technoscientific responses towards the geo-ecological crisis.

My rereading of the three works as geoaesthetic acts allows us to interlink connections between the past and contemporary moment in terms of the intensification of planetary thought and geologic imagination within cultural and aesthetic production. To be more precise, as there is a significant rise in cultural manifestations that engage with the Anthropocene today, my rereading of *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* as geoaesthetic acts enables us to trace the legacies of their discursive, affective and sensual strategies and aesthetic modes that foreshadow an Anthropocenic thought and sensibility, in contemporary and future potential geoaesthetic acts. That is to say, my rereading of these three works through an Anthropocenic lens has reactivated them and underscores their continual historical presence in the contemporary aesthetic landscape defined by the Anthropocene. This historicisation offers an expansive perspective for research on Anthropocene aesthetics and/or geoaesthetics as it uncovers an overlooked impetus that gave rise to planetary aesthetic and geologic imagination in visual culture. Exploring this impetus helps us understand how we got where we are. In other words, since this dissertation allows us to draw interconnections between the past and contemporary context in terms of the rise of planetary and geologic imagination, it helps us understand not only the past but also the present. These precedential geoaesthetic acts catalyse creative and critical insights into our contemporary situation since they have already explored 'some of the underlying problems of our imagined relations with the planet'. In addition, this dissertation offers a conceptual and methodological tool guide for identifying and reading contemporary geoaesthetic acts. More specifically, my conception of geoaesthetic acts and the concepts I have developed throughout my close readings such as *historical vertigo* or *transcalar imagination* can be applied as useful conceptual tools for analysing and reflecting on other Anthropocenic manifestations as potential geoaesthetic acts.

Through my comparative reading, I showed how *La Région Centrale*, *The Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty* raise 'the unthought in thought' in reconfiguring and distributing an Anthropocenic thought and sensibility and thus argued that only with the emergence of the

Anthropocene theory, we are in a better position to understand the wider implications of *La Région Centrale*, *Continuous Monument* and *Spiral Jetty*, to read them critically as geoaesthetic acts. My utilisation of the Anthropocene as a lens, as a conceptual and aesthetic framework of meaning and my conception of geoaesthetic acts not only benefit the readings of contemporary Anthropocenic manifestations but also the scholarly work focusing on the geoeasthetics of the period between the late 1960s and early 1970s. In particular, it adds valuable insights to the critique around the artworks and architectural manifestations that engage with ecological concerns, respond to 'Whole Earth worry' and point towards a geologic shift - as I noted in part in the introduction. Through engaging critically with the Anthropocene theory, I utilised a transversal approach, a different historical optic and a new scale of reference for reading the selected historical works. This transdisciplinary rereading challenges rather limited disciplinary frameworks through which these three works are analysed, which as a consequence disclose new layers of meaning and new angles of thought and activate their potential as historical interventions in shaping the geoaesthetics of the Anthropocene. In addition, my immanent critique and feminist rereading of these works as geoaesthetic acts dissolve the master narratives around their well-known creators and offer new frames of analysis and new theoretical tools that are more attuned to the critical undertakings of the Anthropocene narrative.

My identification of the nodes that outline a map of the prehistory of the Anthropocene aesthetics methodologically benefited from my disciplinary background in architecture since I applied it as a mode of creative thinking and sensibility for investigating the implications of the Anthropocene in visual culture. For example, the visualisation I have developed for Foucault's *Las Meninas* analysis enabled me to specify interconnections between motion and subject positions and framing devices and power relationships, and these interconnections established the basis of my analysis of *La Région Centrale* as a geoaesthetic act. In addition, as I previously pointed out, I used conceptual diagrams for drawing out the implications of Anthropocene as a lens through which I have read and analysed geoaesthetic acts. I mobilised an Anthropocenic filter as a transversal cut that binds interconnections between various scales, temporalities, subjectivities, and materialities posited by geoaesthetic acts. My utilisation of architecture as a mode of creative thinking contributed to the methodology of the dissertation and points towards a reconfiguration of philosophy of architecture or architectural philosophy in an Anthropocenic framework. Therefore, it benefits the research in architectural history and theory that aim to respond to the Anthropocene. More broadly, this architectural methodology and transversal approach is useful for studies in Anthropocene aesthetics and/or geoaesthetics since it introduces conceptual and methodological tools for pursuing an 'ethic of interconnectedness' and mobilising an 'ethics of critical proximity' both of which I positioned

as critically important for responding to the Anthropocene and opposing the dominant Anthropocene visuality.

