

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Art and the Politics of Land Use

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We cut the word in half, as if it was a sculpture, separated, divided it. The word “mark” now becomes a verb, something that marks the land, and in that marking the term means how the land is used, how a land differentiates itself from another land by the way it is being and has been marked—land marked by colonization, land marked by war, by millions of reasons. These marking processes are what constitutes and defines the changing status of a land.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA, *ON LAND MARK* (2001–5)
BY ALLORA & CALZADILLA¹

A groundswell of art since the turn of the millennium has engaged the politics of land use, addressing topics from the widespread privatization of public spaces and resources to anthropogenic climate change, borderland conflicts, the Occupy movement, and the rhetoric of “sustainable development.” Some of the most compelling artists today are forging new representational and performative practices to reveal the social significance of hidden, or normalized, features inscribed in the land. Their work pivots around a set of evolving questions: In what ways is land, formed over the course of geological time, also contemporary, or formed by the conditions of the present? How do environmental and economic structures correlate? Can art spur more nuanced ways of thinking about and interacting with the land? How might art contribute to the expansion of spatial and environmental justice?

Certain artists negotiate the legacy of 1960s and 1970s Land art or the conditions of the global art world, while others actively eschew art-world reference points, choosing instead to position their work relative to disciplines such as cultural geography or urban planning, community-based activism, or even official land management agencies. This critical mass of land-focused practices, keyed to the geopolitics of the past two decades, constitutes a significant strand of contemporary art that has occasioned a likewise important body of scholarship, itself often borrowing ideas and methods from diverse fields.

The artists and writers included in *Critical Landscapes* take land to be neither pre-given—fixed, neutral, or *natural*—nor as something to which we have unmediated access. Rather, they approach it as an outcome and an index of complex procedures. Here, the writings of the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre are a key influence. In his landmark book *The Production of Space* (originally published in 1974 and translated into English in 1991), Lefebvre traces the transformation of space under capitalism and, in so doing, theorizes space itself as a product of social relations and processes. More recently, and extending from Lefebvre, the art historian Rosalyn Deutsche has argued that space is “political, inseparable from the conflictual and uneven social relations that structure specific societies at specific historical moments.”² She attacks smooth, coherent images of social space forwarded by “authoritarian strategies” (whether put forth by politicians, wilderness advocates, city planners, real estate developers, or Romantic landscape painters) for their concealment of the “conflict, heterogeneity, and particularity” that goes into the making of all social spaces, and calls for a “democratic spatial politics” that begins with the recognition that all spaces are “produced and structured by conflicts.”³ The art surveyed in the following pages centers on questions of power and the role of visual representation (or a lack thereof) in struggles over land and its potential meanings and uses. In many cases, as Julian Myers-Szupinska observes in the opening essay, artists seek to “reveal the production of space” in order to detonate it, or to open ways for it to be “produced *otherwise*.”

This volume is organized into four sections: “Against the Abstraction of Space,” “Land Claims: Space and Subjectivity,” “Geographies of Global Capitalism,” and “Urbanization With No Outside.” These groupings are intended as loose aggregates, rather than clear delineations, with many overlapping ideas and issues. Each section includes full-length essays as well as brief entries on individual artworks, some of which are written by the artists themselves and others by scholars from a range of disciplines. While the theoretical framework, history, and artistic precedents touched upon in the following introduction reflect the primarily North American vantage point of the editors, *Critical Landscapes* incorporates work happening around the globe. Many artists do not share common reference points, having instead developed practices in response to local or regional contexts.

FROM LANDSCAPE TO LAND USE

The term “landscape” has a long-standing association in modern art history with the pictorial, with formal composition, and with the aesthetic.⁴ The art in *Critical Landscapes*, on the other hand, approaches land largely in terms of its “use value,” its utilization by humans for practical and ideological purposes. This is not to say that it turns away from the aesthetic altogether. Rather, problems of representation itself are a dominant concern. Distinct from traditional modes of landscape representation, at least in the West (e.g.,

associated with German Romanticism, the American Hudson River School, the ecotourism industry today), the work examined herein foregrounds the economic, social, and political status of land rather than allowing this to be disguised by formal concerns.

