

SMITHSON

DIALECTICS

SMITHSON / DIALECTICS

BA Thesis

Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam

Nicola Godman 2016

Tutor: Christel Vesters

Graphic Advisor: Bert Hendriks

Contents

1.Introduction.	5
2. Defining Dialectics	6
2.1 Plato, Hegel and Marx’s Use of Dialectics	6
2.2 Smithson’s View on Dialectics.	7
3. Sites / Nonsites	9
4. Broken Circle / Spiral Hill.	19
5. Documentation / On Site	22
6. Conclusion / Dialectics	25
7. Bibliography	27

1.Introduction

This thesis is about the use of dialectics in Robert Smithson's practice. Having a practice myself where I'm creating work both on site outside as well as for an inside setting, I'm interested in how dialectics in a work existing on both sides of a wall can be played out. What is the difference between experiencing a work on site or in a gallery/museum space? Using Robert Smithson as my case study, I'm interested in how he used the method of dialectics in his practice, where he simultaneously created works for inside and outside settings.

Robert Smithson is one of the pioneering artists in the 1960s and 70s to work outside of the gallery/museum space and create art in direct contact with landscapes and exterior sites. Becoming famous for his large-scale earthwork pieces in the American desert, Smithson was interested in the relation between inside/outside, gallery/real world, nature/architecture, sculpture/landscape and material origin/displacement. Developing a dialectical method in his practice, where two seemingly opposite elements are juxtaposed, Smithson often created contextual works where the process is taken into consideration and the material showed in the gallery refers back to its material origin.

Robert Smithson was born 1938 in New Jersey, USA. Due to his death in a plane crash in 1973 when filming his earthwork *Amarillo Ramp*, Smithson had a very short artistic career that just stretched around thirteen years.¹ Beginning as a painter, Smithson went through several different stages in his short career. In 1964 he started to make sculpture and in line with the minimalist movement of that time, Smithson made sculptures inspired by crystals and became interested in crystallography, seeing crystals as organic growing entities that consists of regular geometric structures.² In 1968 Smithson began to make his first earthworks with his series of works named Sites/Nonsites, where the work existed in both gallery/museum spaces as well as on exterior sites. Later he moved on to more monumental earthworks outside and with his most famous piece, *Spiral Jetty* (1970), Smithson turned "art centers into provincial outposts and the province into a new center for art."³ Shortly before his accidental death, Smithson began making proposals for land reclamatory projects where art would be integrated into old industrial sites.

1 Hobbs, (1981), *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, p.11

2 Hobbs, (1981), p.12

3 Hobbs, (1981), p.15

In this thesis I would like to investigate Smithson's dialectical approach; what is his view of dialectics and how does his practice embody a dialectical method/structure? What is the difference between experiencing a work on site or through documentation? Does Smithson achieve a situation in his work where the viewer is in a position of experiencing the dialectics played out?

2. Defining Dialectics

First crystallized in his works of Sites/Nonsites, dialectics was a core concept in Smithson's practice, as well as his notion of Entropy, which I will not go deeper into in this thesis. Using a dialectic method, where his projects moved through different positions and mediums, I will first try and define the word dialectic, as it's been used in classic philosophy, as well as in Smithson's own words.

2.1 Plato, Hegel and Marx's Use of Dialectics

Dialectic is a word that derives from Greek and was developed in antiquity by Plato as a mode of discussion for establishing the truth. Closely related to Socratic dialogue, Hegelian dialectics is formulated in a three-step process where one starts with a concept: thesis, then moves to its opposite: antithesis, to in the end reach a resolution in form of a synthesis.⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel developed this thought in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth-century. Affected by Immanuel Kant; Hegel later came to inspire Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their formulation of dialectical materialism.

⁴ O'Conner, Kim, (2003), *Dialectic*
<http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/dialectic.htm> (visited on 30 December 2015)

In an interview with philosopher Robert Stern on Hegel's dialectic, Stern explains how Hegel creates "a method of enquiry"⁵ by using certain principles to move from one position to another in order to reach a truth. Entering a discussion, you might be looking to find a balance between the positions, a synthesis. However, according to Stern, a dialectical moment is, when the position leads into a kind of contradiction.⁶ Associating to a Platonic moment, when you enter a dialogue thinking you know what you're talking about and you then realize things are much more complicated than that, you end up in a kind of middle position. Rather than seeing things as either/or, a dialectical moment is when you begin to see that both sides need to be brought together and "that the one-sided view isn't really opposed to its opposite."⁷ Hegel's view of subjectivity is also heavily influenced by a dialectical viewpoint. In his book *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, he described subjectivity as "a being-for-self which is for itself only through another."⁸ This way of seeing a subject, as only existing in its relationship to others, is