As of today, the planetary ecological crisis that the Anthropocene points at is in the daily news, defining our socio-ecological condition as well as catalysing a collective existential Angst. I positioned the agency of geoaesthetics as vital for 'thinking with and feeling through' the Anthropocene, as an ethico-onto-epistemological attempt that, following Zylinska, emphasises critical and creative thinking as the most political thing we can do before we do anything else in response to the Anthropocene. In this regard, I highlighted geoaesthetic acts' potentials as 'new streams of speculative and creative geopolitical imaginaries and forms of collective subjectivities that recalibrate existing value systems and indicate alternatives'. Drawing on these potentials and consequences of this dissertation, two main lines of inquiries for further research open up. First, the question of a different kind of framing of geoaesthetics in the contemporary context, in particular, how would we conceptualise a contemporary feminist geoaesthetic act? What would it add to my conception of geoaesthetic acts and how does the concept might change or continue into the present? And this question extends to the second question that arises from the meta-argument of the dissertation, namely the decentring and dissolution of the figure of Man. What happens if/after the figure of Man is decentred and dissolved? How would a contemporary feminist geoaesthetic act engage with this decentring and dissolution? I will offer a brief theoretical reflection on these questions not to answer them but to broadly outline possible conceptual threads for future research. In order to do so, yet, to keep this reflection within the scope of this dissertation, I will revisit and expand on some of the conceptual threads I have established throughout the dissertation.

As I mentioned in the introduction, although I conducted my research from a feminist perspective, the creators of the three geoaesthetic acts were white, male and Western. I focused on the agency of the works themselves, what they do, activate or mobilise in terms of implying an Anthropocenic epistemic rupture, rather than focusing on the creators and engaging with the master narratives around these well-known figures. That is to say, although these works were created by male practitioners, my immanent critique and feminist rereading of these works as geoaesthetic acts argued that they begin to decentre and dissolve the figure of Man in relation planetary and geologic forces. Yet, as I revealed a beginning point in the history of Anthropocene aesthetics and conceptualised geoaesthetic acts throughout the Anthropocenic epistemic break, the question of what follows remains open for exploration. I suggest that the concept of geoaesthetic acts could be recontextualised within the contemporary Anthropocene setting and developed further by engaging more with female and feminist voices and decolonial and indigenous perspectives. In this regard, I imply that a

contemporary feminist geoaesthetic act would continue to decentre and dissolve the figure of Man. Yet, it would also address the concerns within the intersection between gender and the Anthropocene and reveal the linkage between environmental destruction and gender violence and how this linkage ties in with the violence of colonialism. It would also expose the struggles and challenges in disrupting colonial and settler-colonial logic and the oppression of racial and extractive capitalism.

As I stated in the first chapter, the configuration of Anthropos in the dominant Anthropocene narrative holds the danger of reappointing power to the figure of Man, this time as the 'universal masculinist figure of Species-Man'. A contemporary feminist geoaesthetic act would decompose the Anthropos, break the illusion of a general, unified, universal and gendered conception of subjectivity and subdivide it 'into several distinct peoples, endowed with contradictory interests, competing territories, and brought together by the warring agents – not to say warring divinities'.³ This decomposition would help to disclose the myriad of inequalities in terms of responsibility for environmental degradation, starting from the difference between global North and global South, highlight the obvious differences between underrepresented communities and rich and privileged ones in terms of risk exposure, and thus problematise issues of environmental justice. In other words, a contemporary feminist geoaesthetic act would tackle politics of differences within geosocial orders and engage deeply with the critical work of decolonising the dominant Anthropocene narrative which Yusoff referred to as 'white geology'.⁴ To do so, it would expose and problematise histories of colonialism, 'systemic racial oppression and inscribed geologic violence' that are deeply entangled in the ongoing processes that led to the Anthropocene. It would raise or engage with the political questions around subjectivity that are posed by feminist critique, decolonial perspectives and critical race theory in the Anthropocene debate. In this regard, my discussion on problematising the Anthropos as a reincarnation of the figure of Man outlines a beginning point for the political questions that potential feminist geoaesthetic acts would grapple with. I identify this political engagement with the question of subjectivity not only as a necessary step in the continuing process of decentring and dissolving the figure of Man but also as a strategy for mobilising an 'ethics of critical proximity' to the Anthropocenic events that I have posited as crucially important for the agency of geoaesthetic acts.

