

**EARTHWORKS: AN ANALYSIS AND EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

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# Abstract

During the past five years there has been a resurgence of an art genre which was first recognized in the late 1960's as "Earthworks". Essentially, it was sculpture which was produced outdoors, in the landscape. Earthworks artists primarily employed natural elements such as earth and stone as their materials, and developed their art in conjunction with the sites they chose. Some artists chose to work in direct opposition to nature and destroyed or greatly altered environments with their sculpture. Others worked more sensitively and some actually sought out wasted areas for artistic reclamation. Even though Earthworks did not receive a great deal of attention in the late 1970's and early 1980's there were still a number of artists who continued to work in this genre. Andy Goldsworthy in particular has gained international fame in the 1990's pursuing his personal interpretation of Earthworks.

Current manifestations of Earthworks are sometimes inextricable from environmental issues, and are often designed with this purpose in mind. There are some highly charged social and political issues surrounding the purposes and parameters of almost any kind of intervention in the landscape, including Earthworks. While some Earthworks artists do see themselves as

environmental activists, others clearly do not. Some artists contend that environmental art need not even be manifested in an object, that a social and moral function may be served by an artist participating in a process which benefits the environment.

It is my contention, however, specifically from an educational perspective, that an artist produces art, and that a visual artist or sculptor produces objects which may be seen. I will show that Earthworks sculpture belongs to a long tradition of form and aesthetics and will trace its heritage from Rodin to the present. I will contrast my view with that of others, particularly Suzi Gablik, who feels that a new aesthetic is necessary to deal with art in the environment.

Finally I will present an educational perspective on Earthworks. While I recognize the value of many forms of environmental activities which seek to heal an ailing planet, I maintain that to be educationally viable as art, art must conform to certain formal and aesthetic standards.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

During the late 1960's and early 1970's there emerged an artistic movement broadly known as "Earthworks". It has also been called "Land Art", and "Art in the Landscape". Essentially, Earthworks consisted of sculpturally based art works created in and of the landscape. The movement was led by Americans Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, and Walter De Maria, among others. Their counterparts in England were David Nash, Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long. While the movement itself received much noteriety at the time, it seemed to run its course and diminish in importance, or at least lose its cutting edge in the contemporary art scene, by the mid 1970's. In matter of fact, however, artists working within the broadly defined arena of Earthworks have not gone away at all. In the late 1980's and early 1990's several of these artists have been receiving international acclaim. The most widely recognized of these artists is Andy Goldsworthy, whose work is the focus of three major books and countless essays, articles, and exhibitions.

The term "Earthworks" conjuring up as it does, Woodstockian images or archeological digs, is, not suprisingly, subtly being replaced by more contemporary if not more accurate, labels such as "Environmental Art" or "Ecological Art".

The obvious political and social implications of such terms will be explored below. Other influences are suggested by the phrase "Art in the Landscape", acknowledging a clear debt to the field of landscape architecture and perhaps, landscape painting. For the purposes of this paper I will be using the terms Earthworks or "land art" to encompass the field under study. I will be defining the qualities inherent in Earthworks, including most of the early works as well as a large body of contemporary work.

Most, but not all, Earthworks are commonly discussed in sculptural terms. I will trace the emergence of Earthworks sculpture and discuss the parameters which allow us to consider it as valid sculpture. I will investigate historical precedents dating from the Romantic interest in landscape both in painting as well as in formal gardens, through to the advocacy of natural materials by Brancusi and successive generations of sculptors.

As contemporary Earthworks artists are predominantly British or American, I will limit my study of sculpture to the western/European sources which were most influential on their development. Specifically, I will discuss works from Rodin onwards. His departure from the salon and classical style is widely recognized as the true beginnings of modern sculpture.

I will look at artists who were immediate predecessors of the Earthworks movement, as well as the artists currently active in this area. I will also consider art forms described as

environmental or ecological art, which have commonalities with the Earthworks movement. Some environmental artists propose a new participatory aesthetic and suggest that art must become more socially and morally responsible in the face of increasing environmental destruction. There are clear parallels here to the nineteenth century dilemma faced by Morris and Ruskin. Their solutions provided the foundations for the Arts and Crafts movement. Current social and environmental conditions may be predicating a similar yearning for a simpler, more honest society, and this is being reflected in some forms of contemporary Earthworks art.

The social context of art should always be considered a relevant component of art education. While we may study the social and historical conditions which led to Impressionism or Modernism, we may fail to investigate the current social and political climate and its effects upon artists working in our own generation. A study of Jan Arp is important, but looking for links between his biomorphic forms and the earth sculptures of James Pierce would bring the lessons up to date and provide a catalyst for developing new ideas as well as reinterpreting classical themes.

Despite being difficult to navigate, the contemporary art scene should be addressed in art education. Earthworks are current, again. In addition to traditional sculptural values, they

provide an opportunity to explore environmental and ecological issues and perhaps wrestle with such problems as, "Is it permissible to kill a tree for art, or is every leaf sacred?". Earthworks provide a topical and accessible focus for sculpture, an often undernourished aspect of art education. Raw materials are, at present, still widely available and easily accessible. The study of Earthworks is also easily integrated with a variety of subjects at both the intermediate and secondary levels for those interested in such an approach. I will maintain throughout, however, that the artistic integrity of sculpture must not be compromised in pursuit of other goals. These points will be developed below in order to demonstrate the educational value and validity of including Earthworks in a visual arts program.

## Chapter 2

### Tradition and Antecedent

There are two distinct historical antecedents to contemporary Earthworks. The first includes all monuments and artifacts left in the landscape by primitive or civilized cultures, from the time of the Romans up to the present. A second antecedent is rooted in the tradition of the landscape as portrayed initially in painting, and later in formal gardens. These two influences are not mutually exclusive. Often primitive or cultural allusions were employed in eighteenth century gardens. While cultural quotations, both primitive and historical, are consciously selected and manipulated in English gardens and parks, one must also consider the less conscious effects of the landscape of an artist's homeland upon that artist. A visitor to Dorset may have quite a different reaction to seeing a standing stone circle than would a native who has lived with a great cairn on the back edge of his property for fifty years.

Britain's great contributions to landscape architecture and formal gardening (and its most singular contribution to civilization, some would suggest) originated during the eighteenth century when many great intellects were dedicated to transforming the English countryside into the "beautiful", the "sublime", and the "picturesque". The results of this period of

history are still evident today and in many ways still define the English landscape. The notions of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque are relevant in a discussion of Earthworks, even though contemporary artists may or may not be familiar with the intricacies of eighteenth century aesthetics. Inquiry into the beautiful and the sublime was given substance by Edmund Burke (1757) in his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. In this work he identified two classes of objects, which may be considered to include landscapes. Smooth, gentle and pleasing objects or vistas were thought to stimulate the instinct of self-propagation and were described as "beautiful". Objects (or views) which could produce a sense of terror through their solitude, vastness or power were thought to stimulate the instinct of self-preservation and were perceived as "sublime". Christopher Hussey (1927), in The Picturesque identified seven distinct characteristics of the sublime. The seven characteristics are: obscurity(physical and intellectual), power, privations(darkness, solitude, silence), vastness, infinity, succession, and uniformity.

It is interesting that several of these characteristics can be discovered in many examples of contemporary Earthworks. Some works, Walter De Maria's *Lightening Field*, for example, can be shown to encompass the complete set of seven characteristics and could be said therefore to be a modern evocation of the

sublime. My purpose at this point, however, is not to employ these characteristics to analyze or evaluate, but to demonstrate concepts which were incorporated in formal landscape architecture, and which also exist in many contemporary applications.

Another Englishman, Uvedale Price, felt that Burke's categories of the beautiful and the sublime were not particularly useful when classifying those things which were somewhat crude, rustic or irregular, yet were in some manner visually appealing. In his Essay on the Picturesque (1794) he described such objects as "picturesque"; like a picture. Price felt that the picturesque accounted for the sometimes irregular compositions of landscape painters who chose rustic or humble subjects which could not accurately be described as either beautiful or sublime. In the same year Richard Payne Knight published The Landscape: A Didactic Poem (1794). This work supported many of Price's ideas on the picturesque but also added an important distinction. He suggested that in addition to the objective or aesthetic qualities which produced a picturesque effect there were non-aesthetic associative elements in operation. These elements functioned on a psychological level arousing multiple associations and ideas in the observer. The placement of a Roman column, or even the suggestion of a stone circle, for example, could enhance the picturesque by evoking an ancient or mysterious air.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century landscapes and gardens were governed by the principles of the beautiful, the sublime, and especially of the picturesque. The picturesque was further developed and modified but always retained the associative elements first elucidated by Knight. Some recognition of the origins of the picturesque is important when we consider that a large number of Earthworks artists originate in England, and lived surrounded by the works of artists and landscape architects who defined the look of both the private and public environment. In Earthworks And Beyond, (1989) John Beardsley suggests, "a people's relationship to landscape is one of the most significant expressions of culture"(p.2). American and English artists have produced quite different reactions to the landscape, dictated both by the different qualities of the landscape in which they work and by the different cultural relationships and traditions which exist in the two countries. The way in which artists relate to the landscape is both personal and cultural, and can usually be traced to precedents which have been selected either consciously or unconsciously . Earthworks is indebted to precedents established both in landscape architecture as well as in the visual arts, particularly in sculpture.

I have suggested that the monuments left by prehistoric cultures in Great Britain have influenced the work of English artists. It is not merely the mysterious and powerful presence of

the stone circles, henges and monoliths which provide inspiration and produce awe, but the very nature of stone itself which continues to attract land artists. Its tactile qualities of roughness and smoothness, its mass, resistance, and sense of permanence all create a powerful and lasting impression. Of equal importance is the location and placement of these stones. While some can be shown to be related to solstices or astronomical alignments, others remain completely mysterious and open to conjecture. They remain, however, a lasting record of human ambition and spirit. Kevin Holland (1989) suggests that as humans we are continually looking for meaning and that the stones represent, "a kind of expression - a stone understanding - of inner truth. They are reflections of our own quickening search; they are monuments to the living spirit" (The Stones Remain, p.121).

Even if an artist is unable to articulate the meaning of stone as clearly as Holland, the history of stone forms and building is as inescapable as is the non-compromising nature of the stone itself. Early English works often explored the nature of honest, natural materials and respected the location or "sense of place" in which they were found. It was in fact, in conjunction with, and usually in harmony with the sense of place that works were initiated and developed. A sense of the beautiful, and more often the picturesque is evident in many of these efforts. It is not surprising that artists like Goldsworthy, for example, are very

comfortable making the picturesque into an actual picture through photography. Issues dealing with the use of photographs as a record of artistic endeavour as well as art objects themselves will be addressed below.

If early English land art reflected the qualities of the picturesque, early American land art reflected much more a sense of the sublime. The cultural history of the United States's relationship to the landscape is more one of domination than of appreciation. For the most part it has not been a matter of marvelling at the medicine wheels and earth mounds created by her native ancestors, but a matter of conquest and expansion. The pioneering philosophy and vastness of the country made her resources seem inexhaustable.

Americans are afflicted with a profound ambivalence toward nature, manifest in a seemingly irresolvable conflict between the impulse to exploit the landscape with ever more sophisticated tools and the urge to nurture and protect such little as is left of the natural world, not only for its beauty, but also for its morally and spiritually uplifting effect."(Beardsley, 1989,p.10)

While moral and spiritual ideas do underpin the work of many contemporary artists, early American Earthworks artists quite clearly did not concern themselves with these issues. Heizer and Smithson in particular demonstrated little concern for the

sites in which they worked and exploited the landscape in the American tradition noted above. Heizer has been accused of destroying natural formations and disrupting subtle life cycles with his pneumatic drills, explosives, huge cranes and earthmovers. The grand scale and apparent emptiness of the locations which serve as his inspiration have produced work quite alien to English sentiments. The metaphysical content of his work has prompted some comparisons to abstract expressionism. Heizer himself, however, denies that he has actually created anything at all. His political agenda and intellectual rationalizations will be analyzed in a later chapter. The important distinction here is that early American and English land artists operated under quite different conditions and with quite different assumptions.

Despite differences, however, there are enough similarities to recognize both groups of artists as sharing the same genre of art. In the last decade the English vision and style has gained international recognition and acceptance. In the past five or six years the Americans have created an ecological vision of socially responsible and environmentally sensitive art which contributes an entirely new perspective to Earthworks and raises important issues which will be addressed below. Both groups, however, are indebted to the great changes which took place in twentieth century sculpture; from Rodin, Matisse and Brancusi, through to

Picasso, Moore and Noguchi. These artists changed the face of sculpture and opened avenues for the emergence and validation of Earthworks sculpture.

## Chapter 3

### Rodin to Picasso: New Forms

Beardsley (1989) quite correctly identifies Brancusi and Noguchi as the immediate twentieth century forefathers of Earthworks sculpture. There are, however, several other artists whose work bears a direct relationship to the development of land art. Both Rodin and Picasso were important catalysts in the process of broadening the vocabulary and content of twentieth century sculpture. Other artists such as Matisse, Epstein, Moore, and Hepworth also contributed in this area and should be recognized for their influence on future generations of sculptors, both those working in the studio and in the landscape.

Although Rodin's important work began in the nineteenth century, the impact of his work was to influence sculptors well into the next century. The *Age of Bronze* (1877) marked the first serious break from the salon style of sculpture which had been consistently and uniformly practiced almost since the Renaissance. By breaking the mold, so to speak, he began the exploration of new ideas and new territory which has continued unabated to this day. Even though Rodin himself was never actually able to break entirely free from the dramatic and sometimes overwrought literary content of salon style sculpture,

he was nevertheless, a major influence on twentieth century sculpture.

Rilke's (1903) monograph on Rodin was the first to delineate some of the changes which Rodin had introduced to sculpture. Central to the idea of modern sculpture is that an object could exist as a "thing" or object entirely for itself alone, independent of association or precedent. Whereas salon sculpture had usually fulfilled some moral, public, or commercial function, *The Age of Bronze* was independent of these constraints. While modern sculpture may still choose to be moral, public or referential, Rodin was the first to suggest that sculptors could choose to express their own feelings rather than public sentiments or those of their patrons. In many ways Rodin was attempting to make up ground which had already been won by impressionist painters. By the late nineteenth century painters had already gained an enormous amount of freedom from the literary and romantic style of their predecessors, as well as from the meticulous attention to detail which had produced the Renaissance version of reality. Sculpture had not won this freedom, nor would it fully do so until Brancusi. Rodin, however, "rescued sculpture from the superficial, cheap and comfortable metier of nineteenth century salon sculpture" (Tucker, 1989, p.13).

In addition to being a significant catalyst for change, there are other aspects of Rodin's work which have a direct relationship with Earthworks. In Rodin, Rilke (1903) recognized the importance of placement, of location, the sense of place as it is often described today. He suggested that sculpture had to be properly and sensibly fitted into the space that surrounded it. This is an important consideration, but an almost unspoken presumption in Earthworks, as well as other forms of contemporary public art. At the time, however, this was not always the case. Rilke also suggested that the significance of a sculpture was completely dependent upon its relationship to the environment in which it was placed. Although it would be inaccurate to judge all of Rodin's work a success based upon this principle, it is, nevertheless, a principle which is sound and applicable to current Earthworks. There are, of course, cases where disharmony is the goal of the artist, evident in the sometimes violent attacks on the landscape by artists in the late 1960's.

The whole notion of a sense of place is central to any discussion of Earthworks. This idea has been variously twisted in accord with the artists who wish to employ it. The ideal environment for land art, I would suggest, is on the land, in the landscape. Others feel that galleries and museums are equally appropriate venues. The important point is, as Rilke suggests,

that the sculptural environment can be as significant as the sculpture itself. Some sources suggest that Rodin felt the studio to be the ideal environment for viewing his sculpture. If this is the case it was certainly not as practised a belief as it was for Brancusi. Nevertheless, Rodin's work began the process of defining a sculptor's ownership of his own work, its conception, its forms, its materials, and its final placement.

While these last four elements are taken for granted in our own epoch, we must recognize the precedents which Rodin established over a century ago. Although *The Kiss* (1907) by Brancusi is considered to be the first fully realized "sculpture-object", Rodin's innovative and expressive use of material and surface predate predates both Brancusi and Matisse. Previously, the personal vision and passion of an artist had been severely limited by the dictates of the salon style. Emotion and sensitivity were subjugated in salon style sculpture by its pursuit of academic perfection and virtuosity. By contrast, *The Age of Bronze* was characterized by a real freedom of handling, a recognition of the "life" of the surface as well as powerful internal qualities. Rodin's response to material was one of the most important breakthroughs he was to realize. Just as large perceptual brush strokes and thickness of paint in impressionist paintings had defined a huge conceptual break from traditional procedures, so did the highly worked and vibrant surface of *The*

*Age of Bronze* signify a new physical and personal response to the medium of clay. This work is significant not only for its recognition of surface and material but for its strong statement about the responsibility of artists. By the late nineteenth century sculpture had become a highly commercialized industry with a myriad of assistants and a very formalized set of guidelines. Rodin's work paved the way for sculptors to infuse their work with their own passion, to create works independent of specific subject matter or function, and to concern themselves with material, structure and gravity as ends in themselves. This is not to suggest that Rodin's work alone was responsible for this dialogue between artist and material, only that it was seminal in this process, and that the effects of these changes have affected the entire range of western sculpture from the turn of the century to the present.

It is pertinent also to note that the forefathers of modern sculpture stressed the importance of natural materials. Even though bronze castings were made of many of Rodin's most popular pieces, it was his direct and dynamic manipulation of clay which produced the most profound effects on the process of sculpture. Brancusi's use of stone and wood is also significant and often discussed in terms of honesty and craftsmanship. It can also be seen as a direct relationship between man and the natural world, a view often emphasized in contemporary land art.

Rodin, unfortunately, was unable to sustain his level of invention and commitment to developing a completely new language for sculpture. He did, however, begin the long process which has resulted in a virtual explosion of twentieth century sculpture. Brancusi was his natural successor and the first to take the next radical step away from the nineteenth century and into the modern era.

Brancusi was undoubtedly influenced by Rodin, especially in terms of allowing the material itself to play a major role in determining final form. He was also, however, one of the first to rebel against Rodin and work in ways totally contradictory to him. One of Rodin's fundamental propositions underpinning his new vision of sculpture was that the sculptor must take control of, and be responsible for, every aspect of a sculpture. This was a commitment that he was increasingly unable to adhere to, largely due to his fame and constant commercial demand for his work. Brancusi, however, worked without assistants and advocated that it must be the artist himself who realized a piece from the first crude blows to the finished product.

Brancusi's use of natural materials, especially wood, is a direct antecedent to many forms of land art. Coming from a craft-oriented rural background, wood was a natural choice for Brancusi's sculpture. He elevated wood from a strictly decorative or functional application to the status of independent art-object.

He also elevated the practice of carving from the exclusive province of craftsmen to a wider domain of artists. Rodin's work with clay had been additive, with seemingly no outer limits or restrictions. Brancusi's carving, on the other hand, was reductive, seeking the unique and definitive final form within the material itself. While there is a suggestion that the "real" form already exists within the wood or stone, he does not express any teleological sentiments any more directly than suggesting that there is a definitive form which can be reached in a specific material, and that certain materials tend to quite naturally produce certain forms. Many contemporary artists make much more of the "natural order" and "inner truth" of materials, sometimes in an overstated and unnecessary manner, as we shall see later. It is important to recognize, however, that Brancusi disrupted the status quo of material and form that had been so restrictive to previous generations of sculptors.

Brancusi was also able to break free from traditional subject matter. The human figure, either alone or in dramatic clusters, had dominated both private and public sculpture for centuries. Brancusi had apprenticed in this style and had for several years produced portrait busts to support himself. While some traditions of the portrait bust, especially the use of a pedestal, persisted in his work, his *Maiastra* (bird), of 1911

broke free of the remaining salon restrictions concerning the human figure as subject matter.

Brancusi was probably the first to use a "found" natural object as the subject of a sculpture (a forked piece of timber in *The Sorceress* 1916), and in this sense his work is a direct antecedent to the contemporary sculpture of David Nash, and to a lesser extent Lynne Hull, who both employ naturally articulated branches in their sculpture. While differences do exist in the expressive use of these materials, the commonalities remain.

Contemporary Earthworks artists, both English and American, can be recognized to be working within one of two subsets. I will broadly identify one set as "mystics," and the other set as "pragmatists." The mystics explain their art and their inspiration in terms of spirituality, universality, and truth. Pragmatists are less concerned with questions of motivation or healing and deal more with the expressive qualities of pure form in the visible world. There is certainly overlapping between these sets, some artists hovering effectively in both zones or moving back and forth between them. For the most part, however, artists can be identified as functioning more in one mode than the other. These modes will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on contemporary artists. It is relevant here to identify Brancusi as one who would clearly fall into the pragmatist set. His increasingly abstract, and for the most part morally neutral

sculptures concerned themselves more with integrity of composition and honesty to material than to any form of enlightenment. An exception would be his *Table of Silence* (1937), in which his attempted symbolic gesture, unfortunately, did not produce a satisfying piece of sculpture. His widely recognized masterpiece *Endless Column* (1937) contains no hint of sentimentality, spirituality, or symbolism. Its placement and alignment in the landscape, however, was carefully measured. The relationship of the sculpture to its environment is a critical element in its overall success. His public art at Tirgu Jiu including *Table of Silence*, *Gate of the Kiss*, and *Endless Column* (1937) differed from previous public commissions in several important ways. It was not narrative. Only one of the sculptures portrayed human forms, and even here, in *The Gate of the Kiss*, humans were abstracted almost beyond recognition. And finally, the relationships of the sculptures to each other as well as to the landscape were an integral component of their conception. These three characteristics are increasingly evident in public art since the time of Brancusi and have certainly had an impact upon public commissions by land artists.

Picasso was another major artist to irreversibly change the face of modern sculpture. Although not primarily recognized for his contributions to sculpture, his developments in cubist collage led to his constructions of wood, paper, cardboard and found

objects. His first three-dimensional collages were extremely radical for their time, even though they could be recognized as existing within the accepted convention of relief work. Like Brancusi, Picasso eroded sculpture's dependency upon the human figure as subject matter. His *Musical Instrument* (1914) produced possibilities never before explored within the realm of sculpture. This work, combined with the seminal *Still Life with Fringe* (1914) represented wholly new forms, a completely new mode of process, and a fresh, original use of materials. His use of common objects for still life was not a protest or necessarily a reaction to more traditional subject matter, but an attempt to neutralize the importance of the subject itself, to move it closer to its sculptural status as an object.

Picasso's other important contribution to sculpture was his actual use of construction to "build" a sculpture. While building objects was common practice in the trades or the craft movement, it had no precedent in fine art or sculpture. The sculptural qualities of Picasso's early cubist paintings seem to suggest themselves as objects quite separate from the canvas. The actual constructing, however, actually developed from his collage work as suggested above. Brancusi had dabbled with construction, particularly with wood and branches, but was never satisfied with the compromises he was forced to employ in the process of assembly. Picasso, on the other hand, had no difficulty

with either the process or the apparent lack of traditional sculptural qualities inherent in his constructions. They appear almost slap-dash and are quite crudely assembled with little regard for the entire lineage of art history. They do represent, however, a direct response to the materials, a straightforward assault on perception and what Tucker (1989) describes as a "character of internal self-sufficiency"(p.72). Although he began by abstracting recognizable objects, he moved, as did Brancusi, into the creation of wholly new objects, previously unseen, except perhaps in the imagination.

Picasso's sculptural collage opened new avenues for sculptors and permitted a freedom never before experienced by artists: freedom of subject matter, freedom of materials, and freedom of process. The liberalizing effects of such freedom has had a direct impact on successive generations of artists, not excluding the current generation of land artists whose work liberally employs and exploits these freedoms to their full extent.

## Chapter 4

### Noguchi: In Tune With Nature

The American Isamu Noguchi, more than any other single sculptor, provided the foundations for the ultimate acceptance of Earthworks by the artistic community. His stone work in particular, as well as his environmental works, are the immediate predecessors of Earthworks, and in some cases coexist in the same time frame. It is interesting that he is not considered to be an Earthworks artist as such, despite the substantial amount of work he has accomplished in this area. It is not surprising, however, for Noguchi has always resisted labeling. He has moved from one style to another, and from one material to the next, always inviting new challenges. His eclecticism has proven to be one of his greatest assets and has had a profound effect not only on his own sculpture but on the sculpture of successive generations. He has always refused to follow any preconceptions about what kind of art he should produce. He works both on small, intimate and personal levels as well as on large public commissions. His designs for playgrounds and gardens, while not always accepted or realized, can be seen in retrospect to have been ahead of their time in terms of both social and aesthetic goals. His work in the landscape, his honest and direct methods of working with natural materials, and his recognition of both

spiritual and historical influences are all elements central to our current understanding of contemporary Earthworks.

In 1925 Noguchi applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship. In his letter of application he wrote, "It is my desire to view nature through nature's eyes, and ignore man as an object for special veneration" (Hunter, 1990, p.34). To view nature through "nature's eyes" sounds very much like a young man's idealism, yet Noguchi has maintained an honest and respectful relationship with nature throughout his career. For the most part his oeuvre is free from artifice and pretense, a remarkable accomplishment in itself. I believe that many Earthworks artists are also attempting to view nature through nature's eyes. A key distinction here, and one which Noguchi initially left unexpressed, is that as humans we are a part of nature and our interventions, though measured, can be as natural as the wind and rain if they are realized with sensitivity and respect. Goldsworthy's early preoccupations with ephemerality express his recognition of change as one of the central characteristics of nature. Later in his career Noguchi commented, "The deepest values are to be found in the nature of each medium. How to transform but not destroy this" (Hunter, p.123). This statement takes on an almost prophetic importance when we look at the concerns of contemporary Earthworks artists.

Indeed the "truth" of materials, and the will, talent and intelligence to resist corruption of those materials, are key concepts in understanding both Noguchi and his successors. Noguchi, having won the forementioned Guggenheim, had the good fortune of arriving in Paris in 1927 and becoming an assistant to Brancusi. Brancusi's influence is evident in shaping many of Noguchi's ideas, a reality which Noguchi openly acknowledges. He states, "Brancusi showed me the truth of materials and taught me never to decorate or paste unnatural materials onto my sculptures, to keep them undecorated like the Japanese house" (Hunter, p.35). Simplicity, even what some critics insist on as "complex simplicity" has become a trademark of Noguchi's oeuvre. His sometimes minimalist excursions have earned him both criticism and accolades, both of which he seems able to effectively ignore. When we consider Goldsworthy and Nash, both of whom have been invited to work in Japan we will further pursue the notion of the Japanese house, and some of the distinctions between art and decoration.

While Brancusi's influence was considerable, Noguchi became less interested in producing the type of pure abstractions which Brancusi was pursuing. Like Moore and Epstein his work began to reflect more passion and a stronger sense of personal meaning, conveyed largely through morphological forms and explorations. He also expressed his disenchantment with

sculpture which lacked structural integrity, and went as far as to describe such work as "cheating". His idea of sculptural cheating occurred when "things are made to subvert the natural forces of gravity as by welding, or by forms of casting which are a reproductive process"(Hunter,p.38). Both welding and to a much lesser degree casting, later became integral components of his sculpture. The subversion of the natural forces of gravity, even on a temporary basis, is a universal sculptural reality. His intentions, however, in committing to such a bold statement are defensible and relevant to the state of contemporary land art. In his earliest explorations Goldsworthy created a manifesto which dictated that he would take no tools into the landscape, that he would work with no fasteners, adhesives or binding agents other than those found in nature, and that he would use only dead or detached flora in his sculptures. He too, would make no attempt to subvert natural forces. As he became more involved in his own artwork he freely disregarded many of his earlier dictums, as did Noguchi. In both cases I believe the original intention of the artist was to seek ever purer forms of expression. One manner of realizing this goal was to seek convergence with Mother Nature by utilizing only her rules and tools. While this approach represents a credible avenue for exploration, both artists quickly realized that they were limiting their expressive potential. It is important to recognize, however, that many very satisfying and

successful sculptures were created by both artists while under the jurisdiction of "natural law". It will be interesting to discover whether or not a different order of objects is actually realized when artists truly collaborate with rather than merely manipulate the natural environment.

Even though Noguchi did subvert some of his earliest principles he remained true to his original intent in regards to casting and copying. His cast pieces were mostly of his landscape or playground designs which had originally been molded in plaster as presentations for commissioned work. His motive in reproducing them was not commercial, but rather to give a permanence to an otherwise unrealized project. His usual method was to work directly into the material of the final product, not wishing to transfer from one medium to another. The whole issue of reproduction appears in Earthworks around the use of photography. Photographs often become the art object in lieu of the actual sculpture, due to the sculpture's remote location or its imminent destruction. The photographic process must be understood and examined critically when it is employed to frame and represent sculpture, especially sculpture which is dependent upon its environment for a good deal of its meaning. Understanding the use and manipulative power of photography is another educational issue which can be explored in terms of its use in contemporary Earthworks.

Noguchi's artistic relationship to the landscape was rooted in his desire to find, "a larger, more fundamentally sculptural purpose for sculpture, a more direct expression of Man's relation to the earth and to his environment"(Hunter,p.55). We can see the awakening of Noguchi's social consciousness in this statement, and the beginning of his foray into a more public art. His first proposals for landscape projects were *Play Mountain* (1933) and *Monument to the Plough* (1935). These projects were at once abstract, socially relevant, and aesthetically pleasing, and represent early attempts to relate sculpture directly to the earth. Although heavily criticized and bluntly, even viciously rejected, both of these projects would have been hailed as visionary if they had been executed in the early 1960's. Indeed to this day we observe biomorphically shaped play areas in daycares and shopping centers which are direct applications of Noguchi's early playground designs.

Noguchi's inclination to produce socially relevant art was uncommon for sculptors in the 1930's, and remained the exception rather than the rule right through the 1970's. The ambivalent or even decidedly aggressive attitude of some sculptors towards their audience is apparent in such artists as Richard Serra, whose public works were often more about the artist than the public they were designed for. This is not to suggest that Noguchi's public works were without controversy

and resistance, only that they were at least designed with a public or social purpose in mind. Whether or not the public understood or appreciated his efforts is another matter.

In 1947 Noguchi proposed his *Sculpture to be Seen From Mars*, another huge land based sculpture which was never realized. It represented a face built up of earth mounds with a nose which was to be a full mile in length. Art produced for a celestial audience was not a new idea, of course, ancient Peruvian ground markings date back several thousand years. Noguchi did not quote such markings directly, however, as did some Earthwork artists such as Richard Long and Walter De Maria. His idea here seems almost playful rather than strictly aesthetic. I think a sense of play, even serious play, is an important element of Noguchi's success and longevity. He quotes his former mentor: "Brancusi said that when an artist stopped being a child, he would stop being an artist" (Hunter, p.57). The literature is full of references to artists who attempt to return to a childlike state of mind, to recapture an innocence in use of colour or material. Children's art is venerated for its ease of expression and honesty of execution. A sense of play is evident in some contemporary land art, and I think it is an important educational issue that students not be oppressed by the weight of art history and rigid training agendas. A sense of play, a free exploration of materials, and an equal regard both for the process and the product should

be evident in all but the most advanced and specialized art programs. Playing, exploring, building with mud, sand, clay, sticks, leaves and stones are a natural part of growing up for many children. Admittedly in our increasingly urban environment children may have less access to these resources than did children only a generation ago. This situation makes direct experience with nature even more important and provides impetus for educators to use the natural environment both as a playground and as a classroom.

In his work Noguchi made no real distinction between fine art and applied art. He recognized the aesthetic elements in craft, architecture, gardens, and utilitarian objects. By the very nature of his work he celebrated a form of pluralism or multiculturalism which is at the heart of many of today's educational issues. He is a model of the contemporary enlightened man, exhibiting diverse cultural knowledge and fusing elements which naturally lend themselves to expression and meaning. Acknowledging the existence of a universal aesthetic, but not necessarily being bound to define it, seems to be a common practice in the past few years. Even the Getty Institute has revised its original Discipline Based Art Education initiatives to recognize and include a greater variety of ethnic content. Working with natural materials and fibres can be seen as an application of universal aesthetic principles. Weaving, claywork, carving, and decorating

have all, historically, been employed in the service of both aesthetics and utility. Alerting students to the origins of pottery or carving should not be substituted or mistaken for the direct experience of material or making. Nor should the actual context of ritual artifacts be trivialized by their mere mention in an art program. The purpose should be to introduce and invite students to learn about images, materials and expression, and to encourage them to create their own artifacts of ritual or meaning. This is not a one lesson or one unit proposal, but should be one of the long term goals of a complete art program. Noguchi was a master at dealing honestly with traditional materials and methods, utilizing them rather than exploiting them to produce unique personal expressions.

It is relevant here to explore in a little more depth some of the influences characteristic of Noguchi's pluralism. There are indeed parallels between Noguchi's blended atavism, the birth of Earthworks, and the more contemporary environmental branches of land art. In each case artists have reacted to serious social change or upheaval. Throughout the course of history cycles of change have had dramatic impact upon artistic passions and philosophies. The Arts and Crafts movement began as both a social and moral reaction to industrialization. Ruskin and Morris realized that technical progress did not necessarily produce progress in social, moral or ethical arenas, and that mechanically

produced copies were not a substitute for honest hand wrought goods. Fundamental to the Arts and Crafts philosophy was the belief that "industrialization had brought with it the total destruction of purpose, sense, and life....reflected in poverty, overcrowded slums, grim factories, a dying countryside and the apotheosis of the cheap and shoddy"(Naylor, 1971,p.8).

Surprisingly Gablik did not use this reference in her book on re-enchantment for these are some of the social and moral issues which she feels truly expose the poverty of both contemporary art and society. At the end of our century however, she suggests it is not that technology is merely failing us, but that it is actually the source of our imminent destruction.

Technology, and more importantly the loss of technology, had a significant impact upon Noguchi's development. Working in post-war Japan, the complete devastation wreaked by the atomic bomb as well as the resultant loss of resources produced a measured, and perhaps logical reaction. Of this time Noguchi states, "when all the possibilities of modern technology are lost, one returns once more to basic things, to basic materials, to basic thoughts. One starts all over again, and I think it's good"(Hunter,1990,p.92). While one may start over again it would be misleading to assume that artists are able to do so without influence or recognition of the past. Noguchi proposed, "an innocent synthesis must arise from the embers of the

past"(Hunter,p.92). A sense of innocence appears as a common theme for Noguchi. It is also characteristic of many contemporary Earthworks artists who employ primitive technologies to facilitate their re-entries to "Edenesque" landscapes. I include practices of meditation and ritual as forms of primitive technology, as well as the rudimentary handling of materials. As we shall see, the demi-Edens of the psyche are fertile grounds for some artists in their search for artistic rebirth and renewal.

Noguchi, however, chose the real ground, the actual stuff of the earth, for his artistic and aesthetic renewal. His first outdoor environmental commission was the garden for the new Reader's Digest building in 1952. For this project he had to immerse himself in the rudiments of traditional Japanese gardening. He had to learn from what Hunter (1990) refers to as the "common" Uekiya, the professional Japanese gardener. Despite Hunter's apparent lack of appreciation of the intricacies, subtleties and aesthetics of Japanese gardening, it is clear that Noguchi himself did not take the knowledge and expertise of the Uekiya lightly. He openly acknowledges their lasting influence upon his work. Traditional ideas are evident in much of his oeuvre, especially in his environmental works. His use of stone in particular demonstrates traditional Japanese principles of rock selection and composition. While he acknowledges the formal limits of

composition dictated by traditional rules and principles, he employs these principles in personal and often unique configurations. In much the same fashion English artists James Pierce and Ian Hamilton Finlay operate within, and pay homage to, traditional principles of English landscape gardening, while bending or extrapolating ideas to provide new insights and meet their own expressive needs.

The UNESCO gardens, completed between 1956 and 1958, were certainly Noguchi's most celebrated works. Here he consciously employed principles of Japanese gardening and integrated them with the modernist architecture of the actual buildings in the compound. A profound change occurred, however upon the completion of these gardens and his return to New York. He abandoned his work with earth and plants and stones to create a series of abstract aluminum sculptures. At the time he wrote, "It seems absurd to be working with rocks and stones in New York, where walls of glass and steel are our horizon, and our landscape is that of boxes piled high in the air" (Hunter, p.112). His statement clearly illustrates his interest in creating art which was relevant and in tune with the time, space, and environment in which it was created. He willfully avoided membership in art movements, schools, or social crusades. His aluminum sculptures were decidedly apolitical, yet referring to his statement above, they would seem to have been

contextually relevant. They were, nevertheless, not well received and not even shown by his agent. The important issue here is that they were meaningful for Noguchi at the time he created them (and have since been reviewed in a very favourable light), and he chose to serve the artistic muse rather than a social or political sense of relevance. This is a point where he parts company with many contemporary artists who are attempting to make political statements with their art, and who deliberately juxtapose conflicting elements to illustrate ecological or environmental issues. For Noguchi the artistic concept was paramount. His sculptures were necessarily sound as art first, and possessed independence as art objects either aside from or in addition to any political, social, or economic realities.

Such is not always the case in contemporary Earthworks. Alan Sonfist, for example, used a 200 by 40 foot block in Manhattan to plant native species of trees which were to represent a pre-colonial forest. This public sculpture was titled *Time Landscape* (1965-1978) and was well received for its ability to "magnify for the public at large the urban ecological concerns of the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's" (Carpenter, 1977, p.151). This work is without a doubt a fascinating botanical project, an inspiring example of reforestation, and an extremely clever exercise in raising public awareness of the large footprint of progress. The question remains, however, "Is it art?". To preserve

some sense of what truly constitutes art versus social activism, politics or entertainment, it is necessary to evaluate a work for its artistic values before generously assigning the term art to acts and products merely because they are produced by artists. Artists can make salads and they can make their beds, and we should not assume that all an artist's activities result in the production of art (although there are artists who claim quite the opposite). I do not propose to pursue the definitive characteristics of art, but to look for characteristics which are educationally viable and defensible.

While *Time Landscape* was well received by both the politicians and the public in general, its success may be attributed to qualities imbedded more in ecological values than in artistic merit. Many may welcome the blurring of artistic borders in order to serve private, political or social agendas. The educational community, however, must not allow the blurring to occur without measured consideration and, one would hope, lively debate.

The complexity of influences in our pluralistic society make it quite impossible, and for that matter, quite unnecessary to develop a single set of guidelines for the constituents of acceptable art practice. We are at liberty, however, in most cases, to judge the success or failure of specific works based upon the ever expanding parameters of our western aesthetic principles.

Art appreciation and criticism is clearly the responsibility of our education system and should be addressed even on the most elementary levels.

The final and perhaps strongest link between Noguchi and Earthworks remains his work in, with, and upon stone. Even in this area, however, it is impossible to categorize or pigeon-hole his style or his vision. Other than scale, the most dramatic differences which occur in his stone sculptures appear in surface treatment. An obvious connection to lapidary is apparent in such works as *Bivalve* (1969) and *Walking Void 2* (1970). These works exhibit extremely smooth highly polished surfaces which as well as being aesthetically pleasing, also compliment the actual forms of the sculptures. He makes no hierarchical or aesthetic distinctions, however, between these works and those which bear raw, apparently unfinished surfaces such as *To Darkness* (1965). Even though sculptors traditionally preferred a high degree of finishing, the expressiveness of a sculpture is not diminished by a lack of smoothing or polishing if the nature of the work does not insist upon it. Non western sculptors and carvers have often demonstrated a quite opposite response to surface than that dictated by classical standards. In some cultures it is the smooth surface which appears unacceptable until it is hacked or chipped to a satisfactory coarseness. Kwakiutl carver Mungo Martin for example, commonly made "a series of fluted finishing marks on

the whole surface, eliminating the smooth surface, which he regarded as unfinished" (Hawthorne, 1979, p.7).

In some of his stone sculpture Noguchi seems to be exhibiting minimalist doctrine in his apparent lack of activity. I think it is more minimalism's debt to Zen than any desire by Noguchi to emulate a minimalist mode of expression. Zen philosophy accepts natural forms as they occur and doesn't require or advocate that they be transformed by excessive manipulation. Often placement alone is sufficient to create harmony in a given environment. Shinto philosophy also embodies a reverence for nature, maintaining that stones and trees harbour nature spirits. While the evidence of Japanese influence is readily apparent in Noguchi's oeuvre, it is his pan-cultural virtuosity which endows it with such broad appeal. He draws with equal ease, and with a lack of self-consciousness, from a variety of cultural traditions and styles. Despite the ever present temptation to plunder traditional, ethnic, or historical art (often undertaken in the name of post-modernism), Noguchi appears to have maintained both integrity and uniformity of purpose in all of his explorations. Contemporary land art should also acknowledge antecedents yet not be unduly restricted nor directly imitative. The most successful Earthworks artists maintain an honesty and a freshness to their work while breaking new ground, quoting traditional forms, or fusing elements as

diverse as poetry and stone. It is, as Noguchi reminds us, recognizing the values in the nature of the materials, and transforming without destroying this nature that is the true and honest work of a sculptor.

## Chapter 5

### Smithson, Heizer, & Long

While the actual sculptural roots of Earthworks can be traced as far back as Rodin, the true catalyst for its emergence in the late 1960's is difficult to isolate. Tucker (1974) links Earthworks with Conceptual Art. He notes the similarities between artists like Smithson and Joseph Kosuth, both of whom displayed hostility to the materialism of the art world and the creation of "precious objects". A major difference lies in the fact that while conceptual artists chose not to produce physical objects or artifacts, Earthworks artists made quite different choices. Early Earthworks artists can be seen, however, to be in opposition to the forementioned precious element, and to a lesser degree also to the de-objectification of art. While back hoe excavations and mile long gouges do not qualify as objects in the strictest sense, they may be seen traditionally in terms of reductive sculpture, albeit to a negative degree.

Tom Wolfe (1975), hip deep in all manner of conspiracy theory, suggests that Earthworks was one of many predictable reactions to the shallow veneer of abstract expressionism. He also identifies the emergence of "Earth Art" as a direct challenge to the museum/gallery system. The latter theory is still fashionable, and is being promoted by a diverse group of artists

and even some former art bureaucrats such as Mary Jane Jacob. Their opposition to the institutionalization of art is manifested in decentralizing "art places", and applies equally to urban, inner city, and traditional landscape sites. Some of their projects will be described in a later chapter.

Alan Sonfist (1983) suggests that land art is predominantly about humankind's relationship to nature, and he identifies two distinct groups of land artists. In one group are those artists working in vast spaces with bulldozers, dump trucks, and all manner of power tools. They produce work on a monumental scale, paralleling, if not mimicking, the conquest and colonization of America. The other group works on a much smaller scale and pursues the idea of cooperation and collaboration with the environment, rather than asserting power and dominance. Theirs is a much gentler and often more subtle touch upon the landscape. Sonfist believes that both groups labour within the same movement, one whose existence is a direct manifestation of "the questioning of a society by itself" (Art in the Land, 1983, preface). He further declares that Land Art is a distinctly American movement and fails to recognize similar work done by many non-American artists. Richard Long is mentioned, but Nash and Goldsworthy are completely ignored. One may take these omissions to represent a personal bias rather than mere oversight, given the international stature of both artists, even in

1983.

Historical references cited by Sonfist are drawn from essays by Joshua C. Taylor (1979) and Robert Rosenblum (1976) which address landscape painters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite these references it is clear that Sonfist considers land art to be as much a political and social manifestation as an artistic movement (and this becomes obvious in his own commissions). Some of the artists he presents have the appearance of "artists doing ecology", a notion I have already presented and will continue to analyze. Because the husband/wife team of Helen and Newton Harrison respectively paint and teach visual art, is their work on the life cycle of Sri Lankan crabs and the ecology of lagoons truly art? Is there any value in calling this art? And more central to our concerns, is there educational value in recognizing such ventures as art?

Anderson (1975) asserts that Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism provided both influence and impetus in the development of Land Art. The Minimalists in particular, he says, "were essentially concerned with reconstituting the object as art to avoid illusion, allusion, and metaphor...emphasizing the concrete physicality and spatial positioning of matter rather than matter as a referential image"(p.239). Some debts, or perhaps credits to minimalism are evident in the work of Earthwork artists, particularly the imposing physicality and importance of

placement (and the added new dimension of location).

Referentiality, however, is impossible to avoid entirely. Landscape and the materials of nature are common to everyone's experience, and meaning, whether actual or imagined is implicit in our perception of landscape. Even if we haven't visited a jungle or a desert we have certainly read about them or seen them in movies or photographs. A dense tropical environment may suggest venomous reptiles and claustrophobic anxieties, quite aside from the realities of the location. Land artists have worked both with, and in opposition to, the existing referential and metaphorical qualities of their sites, but the persistent suggestion of allusion distinctly separates their work from the Minimalists.

Beardsley (1989) offers perhaps the most balanced view on the actual emergence of Earthworks. He recognizes landscape, along with the human figure, as being the most enduring of artistic inspirations throughout history. Although interest in landscapes as a subject may have declined in popularity in the twentieth century, Beardsley remarks that, "old enthusiasms linger even in the midst of change, and little is made that does not bear some conscious or unwitting reference to the past"(p.7). It is both inevitable and appropriate that land art be compared to and at least partially evaluated in terms of its relationship to the various earth and stone works built, carved or excavated by primitive peoples. While the purpose and passion of primitive

earthworks will always remain a puzzle, the principles of their construction are, for the most part, readily apparent. Unlike some contemporary artists, Robert Smithson willfully acknowledged the influences of primitive artifacts and large stone monuments without attempting in any way to duplicate or imitate them. His life-long interest in geology was also seminal to his interest in working in the landscape and should not be underestimated in its influence upon his work. While the actual term Earthworks was officially coined by Virginia Dwan at a group exhibition in 1968, the artists/members of the movement were a diverse lot with equally diverse and varied backgrounds. Most, prior to being drawn to Earthworks, had been fully functioning artists with their own areas of interest, skill, and influences. Geology, agriculture, astronomy, biology, history, geography, masonry, liturgy, botany, and ecology are some of the more obvious influences evident in both early and later Earthworks projects. Rather than investigate each of these influences separately, it seems more sensible to look closely at some of the major contributors and their more influential works.

In the early 1960's Robert Smithson's art consisted mainly of ink drawings, paintings, and assemblage. Alloway (1983) suggests that his early sculptural work from 1964 to 1968 belongs to Minimal Art, "partly because of the way in which his later development throws retroactive light on his earlier

pieces"(p.125). Drucker (1991), while recognizing Smithson's participation in minimalism is less concerned with the sequence of his work or its seminal influences than she is with its historical significance. She feels that Smithson was a visionary actively engaged in challenging and breaking away from the aesthetics of modernity. She places him in a group which includes Robert Rauschenberg, Eva Hesse, Jasper Johns and Joseph Beuys, and suggests that his work "participates in a transition from modernity in a manner that displays an explicit intention to redefine the premises on which art practice could be predicated and interpreted"(p.xiii). The obvious question becomes, a transition to what?. Drucker is admittedly wary and unwilling to describe Smithson as a postmodern artist, and equally unwilling or unable to describe the nature of the aesthetics he developed. She writes:

Smithson's sculptural work subverts the very basis of unity...render(s) moot the conceptual categories in which a sculptural work may even be defined as an object...[and pulls] the elements of the representational norm apart into an ununifiable field of disparate parts. (p.xv)

While persistent deconstruction may indeed lead to a heightened sculptural sensitivity and a deeper understanding of our relationships to ourselves and the material world we inhabit, it may also lead to nowhere in particular.

I am not challenging Drucker's analysis as I think it is fairly accurate. I am, however, intent upon pursuing the value and place of Smithson's art in as straightforward a manner as is possible. In one of Smithson's untitled drawings from 1962 he himself writes, "Cerebral congestion, Jupiter in Aries. Cerebral hemorrhage in Aries, 561 sun in Aries"(Tsai, 1991,p.143). It is suggested from the quote above and certainly evident in Smithson's own prose that he enjoyed writing and talking about his art as much as he did actually producing the works, perhaps to a fault, perhaps to a point of cerebral congestion. In an interview with Dennis Wheeler (1969/1970) Smithson says:

When you investigate tangible, physical fact this will set up a mental experience which is like the mirror. And how I perceive this is metamorphosed through my mental state, and then I translate that mental state into a physical state. In other words, I'm not just presenting materials, there's a kind of transformation that takes place....So that it's not a return to nature; it's like a subsuming of physical properties, and then gathering them into some kind of coherence, and this coherence can be quite a wilderness that is quite fascinating at the same time. (Tsai, p. 105)

While the verity of an artist's perception of his own work may be taken for granted, the accompanying verbiage may be suspect, misleading, confusing and quite unnecessary to understanding

the work of art itself. David Finn (1989) describes the experience of a friend who was "appalled that in two major international exhibitions in Germany in 1987...that the artists needed to describe their ideas in words because their sculptures failed to speak for themselves. The sculptures without the story were, in most cases, zilch"(p.135). I would not dispute the fact that one can learn more about a sculpture and deepen one's understanding when provided with enriched factual or historical data. The point remains, however, that one must first recognize a work as sculpture before the deepening and enriching can occur. Traditionally we recognize objects in a museum, art gallery or upon some public pedestal as belonging to that class of objects we recognize as sculpture. We recognize the cues and do not require lengthy explanations of sculptural norms and forms. Land Art, however, removes some of the traditional cues and requires a slight perceptual shift in order to recognize specific sculptural properties. Once this initial shift is completed, the ensuing process of recognition, if not comprehension, can be pursued. The impact of a sculpture is dependent upon the physical, cognitive, and emotional interaction between the viewer and the work. Working with text or other knowledge may interfere, at least initially, with the honesty or purity of these interactions. One would hope that a work could speak for itself, if only to

suggest, "Look at me, I am *Sculpture*", or perhaps, "Look at me, I have some interesting aesthetic dimensions, do you not think?".

Unable to actually produce the works under consideration, I am reduced to writing both about the works and about the words that have been written about them. Four of Smithson's most significant endeavors, which will be described below, are *Asphalt Rundown* (1969), *Spiral Jetty* (1970), *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), and *Broken Circle* (1971). He was also intensely occupied with a series of *Site/Nonsite* works beginning in 1967. *Spiral Jetty*, however, remains his most celebrated and enduring work (even though presently under water). While appearing to be quite radical in 1970, it was actually one of Smithson's more conservative undertakings. There is, however, a link to conceptual art which becomes evident if one researches Smithson's own account of the project. For most viewers, and also for most writers, only the jetty in its physical manifestation is discussed. The complex allusions and references which underpin the work exist only in the minds of those who have both the access and the desire to conceptualize the entire work. One must feel a kinship or a willingness to enter fully into this type of work with an artist. This implies a degree of trust; trust that the journey will be safe, but not necessarily predictable, perhaps enriching, perhaps enlightening, but most importantly, worthwhile, having some value. It is quite natural that we are less

willing to embark upon this journey with some artists than with others. If a work draws you in, presents its strength and aesthetic qualities openly and without rhetoric, then you are much more willing to spend some time to learn, understand, and appreciate. Admittedly some works of art challenge our sensibilities from the outset. While I am not suggesting that we dismiss difficult or challenging art, I am suggesting that it conform to some standards that allow us to recognize it as art before we attempt to include it in art education programs. Such standards are determined by ministry documents as well as by regional and local consensus.

Some forms of contemporary Earthworks are clearly more accessible and not surprisingly, more commercially successful than other forms. Accessibility is not necessarily synonymous with shallow or simple but often has a good deal to do with the nature of the form itself. Successful sculpture remains dependent upon its sculptural properties more than upon its degree of difficulty in execution or its conceptual complexity. *Spiral Jetty* is after all, simply a spiral. It possesses an autonomy quite separate from the conceptual framework Smithson designed beneath it. Although decidedly unconventional in scale, material, and location, (for 1970) its sculptural status is easily recognized. The actual shape of the spiral itself is sensuous, primitive, and suggests a dynamic coiled energy. It presents well from many

perspectives and exerts its expressive intentionality upon the landscape. Metaphors abound from the uncoiling of fern shoots and other flora, to coiled insects, to the unfolding of life from the fetal position. There are obvious allusions to prehistoric tumuli and pottery decoration, as well as to the enormous primitive glyphs laboriously dug into the ground and only fully visible from the air. Symbolic references suggest a road to nowhere, turning in on itself, or galaxies spinning in space. The question arises whether the true origin of the spiral is in its innermost coil or in the stem where it attaches itself to the shore. One of the lovely paradoxes in the work is that despite the enormous amount of energy stored in the coil, it is actually composed of 3500 cubic yards of boulders and earth weighing approximately 6650 tons which, of course, render the work completely physically inert.

One of the difficulties of working with photographs of art, and to my mind a significant one, is the absence of the tactile, visceral knowledge that one can gain only from direct experience. Alloway (1983) writes:

Walking along the spiral lifts one out into the water into a breathless experience of horizontality....From this point of view the spiral is a low trail of stones and rocks resting on the water like a leaf on a stream. It is a moist and earth causeway with salt caking on the rocks and on the visitor. The landscape is openly geologic, evoking past time with

placid insistence.(p.139)

Here Alloway has allowed the sculptural qualities of the spiral, together with the environment and the materials to shape his perceptions. The autonomy of a work to create an aesthetic experience is, I believe, one of the keys not only to the success of the sculpture, but also to its durability for successive generations. Gombrich (1975) feels that the re-interpretability of a work is one of the important yet unmeasurable qualities which defines a work of art and determines its longevity. Additional information about an artist, and his or her inspiration or philosophy are valuable but secondary to the aesthetic appeal and interest created by the physical embodiment of the work.

Central to much of Smithson's work in the environment is the concept of entropy. His understanding of the natural tendency to chaos is manifest in the destructive elements of his work. *Spiral Jetty* is destructive only in the sense that it drastically altered and intruded upon the natural order of the landscape. In both *Partially Buried Woodshed* and *Asphalt Rundown*, however, Smithson introduced his own agents of chaos. The *Partially Buried Woodshed* is precisely as described. A worker in a back hoe piled dirt upon a woodshed until the main beam cracked. The cracking of the beam was considered significant and signaled to Smithson that the work was complete. The connection to Earthworks is apparent but not necessarily

obvious. He had hoped to demonstrate the destructive power of nature as much as the gravitational mass of earth, but the results were inconclusive and, I believe, not all that interesting.

Smithson, however, was pleased with the results and viewed it as both a finished work and as a work in progress. When donating the work to Kent State University he wrote, "Everything in the shed is part of the art and should not be removed. The entire work of art is subject to weathering and should be considered part of the work"(Alloway, 1983,p.137). The incorporation of time, the processes of change, and the effects of the elements upon this work are probably more significant than the work itself. The theme of a collision between a manufactured artifact and natural forces (though induced) is fertile ground for art and has been taken up by many artists since Smithson. Climate, natural decay, gravity and catastrophe are all responsible for shaping our environment despite our struggles to hold fast, and their acceptance as bonafide elements of an artist's sculptural palette can be traced back to Smithson. While time has without doubt altered, tarnished, and truncated much of our sculptural heritage, Smithson was one of the first to invite elements of time and transformation as an integral component of his sculpture. We will see this to be accepted practice when we visit many contemporary Earthworks artists.

*Asphalt Rundown* was executed in a quarry near Rome. Here Smithson used dumptrucks to pour asphalt down the side of the quarry. His efforts to imitate a lava or mud flow (another proposal) were to touch upon the primordial power and destructive potential of natural forces. His preparatory sketches also predicted that a rather interesting fan-out type of design would be produced. In reality the black blob proved to be much more interesting in its conception than in its execution. It was linked with an unrealized project which involved pouring tar through a ringed formation of sulfur. The preliminary sketches revealed a huge sunflower. These works are significant in their use and manipulation of natural elements in the landscape. His expressive and gestural use of natural materials both as his media as well as his canvas links these works as much to Abstract Expressionism as to Earthworks.

*Broken Circle* is more formally conventional than either *Asphalt Rundown* or *Partially Buried Woodshed* both in conception and execution. It is also more closely aligned with contemporary notions of land art, and establishes some criteria which set precedents still adhered to in present times. Despite the organic origins of asphalt, one would be very hard pressed to find a contemporary Earthworks artist willing to work with asphalt, to deface the landscape or to initiate an environmental disaster, even on the smallest scale. *Broken Circle*, however,

relies upon a geometrical design, represents a non-hazardous intrusion and provides a visually pleasing imprint upon the landscape.

The location of *Broken Circle* is significant both in terms of Smithson's own development and in his contribution to the Earthworks movement. In 1971 he was invited to participate in an international exhibition in the Netherlands. Rather than select a convenient, beautiful or accessible site for his project he chose to work in an abandoned sand quarry. There were as yet unrealized proposals to develop the area for recreational activities. *Broken Circle* represents Smithson's first efforts to reclaim an industrially devastated site. Reclamation through art is a popular theme in the 1990's but was a novel concept in 1971. It marked a radical departure for Smithson as many of his earlier interventions either had no value-added component or were overtly destructive. *Broken Circle* was, however, clearly an indication of the direction he wished to pursue. In 1972 and early 1973 he made proposals to two separate mining companies. In one case he proposed using earthworks to bring life back to an exhausted coal mining site. The other proposal incorporated the tailings from a major mineral operation in creating a new landscape. Both proposals could be described as being environmentally sensitive as well as socially responsible. Even though neither of these proposals was realized, important

precedents were established which would influence the directions of future Earthworks.

There is yet another aspect of *Broken Circle* which links Smithson to the contemporary scene. During the preparatory grading at the site a large glacial boulder was discovered. Beardsley (1989) recounts that Smithson was plagued by the boulder and wanted it moved. He felt it provided an unwelcome focal point for the work. It proved to be too large to be moved, however, and "Smithson grew to appreciate this boulder for its associations with prehistoric burial markers found in the area"(p.23). His initial reluctance and final rationalizations concerning the boulder led him to conclusions which foreshadow elements of contemporary practice. His resignation to the boulder's existence marks his acquiescence to the power of nature and an end to his dominate/conquest mode of working in the landscape. Also, accepting the boulder as a part of his art may have been his first truly collaborative action in dealing with nature. In the end he could not deny the boulder's right to be there. A contemporary artist, perhaps partly due to Smithson's legacy, would almost certainly integrate the formal and metaphorical qualities of the boulder in the earliest conceptions of such a work, not realize them at the end of the process as did Smithson.

The significance of Smithson's oeuvre lies in the expanded vocabulary he introduced to sculpture. His successful works are important not only in the ways they differ from traditional sculptural norms but also in the ways they are similar. Their formal sculptural qualities allow us to identify them as art, not as construction sites, despite novel treatments of scale, material and location. It is difficult to trace the awakening of Smithson's social consciousness, and equally difficult to suggest that he was an avant garde environmentalist based solely upon a handful of ecologically sensitive proposals made late in his career. It is perhaps significant that Smithson was "awakened" after actually working first hand in remote and primeval landscapes for several years. I think it unwise to underestimate the power and influence of nature upon the human psyche. Certainly one's respect for nature is not born solely upon rational thought but is also manifested upon some aspects of the sublime.

Michael Heizer embarked upon his earliest Earthworks with the clear intent of breaking formal sculptural conventions. His disdain for the influence of gallery marketing schemes, the dictates of formal aesthetics, and the manufacture of art as a commodity drove him into the Nevada desert to create a decidedly non-commercial art genre. In 1968 and 1969 he executed a series of works which operated in direct opposition to the precious object syndrome he was witnessing in mainstream

sculpture. While these works have been interpreted as modern evocations of eighteenth century sublimity, it was Heizer's intention to not actually create an emotive object at all, but to create a space totally absent of object. His notoriety was confirmed with *Double Negative* (1969), two 35 foot wide excavations in the Nevada desert, facing each other across a 50 foot deep chasm. Beardsley (1989) feels that the work provides "an experience of vastness conveyed through the arrangement of space that is compellingly distinct from the intrusive, space-occupying character of traditional monuments"(p.17). Other critics, however, were less kind, leveling an indictment not only against Heizer, but against the entire Earthworks movement. Michael Auping (1977) writes, "earth art, with very few exceptions, not only doesn't improve upon its natural environment, it destroys it"(p.16). At this point of his career the landscape was merely Heizer's medium, not necessarily a part of his message. His interest lay in developing a new sculptural syntax, not in promoting environmental awareness. His next works, however, were shaded with social and moral overtones. *Complex One* (1972), a large semi-architectural structure of concrete and earth, was initiated as a direct response to the ethical and political dilemma presented by the American involvement in Vietnam. Heizer relates:

I started making this stuff in the middle of the Vietnam

War. It looked like the world was coming to an end, at least for me. That's why I went out into the desert and started making things in dirt....When I calmed down and thought about it, I thought it was a good contribution. It wasn't materialistic, and it was spiritual mystical and oriented toward the earth.(McGill, 1990,p.11)

Like the Egyptians, Mayans and Aztecs, Heizer was attempting to continue the ancient tradition of building monuments which would outlast the culture which produced them (his father was an archeologist and no doubt fueled a young Michael's imagination). *Complex One* was the cornerstone of what was to expand to become a city. Heizer remarks:

When that final blast comes, a work like *Complex One* will be your artifact. It's going to be your art, because it's accurate and it's going to represent you. *Complex One* is designed to deflect enormous heat and enormous shock.

It's very much about the atomic age."(Auping, 1983,p.95)

He has defended his work from criticisms by ecologists by suggesting that any environmental destruction he has generated is minuscule and irrelevant compared to the ravages perpetuated by industry and war.

Heizer's most significant contribution to the new tradition of Earthworks represents a radical departure from his earlier preferences for abstract forms. It also recognizes traditional, if

not ancient, aesthetic principles and clearly representational forms. The *Effigy Tumuli* were first commissioned in 1983 and completed in 1988. These works continue the prehistoric traditions of mound building as practiced in many parts of North America. Heizer's work pays homage specifically to early American Woodland Indians who lived east of the Mississippi River between 2200 B.C. and A.D. 1500. These people built mounds that were used variously for burial, religious ceremony, and platforms for temples or houses. The *Effigy Tumuli* are earth works in the truest sense. They are large formed mounds of earth dug, piled and graded into the shapes of insects and animals indigenous to the area. The five mounds represent a water strider, a frog, a turtle, a snake and a catfish. The extrapolation of scale follows the precedents established by both Smithsonian and by Heizer's own early work, and imitates the scale used by ancestral mound builders. The *Water Strider* is 685 feet in length and rises to a maximum height of 14 feet above the surrounding landscape. The *Snake* is over 2,000 feet long. A similar snake, the *Serpent Mound* built by the Adena Culture in what is now Ohio, is 1,345 feet in length and between three and seven feet high. While the meaning or purpose of early mounds is uncertain, mythologies were developed and have been passed on through many generations. Nineteenth century Indians, according to E.G. Squire (1847), believed that the mounds had been made by a

great spirit and were designed to ensure a plentiful supply of fresh game. We cannot be certain of how accurate such reports are, or speculate on how much these myths have been altered from their original form. Indications are, however, that these mounds were linked to ritual or spiritual activity.

Although Heizer was initially reluctant to undertake the project (originally offered to Noguchi), he found himself becoming increasingly more interested despite his misgivings about producing representational art. He states, "Those mounds are part of a global, human dialogue of art, and I thought it would be worthwhile to reactivate that dialogue (McGill, p.23). His acquiescence to the figurative nature of the tumuli was complete when he realized, "The obligation was to maintain that ancient dialogue, and so I couldn't just come in with some modernist sculptural geometry"(McGill, p.23). That ancient dialogue necessarily included elements of the spiritual or supernatural. The metaphorical allusions and the fact that the completed tumuli can only be fully recognized from a heavenly perspective cannot be ignored. It would be stretching a point, however, to suggest that the construction of the tumuli was a spiritual experience for Heizer. He had completed larger works in the Nevada desert, and was competent at marshaling large work forces to execute quite complex projects. An interesting question revolves around the actual making of the mounds. Tractors,

bulldozers and other heavy duty earth moving equipment were employed by the local contracting company responsible for the actual excavating, grading and shaping of the mounds. Due to bureaucratic red tape surrounding complex joint federal funding for the project, the contractor was to take his instructions only from a state official, and was not permitted to discuss project details with the artist. Having assistants work on various aspects of a sculpture, or even completing generous portions of the work, is not without precedent in the world of sculpture. Usually, however, the assistants are artists or apprentices likely to understand or at least be sensitive to the sculptor's artistic vision. I do not intend to demean the contribution of lay workers to Heizer's work, only point out that this practice is not uncommon in large scale Earthworks. What I do question is the comparison between the two forms of making that occur in prehistoric and modern land art. While there are no records detailing the methods and circumstances of primitive mound building, it is usually assumed that such artifacts were the result of some form of communal activity, that the participants worked with their hands and with simple tools, and that their motives and understanding of the event were a part of their shared experience. My premise that the actual handling of materials is an important and influential component of the aesthetic experience of Earthworks may or may not have played a role in the ritual. We

do assume that primitive people, people who rely directly upon the land for sustenance, have a certain reverence for that land. It is impossible to determine whether or not this romantic western notion is operative in the case of the tumuli. It is equally difficult to ascertain whether or not the finished mounds provided spiritual or aesthetic satisfaction for those who laboured upon them. If, however, a temple or chief's house was placed upon a mound, there would likely be an accompanying significance to that act. Similarly, if mounds were used as burial sites there would likely be specific spiritual significance inferred and embodied in that act.

What, one may ask, is the significance of Heizer's work outside of its formal aesthetics and obvious historical allusions. Does it represent a misappropriation of sacred subject matter, or is it indeed a successful attempt to reopen the dialogue Heizer alluded to earlier? Does the fact that Heizer conceptualized and directed the work but did not actually move the earth in any way compromise the integrity of the work, or does the success of the work and its public acceptance render such questions moot?

Heizer is important to the movement of Earthworks in that he not only established some of the aesthetic precedents over twenty-five years ago, but has continued to work actively on large scale environmental projects throughout his career. He is the living link between the early Earthworks movement and a new

generation of artists making their marks upon the landscape. While many contemporary artists have chosen quite different approaches to the earth, Heizer's work has helped to provide credibility for Earthworks whether soil or sod, grand or diminutive. It is also significant that the *Effigy Tumuli* received federal funds from the Abandoned Mined Lands Reclamation Project. The highly acidic soil in the area was neutralized with lime and seeded with indigenous grasses. Heizer considered the new growth vegetation as an important part of his palette. Despite the apparent spiritual component of the tumuli Heizer could not be placed with artists who seek spiritual enlightenment either for inspiration or from their completed art. Nor can he be considered to be standing squarely in the ranks of the environmentalist group. McGill (1990) reports that:

Heizer dismisses as "frivolous" the idea of "reclamation art" collaborations between artists and mining companies that have been pursued by a number of contemporary artists in recent years, and says he undertook the *Effigy Tumuli* purely for the possibilities it offered him as a work of art.(p.35)

I find these comments most refreshing in light of the many artists who consider their art to be something other than art, or something as well as art, or art in the service of the social or the political or other non-aesthetic domains. I don't doubt that

Heizer feels a sense of personal satisfaction knowing that he has made a positive contribution to the environment. Of at least equal importance, he has remained loyal to the artistic muse and thereby, I believe, been able to produce an honest and successful artistic statement. There are important ramifications of establishing priorities in art education. Art must be taught first and foremost as art, not as sociology, archeology or ecology. Contextual art education is appropriate and quite necessary due to the ever decreasing time allotments for art in our schools, but this need not preclude the teaching of the basic skills, concepts and vocabulary of visual art. Developing political or moral statements with art can only be successful if students/artists first possess the appropriate tools and knowledge.

Another major contributor to our current concept of Earthworks is Englishman Richard Long. While not categorically included in the Earthworks movement, Long and his countrymen Hamish Fulton, David Nash, James Pierce, Andy Goldsworthy, and Scotsman Ian Hamilton Finlay were producing art in the landscape during the late 1960's and early 1970's. We will be looking more closely at these artists, particularly Goldsworthy, and some of his more recent works. There is, however, a significant difference between the manner in which this group of Britons entered the landscape and that of their American contemporaries. Their interventions were light of touch, often

barely discernible, quite in contrast to the large scale disruptions initiated by Heizer and Smithson. Fulton has remarked, "I feel the three artists you have mentioned [Smithson, Heizer, De Maria] use the landscape without...any sense of respect for it...I see their art as a continuation of Manifest Destiny...the so-called 'heroic conquering' of nature" (Beardsley, 1989, p.44). Contrary to the heroic conqueror, Beardsley feels that the operative English sensibility here finds its nearest antecedent in the life and work of William Wordsworth, "with his physical ramblings through the landscape of the Lake District and his poetic musings on the same" (p.41). It appears that both history and the nature of the landscape itself have had an effect upon the type of art created by English and American land artists.

Long began producing geometrical stone shapes and designs as early as 1967. By 1969 he was making "the ramble" or "the walk" his main form of sculpture. His walks often constituted geometric designs upon the countryside. Using local maps he marks out the route and pattern he wishes to travel. He then walks the route as accurately as possible, keeping notes, times, and points of interest. The walk itself is considered the art, and the map and notes the artifact or visual record of the activity. Often along the route he will make markers, usually from stones, piled, laid in lines, or stood on their ends. He also makes extensive use of photography to record his art, but is quite clear

that the photographs are not a part of the art itself. While not overtly political or moral in nature, Long's personal feelings are often evident. In 1980 he created *Power Line Walk: From a Water Wheel to a Nuclear Power Station*, to emphasize "the relentless and potentially cataclysmic development of technology" (Beardsley, 1989,p.42). He sees the act of walking as a link with the past, as a layer or a mark laid upon the thousands of other layers of human history. The configurations and shapes he uses have remained simple; circles, squares, spirals, and straight lines. He uses these marks because of their associative and referential significance. The actual artifacts or sculpture which he creates in the landscape, while primarily providing evidence of his journey (and the metaphorical referentiality of that journey), also embody formal sculptural properties which differentiate them from their natural surroundings. While subtle, the standing stones, lines and circles belong to and refer to the ancient walls lines and monuments of prehistoric Great Britain. They also allude to grave markers and possibly most significantly for Long, the practice of putting up road markers and milestones.

Initially the notion of walking as art seems rather radical unless viewed in the context of conceptual or performance art. It begins to make more sense in terms of visual art when we look at the results of the artistic activity. It also differs from environmental or social action art in that Long, like Heizer, is

pursuing aesthetic goals first and foremost, and allowing the social or ethical ramifications fall where they may. Long can also be seen to be squarely in the camp of pragmatists rather than the mystics when following my arbitrary division of Earthworks artists. Walking is about as down to earth as one can possibly get. His preference for remote or even desolate locations tempts Fuchs (1986) to suggest that there is something romantic or poetic about his landscapes, but cautions that, "He himself tends to see the choice of place in rather practical terms, playing down as much as he can the romantic, poetic connotations"(p.43).

It is not common practice to question the source or integrity of an artist's inspiration. Sculptural forms spring from the imagination, experience, and vision of the artist, tempered by the limits of his or her chosen medium and the laws of the physical world. While we may not like or appreciate a specific sculpture, we trust that the source of the artist's vision, if not entirely sound, is at least within the boundaries of artistic license. Therefore, that an artist conceives of his work in terms of walking routes and distances should be viewed as fresh and original rather than as alien to artistic practice.

While not all of Long's oeuvre appears fresh and original he has produced a large body of successful, internationally recognized work which moves in and around traditional aesthetic norms. Once one has accepted the invitation into his conceptual

framework the work can be seen at once as stimulating, relaxing, inspiring, and completely pedestrian. Above all I am struck by the honesty of Long's work, the total lack of pretension or use of devices to seduce the viewer. The work is accessible, even simple, yet offers fertile ground for the imagination. Despite Long's protests to the contrary, Fuchs insists upon mining the poetic appeal of his work, "form and experience and memories and feelings come together, mysteriously and beyond the words of the prose-writer: so there is the intimation of poetry"(p.44).

Earlier I discussed the question of one's willingness to enter fully into a work of art, and the trust implicit in the artist/viewer relationship. My own walking experiences predispose me to appreciate both Long's vision and the physical embodiment of his experiences. I believe his motives to be pure in the sense that they are truly produced by the unencumbered interaction of artist with landscape. He remains true to his original intention in the 1960's to work in opposition to the aesthetics of the gallery generated precious object syndrome. He has also been much more steadfast than Goldsworthy, for example, in his adherence to his original vision of working only with the materials provided by the landscape, without tools, and within the natural laws of time and place. He could never be accused of producing cute or contrived exhibitions, or of manipulating nature into something other than its natural state. A powerful subtext in all of Long's

activity is his respect and reverence for the land.

Long's work unavoidably forces us to focus upon the process of creating art, and to consider the value of that process as well as the physical outcome of artistic activity. A completed canvas, song, or dramatic performance can all be considered to be the artifacts or residuals of artistic experience. Conceptual art, strictly speaking, does not require that any evidence be manufactured other than the creative act itself. I do not wish to debate the merits of conceptual art, only indicate the difficulties which it presents in an educational setting. Process, however, must be recognized as an integral component of art education. Evaluating process is extremely difficult, given class sizes and timetables, unless there are artifacts or residuals which indicate the paths a student has trodden and the problems which have been resolved. Students should realize that their whole creative process has value and that a finished product may or may not fully represent the sum total of their experience. Unfortunately we cannot grade a student solely upon her own assurance that she has undergone radical conceptual growth; we must see evidence.

One of the most compelling aspects of Long's work is that it invites us into the landscape and encourages us to use our own senses to experience both the beautiful and the sublime aspects of the natural world. If we do this with students and allow them

to appreciate first, and then create based upon their own personal experiences, we may have done more potential good for the environment than some of the more radical manifestations of environmentalism could ever hope to accomplish.

While the British ideological approach to land art may initially appear more defensible from an educational perspective (due to its less intrusive nature), the environmental issues raised by American Earthworks provide an equally valuable educational component. If the integrity of the art experience is maintained, a synthesis of the two styles is possible, and in some cases, desirable. I will explore some of the possibilities of such a union in chapter seven.

## Chapter 6

### Gablik & Goldsworthy: Two Views

Literature or commentaries on current developments in contemporary Earthworks as movement or genre are relatively scarce. Artists who work in this field are reviewed regularly in the leading art journals and magazines, have in many cases published recent monographs and have been the subject of some critical analysis (often in the form of favourable prefaces). Despite this attention only Beardsley (1989) and Sonfist (1983) have attempted to look collectively at the work of these artists, and there have been very few writers who have considered Earthworks from an educational perspective. Beardsley offers a mostly uncritical look at Earthworks artists and focuses a good deal on their impact upon landscape architecture and public monuments. Sonfist has produced what is basically a survey of artists who serve the interests of environmental awareness and social change. Suzi Gablik is the only writer who has attempted to examine land art and discuss its social implications, as well as its relationship to, in her view, the unfulfilled promise of post-modern aesthetics. While her focus is art, her concerns are ecological and environmental. Since these concerns are clearly educational issues also, it is pertinent to review her work in some detail. It should be noted that land art is only one component of

her vision of a new aesthetic realm of visual art. Her position is clearly concerned with the political, moral, and ethical significance of art in a volatile post-modern world.

While her representation of the future (and the present) may be grim, she does attack problems with a positive attitude and with hope for a better, cleaner, safer, and saner world. She expresses the potential and the possibilities inherent in art to effect social and environmental change. Her perspective on contemporary land art is unique. It expresses the spiritual, mystical components of art practice, in contrast to some of the more pragmatic approaches which I have already presented.

Gablik's vision is based upon her love of the arts and her conviction that the world is heading for imminent disaster. She thinks artists have both the ability and the responsibility to direct their talents and energy towards positive social action. I will contrast her overt political conception of land art with the more subtle, personal approach of Andy Goldsworthy.

Gablik's ideas have educational significance in that they provide a broad contextual framework for art in the curriculum. She does not separate art from other disciplines as she believes art to be an essential fibre in the fabric of contemporary society. Therefore environmental studies, ecological issues, scientific research, and other curricular areas addressing social or political issues can be dealt with or expressed in artistic terms. Certainly

many educators are already integrating the arts in meaningful ways with other curricular areas. Specific examples of successful integration will be presented later in this paper. Initially, however, it is crucial to understand how Gablik has formed her ideas and why she feels that land art has a vital role to play in the redemption of our planet.

In Has Modernism Failed (1984) and The Reenchantment of Art (1991), Gablik goes to some lengths to portray the emptiness and meaninglessness of postmodern art. Her hope for both art and the world is a spiritual rebirth, a return to myth and magic combined with a new awareness and social responsibility. She believes that art must be personal, meaningful, and ecologically sensitive. In her "back to the earth" style of philosophy she cites the works of a handful of contemporary artists who she feels are the vanguard of a new art for the next century. Goldsworthy is one of these artists. While there is certainly common ground shared by Gablik and Goldsworthy, there are also a great many differences in the manner in which they approach art. Both offer insights and possibilities for an art which is meaningful, responsible, and environmentally sensitive.

The cover of the *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1994 proclaimed the following:

THE COMING ANARCHY: NATIONS BREAK UP UNDER THE TIDAL

FLOW OF REFUGEES FROM ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL DISASTER. AS BORDERS CRUMBLE, ANOTHER TYPE OF BOUNDARY IS ERECTED - A WALL OF DISEASE. WARS ARE FOUGHT OVER SCARCE RESOURCES, ESPECIALLY WATER, AND WAR ITSELF BECOMES CONTINUOUS WITH CRIME, AS ARMED BANDS OF STATELESS MARAUDERS CLASH WITH THE PRIVATE SECURITY FORCES OF THE ELITES. A PREVIEW OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN.

While such predictions may seem like another "Road Warrior" vehicle for Mel Gibson, or merely an alarmist diatribe, there are many who believe that the scenario described above is not only possible but inevitable. Gablik feels that there are close parallels between social dysfunction and socially dysfunctional art, and that the loss of the spiritual component in art is closely linked with the general loss of spirituality in our society. I'm sure that scenarios like those created by Robert D. Kaplan are quite plausible to Gablik. She is concerned enough to make an effort to reverse the trends and behaviors which could create a world run amok. She claims that one of the major distinctions between other historical periods and our own is that "in the past, belief and hope permeated all human activity - and art had a clear consensus behind it - our own epoch is characterized by disbelief and doubt"(Gablik, 1984,p.14). She sees modern society as being in direct opposition to the values held by most traditional societies. She itemizes secularism, individualism, bureaucracy,

and pluralism as the modernizing ideologies which have undermined our traditional sensibilities about art and left us without a coherent set of guiding principles. Rather than examining each of these ideas at this time, it is sufficient to say that Gablik is deeply concerned about the despiritualization of the world, the effects of the capitalistic marketplace, and the "tyranny of freedom" produced by pluralism. I am more interested in her solutions to our current state of affairs and the role of land art in those solutions than in arguing over how they came about. She herself states, "The question is no longer how did we get here, and why? but, where can we possibly go, and how"(Gablik, 1991,p.3)?

As noted above, Gablik feels that our entire culture is in crisis, not just our artistic sensibilities. She examines our emotional, psychological, ethical, and spiritual lives in light of our social and cultural conditioning, and notes that we model ourselves and our world view on the beliefs and values of our culture. If, however, things go awry in our cultural model, she reasons, so we become disordered in exactly the same manner on personal and social levels. She feels that our western culture has become dysfunctional and that we, as persons, are following a similar pattern that will lead us all to ruin. The challenge, as she sees it, is to change or resist the dominant paradigm in which we currently exist, and adopt a new philosophical framework which

challenges some of the basic assumptions on which modern western society is built. Specifically, she wants to undermine the consumeristic constructs in which we work and play. She wants to reopen our sensitivity to moral and spiritual issues, and she wants to examine the role of art and artists in accelerating these processes.

In pursuit of these goals I think caution should be encouraged. Enthusiasm can share borderlines with fanaticism and sometimes an overzealous advocate can turn potential converts away rather than bring them into the fold. Gablik is aware of this phenomenon, but boldly challenges it on several occasions. She even suggests that for those who cannot take her discussion seriously, "the limousine stops at the Ritz" (1991,p.58). I think that many might accept this invitation, especially when we realize that she has shunned automobiles completely and is riding a "great ancestral tortoise through some vertiginous country"(1991. p.58). Certainly there are things to be said for both modes of travel, and I believe that travel options are central to this discussion. I will not criticize Gablik further for her enthusiasm or her commitment to her ideals, but I will question her method of presentation and some of her assumptions about the most productive manner in which to reach her goals. The metaphor of travel is, I think, an apt one, and we should recognize that there may be several routes to the same

destination. This idea will be developed more fully in the discussion of Andy Goldsworthy's work.

New ideas are usually developed either in harmony with or in opposition to earlier ideas. Gablik suggests that we need to develop a completely new form of aesthetics which includes a subtext of social responsibility, and which shifts the focus from objects to relationships. Her ideas have been developed in response to her disapproval of modernist aesthetics in which anti-social individualism was the operative mode for many artists, especially painters and sculptors. It would be difficult for her to accept many of the early Earthworks artists or condone their single-minded interventions in the landscape. Contrary to the solitary heroic gesture, her emerging idea of aesthetics involves a community participation component. It bears little relationship to traditional aesthetic principles such as individuality, originality and form. She feels that "exalted" individualism has no place in her new aesthetics since it does not offer a creative response to the needs of the planet. By denigrating more formalized notions of aesthetics, and offering little of real substance in exchange, she may inadvertently be overlooking the essence and nature of the creative spirit. Now, more than ever, we need creative solutions to our social ills. Organized action can certainly be a component of the healing process, but we must still recognize and utilize the power of unique, individual, creative thought. It is

from these seeds that plans, programs, and responsible action can be germinated.

Fundamental to Gablik's arguments is the assumption that it is both desirable and possible to forge a new set of aesthetic principles to lead us into the twenty-first century. She is generous in allowing for the inclusion of both traditional mediums and a new social or participatory genre of public art. She celebrates equally artists working with pigment, stone, wood, brick and fabric. While Gablik envisions her notion of participatory aesthetics developing through community action as well as some form of mythic ritual, she isn't clear on where spirituality and the laying of sidewalks merge. Others have taken a more pragmatic approach to achieving similar goals. One such artist/activist is "Culture in Action" curator Mary Jane Jacob. While Gablik's primary adversaries are the bureaucrats of commerce and the purveyors of existentialist atheism, Jacobs has developed her work fundamentally in opposition to the institutionalization of art by the museum system. She left her position as curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles to try to bring art closer to real life as she understands it. She is attempting to get away from the "institutional white-box vacuum" (Jacob, 1994,p.16). Her work has produced site specific work as well as community based interactive projects which address social issues in specific communities. One of her endeavors produced the

Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group which worked together on local gardening projects. Gardening, of course, has already been linked directly to English sensibilities and their ideas of what a landscape and landscape art should look like. Jacob, however, considers the activity of gardening itself as perhaps the most significant component of a new communal art form. She believes that both interaction and dialogue can stand on their own as art. Even though her projects have provided ample opportunities for more ephemeral or conceptual works, and despite her efforts to shift emphasis more towards relationships and away from objects, participants have still chosen to embody their ideas in some kind of physical form. "What I found interesting in undertaking 'Culture in Action' is that for all the radical propositions offered - defending the idea that there may, in the end, be nothing to see - even with all that latitude and no gallery to fill, the artists and their collaborators still chose to make art works"(1994,p.51). Undeniably there is a satisfaction which comes from producing form, birthing an object into existence. The attendant pleasure of being able to see and touch the fruit of one's labour in no way devalues or replaces the significance of the actual experience of art making, but recognizes the reality of our culture and its social and aesthetic norms.

It appears from Jacob's study that traditional aesthetic sensibilities may be extremely difficult to undo. Environmental or

socially responsible art certainly has a place and an important role to play in society, but surely not all art should be so single minded. Nor should all community based projects be necessarily linked to visual art merely because a former art curator is at the helm. A long battle has been fought in Vancouver by the Strathcona Community Garden Society. As well as endless bureaucratic red tape from city hall they fought to reclaim a few acres of mud from:

the long-buried cement blocks and rusted machine parts of its days as a landfill site; from the hookers and johns who leave condoms scattered among the blackberry bushes; from the drifters and junkies whose bottles and needles show up every morning; from the garbage left by people who think it is still a dump; from the rats feasting on waste from the food wholesalers of Malkin Avenue.(Sinclair, 1994,p.7)

The perseverance and determination of the Strathcona community to not only reclaim and beautify this area, but also to utilize it to allow low income families to grow their own vegetables, represents an effort far more encompassing than that described by either Jacob or Gablik. Yet at no time in the reporting of the project did any of the directors or participants refer to their efforts as art. I do not see the value of linking such communal activity with visual art. It would be understandable to

consider certain aesthetic elements when designing a garden, but there is really no justification in attempts to re-define those elements in the service of vague new age notions.

It is difficult to find fault with Gablik's motivation for championing Reenchantment as it "refers to that change in the general social mood toward a new pragmatic idealism and a more integrated value system that brings head and heart together in an ethic of care, as part of the healing of the world" (1991,p.11). At one point she states that her ecological perspective does not replace the aesthetic, but goes on to say that it attempts to reformulate its meaning and purpose within the aesthetic model. I don't think she has quite made up her mind about what she needs to keep and what she should throw away. She hopes that her new ecological participatory aesthetics can "redress the lack of concern, within the aesthetic model, for issues of context or social responsibility"(1991,p.8). My question at this point is whether or not aesthetics should or *can* demonstrate concern for issues of context or social responsibility.

Many would agree that it is appropriate to review our present aesthetic ideology to discover whether it is still relevant in our current social and political climate. Both Scruton (1979) and Redfern (1986) suggest taking a second look at aesthetics, but not the elimination of our present standards and points of reference. Gablik (1984) grumbles about the negative effects of

pluralism because she feels it puts us in a situation where "anything goes", no real standards exist, and "the lines between what is acceptable as art and what is unacceptable no longer exist"(p.75). She also suggests that, "perhaps we can go forward from the point we have reached by also going back, with a new knowledge of how form, structure, and authority sustain the spirit and enable us to live our lives with more vision"(p.128). On the one hand she recognizes the value of the tension between freedom and restraint, and the importance of structure and form, yet suggests in The Reenchantment of Art (1991) that a new aesthetics should be developed free from such conventions and operate more within the principles of conceptual art. The aesthetics of conceptual art, I would suggest, are much less definitive and much more likely to threaten art with an imprint of meaninglessness than any other form of aesthetics that she might imagine.

Gablik repeatedly returns to issues of spirituality in her books. She never actually addresses religion as such but dresses her faith and names her chapters with New Age style descriptors such as "Learning to Dream, The Remythologizing of Consciousness"(1991,p.41). The chapter so titled opens with quotes from Joseph Beuys and Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda is receiving wisdom from Don Juan about the deep sense of magic and mystery of which we are all part. He admits, however, that

some people have a great deal of difficulty getting underneath the surface, while other people can do it with total ease. Some of these "other" people of course, have ingested a few peyote buttons to help them under. Gablik goes on to describe the winter solstice ritual enacted by Chicago artist Fern Shaffer, apparently as an example of someone who can effectively "get under" normal levels of consciousness, and create art at the same time. Shaffer is shown on the cover of The Reenchantment of Art, dressed in an extraordinary costume and headdress, standing among equally extraordinary ice forms by the side of Lake Michigan. In the text we learn that the temperature was thirty-five degrees below zero with a windchill factor of minus eighty degrees. Moving very slowly, at five o'clock in the morning Shaffer washed some crystals in the lake. One cannot help but be impressed upon reading about this decidedly unusual ritual. One also cannot help but wonder about the effects of using Shaffer as the cover story for this book. Gablik must fully realize that it is an extreme and provocative choice and could alienate her from some of her audience who might think this to be a very strange type of art indeed, and others who will unquestionably be of the opinion that it is not art at all.

Clearly, however, it was the experience that was significant for Shaffer, not that her crystals were particularly dirty. Upon reading about her ceremony I was impressed, as mentioned

above, by Shaffer's determination, the will to actually act upon her ideas despite the overwhelming number of reasons not to, how different she was from me, and in an odd way, how similar. For me, the significance was imbedded in the power of ritual and the overwhelming sense of time and place which can only be understood in terms of direct experience. The photographs and the words are poor ambassadors for the actual experience. This is where Shaffer and I share common ground. She writes, "An ancient rhythm takes over; time does not exist anymore"(1991, p.42). This need not have anything at all to do with magic, myth or shamanism. This may have everything to do with working with your hands and being immersed in nature.

Gablik's view of Shaffer's ritual I find quite meddlesome and overwrought:

At the edge of a frozen lake a woman dances herself into a visionary state. She wears an extraordinary garment of raffia and string that transforms her into the supernatural being she is impersonating. Her presence in the landscape is like a numinous symbol of wings and flight, signifying the possibility of transition into another mode of being - the freedom to change situations, to abolish a petrified, or blocked, system of conditioning. (1991,p.42)

Far from whirling and dancing herself into a visionary state Shaffer herself has described her movements as slow and

methodical. I also have difficulty with the use of "transforming" and "impersonating" in the same sentence. My point is only that working directly in and with nature need not be anything mystical or other worldly, it may in fact, be one of the most "grounded", most decidedly "real" experiences one can have.

Gablik suggests that magic clothes such as worn by Shaffer can lure spirits and serve as a means for entering alternative states of consciousness. She mourns the fact that we are without a "sacred wardrobe", a "cap of eagle and owl feathers...a cloak adorned with ribbons and stuffed snakes"(p.43), that would allow us to enter into a visionary state of "dreamtime". She also makes several references to Native Indian myth and ritual. One must wonder about the appropriateness of such quests for those of us with our intact western sensibilities. We must also be aware of the harrowing political incorrectness of such cultural appropriation.

There are, however, approaches to personal and collective transformation which revolve more around one's own inner life and collected experience. Peter London (1989) not only explores the power of transformational art experiences, he provides guidelines which assist people to discover more about themselves and the world. While he recognizes the significance and beauty of native North American Indian myth and ritual he does not prescribe it as a necessary prerequisite for enlightenment:

We need not hold to the Indian cosmology if that is inconsistent with our own. We needn't go off into the forests and wait for signs and voices in order to transform the function of art from decoration and the pursuit of only beauty to art as the pursuit of empowerment, wisdom, and wholeness. Empowerment, wisdom and wholeness are not intrinsic only to Indian views of reality and practice."(p.13)

I think we can hold London's goals of empowerment, wisdom, and wholeness to be congruent with Gablik's quest for vision, spirituality and healing. The difference lies in their approaches. Gablik (1991) feels that "in order to initiate healing we have to find ways of effecting a release of archetypal memory that predates the loss of our integration with nature"(p.43). Obviously she is implying that it is necessary to somehow disconnect oneself from the staggering number of twentieth century distractions if one is ever to experience or discover different levels of consciousness.

London's approach is far more pragmatic and revolves around a series of creative encounters which use art as an instrument of personal transformation. It should be noted that London's professed goals are no less sweeping than Gablik's, but his methodology is practical, proven and accessible to a wide and varied audience. His encounters include shared drawings or "visual dialogs", the making of portrait masks to discover other

images of oneself, exploration of the balance of yin and yang, guided imagery, and work with "forbidden" colours and feelings. He also provides guiding questions and discussions to assist his groups in processing what they have learned about themselves, others, and the world around them. It is a slow, respectful yet challenging collaboration, a journey that seeks understanding, wholeness and healing.

Gablik encourages us to foster our "psychic mobility", and makes references to ritual, drumming, monotonous chanting, and repetitive movements as a "sure way to make a direct hit on this "dreaming" aspect of the psyche"(1991,p.47). I don't believe, as she suggests, that people are unwilling to enter visionary states such as those produced by the activities mentioned above because "they fear it will draw them away from the world of modern consciousness, fixing them in archaic states that are unsuitable to contemporary life"(p.47), but that they possess a natural and measured reluctance to enter carelessly into practices completely foreign to their belief systems. I feel quite certain that a lifestyle of drumming, monotonous chanting, repetitive movements, and all of the related litany are not appropriate for me. Gablik should concede that there are many avenues to enlightenment and not dismiss such criticisms as "cowboy arrogance toward the magical, mythological and

feminine modes that are unacceptable to rational patriarchal consciousness, which believes only in surface reality"(p.44).

The environmentalist slogan of "think globally, act locally" is also appropriate on a personal level. I agree with Gablik that personal change and transformation must provide the impetus for change on broader social levels. People must change on the inside before they can change on the outside, and in turn have a positive effect on their environments. The questions remain: "How do we do it?", "How do we teach it?"and "Who do we trust to show us the way?". Gablik (1991) uses New York artist Jos. A. Smith as another example of an artist who effectively combines art, ritual, shamanism, "psychic mobility", and trance as an avenue into the unconscious. Smith uses non-drug-induced techniques ('Just Say NO') for altering consciousness, in combination with, "Jain meditation, practices from the martial arts and visualizing techniques learned from the Nyingma Order of Tibetan Buddhism"(1991,p.48). Smith describes the *Priest of Dark Flight* whom he encountered during one of his shamanistic journeys:

The first time I saw *Guardian of the Deepest Gate* it was standing on a mandala that had a continuously shifting and changing image. It held a shield made of twisted roots that formed a mouth. The mouth was stretched open and it was screaming in an endless stream of sound that was pain and

anger and fear all intertwined. I heard a voice that seemed to come from no particular direction saying, "This is the guardian of the deepest gate." I knew without being told that at some point I have to pass it. When I do, I will be on a level of mind that I have never experienced, a totally different world. It obviously entails another death beyond the very realistic one I experience when I enter a deep trance. (1991,p.49)

While I have no doubts that, as Gablik points out, these visions feel totally and even terrifyingly real to Smith, I remain unsure of how this "ancient form of consciousness" fulfills any social, aesthetic, or ecological imperative. More to the point however, is that I question Mr. Smith's mental health. The line between sanity and psychosis, even self-imposed psychosis, can be alarmingly thin. Psychic dabbling in the "sub", "un", or "pre" conscious should not be undertaken as if it were merely mixing colours on a palette. If this is the breed of artist Gablik chooses to champion her new aesthetics I think we would be advised to choose someone else to lead us into the future. Gablik also profiles other less radical artists such as Goldsworthy, Murray Schafer and Richard Rosenblum to illustrate her ideas. It is through the work of Goldsworthy in particular that I wish to examine other modes of working in harmony both within oneself and within nature.

Goldsworthy has received widespread recognition in the

past four or five years. He has, however, been developing his ideas and methods since approximately 1976. His first exposure to a wide American audience came with the publishing of Andy Goldsworthy: A Collaboration with Nature (1991), a full colour photographic survey of many of his pieces. The use of the word collaboration is significant in several ways. It suggests at once a respect for nature as well as a degree of humility. He has resisted the temptation to impose his will upon the environment to demonstrate his power or superiority. He has made every effort to de-mystify his work. He maintains a journal in which he details his thoughts, methods, successes and failures. He has sought to make his work accessible to as diverse an audience as possible. For the time being he has ceased to teach or take commissions, but his work has a great deal to offer those seeking new artistic avenues which can be personally meaningful, environmentally sensitive, and aesthetically satisfying. His sculpture has been widely praised for its sensitivity and originality. I think it is necessary, however, to look carefully and perhaps a little more critically at some of his recent work.

Goldsworthy is not the first contemporary artist to produce works which are decidedly rooted in nature, but he is rapidly becoming one of the most prolific. While Goldsworthy has not directly quoted any Earthworks artists, their work must have lent some form of validation to his own early work. For the most part,

however, he has followed his own muse and allowed nature itself to be his primary influence.

A sense of place is a dominant theme used to describe contemporary Earthworks. Beardsley (1989) suggests that such art should be designed "in conformity with nature, drawing out the best characteristics of the site, and thereby enhancing the work created upon it"(p.20). Goldsworthy's early work conformed to this paradigm almost without exception, whereas some of his later works have been created and exhibited in gallery or museum spaces.

In the frontpiece of Hand to Earth (1993), there are six statements by the artist. A brief examination of these statements will provide insights into both his completed works and his methods. Each statement is a direct quote from the period between 1980 and 1989.

#### Andy Goldsworthy At Work

The most profound thing I can say about a sculpture is how it's made.

Learning and understanding through touch and making is a simple but deeply important reason for doing my work.

I want an intimate, physical involvement with the earth. I must touch ...I take nothing out with me in the way of tools, glue or rope, preferring to explore the natural bonds and tensions that exist within the earth...Each work is a discovery.

When I began working outside, I had to establish instincts and feelings for Nature...I needed a physical link before a personal approach and relationship could be formed. I splashed in water, covered myself in mud, went barefoot and woke with the dawn.

When I'm working with materials it's not just the leaf or the stone it's the processes that are behind them that are important. That's what I'm trying to understand, not a single isolated object but nature as a whole.

I couldn't possibly try to improve on Nature. I'm only trying to understand it by an involvement in some of its processes.

I often work through the night with snow or ice, to get temperatures cold enough for things to stick together. You approach the most beautiful point, the point of greatest tension, as you move towards daybreak: the sunlight which will bring the work to life will also gradually cause it to fall apart.

His first statement places the focus squarely on the artist and the process and experience of producing a sculpture. When he works he is not thinking of a specific outcome, audience, or rational application for his work. His art is about interacting with a specific site, the materials at that site, and the effects of climate and light. His attitude removes him from the crassness of competition and commercialism and places him in a mode of direct experience with his work. He allows nature to suggest ideas which he then develops. London (1989) offers the following advice to his students, "Allow the mind to follow - not lead - the

hand"(p.17). Goldsworthy allows himself the luxury of this freedom. It has a lot to do with faith, and with hope, for that matter. He would not enter a wood thinking negatively about the day's work in front of him. There is always the imminent possibility of failure, but he considers failures to be an important part of his work and dutifully records them in his journals. The salient point is that he is out there doing, participating, and dealing in good faith with fate, nature, the elements, and himself. He feels that the manner in which we make things in the landscape is important because it creates new relationships between ourselves and nature. His honesty and lack of pretension are readily apparent in his most successful works.

Goldsworthy originally explored materials and sites with a somewhat detached naiveté, not wanting to even know the names of the leaves or flowers with which he was working. His attitude changed when he discovered that he could actually learn about the world by making art. (The educational implications of this discovery are profound.) His second statement reflects the importance of the ability to learn by touching and exploring materials, by experiencing shifts in the weather, and by observing the tensions and balances in nature. This attitude is in direct contrast to many of the ego-centric "journeys of the self" which Gablik uses as examples. He writes, "Instead of being a means of dumping my feelings or ideas, it acted as a kind of vehicle for

getting information"(1993,p.58). His understanding of nature and the elements, and his relationship to these forces, became primary influences in his work. The emphasis shifted away from the artist as the emotional centerpiece, and towards the process involved in actually making the work.

It is only a small jump from learning to education, but often a much larger leap the other way around. What we frequently endorse as education provides far too few opportunities for direct learning and understanding. Goldsworthy helps us to recognize that art is a legitimate avenue for learning, not just about art, but about the whole planet. Students can learn many more important things about a leaf by being in the woods and finding, touching, and drawing a leaf than they could by reading a grade five textbook. I'm not suggesting that textbooks are without value (except of course to those legions of ten year olds who are unable to read at "grade level"). Rob Barnes (1987) suggests that children "must use ideas from things they themselves experience at first hand. They need to handle things because...tactile experience is very important"(p.4). Working in nature provides students with an opportunity to connect art to real life and to the real world, away from the restrictive walls of the classroom. Recent research supports "context rich educational settings" (Rogoff 1990) and the appropriateness of "situated learning" (Lave & Wengen 1991). Artistic modes of

thinking, learning, and problem solving may also be considered in these terms. Art based education is becoming more widely recognized and, "Increasingly, researchers in many disciplines are coming to appreciate the significance of approaches to teaching and learning that can be seen to be central to artistic thinking and practice"(Sullivan, 1993, p.5). While Goldsworthy does not approach his art primarily from an educational perspective, his work provides a wealth of educational opportunities across many curricular areas. Some of these opportunities will be discussed in chapter seven.

Goldsworthy's third statement concerns some of the self-imposed rules or conditions which govern his work. It is of interest to note that as he has developed his style as an artist, and with that a self-consciousness in his work, more and more of his initial rules or guidelines have been compromised. After unsuccessful early attempts to approach beach sand as if it were a canvas upon which to illustrate his ideas, he decided that he no longer wished to use or unnaturally manipulate the landscape merely as a means to an end. As mentioned earlier, he developed guidelines which precluded the use tools or fasteners. When working with vegetation he insisted on using only dead or fallen materials, nothing was to be cut or pulled from living plants. Developing a "purist" approach was embarked upon as a visible demonstration of his respect for nature. Even though such

romantic sentiments would be ideologically correct in the current decade, he now rips, shreds, tears, and even removes materials from the context of their original locations. His third statement ends with the quote "each work is a discovery". One might assume that his more recent works with earth moving tractors and chainsaws have presented him with new and rich sources of discovery. On the other hand we must wonder if something has also been lost when he is removed even one step away from the actual handling of materials.

In his fourth statement Goldsworthy alludes to the physical nature of his work; the splashing about in water, smearing of mud, walking barefoot, and rising with the dawn. He describes these activities as establishing "instincts and feelings" for nature. While the physical link may be a key element to working successfully in the outdoors, it can also be recognized as an artist getting to know and understand his palette as well as his subject, and is in this way similar to more traditional forms of "indoor" art. When the muse taps Peter London on the shoulder, but he is unable to decide on material or media, he says, "I put aside any sense of urgency...to make a 'thing'...and instead put that energy to touching, seeing, smelling the heaps, piles and stacks of stuff in my studio"(1993,p.181). Becoming intimate with one's materials, and even seeking inspiration in their nature, allows the artist to get the utmost from them in terms of expression and

form. For Goldsworthy it is also a conscious act of immersing himself in his subject as well as his materials.

Taking time to attune one's senses can also serve to slow down headlong thrusts into environments which may require some delicacy. Entering a material or environment through all the senses allows the capacity for free association which Jack Shadbolt (1991) suggests "is the natural process for making art - feeling or improvising one's way into a form"(p.2). To his credit Goldsworthy has never openly stated that he is trying to get "inside" a stone or tree, but to allow the object's particular nature to suggest ideas, shapes or forms. Barnett Newman (1974) asserted that Theodore Stamos revealed "an attitude toward nature that is closer to a true communion....He redefines the pastoral experience as one of participation with the inner life of the natural phenomenon"(p.19). Goldsworthy sticks to his principles of collaboration rather than communion.

The notion of communion suggests a spirituality in nature which does not play a major role in Goldsworthy's work. Nash, however, admits to a certain reverence for the spirit of materials, especially wood. To Nash, different trees have different characters, "...an oak being defined as brutal and full of compact energy, while a birch is seen as delicate, ethereal and passive"(Adams, 1983,p.27). Both Nash and Goldsworthy have been well received in Japan. Nash particularly for his sympathetic

expression of the Shinto veneration for nature. Goldsworthy, however, believes his work is popular in Japan not for its spiritual qualities, but because "It is in the nature of the Japanese not to question the value of something which is not going to last"(Gablik, 1991,p.92). While the ephemeral quality of his art is sometimes discussed in terms of spirituality, he continues to resist attempts to mystify his work.

Goldsworthy's fifth statement again responds to the materials and processes of nature. He endeavours to understand nature as a whole and not as a series of isolated objects. He recognizes that "A rock is not independent of its surroundings....I do not take it away from the area in which I found it"(1993,p.150). He does however, as mentioned above, now remove stones, leaves, sticks, berries and even snow from their natural environments. In this manner he is actually granting these objects their independence and to a point romanticizing them out of context as art. Having large snowballs, for example, shipped to a warehouse to melt in carefully ordered rows is less about the processes of nature than about artifice and the effects of indoor heat (Glasgow 1989). The theme of this particular work was "Snowballs in Summer". The juxtaposition of elements and seasonal simulation can be considered an event of some sort, and perhaps led Goldsworthy to new discoveries or understandings, but for the most part appear to be a personal exploration that

perhaps should have remained personal.

Seasons and cycles of weather still play an important role in his art, but in his new work he has often chosen to create his own environments and exercise more and more control over natural elements. Garlake (1986) also comments on this aspect of his work when she writes about a *Hairy Birch Circle* made by Goldsworthy on Hamstead Heath, "As seen by the *Times* photographer on the Heath, it was a mysterious and eloquent object. Brought down to Convent Garden and displayed on a carpeted floor, it was dead twigs"(p.19).

Goldsworthy's sixth statement deals with the ephemeral nature of much of his work. Interestingly, this quote is from 1989, a time when he was already producing many decidedly non-ephemeral objects including leafworks, stone walls and monuments. He was, however, still producing ephemera from ice, snow and leaves. When asked by John Fowles (1987) if the transient, short-lived nature of his work worried him at all, Goldsworthy replied:

Working with nature means working on nature's terms. I cannot stop the rain falling or the stream running....These things are all part of the transient process that I cannot understand unless my touch is also transient - only so is the cycle unbroken, the process complete.(p.160)

It is fair to say that while ephemerality is no longer the dominant

theme that it was in his early work, it is still a part of his vocabulary which he uses when appropriate. He admits to a tension within himself and his work and recognizes that "It feels sometimes like being two artists, arguing with each other"(1987,p.160). He refuses now to allow art to restrict or bind him, thus explaining the gradual erosion of his early self-imposed rules. His ego now permits him to deal with nature on his own terms as an artist. One can almost visualize the scales of collaboration becoming less and less balanced.

Any discussion of ephemerality in Goldsworthy's work must consider the apparent contradictory permanence of the photograph used to record and display much of his work. He remains unconcerned about criticism in this area and feels that even though much of the energy is missing, enough meaning is still left to make the photographs worthwhile. It is important that the photographs are not considered as the art itself when they are actually the result of his art, what Yves Klein referred to as the "left-overs" from the creative process. Clearly, however, specific choices have been made when photographing selected works. Framing, representation of scale, exposure, lens distortion, film type and filters, and choices regarding light all must be considered when making a photograph. These choices determine the overall impact of the photograph and may have as much influence on a viewer as the form of the sculpture itself.

The indoor experience of an outdoor event leaves much to be desired and while enough meaning may be left, it may be quite a different meaning than that originally embedded in the sculpture. Goldsworthy encourages people to visit his actual sites, where and when possible, so that they may enjoy the full value of direct experience with a work. He claims his photographs are largely a personal record, and like his journal entries, a working record of both successes and failures. He cannot be faulted for allowing his photographs to bring him international recognition and enough money to continue his artistic pursuits, but the point must be made that looking at photographs of sculpture is quite quite different from the direct experience of three-dimensional form.

Both Goldsworthy and Gablik are concerned with raising public awareness and sensitivity to the environment. While Gablik is attempting to somehow find common threads to unite a whole generation of artists, Goldsworthy is working independently allowing his work to influence and educate. He also lectures and works with students on some of his larger commissioned projects. Gablik wants to impose a paradigm from the top down, sometimes molding and manipulating information to suit her purpose. When describing Goldsworthy's work at the North Pole, for example, she wrote of his "ritual journey into the wilderness", and called his *Touching North* "ice henge", appropriating his work to her own preoccupation with ancient myth and ritual

(1991,p.92). Far removed from such mysticism, Goldsworthy approached *Touching North* on the most down to earth and practical terms, "I will go in the winter when the snow is hard-packed and good for making snow houses"(1993,p.75).

Artists are being challenged to work in ways that are socially responsible and ecologically sensitive. Artists do have the ability and the profile to help develop awareness and sensibilities which may contribute to positive social and political action. Gablik insists that a new aesthetic is necessary to predicate positive transformation. Others, like Goldsworthy, recognize that it may be more realistic to build upon accepted formal notions of aesthetics, broadening or reframing ideas as they apply to specific situations. Both Gablik and Goldsworthy deal with hope and positive action and believe strongly enough in what they are doing to influence and provoke others into action. Clearly education must be a part of an agenda ambitious enough to forge new political or social awareness. While neither Gablik nor Goldsworthy have an educational agenda as such, their ideas are influencing both artists and educators. The following chapter will explore some of the educational implications of their work.

## Chapter 7

### Earthworks and Education

In Gablik's crusade for a morally and socially driven art practice, it is evident that an important component of her work is, and will continue to be, education. Even though she does not develop her ideas or express her theories in formal educational contexts, she does seek to alert, inform and transform all who are able to listen, look, and really hear her message. Her concepts of environmental art should be discussed in terms of their implications for art education. Earthworks, as an art form, have the potential to allow students to explore issues and ideas which are both specific to art and which also cross conventional curricular boundaries. I do not feel, however, that the role of Earthworks or any other art studies should be contingent upon fulfilling ecological or social imperatives. If issues in these areas are an integral part of the work, in its conception or execution, then of course it would not make sense to exclude them. The work must first, however, be educationally viable and defensible, and meet the formal standards of accepted art practice in the community in which it is undertaken. Provided with the proper environment and access to information, students themselves, by their very nature, will push the creative and social envelope when impassioned with a cause or an issue which can be dealt with in

terms of visual art. Educators need not provide ideologies, only the tools and the opportunities. Blandon (1987) demonstrates that students may need to be shown that they do have a voice and that they can be heard, particularly in the arena of public art. While I agree with this view I am uncomfortable with the thought that students may be employed in the service of a teacher's convictions.

For educational purposes it is necessary to look at the parameters of Earthworks in more concrete terms. My earlier definition was intentionally broad enough to include all the activities undertaken to date by artists working in this field. Earthworks are sculpturally based art works created in and of the landscape. Heizer's mounds and excavations, Smithson's jetties, Long's rambles, Goldworthy's stones, and Nash's wood sculpture, are all encompassed by this simple definition. It is necessarily broad so as not to exclude valid new works and forms which may emerge. While unwilling to limit the genre with a specific definition, Beardsley (1989) recognizes many recent developments which are at least related to Earthworks, including "poetry gardens, artist designed parks, architectural structures, and sculptures in concrete and steel, all of them in the landscape and all of them demonstrating a deliberate and insistent relationship with their settings" (p.7). Sonfist (1983) is content to define Earthworks as "art in the land" (p.ix), and is generous

enough to include artists who do not even venture into the landscape. For Gablik (1991), art in the landscape must be built upon "an ecological subtext....a recognition of the reality that all things are linked together in the cyclical processes of nature"(p.91). Each of these writers has a contribution to make and each contribution should be judged on its own merits. It becomes clear, however, that if the leading writers in this field cannot reach consensus on a definitive description of Earthworks, that it would be a mistake to attempt the same merely for the curricular convenience of educational documentation. Broad and even vague descriptors are not uncommon in Ministry of Education documents, allowing a certain amount of latitude for professional autonomy. The Elementary Fine Arts Resource Guide (1985) states, "The organization and content of [this] instruction is left to professional judgment of the teacher"(preface).

Most of the Earthworks artists mentioned above, as well as working in the landscape itself, have brought some of their sculptures indoors, with, I believe, rather mixed results. While indoor evocations of the outdoors is historically rooted in landscape painting, it becomes problematic when the very existence of a sculpture is defined by its environment and its relationship to that environment. The nature of Earthworks dictates that they be judged in their proper environment, and as is the case for all sculpture, preferably first hand. A gallery, in

this case, represents a second hand experience of an original event. Most traditional sculpture invites the viewer to view it either in conjunction with the space it occupies or in isolation from the immediate surroundings. (The possibilities of the latter, despite many artists' best intentions are usually quite remote. The huge bare room in which they park their significant forms has an inescapable sensory impact). Earthworks almost exclusively invite the viewer to view the sculpture in conjunction with its environment. Location, material, light, weather, historical and geographically significant elements, scale, and physical relationship to the viewer are all components central to the understanding and appreciation of Earthworks sculpture. The presence and the relevance of many of these outside-in gallery installations is greatly diminished through their displacement. Arguments which support such maneuvers and exploit principles of juxtaposition as *raison d'être* for placing sticks or stones on a gallery floor are sadly misguided. Contrast and juxtaposition are possibly the most overworked and undernourished design principles of the last three decades and cannot seriously be employed to rationalize poorly conceived installations. Just as digitizing an El Greco removes not only context but also its emotive content, so does the removal or reframing of an environmental work alter its expressive potential.

My opinions regarding "outside in" installations obviously reflect a personal viewpoint and are not expected to be perceived as canonical. A critical approach to Earthworks sculpture, however, should be a component of any educational program dealing with this genre. Naturally, all Earthworks are not of equal aesthetic value, nor do they all represent sound art practice. It is common in Discipline Based Art Education to provide exemplars in any given area for students to study, criticize, and emulate. This practice is relevant to Earthworks, but its benefits should not be exaggerated. It is also of value to look at less successful sculpture, to seek out and discuss personal bias and visual inconsistency. Through careful analysis of the work of others, students will be more able to turn a critical but reasoned eye upon their own work. Tollifson (1990) suggests that students should become familiar and fluent in four basic components of art criticism: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment.

Unfortunately much contemporary criticism of Earthworks has focused more on description and less upon judgment. Through no fault of his own, Goldsworthy for example, has received very little negative press. Perhaps writers are too struck by the freshness and uniqueness of his work to even consider critical judgments. Perhaps also, some critics feel that old standards do not apply to such new work. Quite to the contrary, however, traditional measures of artistic competence and

aesthetic unity can and should be applied to Goldsworthy and others who are working within the traditional principles of three-dimensional sculptural objects. