



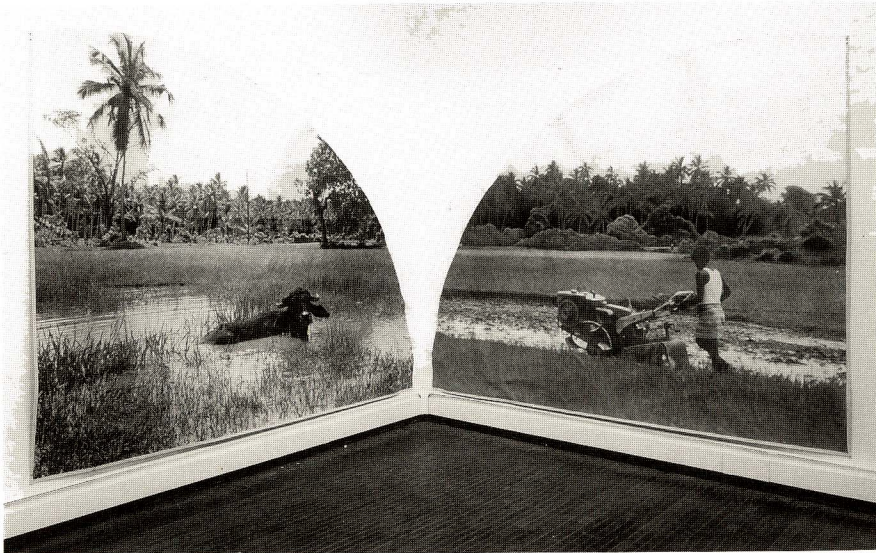
Tracing Cultures

art history criticism critical fiction

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Jetties and Lagoons

David Raskin



Helen and Newton Harrison, *That Idiot Theseus Did In the Minotaur* (Sketch for the 7th Lagoon), 1982
Photographic painting on wedge-shaped canvas panels, buffalo panel, 97 x 121 inches;
tractor panel, 97 x 119 inches
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Introduction

When Robert Smithson was building *The Spiral Jetty* (1970) in the Great Salt Lake, Newton Harrison was growing brine shrimp in California. They met at the Spring Street Bar in New York. Newton Harrison tells this tale: "I told him, 'hey look the water turns red doesn't it?' And he said 'yes, it does.' I told him, 'hey then it turns clearer doesn't it?' He said 'yes, it does.' I said 'its the algae *dunalliella*.' I said 'look maybe its because the brine shrimp have just eaten it.' I proposed that I live off his jetty and harvest brine shrimp. He got very offended." Newton Harrison continued, "It delineated our opposition to each other. He apparently wasn't willing to let the purity of his work be compromised."¹ Purity and Robert Smithson?

Seven years before this encounter was published, Newton Harrison had become notorious with his *Survival Piece #3: Portable Fish Farm* (1971). In London's Hayward Gallery, he showed two dozen catfish in saltwater tanks. At the show's finale, Harrison killed and cooked the fish, then served dinner to "a group of rather precious art-lovers," as one art critic remarked.² Tipped off about what would transpire, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals had attempted to have the catfish dinner censored.³ Popular sentiment was not amused. With this transgression of polite society, Newton Harrison hoped for a practical message carrying symbolic overtones: fish farms might feed us once our natural resources are destroyed. By exhibiting what he saw as a complete ecological cycle, "gathering, growing, harvesting, and feasting,"⁴ Harrison's artistic agenda was set.

Because the fish did not travel well (many died in shipment from California to London), Newton Harrison, now working in collaboration with his wife, Helen Mayer Harrison, began experimenting with a heartier animal: a crab found in warmwater lagoons in Southeast Asia. The Harrisons visited one such lagoon in Sri Lanka. That lagoon

became for the Harrisons, in 1972, a “primal” lagoon symbolizing an ecological ideal now lost to the West. The Harrisons chased this ideal in *The Lagoon Cycle* and mapped a course for its retrieval. *The Lagoon Cycle* consists of an introduction plus seven individual lagoons, which act as chapters.⁵ The project begins with Newton Harrison playing the “Lagoonmaker” (Helen Mayer Harrison’s character in *The Lagoon Cycle* is the “Witness”) and contemplating the work that lies ahead:

So I thought
I can make a tank four paces by five paces
and waist high I can make a light cycle with timers
and time it to equatorial light
and keep it at equatorial temperature
and make a bottom filter that changes
the water as the tides