5 Stern, Robert, (2012), *Robert Stern on G.W.F Hegel on Dialectic*, Edmonds, David/ Warburton, Nigel, *Philosophy Bites Back*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.145

6 Stern, Robert, (2012), p.147 -148

7 Stern, Robert, (2012), p. 148

8 O'Conner, Kim, (2003), *Dialectic*
<http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/dialectic.htm> (visited on 30 December 2015)

something that is also shared by Marx. Together with Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx developed dialectical materialism, which compared to Hegel's dialectics, has a materialistic starting point instead of an idealistic. In dialectical materialism, the material world is what is reflected in thought, and is the driving force in history, rather than in Hegel's idealism where the world is a form of the idea.⁹

2.2 Smithson's View on Dialectics

For Smithson, dialectics represented a way of refuting the modernist view of the autonomous art object. In his essay *Art and Dialectics* (1971), Smithson criticizes art critics and artists for not considering the context of the artwork.

9 The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica., *Dialectical materialism*, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/dialectical-materialism> (visited on 3 January 2016)

“Late modernist art has for some time placed all its emphasis on art as an order of particular things, objects that exist by themselves removed from what surrounds them. Art as a distinct thing is not supposed to be affected by anything other than itself. Critical boundaries tend to isolate the art object into a metaphysical void, independent from external relationships such as land, labor, and class. (...) Dialectics could be viewed as the relationship between the shell and the ocean. Art critics and artists have for a long time considered the shell without the context of the ocean.”¹⁰

Putting forth a concern of the artwork’s context is something essential in Smithson’s practice. Often showcasing the process of his pieces, Smithson was, according to the art historian Robert Hobbs “the artistic formulator of the contextual work of art, the no longer isolated and no longer autonomous art object that is both a sign and a symbol of interconnectedness.”¹¹ Smithson’s interest in using a dialectical method in his practice as well as actively working with the context surrounding his work could be seen as a statement towards modernism’s view of the autonomous art object but also a critique of abstraction.

10 Flam, Jack, (1996), *Robert Smithson: The collected writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley and California, p.370-371

11 Hobbs, (1981), p. 16

Saying that “As soon as an artist gets over the notion that art is merely a matter of shipping objects around, or putting paintings on walls, he will discover whole new areas of investigation that involve questions of site, politics and value. As long as artists are outside the dialectics of nature, art will be abstract currency.”¹² According to Lucy R. Lippard in her essay *Breaking Circles: The Politics of Prehistory*, Smithson saw abstraction as the enemy, something he considered closely related to capitalism and that separated production from work.¹³ The connection to the material world was how Smithson’s work embodied a dialectical image and became a counterweight to conceptualism of his time. As he says himself in a letter to Enno Develing; “Both abstraction and conceptualism form substitutions for natural resources or physical development, enabling the collector to cut off the artist from his own production. Conceptual art is like a credit card that has nothing to back up.”¹⁴

12 Commandeur; Ingrid / van Riemsdijk-Zandee, Trudy, (2012), *Robert Smithson Art in Continual Movement*, Alauda Publications, Amsterdam, p.125

13 Hobbs, (1981), p.39

14 Commandeur; Ingrid / van Riemsdijk-Zandee, Trudy, (2012), p.125

3. Sites / Nonsites

Probably the most pronounced works with which Smithson worked and exhibited a dialectic structure was in his series of Sites/Nonsites. In 1968 Smithson started what could be seen as his first examples of earthworks in Sites/Nonsites, where he worked with raw material directly taken from specifically chosen locations. In the series of works, geometrical formed bins in the gallery where filled with material (often sand or rocks) which were accompanied by maps showing the place of extraction. Not having seen the Sites or Nonsites in person, I'm basing my reflections on what I've been able to see/read in the form of documentation and writing in art historical books (*Robert Smithson: Sculpture*) as well as in interviews and writings by Robert Smithson himself.

In Smithson's first Nonsite; *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey* (1968), thirty-one metal containers in a shape of a hexagon, contain sand taken from an airfield in the Pine Barrens Plains in South New Jersey (see fig. 1). Part of the work is a map (also in the shape of a hexagon) with a text explaining that the sand is taken from the Site and that tours can be arranged between the

Nonsite and the Site (see fig. 2).¹⁵ The sculpture of the Nonsite repeats not only the hexagon shape of the map, but also the actual Site, where the airfield of Pine Barrens is in shape of a hexagon and with six runways around the central axis.