Throughout this dissertation, I problematised the question of the end in the Anthropocene narrative as a potential for the end of the figure of Man. I argued that although the

³ Latour, "Facing Gaia", 110.

⁴ Yusoff, *A Billion*, 27.

Anthropocene betrays itself in its naming, if there is an end signified by the Anthropocene it might be the end of the conception of the human as *Anthropos*, as ‘the masculine universalist Species-man’ and his technoscientific conception of the world. Drawing on Zylinska, I pointed out that the dissolution of the figure of Man activates an ‘ethical opening’ and suggested that through this opening an ethic of interconnectedness can be mobilised. By drawing on critical posthumanist theory and in opposition to anthropocentric undertakings of the Anthropocene narrative, I argued for geoaesthetic acts that underscore the entanglements between nonhuman, human and inhuman and the agency of those who have been historically considered as less-than or non-human. Yet, as English studies scholar Zakiyyah Iman Jackson rightly points out “[w]hether machine, plant, animal, or object, the nonhuman’s figuration and mattering is shaped by the gendered racialization of the field of metaphysics even as teleological finality is indefinitely deferred by the processual nature of actualization or the agency of matter”.⁵ The Anthropocene foregrounds the ‘processual nature of actualization or the agency of matter’ by displaying material evidence for a myriad of interconnections and intra-actions between nonhuman, inhuman and human that continuously take place in geo-bio-socio assemblages. Noticing and witnessing these entanglements in geosocial orders helps to dissolve the imagination of the end as an anthropomorphic concept. Although the ‘gendered racialisation’ is also still inherent in the dominant Anthropocene narrative, contemporary feminist geoaesthetic acts have the potential to disentangle it first by exposing the conceptual mechanisms of racialised and gendered human-nonhuman distinction and then giving voice to those who have historically been considered less-than- or non-human.

My proposition of geoaesthetic acts for foregrounding an ethic of interconnectedness and mobilising an ‘ethics of critical proximity’ to the Anthropocene is interwoven with the conceptual possibilities and ethico-onto-epistemological openings that emerge from the dissolution of the figure of Man. Although the conceptual dissolution of the figure of Man is an ongoing process, a critical undertaking of the Anthropocene narrative provides an opening for a new understanding of entanglements of earthly being and invites us ‘for a tending once again to relations, to kin, to life, longing, and care’, as Davis and Todd pointed out.⁶ The three preliminary geoaesthetic acts dissolved the figure of Man and pointed towards responses to what happens after this dissolution by proposing alternative conceptions of subjectivity, framings of temporality and imaginations of scale, all of which emphasise relations and interconnections in geo-bio-socio assemblages. For example, *Spiral Jetty* engaged with

⁵ Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement “Beyond the Human” in Dossier: Theorising Queer Inhumanities, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, No. 2-3, (June 2015): 217.

⁶ Davis and Todd, “On the Importance”, 775.

crystal individuations and geologic life and *La Région Centrale* turned human subjectivity into technospheric mediation. How to continue to dissolve the figure of Man and what happens after the figure of Man dissolves are broad questions that could be further explored by contemporary feminist geoaesthetic acts and their critical readings. It is a line of inquiry that opens up different conceptual possibilities to be explored by offering alternative, relational, and processual conceptions of subjectivity, as becoming is becoming with and the human is always and already more-than-human. My reading of preliminary geoaesthetic acts demonstrated that what really dissolves is the illusion of the human configured as the figure of Man, conceptualised as an autonomous entity separate from the environment, dominating and exploiting the Earth and earthly beings including the ones who are considered less-than-human, nonhuman and inhuman. Through revealing the complexities of nature-culture entanglements such as co-dependency, co-emergence, co-existence, and co-extinction, tackling politics of differences within geosocial orders and introducing practices of kin-making and care, geoaesthetic acts hold the potential to show how to relate to the Earth otherwise and offer new and novel ways of ‘thinking with and feeling through’ the Anthropocene.



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