And
I thought
how will a crab know it’s not a lagoon⁶

The *Lagoon* is a “suite of seven interconnected meditations on the ecosystem, in constant evolution between 1972 and 1983”⁷ that draws attention to pressing environmental concerns. The *Lagoon* has taken the form of, for instance, public performances of scripted dialogues, published documents, and multimedia installations of up to fifty wall-sized panels. *The Second Lagoon* includes a panel with an image of an aquaculture tank for raising crabs, a photograph of a crab, and a two-page report entitled “Development of a Commercial Aquaculture System for the *Crab Scylla serrata* (Forsk.)” that documents some of the Harrisons’ research. In a presentation of a different type, the Harrisons performed *The First Lagoon* at Georgia State University in 1980. This lagoon describes the Harrisons’ trip to Sri Lanka; Newton Harrison spoke with a guard at the temple of the tooth of Kandy:

And I asked
What is in this casket that is so marvelous

He answered why the tooth of course
(and I heard the truth)

So I asked
Do you ever open this casket
and reveal the truth
(and he heard the tooth)
And he said every ten years⁸

The truth that Harrison asks to see at the Temple of Kandy is one small part of the *Lagoon*’s larger quest. The Harrisons’ seek a holistic nature, which they think will provide the truth of an ecological ideal. The present study examines this proposition by exploring the divergent and, ultimately, conflicting textualities, spatial politics, and ecologies of the Harrisons’ *Lagoon* and Robert Smithson’s *Jetty*. I will argue that despite the Harrisons’ high-minded environmental orientation, Smithson more effectively unfolds the “truth” of nature—its non-existence as a pure, cohesive category.

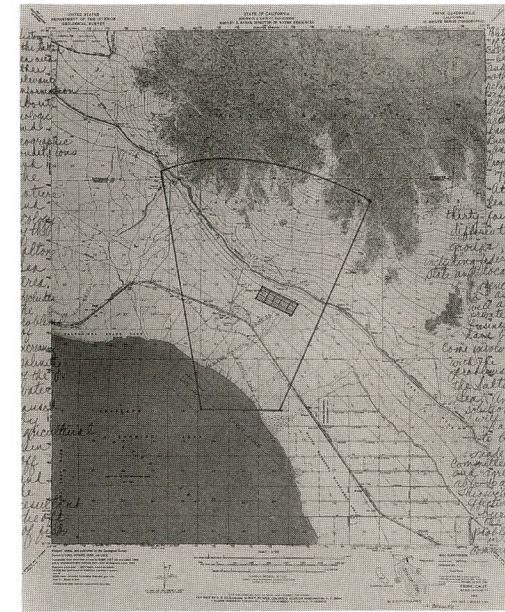
Textuality

By the time Newton Harrison’s encounter with Smithson was published in 1978, the Harrisons had been working on the *Lagoon* for six years and Smithson was dead. Newton Harrison’s characterization of the *Jetty* as “pure” was strategic—it suggests a particular way of understanding *The Spiral Jetty*: as modernist sculpture. But Smithson’s work is open to many, even opposing, interpretations. As one critic recalled about *The Spiral Jetty*, “because hardly anyone had actually seen it, it functioned as legend, bouncing off our imaginations, planted in our memories by photographs with the magic of faraway places untouched by reality. Inaccessible, it reverberated to the ends of the art world.”⁹ In fact, because the earthwork is deliberately inaccessible, it can be seen not so much in modernist terms as a single object containing an inherent meaning, but as a system of structuring meaning that continually opens up to larger, more encompassing, or just plain different systems.¹⁰ Inaccessible and legendary, the *Jetty* resists any *single* understanding. Its meaning and its constitution are incomplete, altering with context. Any number of critics have commented on this dimension of the *Jetty*, but none as eloquently as Craig Owens:

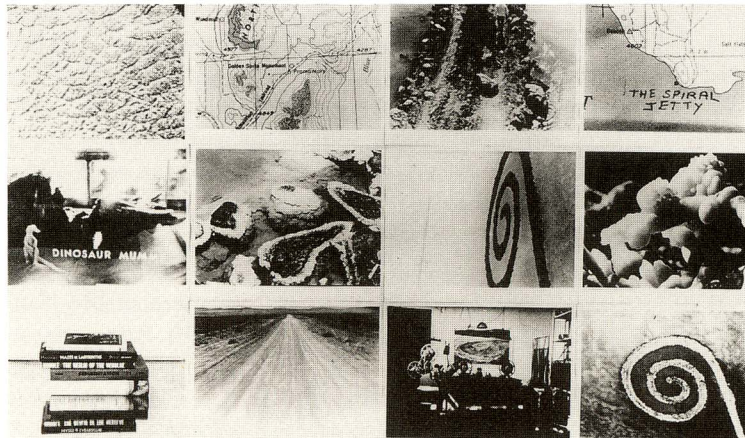
the *Jetty* is not a discrete work, but one link in a chain of signifiers which summon and refer to one another in a dizzying spiral. For where else does the *Jetty*

exist except in the film which Smithson made, the narrative he published, the photographs which accompany that narrative, and the various maps, diagrams, drawings, etc. he made about it? Unintelligible at close range, the spiral form of the *Jetty* is completely intuited only from a distance, and that distance is most often achieved by imposing a text between viewer and work. Smithson thus accomplishes a radical dislocation of the notion of point-of-view, which is no longer a function of physical position, but of the mode (photographic, cinematic, textual) of confrontation with the work of art.¹¹