Another work that deals with the Site/Nonsite relationship, and uses photos and maps in a different way is *Nonsite "Line of Wreckage", Bayonne, New Jersey* (1968) (see fig. 3).¹⁶ Here a rectangular bin contains broken concrete rocks that are stacked on top of each other and held together by horizontal aluminium boards, dividing the rocks into linear sections. On the wall beside the sculpture, is a horizontal cut-out of a map showing the area of the *Line of Wreckage*, followed by three rows of photographs that document the chosen site.¹⁷ Here you can see a parallel of the rows of photographs and map to the rows of concrete rocks. Being divided into horizontal lines, the sculpture and photographs also play on the title and name of the site *Line of Wreckage*. Letting the form be repeated across the different mediums he uses, Smithson creates a clear dialectic between

¹⁵ Hobbs, (1981), p.102-103

¹⁶ New Jersey as Non-Site, *Nonsite: Line of Wreckage (Bayonne, NJ), 1968*, <http://artmuseum.princeton.edu/njns/objects/85186/2185099> (visited on 21 April 2016)

¹⁷ Hobbs, (1981), p. 109

the sculptures, maps and photographs. Smithson stating, “The Nonsite is a container within another container – the room”¹⁸, can also be seen as playing on the idea of the Nonsite doubling the gallery room.

Even though Smithson made several Nonsites during 1968, it wasn't until a year later that he refined the idea in *Dialectic of Site/Nonsite*:

<i>Site</i>	<i>Nonsite</i>
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
Certainty	Uncertainty
6. Scattered	Contained
Information	Information
7. Reflection	Mirror
8. Edge	Center
9. Some Place	No Place
(physical)	(abstract)
10. Many	One ¹⁹

¹⁸ Flam, Jack, (1996), p.153

¹⁹ Flam, Jack, (1996), p. 152-153

Juxtaposing Site and Nonsite, they at first glance may appear as opposites. In a following section, Smithson however pleads for a “Range of Convergence”²⁰, where they both meet or unite, writing that the maps and photographs belong to both sides of the dialectic at once, controlling one another’s scale, and being present and absent at the same time. In an interview with Patricia Norvell in 1969, Smithson starts off saying that “my view of art springs from a dialectical position that deals with, I guess, whether or not something exists or doesn’t exist.”²¹ Later he claims, “What you’re really confronted within the nonsite is the absence of site.”²²

Stressing the thinness of the gallery walls, Smithson puts the viewer in a state of limbo and according to Robert Hobbs, “cancels out one’s sense of here-ness.”²³ Also if you as a viewer actually take the trip to the site you are confronted with the material being scattered without being able to fully locate exactly where the material was taken from. In his essay *Smithson’s*

²⁰ Flam, Jack, (1996), p.153

²¹ Smithson, Robert/Norvell, Patricia, *An Interview with Robert Smithson*, (1969), in Wood, Jon/Hulks, David/Potts, Alex, *Modern Sculpture Reader*, (2007), Henry Moore Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles and Leeds, p.286

²² Smithson, Robert/Norvell, Patricia, (1969), p.288

²³ Hobbs, (1981), p.14

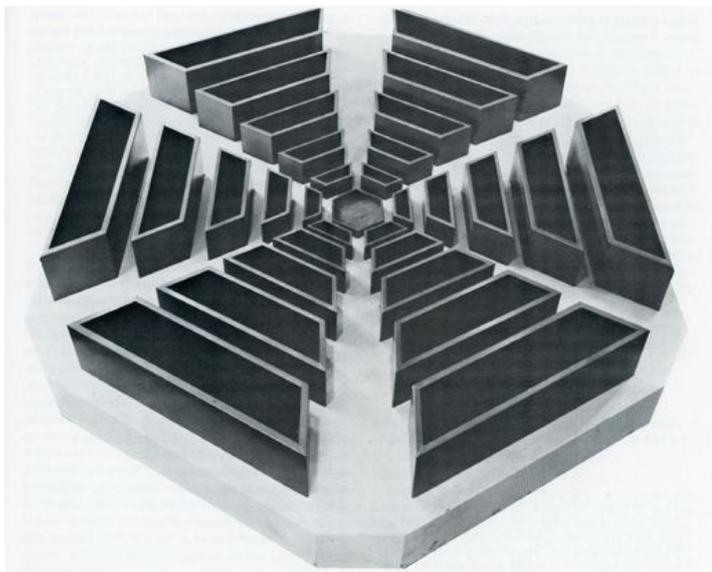


Figure 1

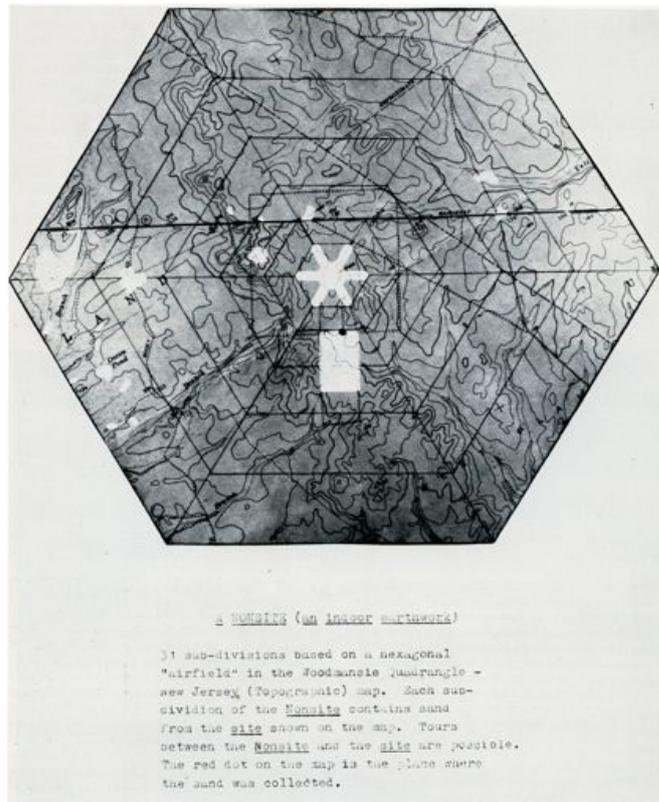


Figure 2

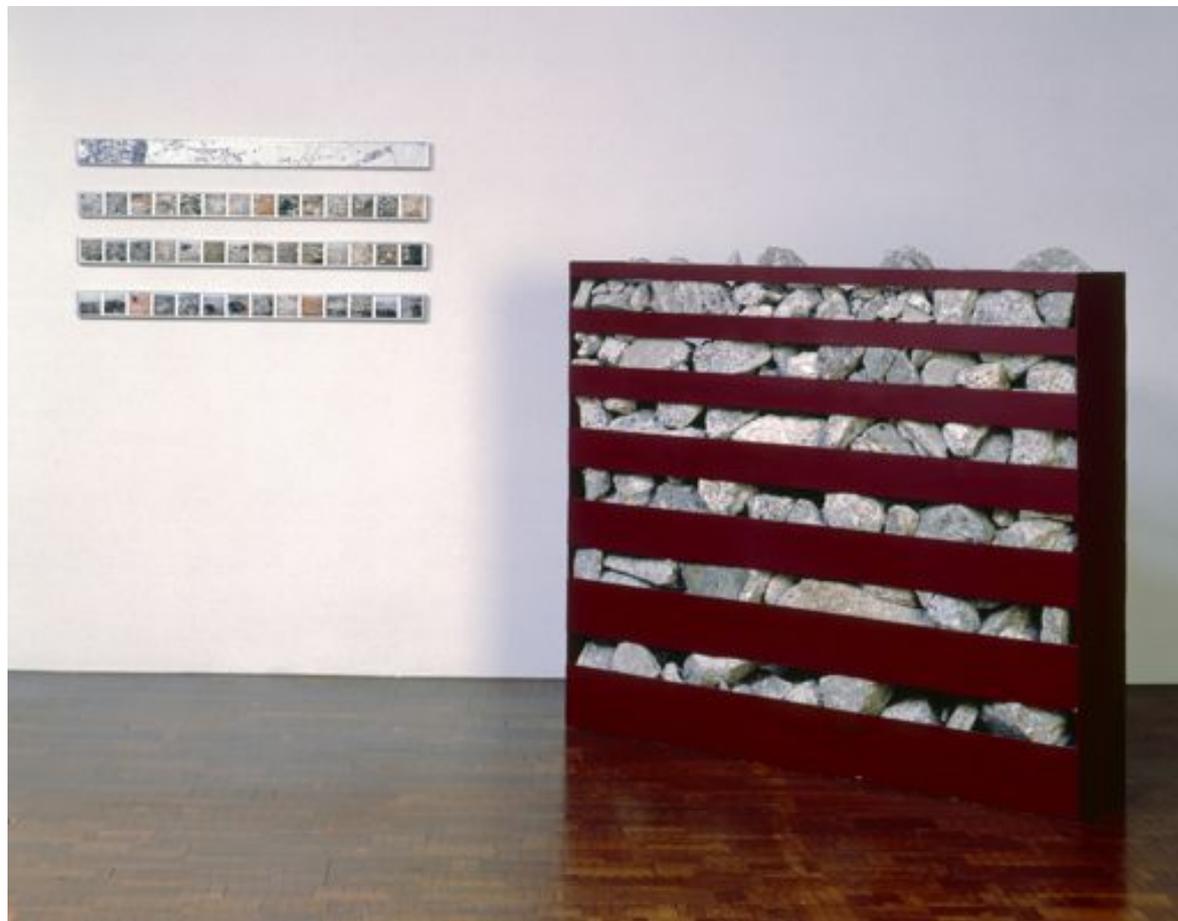


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Figure 6





Figure 7



Figure 8

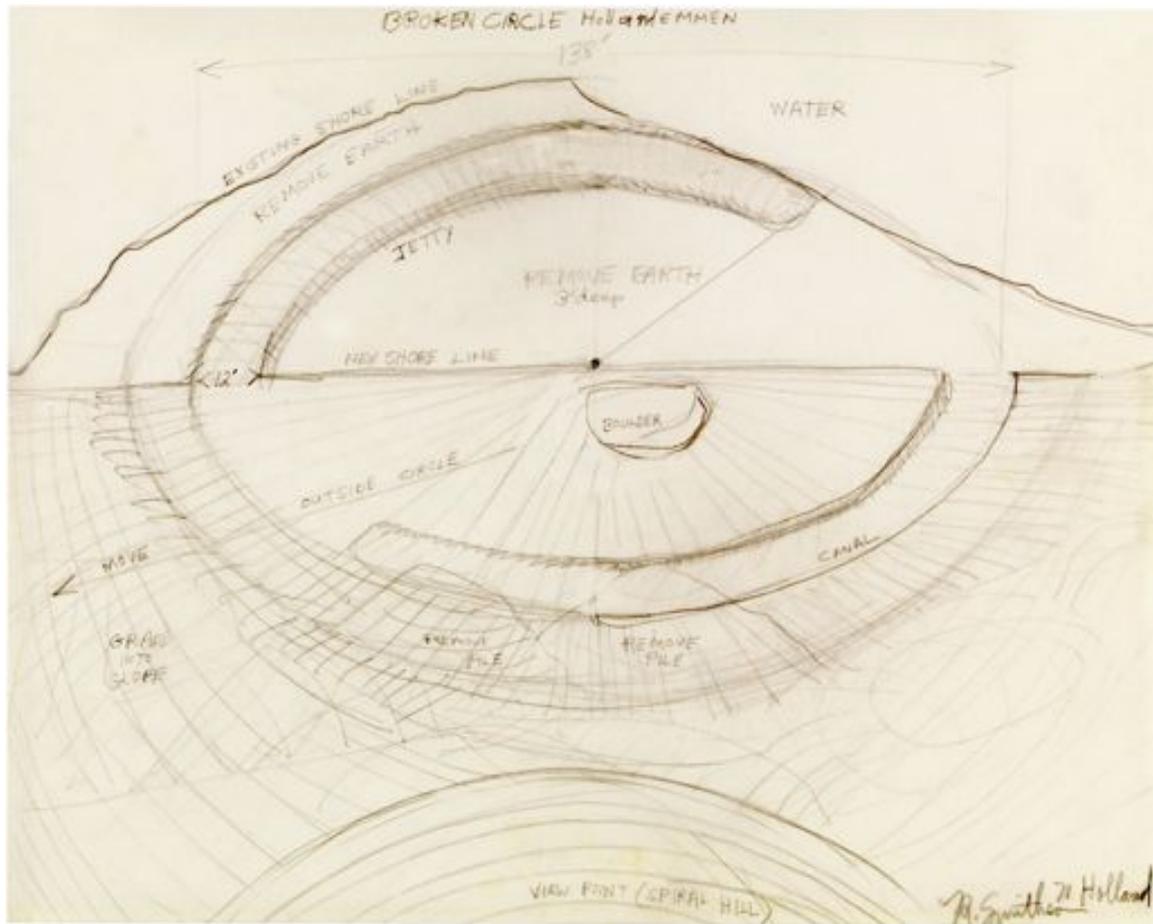


Figure 9

Figure 10



Unresolvable Dialectics, Hobbs writes that in Smithson's work, he uses a dialectical method in his art "in which dialectics are structured but not resolved."²⁴ This is something that goes hand in hand with what Smithson writes himself, where he claims that "Dialectics is not only the ideational formula of thesis-antithesis-synthesis forever sealed in the mind, but an on-going development."²⁵

4. Broken Circle / Spiral Hill

The only monumental earthwork by Smithson existing outside of North America is *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* (1971), located close to Emmen in the Netherlands.

In September last year when I saw a friend posting photos from *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* on Facebook, I commented and said I also wished to go there. A few months later I got a message from my friend, telling me about an excursion that would be organized to *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* by Kunsthal Kade in Amersfoort. I signed up and got excited thinking about this going to be a historical moment for me, seeing one of his major outside works in person for the first time. Waking up early in the morning, I took the train from Amsterdam to Amersfoort, where I met up with the group (of mostly ladies in their 60s) and we boarded the bus that would take us to northeast Netherlands and *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*.

Arriving at the old sand quarry in heavy wind and rain, we were welcomed by a man who turned out to be the son of the contractor in charge of the quarry when Smithson made his work there. The group went into the small museum about *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* that was made in the house of the

24 Hobbs, (1981), p.30

25 Flam, Jack, (1996), p.371

sand company and then into a small shed where the son of the contractor turned on a television to show the film *Breaking Ground: Broken Circle/Spiral Hill (1971-2011)* made by Nancy Holt, Smithson's widow and Theo Tegelaers from SKOR (*Stichting Kunst en Openbare Ruimte*). It seemed like everybody was waiting for the rain to stop. I just wanted to go outside and see the work for myself, so I left the shed and started walking along a grass path that went towards the far corner of the quarry where the work was located. Passing some kind of metal rubble sculpture on the way, I realized only halfway there that my feet were totally soaked. Not wanting to let that dampen my spirits, I was excited about being there, on my own, walking to meet the work.

Arriving on the hillside beside Spiral Hill, I followed the spiralling path leading up the hill. It was muddy and slippery, but only just about two or three loops to reach the top. Once on top, I had a good view over the quarry and central perspective towards Broken Circle below. I got the feeling of really being there, standing on top of one of Smithson's works, looking out over another. I took a selfie (see fig. 4). I saw the rest of the group approaching from a distance so I began to make my way

down the hill and towards Broken Circle. Watching not to slip on the wet grass, I walked down the slope towards the giant boulder in the middle of Broken Circle. The boulder gave a kind of organic presence, descending from a prehistoric past. Because of the rain, the stone was wet and the sand plateau rising from the water had some puddles on it. I continued, walking out on the sand pier that stretched out in a half circle. I heard and felt the presence of the water on both sides, hitting the sand bank in waves and flowing in and out of the bay. There were some sticks were pointing up above the surface on the outside of the sand bank, perhaps as a support for the structure. Looking up at Spiral Hill, from Broken Circle below, it seemed high, doubling the effect of the hillside. Walking back to the shore and slowly away from the work along the shoreline, I saw the two; Spiral Hill, covered with bushes, resting on the hillside, elevating above, but also sinking downwards and Broken Circle; extending the movement down, reaching out into the turquoise water, embracing part of the water, together creating one form.

While visiting and experiencing *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, I noticed several dialectics being played out within the work and its surrounding environment. Consisting of two parts: Broken Circle and Spiral Hill, there's a certain relation between the two. Spiral Hill, rising above ground, resting on the already existing hillside²⁶ and Broken Circle stretching out from the shore, creating a form above and below water, together they create a juxtaposition between above/below and height/flatness. Spiral Hill, having a maintained path to its summit, seems to be meant to be walked upon and as a way of viewing the quarry and Broken Circle beneath. In that sense Spiral Hill's independence as a sculpture becomes undermined, as it seems like its main purpose is to function as a viewing point towards Broken Circle, which takes the leading role. However, while walking around Spiral Hill from ground level, it radiates a poignant presence. Green and bumpy from the bushes, it feels like an overgrown beast resting on the slope. Viewed from the shore below, it appears high but still blending in with the trees in the background.

²⁶ The hillside that Spiral Hill is placed on is part of the *Hondsrug*, a ridge of sand going through Drenthe and Groningen. The ridge is believed to be a glacial landform. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hondsrug>, visited on 13 April 2016)

Broken Circle creates a clear dialectic with the surrounding environment of the water-filled sand quarry. Consisting of a sandbank with a central boulder, a dug out ditch on the inside towards the shoreline and a sand pier reaching out in the water in form of a half circle, grasping a section of water, the whole sculptural form consists of both sand and water. With the water flowing in and out of the ditch, there's a direct backward and forward movement between the sand and water, both forming one another. The sand, creating a border for where the sculpture begins and ends, is constantly negotiated by the movement of the water.

The boulder in the middle of Broken Circle, which was already there when Smithson started to make his work, creates a focal point of the piece. The boulder was something Smithson first felt ambivalent about²⁷ and in the beginning of the process wished to have removed. While making the work he travelled to New York and later upon his return to the Netherlands (after being told it was one of the largest in the Netherlands), Smithson decided to leave it there, letting it become a "warning from the Ice Age."²⁸

²⁷ Flam, Jack, (1996), p.258

²⁸ Flam, Jack, (1996), p.258

The boulder also makes reference to the prehistoric graves called *Hunebedden*, which are located in the area around *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*. Smithson being concerned about geology, was interested in creating a connection to the *Hunebedden* through the boulder in Broken Circle. He was also planning to make a link between the two in the film he was making, but didn't finish due to his accidental death.²⁹

29 Flam, Jack, (1996), p.258

5. Documentation / On Site

Before visiting the site of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, I had seen several photographs of the work in various publications. Most often what I would see as a representation/documentation of the work would be a photograph of Broken Circle, taken slightly from above (standing on Spiral Hill), with the boulder in the middle. Often it would be a colour photograph showing the contrast between the turquoise water and the white sand. As a matter of fact, at first I didn't even know about Spiral Hill's existence, thinking that Broken Circle was the only work existing in Emmen. Smithson was very aware of how his works were documented, and that most people would view the work mainly through secondary media.³⁰ The photographs I've looked at and will analyze are all taken by Robert Smithson himself in 1971.

In the catalogue for *Robert Smithson: A Retrospective View*, which was the contribution for U.S pavilion at the 40th Venice Biennale in 1982, there are two photographs representing *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* (see fig. 5 and 6).³¹ Both in colour, there is first

30 Hobbs, (1981), p.15

31 Hobbs, Robert, (1982), *Robert Smithson: A Retrospective View*, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, p. 108-109

the one of Broken Circle, taken from above on Spiral Hill, with a central perspective over Broken Circle and the sand quarry in the background. On the next page there's a photograph of Spiral Hill, taken from the side, at the same height as where the hill and path starts. Shot after the works completion in the summer of 1971, Spiral Hill is freshly constructed of earth, with a white sand path leading to its top. The photograph shows Spiral Hill in a different state than how I experienced it in November last year, when it was covered in green bushes and somewhat sinking into the hillside. In none of the photographs in the catalogue are there any people present, enhancing the sculptural qualities and not giving any clear indication of scale. In the book *Land Art* I find a black and white photograph (also taken from on top of Spiral Hill) with one person walking on the pier of Broken Circle.³² Seeing this photograph, the monumentality and scale of the work becomes evident, being able to compare the size of the person to the huge boulder and the distance of the sand pier to the shore. In the chapter *A Living Archive* in *Robert Smithson Art in Continual Movement*, I find the same photograph but in colour, now with vibrant turquoise water and brilliant white

sand (see fig. 7).³³ A couple of pages before, there is a black and white photograph, with two figures standing a distance apart, at the beginning, and on the tip of the sand pier (see fig. 8).³⁴ The distance between the two figures creates a feeling of desolation, the two standing on this manmade structure in a post-industrial landscape. In black and white, this photograph becomes a strange document of some past civilization. In the books I've looked through, most often *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* is depicted in parts, each being represented with a separate photograph. In *Land Art* however I find a colour photograph of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* with both in one frame (see fig. 10).³⁵ Taken from what seems to be the other side of the shore, you can see the juxtaposition between Spiral Hill rising above and Broken Circle stretching out, above and below the water. Also taken in 1971, the ground around the work has no grass on it, showing traces of the construction work.

The bus trip organized by Kunsthal Kade, suitably in the context of their exhibition *Expeditie Landart*, became a kind of expedition; travelling with a group of people, on a bus, into

33 Commandeur, Ingrid / van Riemsdijk-Zandee, Trudy, (2012), p. 192

34 Commandeur, Ingrid / van Riemsdijk-Zandee, Trudy, (2012), p. 188

35 Tiberghien, Gilles, (1995), p. 111

32 Tiberghien, Gilles, (1995), *Land Art*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, p. 113

(for me) unknown parts of the Netherlands to reach the goal of seeing *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*. The day of the excursion it was raining and windy, making it feel even more of an effort to get there and walk the path leading to the work. Being a work outside, without shelter or walls, the weather and surrounding environment becomes part of the viewing experience of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* on site. I got a wet face and feet, but the actual sculptural work was also affected by the weather with its slippery path up Spiral Hill and the puddles on Broken Circle. Seeing the work on site is also an experience in scale: to stand beside Spiral Hill; bushy, bumpy and rising above ground, to look out over Broken Circle from above the hill, to walk out on the sand bank and stand next to the massive boulder. Experiencing the work on site is a way of relating it to your own body. You compare the size and distance to your bodily references; how high is the boulder compared to your height, how slippery is the slope underneath your feet and what is the distance you need to walk to reach the tip of the pier. Comparing the experience of viewing *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* on site to looking at the documentation is in one way comparing (outside) sculpture to photography, 3 dimensional to a framed picture plane, the body to the eye.

Smithson was very conscious of how to document his works, and in one way direct the way of looking at his art. In a drawing of Broken Circle in *A Living Archive*, the frame is nearly exactly the one of the photograph (see fig. 9).³⁶ With Spiral Hill in the lower edge “VIEW POINT (SPIRAL HILL)” is written on the drawing. Seeing this drawing, it seems like it was a clear intention of Smithson that Spiral Hill would be a viewing point for Broken Circle, and that it was there the main photograph of the work would be taken. Comparing it to my own selfie, also taken from on top of the hill, I believe that having seen the photographs of the work prior to my visit had an impact on my own choice of frame for my photo. The feeling of really being there, standing on top of Spiral Hill can be seen as a moment of transcending the border between the photograph and the physical site, placing myself in the frame of the photograph.

36 Commandeur, Ingrid / van Riemsdijk-Zandee, Trudy, (2012), p. 177

6. Conclusion / Dialectics

Looking at dialectics through Robert Smithson's work, you can see a chain of juxtapositions being set up between different elements. Creating a framework to view outside/inside or site/white cube, his Sites/Nonsites embody these oppositions that perhaps create more confusion than meaning together. Knowing that none of the Sites or Nonsites are complete in themselves, the dialectic is set up, but without reaching a conclusion. As a viewer you are caught up in-between, in a kind of middle position/blind spot. By separating the physical site from its inside comparison, Smithson makes clear the different qualities the Site and Nonsite inhabit. However, a truth is not established of the Site and Nonsite as opposites, rather they become reflections of each other. One could also say that he's not actually separating, but merging, if you compare to most of the other art of his time where the sculptural material shown in a gallery space had no connection to its material origin.

Relating to Marxist theory and the idea of dialectical materialism, the connection to the material world was how Smithson's work embodied a dialectical method/structure. Outspoken in his critique against conceptual art, for example,

Smithson saw conceptualism as something lacking a material back up and abstraction as something that cut off the artist from his own production. Making material interventions in the landscape was a way for Smithson to engage with the world outside of the gallery/museum and criticise modernisms' idea of the autonomous art object.

Actively working with the context of his artworks, channelling his ideas in writings, films, photographs, drawings and sculptures, Smithson puts the viewer in a position of being able to experience different frameworks of his work. When creating various signifiers of the same material intervention, Smithson opens up for dialectic within his work between the signifier and the signified. This may seem as an open field where you as a viewer are free to choose your position to view the work. However, I would say Smithson still has a certain control over from what position you approach his work. As in *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, the frame of the photograph, taken from on top of Spiral Hill, influences the main perception of the work on site, where it seems as that from this position (on top of Spiral Hill) is the 'true' way of viewing the work, and as a viewer you end up taking the position of the photograph/photographer. In one way,

this merges the two different positions; that of the photograph to that of the site, and a resolution seem in hand. But while standing there, in the rain, you realize it is not sunny as in the photo and that there are bushes all over the hill.

7. Bibliography

Books:

Commandeur, Ingrid/van Riemsdijk-Zandee, Trudy, (2012), *Robert Smithson Art in Continual Movement*, Alauda Publications, Amsterdam

Flam, Jack, (1996), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles

Hobbs, Robert, (1982), *Robert Smithson: A Retrospective View*, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

Hobbs, Robert, (1981), *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London

Stern, Robert, (2012), *Robert Stern on G.W.F Hegel on Dialectic* in Edmonds, David/Warburton, Nigel, *Philosophy Bites Back*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Smithson, Robert/Norvell, Patricia, (1969), *An Interview with Robert Smithson* in Wood, Jon/Hulks, David/Potts, Alex, (2007), *Modern Sculpture Reader*, Henry Moore Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles and Leeds

Tiberghien, Gilles, (1995), *Land Art*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York

Web pages:

The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *Dialectical materialism*, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/dialectical-materialism> (visited on 3 January 2016)

New Jersey as Non-Site, *Nonsite: Line of Wreckage (Bayonne, NJ), 1968*, <http://artmuseum.princeton.edu/njns/objects/85186/2185099> (visited on 21 April 2016)

O’Conner, Kim, (2003), *Dialectic*, <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/dialectic.htm> (visited on 30 December 2015)

Wikipedia, *Hondsrug*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hondsrug> (visited on 13 April 2016)