The concept of landscape has, in fact, been hitched from the beginning to aspects of human use—labor, property, domestication, jurisdiction, and so on—with a dialectic between humans and the land at its core. Derived from the Dutch word *landschap*, landscape by definition acknowledges the mutual “shaping” of land and people. According to many scholarly interpretations, it furthermore denotes a view or composition of the world, one that implicitly coheres customs and laws for human coexistence with the land, or a domain for civic life. The art historian Svetlana Alpers, in her analysis of seventeenth-century Northern Renaissance art, for instance, examines the “mapping impulse” embodied in early Dutch landscape painting, identifying continuities between contemporaneous artistic and cartographic practices on the basis of their shared investment in acute topographic detail, an imperative itself underpinned by financial and territorial interests.⁵ (This in the same period that the Dutch were at the forefront of a burgeoning global shipping trade, and simultaneously undertook one of the largest-scale engineering projects in history by constructing massive *polders* to protect their low-lying lands from the sea; both land and its painterly depiction, in other words, were thoroughly constructed in this context.)

Art history’s emphasis on the visual dimension of landscape, and on seeing more generally, has been called into recent question by the anthropologist Tim Ingold, among others. Ingold attributes this entire disciplinary orientation—a profound mis-orientation, in his opinion—to a simple etymological error, albeit one that has had far-reaching consequences:

Of early medieval provenance, [“landscape”] referred originally to an area of land bound into the everyday practices and customary usages of an agrarian community. However, its subsequent incorporation into the language of painterly depiction—above all through the tradition of Dutch art that developed in the seventeenth century—has led generations of scholars to mistake the connotations of the suffix *-scape* for a particular “scopic regime” of detailed and disinterested observation. They have, it seems, been fooled by a superficial resemblance between *scape* and *scope* that is, in fact, entirely fortuitous and has no foundation in etymology. “Scope” comes from the classical Greek *skopos*—literally “the target of the Bowman, the mark towards which he gazes as he aims”—from which is derived the verb *skopein*, “to look.” “Scape,” quite to the contrary, comes from Old English *sceppan* or *skyppan*, meaning “to shape.” Medieval shapers of the land were not painters but farmers, whose purpose was not to render the material world in appearance rather than substance, but to wrest a living from the earth. . . . Nevertheless, the equation of the shape of the land with its look—of the *scaped* with the *scopic*—has become firmly lodged in the vocabulary of modernist art history. Landscape has thus come to be identified with scenery and with an art of description that would see the world spread out on a canvas, much as in the subsequent development of both cartography and photography, it would come to be projected onto a plate or screen, or the pages of an atlas.⁶

In line with Ingold's corrective, much of the art and writing in *Critical Landscapes* reflects a move beyond, or sometimes even against, the "art of description," and a renewed focus on the material rather than the primarily visual aspects of land, often with special attention to issues of labor.

Many artists herein take familiar sights/sites and make them strange or legible in new ways in an attempt to undo what seems "natural," or to highlight the ideological workings of landscape. Others explicitly address the conundrums entailed in representing any particular place with attunement to the inevitable intricacies, paradoxes, and contingencies at play. In certain cases, artworks involve "reading" the ways that land has been marked, or used; in others, artists create new markings, or material interventions, in the landscape itself. At play is an overall shift from representation toward presentation, or performance, one might say. Indeed, the question seems to hover in the background of whether or not painting and photography—as media that collapse the worldly into the static and the two-dimensional—are capable of relaying the frictions, layers, and interrelations of landscape. Are there inherent limits to using media that, in essence, translate their subject into a scene?

The cultural theorist Raymond Williams, in his 1980 essay "Ideas of Nature," cites a fundamental divide between those who approach landscape as a product of nature versus human shaping: "A considerable part of what we call the natural landscape . . . is the product of human design and human labour, and in admiring it as natural it matters very much whether we suppress that fact of labour or acknowledge it."⁷ The landscape photography of Ansel Adams, at least within the past half-century of American art, perhaps best demonstrates the impulse to suppress, or evacuate, the "fact of labour" that goes into landscape's making. Adams's exquisitely composed black-and-white pictures feature sweeping landscapes of the American West, typically devoid of any hint of human presence. The scenes are monumental, conjuring a seemingly original moment—and one that is specifically American, yoking the birth of American national identity to the vision of an unpeopled, wild, Western frontier. (Here, Williams's reminder of the etymological link between *nature*, *native*, and *nation*—all derived from the Latin *natus*, meaning "to be born"—is useful.⁸) Formally, Adams's images hark back to the sublime depictions of the nineteenth-century Hudson River School painters while simultaneously harnessing the deep tonal contrasts of twentieth-century modernist "straight" photography to extreme dramatic effect.

Already in the 1960s and 1970s, certain artists sought to counter Adams's representational schema and the Romantic notions of landscape it embodied, many of them taking up industrial and otherwise visibly impacted landscapes in order to do so.⁹ Those photographers who participated in the prominent 1975 exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, adjusted their frame of view (in some cases, we can imagine, only ever so slightly) to capture those marks erased by Adams. They portrayed the mundane, unglamorous processes of suburbanization, industry, and everyday habitation in the American West—



1. Joe Deal, *Untitled View*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1975. © The Estate of Joe Deal, courtesy Robert Mann Gallery, New York.

underscoring the human-land dialectic of landscapes in formation (figure 1).¹⁰ Meanwhile, the American artist Robert Smithson wrote about the “dialectical landscape” in the last published essay of his life, and from the mid-1960s onward preferred explicitly “disrupted,” or “pulverized,” sites to those that evoked a sense of untouched beauty.¹¹ He was critical of the ecology movement quickly gaining steam at the time and derided a budding “wilderness cult” for its reductive division between the human and non-human worlds, arguing, “Spiritualism widens the split between man and nature.”¹² (Ansel Adams’s widely circulated images were both an illustration and driver of such a wilderness ethic in the period.) Smithson insisted upon the importance of confronting contemporary environments in all their messy complexity: “The artist cannot turn his back on the contradictions that inhabit our landscapes.”¹³

A number of critically engaged artists today likewise turn to the American West as one among other sites of heightened contestation. Differently from their predecessors,

however, they approach it as a locus for dramatic erasures and dislocations, elucidating links between long-standing myths of a national frontier and the systematic militarization and colonization of space there. Their works often foreground the ways that landscape, when taken as an embodiment or extension of “nature,” has served to sanitize, obscure, and/or *naturalize* spatial conflicts. Julia Bryan-Wilson, for instance, considers artists’ negotiation of atomic legacies in the American West and Japan, dwelling on the relationship between wastelands and the fragility and identity of the body. Jeannine Tang, through the artist Andrea Geyer, digs deeply into the politics of representation relative to indigenous land rights in the American West, while Kelly C. Baum brings landscape into focus through the lens of eco-feminism.

Many artworks emphasize not the visible landscape, but *invisibility*—that which is not immediately apparent to the eye. For the constitutive forces of landscape are most often hidden from view, eluding our ability to know by standing onsite and looking alone. Sarah Kanouse, in her essay on critical touristic practices by artists, takes the point further, claiming: The “visual dimension of a site often conceals the ‘production of space’ by historical and contemporary economic, social, and ecological agents, and is often designed to do so.” The projects she analyzes seek to illuminate instances and mechanisms of erasure, or the “behind the scenes,” of landscape. Of course, the land, in its liveliness and constant flux, itself possesses a peculiar power to obscure. In other words, the very entity that bears the imprint of—gives spatial form to—various social, political, economic, biological, geological, and climatic operations, also erodes evidence of its own production. As the geographer Jessica Dubow has eloquently noted, the “problem” with landscape lies in its tendency to absorb “the events played out on its surface” and thereby to “*outlive* history,” to allow “history to decompose.”¹⁴

The Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) has been a touchstone for many land-based artistic practices in the last decade, and is an early and critical source for the concepts of land developed in this volume (figure 2). In 1994, nearly twenty years after Smithson’s untimely death, CLUI was founded by Matthew Coolidge on principles articulated by Smithson—an understanding of landscape as a transitional and historical expression of human values. A nonprofit organization based primarily in Los Angeles, CLUI comprises a shifting configuration of multidisciplinary researchers, some affiliated with CLUI over the long haul, and others by way of participation in an individual project. Although the organization has received significant funding from and exposure within art contexts, the word “art” is not used in the group’s mission statement, which says, in part: “We believe that the manmade landscape is a cultural inscription that can be read to better understand who we are and what we are doing.”¹⁵

In reading the “cultural inscription” that is the Earth’s surface, CLUI has over the years established a sprawling framework for documenting and interpreting the built environment, primarily but not exclusively in the United States. The group creates guided tours, exhibitions, research stations, artist residency programs, informational



2. The Center for Land Use Interpretation photo archive.

displays, lectures, publications, and an online database, all devoted to investigating “the language of land use and teaching it to others.”¹⁶ Its research concentrates on places that are both everyday and overlooked, places that constitute the simultaneously strange and banal landscape of contemporary life. For example, CLUI’s 2006 book *Overlook: Exploring the Internal Fringes of America with the Center for Land Use Interpretation* surveys such wide-ranging sites as show caves, towns drowned by dam construction, mock cities designed for police drills, miniature models of the Earth’s surface, and nuclear proving grounds. Past tours in the Los Angeles area have visited landfills and other highlights of the city’s “landscape of waste”; Terminal Island, whose ownership is split between the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, which together comprise the fifth busiest port complex in the world; and exurban gravel pits where the foundational materials of the urban environment are extracted. In its own words, CLUI targets those places “left unexplored by scholars, scientists, and other specialists.”¹⁷

CLUI’s Land Use Database, a free resource available to the public through its website, is the destination for much of its ever-accumulating, collaboratively collected, and often esoteric data. The database is comprised of photographs and textual descriptions showcasing more than a thousand “unusual and exemplary” sites throughout the United States. All content is generated by CLUI rather than aggregated from existing sources, thus avoiding representations of landscape already in circulation that originate from invested corporations, government agencies, or individuals. Considered “the informational bedrock”¹⁸

of the organization, the database not only provides source material for CLUI's programming, exhibits, and publications, but also enables others "to explore remotely, to search obliquely, and to make creative collisions and juxtapositions that render new meanings and explanations of America—and of the many ways of looking at it."¹⁹

CLUI's endeavors are rooted in methods originally associated with non-art disciplines, including geography, architecture, urban planning, and the social sciences (e.g., economics, political science, sociology, and anthropology). Indeed, CLUI is emblematic of the research orientation of much contemporary art. It is moreover an oft-cited example of an organization that has successfully operated outside the conventional bounds of "the art world" (museum and gallery displays are the exception rather than the main format for its work) by refusing to recognize disciplinary boundaries and avoiding well-worn institutional models. Many of the artists and artist collectives included in this volume follow CLUI's lead in avoiding the ghettoizing term "art" to characterize their activities of careful observation, data collection, and general concern with producing accurate representations of the conditions that form the environments in which we live. Their interventions, mappings, and temporary and permanent modifications of the land often involve strategies and roles that are continuous with policy making, tourism, habitation, and land stewardship. As the curator Nato Thompson wrote in the catalogue for the 2008 exhibition *Experimental Geography*, the work of CLUI and others' "radical approaches to landscape, cartography, and urbanism" has widened the frame of art to the point where "we must begin to understand the mechanisms of power, finance, and geopolitical structures that produce the culture around us."²⁰

Throughout its extensive activities, CLUI adopts an appearance of administrative neutrality. It maintains a position of non-alliance with activist groups as well as the industries and government agencies whose "geo-transformative activities" it tracks, even as its quasi-bureaucratic self-presentation mirrors these same bodies. For instance, a promotional blurb for its 1996 pamphlet "The Nevada Test Site: A Guide to America's Nuclear Proving Ground" enthusiastically declares: "Praised by both anti-nuclear activists and Department of Energy officials!"²¹ Consistent with its ambiguous ideological stance, the group employs documentary-style photography as one of its primary mediums. (Photography has a long history, of course, in relation to the visual documentation of land, from its central role in nineteenth-century topographic surveys propelled by various scientific and colonial agendas, to the instrumental role of aerial photography in World War I and onward, to the vast archive produced by the U.S. Farm Security Administration in the 1930s and 1940s that was used to shore up support for the New Deal during the Great Depression, to current photojournalistic exposés on environmental devastation around the world.) When confronting familiar representational formats employed by CLUI—the photographic field essay, the observation log, the touristic guidebook, the government database, the corporate annual report—we are meant to forget about the individual artist or author, the interested viewpoint. As Coolidge writes in the introduction to *Overlook*, "It's my hope that, after reading this book, you forget about us . . . What matters is that

. . . after encountering any of our programming . . . you come away with a widened sense of awareness of the physical world that surrounds you.”²² CLUI seeks to disappear, but its disappearance is a reminder of the ideological positions that shape all representations of the land.

In contrast to CLUI’s neutral posture, many artists included in *Critical Landscapes* aim to transform the very issues and conditions that they take up in their work as an active mode of political engagement. They not only engage spatial politics as their subject, in other words, but also self-reflexively exercise political agency in space. The artist-geographer Trevor Paglen coined the term “experimental geography” to describe and encourage such spatial practices. In his essay reprinted in this volume, he elaborates:

If one takes the production of space seriously, the concept applies not only to “objects” of study or criticism, but to the ways one’s own actions participate in the production of space. . . . Taking this head-on, incorporating it into one’s practice, is what I mean by “experimental geography.” . . . To move beyond critical reflection, critique alone, political “attitudes,” into the realm of practice. To experiment with creating new spaces, new ways of being.

As Paglen indicates, the approaches to landscape implied by “experimental geography” are premised on the possibility of actual interventions within material and political realities.

Today, the forces that produce landscape are more decentralized, dematerialized, and de-linked from the actual ground than ever before. More accurately, distances have widened between the places where decisions regarding land use are *made* and where they are *enacted*. Whereas Ingold’s medieval worker-shapers, who “with foot, axe, and plough . . . trod, hacked, and scratched their lines into the earth,” performing labor that was “close-up, in an immediate, muscular and visceral engagement with wood, grass, and soil,” in our own day and age, a whole series of geographically dispersed factors and agents, some virtual and others “analog” (e.g., international trade and patenting laws, migrant worker streams, stock market figures, transportation systems) prefigure any moment before foot or plough pierces ground.²³

Globalization is not a new phenomenon; it dates back centuries or even millennia to the early exchange of goods and ideas between geographically distant populations. Since the 1980s and 1990s, however, various neoliberal economic policies such as the deregulation of financial markets, together with the expansion of multinational corporations and advancements in telecommunication technologies, have ushered in an era in which the global economy operates with unprecedented power and swiftness. The present moment, we might say, is distinguished by the degree to which to which finance orders space. The sociologist Saskia Sassen has described “finance [as] the engine of our time”—a vast force that is “flattening everything around us” as it “grabs more and more terrain”

amid an ongoing shift from a world organized largely by national territories to one of global connectivity and jurisdiction.²⁴

In tandem with the ascendance of free-market ideology and the global implementation of its growth economy, more and more people are migrating to densely populated areas for work (sometimes at will, other times by force), including to quickly proliferating “megacities” with more than ten million inhabitants. Some scholars have gone so far as to describe this trend in terms of a “planetary urbanism,” or urbanization with no outside, wherein territories are newly entwined with one another, and units previously used to analyze patterns of development, such as “the city,” are no longer tenable.²⁵ Sassen furthermore reminds us that this accelerated, all-encompassing urbanization involves the displacement, or “systemic expulsion,” of humans on a massive scale resulting from a number of practices and processes, among them: mega-development projects such as the construction of dams in China; desertification owing to deforestation and over-farming; and neocolonial land grabs, wherein large tracts of land, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, are sold off to foreign investors. (In this final case, an exponential privatization of resources, including land, is under way.) As places become ever more interlinked via flows of labor and capital, it is increasingly impossible to tease apart the urban from the non-urban, or *here* from *there*.

Global capitalism is not a smooth, seamless, or evenly distributed phenomenon, but—to the contrary—one that has arguably contributed to growing disparity and precarity around the world. Critical geographers have been especially helpful in theorizing the “uneven development” that is endemic to globalized advanced capitalism, whereby the landscape is organized according to strategic targeting by capital, and violence (to land, humans, and nonhumans) is often shifted from one place to another, and in the process further from common view.²⁶ This type of relational thinking quickly brings questions of justice to the fore. The literary and postcolonial theorist Rob Nixon furthermore elaborates upon the “slow violence” entailed in environmental disasters (e.g., long-term contamination owing to extractive industries, the severing of ties between indigenous communities and their homelands and ways of life) that unfold across vast scales and in forms and temporalities that are often hard to perceive, compounding their intensity. This, he describes, is “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”²⁷

A number of projects within this book highlight the socially uneven production and distribution of various environmental crises, including the disproportionate impact of climate change on poor regions of the world. As such, they resonate with, if not at times directly participate in, the environmental justice movement that has, since the 1980s, waged an incisive critique of mainstream environmentalism’s failure to adequately acknowledge issues of social inequality. Ashley Dawson, for instance, analyzes critical documentary practices by artists who track the “accumulation by dispossession” endemic to advanced capitalism. He concludes, making clear his own ethical-political orientation:

“Documenting the transnational networks of power that characterize contemporary imperialism and thereby contributing to bonds of solidarity between the dispossessed in the global North and South is *the* key task for contemporary artist-activists.”²⁸ The art historian T. J. Demos, in his curatorial essay for the 2010 exhibition *Uneven Geographies* (reprinted here), meanwhile heralds artworks that not only “chart the operations of globalization” but also “situate us critically and creatively in relation to [its] uneven developments” and thereby “open up other modes of globalization.” Such work, he claims, aspires to produce new spatial-political configurations by envisioning “imaginative possibilities for a world—and a more even geography—of social justice, experimental creativity, and political inclusion.” More broadly, artists associated with “critical spatial practice” (and “experimental geography,” too) aim to intervene in worldly conditions, for example by working against the abstraction and cooptation of space in the service of finance.²⁹

The relationship between the global economy and the environment is a tangled one. Take, for instance, the patenting of genetically modified seed varieties by a multinational agrochemical and agricultural biotechnology giant like Monsanto, which has emerged in concert with recent changes to international patent and trade laws. In the eyes of the philosopher-activist Vandana Shiva, this phenomenon amounts to nothing less than the “corporate control of life.”³⁰ It has drastically transformed agriculture around the world, resulting in the widespread contamination of wild seed stocks, the homogenization of vast tracts of land via “mono-cropping,” and extreme economic and social turmoil in places such as India, where local farmers are now barred from continuing generations-old practices without going through the channels of corporate seed “providers.” (Shiva and others point to the bitter irony, or double-insidiousness, of the fact that biotech companies have appropriated knowledge built over millennia by the very indigenous peoples from whom they now reap a profit.) The rise of corporatized, de-diversified agriculture coincides with a growing nostalgia for the agrarian past, before pesticides and fertilizers were needed to grow “conventional” produce, as reflected in the current explosion of urban gardening movements as well as markets for organic, artisanal, and slow foods among a largely affluent and “progressive” demographic in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere.

Contemporary urbanism, including the ascendance of speculative real estate practices as a dominant structuring force, is similarly shot through with seeming paradoxes. Within a speculative model of development, oriented toward the potential future uses of land and property, the production of space takes on new guises. In countless urban “renewal” projects, the incorporation of nature (e.g., the addition of parks or other “green space,” lakefront development, the “revitalization” of river ways) and, more generally, an imperative of “sustainability,” are cornerstones. (The geographer Neil Smith speaks of this in terms of “nature as accumulation strategy.”³¹) Such gentrification efforts, while purportedly ecological in character, are of course also (if not ultimately) meant to generate revenue, whether by boosting tourism or attracting potential new investors, businesses, and

inhabitants; they always involve some degree of displacement, too. If “greenwashing” is prevalent in the current development and marketing of cities, we might also consider “art-washing,” wherein art and the “culture class” associated with it are likewise instrumentalized to drive up real estate values. The American artist and critic Martha Rosler bluntly states: “The artist’s assigned role in urban planning is to gentrify space for the rich.”³² The artists and scholars in this volume address the local ramifications of such complex dynamics. Janet Kraynak’s essay, which focuses on Rirkrit Tiravanija’s ongoing, collaborative project in Thailand, *The Land*, in particular dwells on the fundamental contradiction of dominant notions of “sustainability” since the 1990s that perpetuate an economic growth model rather than calling it into question as the very source of environmental degradation. Ying Zhou presents a series of case studies that register the transformation of Shanghai in conjunction with economic liberalization since the early 1990s. The Chinese government has deployed culture, and specifically contemporary art, to elevate land values and project to the West an open-minded attitude toward artistic expression, but in reality, seeding culture has meant the eviction of poorer communities from newly desirable urban spaces.

. . .

The artists Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, long considered pioneers in the realm of land and environmental art, have spent the last four decades developing research-intensive projects on climate change, globalization, and biological “survival.” Since 2000, for instance, a series of their artworks has investigated the multifold effects of global warming—from rising sea levels and drought to the transformation of forests and agricultural land—on the European peninsula, as well as the need for new, and more collective, forms of governance in the face of such urgencies.³³ Already in 1978, in conjunction with a piece called *The Lagoon Cycle* (1974–84), the Harrisons wrote:

It is said that if all the ice melted, the oceans would rise about 300 feet. So we drew a line, as best we could, at the 300-foot level and thought about how the land would shrink as the ocean grew. . . . As the waters rise slowly in the Red Sea and the Dead Sea, the Caspian, the North, the Baltic, and the Black, the ocean gyres will redraw themselves, as will the currents and the tides, and over time, gracefully, this raising tide will flow up every river that once flowed down to the sea. . . . And the flood plains that are farmed upon and lived upon will become marshes or swamps or bogs or beds for swollen rivers or even shallow inland seas. And the tropics will become uninhabitable. . . . And most life, known and unknown, will have to go elsewhere than now. . . . And, in this new beginning, this continuous re-beginning, will you feed me when my lands can no longer produce? And will I house you when your lands are covered with water?³⁴

This passage, and the Harrisons’ art more generally, highlights a number of crucial connections: between land and water, between seemingly distant places, and—perhaps most importantly—between the ecological and the social, political, economic, legal, and ethical.

It is also highly prescient for our present moment, when environmental issues are increasingly characterized by their networked intricacy and spatial reach, and clearly defined causality is rare. In the Indian Ocean, the low-lying atolls comprising the Maldives are indeed being swallowed as waters rise, leading to “the complete disappearance of a nation state beneath the ocean,” something “unprecedented in modern times.”³⁵ The type of human migration, or environmental diaspora, ensuing from this will become more and more common in the coming years and decades. Meanwhile, with the rapid melting of polar ice, the Arctic has become a geopolitical hotspot as northern countries vie to stake claims on potential new routes for shipping and oil exploration. The impossibility of disentangling the human from the “natural” is made especially clear, perhaps, in the case of catastrophic events such as the 2010 explosion of British Petroleum’s Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico or the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan, which led to the partial meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Here, immediate and spectacular devastation has been coupled with tolls that unfold slowly, lie beyond our ability to fully assess, and involve an aspect of uncontainability reminiscent of atomic radiation from the height of the Cold War era.

A number of earth scientists, philosophers, and others have begun to adopt the term “Anthropocene” to describe our present epoch, with humans understood to be a newly geological force, possessing the power to shape not only the land, but also the planet at the scale of its Earth systems. At the same time, there is a surge of interest across multiple disciplines in the material world and its agency. This extends to thinking about the land as something that is not only acted upon, but that also acts, structures, and exerts force along the lines of the Harrisons’ ocean gyres, tides, swamps, and bogs, which draw and redraw the conditions upon which the biological, the social, and the political rest. How might art and other critical spatial practices stir our sensitivities to human-nature entanglements and imaginaries, thereby opening the way for new modes of response and engagement, new forms of making and marking, new sets of relations, and new ways of being?

NOTES

1. Guillermo Calzadilla, interview by Hans Ulrich Olbrist, 2003/2009, in *Allora & Calzadilla* (Zurich: J. R. P. Ringier, 2010), 14.

2. Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: MIT Press, 1996), xiii. See also Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).

3. *Ibid.*, xiii–xiv, xxiv.

4. Some artists, historians, and critics have opted to abandon “landscape” in favor of a term such as “territory,” which carries immediate geopolitical connotations. Examples include Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose, eds., *Deterritorializations* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2003) and the architectural historian Alessandra Ponte’s “The Map and the Territory,” in *The House of Light and Entropy* (London: Architectural Association, 2014) 169–221.

5. Svetlana Alpers, "The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art," in *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 119–168.
6. Tim Ingold, "Landscape or Weather-World?," in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), 126–27.
7. Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Problems of Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 78.
8. Raymond Williams, "Nature," in *Keywords* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 219.
9. Emily Eliza Scott, "Wasteland: American Landscapes in/and 1960s Art" (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 2010).
10. This important exhibition has been restaged and revisited multiple times, most recently in 2009 by the George Eastman House and the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson; that show proceeded to travel to ten venues across the United States and Europe.
11. Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape" (1973), in Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 157–171.
12. *Ibid.*, 163.
13. *Ibid.*, 164.
14. Jessica Dubow in "The Art Seminar," a roundtable discussion reproduced in *Landscape Theory*, eds. Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (London: Routledge, 2008), 100.
15. <http://www.clui.org/section/about-center>.
16. Matthew Coolidge and Sarah Simons, eds., *Overlook: Exploring the Internal Fringes of America with the Center for Land Use Interpretation* (New York: Metropolis Books, 2006), 16.
17. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
18. *Ibid.*, 17.
19. *Ibid.*, 25.
20. Nato Thompson, *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 15.
21. This example is cited in Sarah Kanouse, "Touring the Archive, Archiving the Tour: Image, Text, and Experience with the Center for Land Use Interpretation," *Art Journal* 64, no. 2 (summer 2005): 85.
22. Matthew Coolidge and Sarah Simons, *Overlook*, 15.
23. Tim Ingold, "Landscape or Weather-World?," 126–27.
24. Saskia Sassen, keynote lecture presented at the "Thinking the Contemporary Landscape: Positions and Oppositions" conference (Herrenhausen Gardens, Hannover, Germany, June 21, 2013). Also see T. J. Demos on the "naturalization of finance" and "financialization of nature" in "The Post-Natural Condition: Art After Nature," *Artforum* (April 2012): 191–97.
25. See, for example, Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, *Implosions/Explosions: Toward a Study of Planetary Urbanism* (Berlin: Jovis, 2014) and Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2007).
26. The writings of the geographers Neil Smith and David Harvey, beginning in the 1980s, are foundational here.
27. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2.

28. Ashley Dawson, "New Modes of Anti-Imperialism," in *Exceptional State: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the New Imperialism*, eds. Ashley Dawson and Malini Johar Schueller (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009), 250.
29. The term "critical spatial practice" was coined by the art and architectural historian Jane Rendell. See Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).
30. Vandana Shiva, "The Corporate Control of Life," in *dOCUMENTA (13): 100 Notes—100 Thoughts* series #012 (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2012).
31. Neil Smith, "Nature as Accumulation Strategy," *Socialist Register* (2006): 16–36.
32. Martha Rosler, "Imagination Retakes the Streets," in *What Is Critical Spatial Practice?*, eds. Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 120. Also see Rosler's three-part series "Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism," which was published in the online journal *e-flux* in 2010–11, and is now collected in *Culture Class* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).
33. For instance Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, *Greenhouse Britain* (2007–9) and *Force Majeure* (2000–). See <http://theharrisonstudio.net/>.
34. Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, *The Ocean Is a Great Draftsman* (1978). This short text was part of an installation *The Lagoon Cycle* (1974–84), and specifically associated with *The Seventh Lagoon: The Ring of Fire the Ring of Water*, exhibited at the Johnson Museum of Cornell University and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It also appears in *The Book of the Lagoons*, a handmade, limited-edition folio self-published by the artists in 1984. See <http://theharrisonstudio.net/>.
35. <http://www.contingentmovementsarchive.com>. The Contingent Movement Archive was built in association with the Maldives Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013.