In Owens' conception, Smithson's work is generated through potentially infinite signifiers that extend from the constructed earthwork to its quotation in other works of art.¹² For example, the *Jetty* flows between the physical mass of rock and dirt and an image of the earthwork in a photograph. Potentially infinite in number, yet unique in each instance, each element signifies individually. Drawing on Roland Barthes' ideas and applying them to Smithson's own writing, Owens pinpointed the *Jetty's* textuality.¹³ As a *work* of art, the *Jetty* crumbles under the dispersal of its signifying elements, but as a *text* its lack of conceptual closure is expected. This shift from a *work* to a *text* is a shift in the meaning of art, which now rests not in its *production* by an author but in the context of its reception.¹⁴ The meaning of an art



Helen and Newton Harrison, *The Fourth Lagoon*, Panel III, *Mixing: Digital Mapping with Sociological Information Superimposed*, 1974
Photographs, photo enlargements laid on canvas, oil, pastel, ink, crayon, and graphite, 97 x 79 inches
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty Film Stills Photo Documentation*, Panel 3, n.d.
Photo collage documentation, 25 1/4 x 43 1/2 inches
John Weber Gallery, New York

work, then, is in flux: it does not signify apart from the circumstances in which it is read. In this understanding, meaning is subject to the conditions of reception: the text is political.

Like the *Jetty*, the *Lagoon* is fruitfully read as a text. For the *Lagoon* only exists in the installations the Harrisons built, the dialogues performed, journal articles written by numerous critics, two books about *The Lagoon Cycle*, and the Harrisons' various aquaculture experiments, photographs, maps, scripts, etc. There is no fixed site from which to view the *Lagoon*. Instead, there are presentations in various media to various audiences at various times. For example, *The Fourth Lagoon* describes plans for an aquaculture project of massive proportions on the shore of Southern California's Salton Sea. Yet this project was later abandoned in the light of larger environmental issues discussed in *The Fifth Lagoon*. The fifth's script shows that the Witness held the Lagoonmaker in check. She asks him:

For
 if you flush the Salton Sea and make it into an estuarial
 lagoon by cutting input-output channels with locks and
 pumps northward to the Pacific or southward to
 the
 gulf
 then ...
 who will flush the ocean
 who will flush the gulf¹⁵

Is the privileged point for viewing the work of art in projects such as *The Fourth Lagoon* a map of the Salton Sea or the land mapped? The wall panel that held the map or the gallery in which the panel was installed? One can only view the *Lagoon* through the imposition of a text.

For this art and art similar to it, there is no unmediated relation to the object of knowledge. For, as Roland Barthes writes, "If the Text raises problems of classification (moreover, this is one of its 'social' functions), it is because it always implies a certain experience of limits."¹⁶ The *Jetty* and the *Lagoon* are self-consciously texts. The text is only experienced in movement: its constitution is what Barthes calls "traversal."¹⁷ The *Jetty* and the *Lagoon* present the limits of our conceptual framework, including the limitations of theories for explication. When categories for understanding falter in light of textuality, their constructed nature is revealed, and social structures can thus be excavated.

While both the *Jetty* and the *Lagoon* are texts, their textuality serves different purposes. The *Jetty* exists in a state of radical uncertainty, which argues that there is no direct access to "reality." With the earthwork a "lost object," the *Jetty* is layered like an onion. Even if one went to Utah and walked on the jetty, one could still not find the *Jetty*: it cannot be perceived in this manner. The *Jetty* is unintelligible at close range, and this view is supported by the evidence—the *Jetty*'s multiple forms of presentation. These presentations do not add up to a transcendent unity, but are instead suspended in their difference. Smithson's *Jetty* posits that meaning is produced in reading the text.

In contrast, the *Lagoon* is not in its essence about textuality and meaning, despite certain similarities that exist between its form and that of the *Jetty*. The *Lagoon*'s textuality lies in the Harrison's method of finding a "lost object"; it is not simply an argument that the "real"

is inaccessible. The *Lagoon* is their attempt to reconceive momentarily a lost ecological utopia and to retrieve it for society by planning its creation. The *Lagoon*'s multiple presentations are not suspended like the *Jetty*'s, but instead are supposed to add up to a transcendent unity, unreal but utopian. The *Lagoon* suggests that there is a truth outside representation.

The *Jetty* and the *Lagoon* have a similar technical form (an inaccessible object and numerous types of representations of it), but while Smithson develops these forms as a meditation on meaning production in language and culture, the Harrison's use the same forms for a different, possibly opposing, purpose—to locate meaning in a source outside language and culture. As texts, then, the resemblance between the two projects is just technical.

As one would expect, both texts defy substantiation.¹⁸ Yet the Harrison's attempt to use the play of textuality specifically to produce a reality that would otherwise be beyond grasp; they hope to suspend a vision of an ecological utopia amid the *Lagoon*'s multiple presentations. Newton Harrison also tried to impose a closure on the *Jetty* and bring its play of textuality to a dead halt: in describing the *Jetty* as pure, he reified its textuality and converted it into a *work*. Labeling corrals signifiers into one understanding and allows only one field—formalism in this case—for the collection of the traces of a "work" of art. This characterization locks the *Jetty* in a Greenbergian cage. Identified by Newton Harrison as modernist sculpture, *The Spiral Jetty* emanates a "radical unlikeness to nature."¹⁹ But, as I will show, this acute dissociation of the *Jetty* from nature threads it through the apparatus of ecology by its paradox: can an earthwork ever not be about nature?²⁰

Mother Earth

Smithson insisted that for him the earth is simply "stuff," that is, not-nature. In a panel discussion with Michael Heizer and Dennis Oppenheim, Smithson said, "I think we all see the landscape as coextensive with the gallery. I don't think we're dealing with matter in terms of a back to nature movement."²¹ The collagelike film *Spiral Jetty* illustrates this point with its closing shot. Filmed in the editing room, the camera zooms past editing equipment to a large photograph of the earthwork, *The Spiral Jetty*, which is tacked to the back wall. By

nesting a photographic representation of the *Jetty* within a cinematographic one, Smithson suggests that the sites for artistic reception are constructed. This “double” image is part of a “discourse on the objects of knowledge”²² and attests to Smithson’s interest in the institutions that structure understanding. For, as Smithson claimed, “the world is a museum.”²³ In other words, reality is produced in the structuring of society. In this manner, Smithson makes a telling decision: he firmly places the *Jetty* in the realm of culture, not nature.

In contrast to Smithson’s beliefs, the Harrisons insist that earth is ecology: that is, nature *and* culture. The Harrisons’ reputation has been tied to the popularity of environmental issues. For instance, the curator of a recent exhibition entitled “Fragile Ecologies” writes, “over the course of their long careers, the Harrisons have helped to promote and popularize ecological art through their unwavering commitment to its ideals.”²⁴ They have had what has been described as an “art and ecology” career.²⁵

When asked about the differences between their art and the earthworks of Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson, Newton Harrison replied, “They used earth as material; we feel that our works were among the first to deal with ecology in the full sense of the term.”²⁶ Despite Harrison’s assertion that the *Jetty* is only culture, any use of the earth, even as material for art, must raise ecological issues.

In fact, Smithson’s *Jetty* and the Harrisons’ *Lagoon* problematize the very possibility of dissociating nature from culture. Describing the *Jetty*, Lawrence Alloway makes this point, albeit unknowingly, by highlighting the effort required to manufacture art from earth:

The working procedure on what was called Job No. 73 was as follows. Front-end loaders (Michigan Model 175) were used to burrow rocks out and to collect sand on the shore. Tenwheeler dump trucks carried the load to the lake, backed out along the coil, and tipped it off the end. Here truck loaders (Caterpillar Model 955) placed the dumped rocks and tamped them down within the narrow limits set up by guide lines placed by Smithson. The technical difficulties were considerable and called on all the skills of the drivers, including the operational hunch that tells when the ground is too soft and likely to subside. The drivers, far from being ironic about a nonutilitarian project, appreciated the task as a challenge and would bring their families out to the site for picnics at which they could demonstrate their virtuosity. The machines tipped and jostled their way along the spiral as the new embankments grew.²⁷

How does this jetty—or a Caterpillar—fit into the traditional categories that structure understanding? Are they Nature or Technology or Culture? Innovations in machinery *qua* prosthesis have extended the body’s boundaries, which were once biological.

Like the *Jetty*, the *Lagoon* displays thoroughly ambiguous boundaries between Nature, Technology, and Culture:

We
began to search for what might be missing and
discovered that monsoon time in Sri Lanka had begun
and that a monsoon changes the salinity of the
coastal
waters and enriches the food supply So we
improvised a monsoon as best we could with fresh
water from a hose and within minutes the crabs
started
to behave differently²⁸

The Harrisons’ technological intervention in nature suggests that what counts as nature is performative: a garden hose makes a monsoon and crabs begin their mating rituals. What nature is to perform is ideological, held in check by the prevailing social order.

Smithson and the Harrisons operate in the realm of ideology, questioning the socially constructed distinction between nature and culture. In 1985 Donna Haraway, a historian of science turned cultural theorist, went a step further and undermined any possible ideology of the natural.²⁹ She opened the lived environment to the political struggle over meaning by revealing the scientific object of knowledge (the body, for example) to be thoroughly artifactual and therefore radically contingent, its understanding based on social formations.³⁰ Haraway argues that technological advances have made the human body into a living machine of flesh and metal, like the cyborg of science fiction fame. Her “cyborg politics” is a textualization of the lived environment—“social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction.”³¹ The cyborg formation shows that the borders between biology and culture, organic and inorganic, and nature and technology lack any conceptual closure. Haraway, and, by implication, Smithson and the Harrisons, is engaged in one struggle for power in our thoroughly mediated society, seeking to produce a new political structure—the specified orga-

nization of existence that allows for identity—by calling into question the dichotomies that structure understanding.³²

Contesting Social Space

Space is a second site of the struggle for power in society. Space does not exist until made, and its production must be contested at every level by the production of alternative space, a practice in which Smithson and the Harrisons are also engaged.

Smithson left precise directions to visit the *Jetty*: “Beginning at a point South 3000 feet and West 800 feet from the Northeast Corner of Section 8, Township 8 North, Range 7 West; thence South 45, West 651 feet; thence North 60, West 651 feet; thence North 45, East 651 feet; thence Southeasterly along the meander line 675 feet to the point of beginning.”³³ In case this cartography makes one uncomfortable, he offered an alternative:

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
 Southeast by South — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 South by East — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 South — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 South by West — Mud, Salt crystals, rocks, water
 Southwest by West — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 Southwest by South — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 West by South — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 West — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 West by North — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 Northwest by West — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 Northwest by North — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 North by West — Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water³⁴

Even if one protests, “Not specific enough, all of Utah is water, rocks, salt, and mud,” Smithson was prepared. He provided close up photographs of single clumps of salt crystals. Find the crystals and you have found the *Jetty*. By employing assorted signifying structures—surveyor’s coordinates, descriptive narrative, and photographs—to identify a physical site, Smithson’s directions in their absurdity expose space as producer and produced. Space geographer Henri Lefebvre writes,

is at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures....Thus this means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge, or from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and the superstructures of society.³⁵

Viewed as both social cause and effect, space is far from neutral: social relations and spatial organization are interwoven.³⁶

Smithson’s production of space is directly tied to a project known as institutional critique, whose best-known practitioner is Hans Haacke. This artistic intervention contests the meaning of some aesthetic (social) spaces by revealing some of the social mechanisms that structure them.³⁷ Unmasking restructures these spaces and produces an alternative space by dispelling the myth that the public and private spheres are independent. By doing so, the individual is given the chance to marshal sufficient critical reflection and gain an alternative intelligibility to avert his or her absolute administration.³⁸ A critique of institutions such as this exposes the social relations involved in the production, viewing, and display of art.

While Smithson’s production of an alternative space interrogates the sites of aesthetic reception, the Harrisons’ prophetic mappings have a different function.³⁹ *The Lagoon Cycle*’s introductory panel shows a map of the earth as it is now, in tondo. *The Seventh Lagoon*, the final lagoon, shows a final earth, post apocalypse. Water has flooded the land and the Harrisons await rebirth. Yet the *Lagoon* tells us that this biblical ending is far from certain. Six lagoons intercede, offering new spaces and with them the hope of environmental salvation.

The Fourth Lagoon designs a self-feeding polyculture system for the shores of the Salton Sea from which to farm mollusks and crabs.⁴⁰ The project was composed of a number of self-contained arrays, each with a “broth” pond, mollusk pond, and crab pond; each array would cover sixty-two acres and contain 73,327,500 gallons of water. This



Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty Film Stills Photo Documentation*, Panel A, n.d.
 Photo collage documentation, 25 1/4 x 43 1/2 inches
 John Weber Gallery, New York

proposal would manufacture estuarial lagoons of a kind not dissimilar to Sri Lanka's, which are discussed in the first lagoon.⁴¹

This project is a step toward the *Lagoon's* larger vision. *The Fourth Lagoon* is preceded by the third, which is a small-scale implementation of the Harrisons' lagoon technology, and followed by the fifth, which analyzes the ecological impact of the fourth's plans. The *Lagoon*, with its mix of well-reasoned science and biblical fervor, maps the course to a desired world. It also shows that future to be within reach. The Harrisons' maps seek to move the future in one direction, and they warn of the disastrous consequences of missteps or apathy.

While the *Jetty* and *Lagoon* are producers of alternative social spaces—ones infused with a cyborg identity, discussed earlier—the spaces they produce are fundamentally different. Smithson's *Jetty*, as a meditation on the social mechanisms that structure aesthetic spaces, produces an alternative, oppositional space. In contrast, the *Lagoon* takes no part in the critique of the institutions that structure society. By plotting a course toward a desired ecological utopia from within aesthetic spaces left uncontested, the *Lagoon* produces an ecological space, but one that while perhaps alternative is not oppositional. As it was for texts, the resemblance between the *Jetty* and *Lagoon* as producers of space is also technical.

Ecology

Although to my knowledge, no one has substantially challenged the Harrisons' views of ecology (and hence, the ecological space they produce), one critic comes close: "Oldenburg's classic comment, 'Art should do more than sit on its ass in a museum,' would have been a great motto for the Harrisons to have remembered. A commitment to environmental questions now requires an equal commitment to action, substantial and inventive enough to confront the monolithic structures of dollar-power control of ecological destiny."⁴² However, criticism such as this assumes incorrectly that ecology is an uncontested discipline. But, far from monolithic, the environmental movement is fraught with divisions.

Self-described once-radical environmentalist Martin W. Lewis divides radical environmentalism—distinguished from a more moderate mainstream—into three major camps: Deep Ecologists, socialist/marxists, and eco-feminists. These sects share one guiding principle: "human society, as it is now constituted, is utterly unsustainable and must be reconstructed according to an entirely different socioeconomic logic."⁴³ One group, Deep Ecologists, believes that all forms of life are intrinsically important. In this view, nature forms an interconnected web from which humanity has decoupled itself. Deep Ecologists seek to transform both the structure of society and the psyche to achieve this reintegration. Slime molds and humans should see eye-to-eye. In order to reintegrate, "small-scale, local communities" should strive to minimize their impact on the earth.⁴⁴ A more extreme version of this philosophy glorifies violence as a way to rid the earth of the human threat to nature. These "primitivists" are committed to radically de-populating the earth and destroying all traces of modern civilization. Earth First! is one such committed group and has employed the motto, "Back to the Pleistocene."⁴⁵ If humanity returned to its prehistoric roots, they believe man and nature would exist symbiotically.⁴⁶

A second school of radical ecological thought is heavily influenced by the classical left and advocates class struggle to overcome the ecologically destructive foundation of capitalism. In America, Murray Bookchin and "social ecology" are most prominent. Unlike those of the Deep Ecologists, Bookchin's tenets have a humanist focus, stressing social equality as the first step toward ecological health.⁴⁷

A third major group are the eco-feminists, who, for Lewis, attempt to transcend the positions described above. Eco-feminism

itself is quite fragmented (liberal, marxist, cultural, socialist),⁴⁸ yet its factions are linked by the belief that the destruction of nature and the exploitation of women go hand in hand.⁴⁹ Though many eco-feminists are liberal, some radical strands believe that men and women are inherently different. These groups align with goddess cults, arguing that women are closer to nature than men.⁵⁰ This spiritual focus stems from what is seen as a religious and spiritual void in the modern consciousness.⁵¹ Entangled in the "goddess" concept is the Gaia hypothesis, which personifies the earth: spiritual ecologists seek a partnership with a "living" nature.⁵²

While radical environmentalists are some of the people who are most committed to environmental reform, many of them actually espouse a doctrine that has disastrous implications for the global ecosystem. Lewis argues that one of the gravest threats to the earth "masquerades under the mantle of environmentalism itself."⁵³

The Harrisons, while deserving praise for their steadfast environmentalism for nearly twenty-five years, advocate some radical environmentalist positions that should be challenged as a green threat to nature. This threat can take multiple forms, one of which is to inspire an anti-environmental backlash. Though Lewis has in mind popular repulsion to "eco-terrorist" groups like Earth First! or even Green Peace, I want to extend his concern in a different direction. The Harrisons adopt the Gaia hypothesis, which argues that through spiritual re-integration, all life will exist in mutually nourishing harmony. In the *Lagoon*, one of the Harrisons is gifted with an environmentalist's "divine" visitation:

It was a test
an examination of sorts
I grasped that I was in the company
of earth of water of rock and stone
and the issue was whether any communication
at all of any kind
could take place

I awoke knowing that the business of the universe is conducted in an odd
kind of dialogue⁵⁴

By laying claim to a spiritual high-ground, this brand of ecology may alienate a less radical mainstream, which might otherwise be interested.⁵⁵ But this is the least of its problems.

A second radical environmentalist ideology in which the Harrisons participate is a Deep Ecologist-like celebration of less technically advanced societies. The Harrisons are involved in a Western primitivist discourse. Choosing Sri Lanka as the site for their metaphor of utopia is a perfect example. For Sri Lanka is one of the world's most impoverished countries⁵⁶ and is ravaged by civil war. In conflict with this grim information, the *Lagoon's* photographs of a rail-thin "native" are unable to say anything other than "what a beautiful world!"⁵⁷ This romanticism ignores the social conditions in many less-developed countries. As Lewis writes, "'Primal' economies have rarely been as harmonized with nature as they are depicted; many have actually been highly destructive."⁵⁸ To support this assessment, Lewis assembles evidence of the wholesale slaughter of wildlife by the modern "primal" groups that are frequently upheld as having ecologically model societies: North American Plains Indians, Eskimos, and the !Kung San.⁵⁹ In addition, the common tribal horticulturist practice of slash-and-burn cultivation is often environmentally destructive.⁶⁰

Equally romantic is the Harrisons' advocacy of a return to simple technologies. They would see tractors replaced with water buffalo⁶¹ and cyborgs by "simple aquaculture system[s]."⁶² While their advocacy correctly points to the dangers that technology can present to the environment (the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, for example), it forgets the tremendous role technology has had in increasing the quality of life for many. Technological advances have improved work-safety conditions and found replacements for environmentally devastating fuel sources such as wood. They have also minimized widespread disease and many other threats to human health.⁶³ By contrast, technologically less sophisticated countries have suffered unchecked pollution (Eastern Europe) and deforestation (Southeast Asia), among other afflictions.⁶⁴ The desire for a society devoid of advanced technology runs counter to the demands of our current ecological conditions. Without new technological innovations, how should we repair past ecological disasters or prevent new ones?

Eschewing advanced technology also forfeits a potential instrument for emancipating social change. Whereas the Harrisons would retreat to a space "of [their] own devising,"⁶⁵ Haraway argues that in order to effect social change, one needs to gain control of technology.⁶⁶ The social, political, and biological implications of birth control technologies are a case in point.

Perhaps even more frightening is the Harrisons' comfort with what I will call "dehumanization," a term I use for its likeness to deforestation. The Harrisons' meet the devastation of a flooded earth with the joy of renewal, making no mention of the accompanying loss of human life. I quote in full:

And over time gracefully
 this rising tide will flow up every river
 that once flowed down to the sea
 and each freshwater tongue will withdraw
 before the advance of the salt
 Up the Saint Lawrence the Columbia the Amazon
 the Hudson the Mississippi
 the White Nile and the Blue
 the Volga the Don the Danube and the Thames
 the Seine and the Loire
 the Rhone and the Rhine
 and the Garonne
 the Ganges the Congo
 the Tigris and the Euphrates
 the Yellow the Amur the Irrawaddy
 the Lena the Potomac and the Snake
 and all rivers named and unnamed

And the flood plains that are farmed upon
 and lived upon
 will become marshes or swamps or bogs
 or beds for swollen rivers
 or shallow inland seas
 and the tropics will become uninhabitable
 and the far north will become temperate
 and corn and rice and wheat and beans
 and plantain manioc and yams
 and all the grains and starchy roots
 known and unknown
 named and unnamed
 will have to grow elsewhere than now
 and most life
 known and unknown
 will have to go elsewhere than now

as vast parts of the eastern seaboard of the United States
 and parts of Europe near the North Sea
 and much of South America near the Amazon
 and China somewhere
 and Russia in some parts India
 and other bits of Asia
 Africa Polynesia
 Melanesia Australia
 and Japan will join the growing sea

And in this new beginning
 this continuously rebeginning
 you will feed me when my lands can no longer produce
 and I will house you
 when your lands are covered with water
 and together
 we will withdraw
 as the waters rise⁶⁷

This massive human die-off, while perhaps establishing small-scale communities based on mutual dependence, is the most extreme illustration of my contention: the Harrisons' environmentalism as per the *Lagoon* fails to offer solutions to the environmental crisis.

The Harrisons' ecological space, while offering a vision of liberation, is a utopian space *outside* the struggle for power in our mediated society. Thus, their space has a double edge that can be described as the dialectic of enlightenment: while promising liberation, it also serves the cause of repression. Imposing a closure—a proposed reality outside the text—the *Lagoon's* cyborg and spatial politics serve the dominant political organization. Reality is replicated in its most basic spatial structures because those structures are reused as the very foundation for the Harrisons' utopia. The *Jetty*, in contrast, by firmly resisting conceptual closure, avoids the dialectic of enlightenment, the trap in which the *Lagoon* is snared.

Spiral Dance

Purity and Robert Smithson? What Newton Harrison called "purity" can now be read on one level as provocative revenge. Smithson

ridiculed art and artists who overtly addressed environmental issues.⁶⁸ At the other extreme, Smithson also lambasted formalist critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried and artist Anthony Caro.⁶⁹ With delightful subtlety, Newton Harrison's anecdote suggests that Smithson was forced to ally himself with exactly what he loathed. "Purity" implies that Smithson chose the "sin" of formalism over the greater "evil," or in Harrison's opinion, greater good, of environmentalism. With the *Lagoon's* help, I have shown that the *Jetty*, nevertheless, is a work of art about nature, producing an oppositional, cyborg space.

But we can find a more tantalizing suggestion in the "purity" anecdote. Let us return once again to the question of the text, specifically in relation to the Author's demise. According to Owens, this death allowed new questions to be asked: "Where do exchanges between readers and viewers take place? Who is free to define, manipulate and, ultimately, to benefit from the codes and conventions of cultural production?"⁷⁰ The death released the radical play of meaning, which allowed the critique of institutions. But the death of the Author is the death of Nature—as I have shown by Haraway's cyborg formation. This other death demanded its own sets of questions—one of which is about ecology.

My point is simply this: whatever his intentions may have been, Newton Harrison's accusation of "purity" threads the *Jetty* through the apparatus of ecology. While I mentioned this threading earlier—earth is always ecology—this traversal can now be understood in a new light. The cultural institutions that Smithson deliberately criticized through the *Jetty* are one possible site for political engagement. Cyborg politics shows that ecology as an institution is another. Moreover, by tying cyborg politics to the institutional critique, "purity" shows the two engagements to be bound in a spiral dance.

Notes

1. Kim Levin, "Reflections on Robert Smithson's 'Spiral Jetty,'" *Arts Magazine*, 52 (May 1978), p. 137.
2. Jonathan Benthall, "Newton Harrison: Big Fish in Small Pool," *Studio International*, 182 (December 1971), p. 230.
3. The British Arts Council brokered a compromise; Newton Harrison was allowed to prepare dinner, but the killing could not be in public view: see Benthall, "Newton Harrison," p. 230 n. 1.
4. Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, *The Lagoon Cycle* (Ithaca: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 1985), p. 100.
5. The seven lagoons are: *The First Lagoon: The Lagoon at Upouveli*; *The Second Lagoon: Sea Grant*; *The Third Lagoon: The House of Crabs*; *The Fourth Lagoon: On Mixing, Mapping and Territory*; *The Fifth Lagoon: From the Salton Sea to the Pacific From the Salton Sea to the Gulf*; *The Sixth Lagoon: On Metaphor and Discourse*; and *The Seventh Lagoon: The Ring of Fire The Ring of Water*. The sequence does not necessarily reflect the chronology of each lagoon's creation.
6. Harrison and Harrison, *The Lagoon Cycle*, p. 41.
7. Linda McGreevy, "Improvising the Future: The Eco-Aesthetics of Newton and Helen Harrison," *Arts Magazine*, 62 (November 1987), p. 68.
8. Harrison and Harrison, *The Lagoon Cycle*, p. 36. The text quoted above may not have been the actual script performed by the Harrisons, as they have frequently reworked *The Lagoon Cycle*.
9. Levin, "Reflections on Robert Smithson's 'Spiral Jetty,'" p. 136.
10. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and John Johnston, "Gravity's Rainbow and the Spiral Jetty," *October*, no. 1 (Spring 1976), p. 68, analyze *The Spiral Jetty* with the now commonplace entropy model. This note is the only mention I will make of entropy, the paradigm for understanding Smithson's art, because his art does not need to be understood in relation to it.
11. Craig Owens, "Earthwords" (1979), in Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock, eds., *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 47.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
14. "The unity of a text," Barthes wrote, "is not in its origin, but in its destination..."; see Roland Barthes, "The Death of The Author" (1968), in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 54.
15. Harrison and Harrison, *The Lagoon Cycle*, p. 79.
16. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" (1971), in *The Rustle of Language*, p. 58.
17. *Ibid.*
18. On this point, see Barthes, "From Work to Text," p. 58.
19. Clement Greenberg uses this phrase to describe Anthony Caro's sculpture in "Contemporary Sculpture: Anthony Caro," in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago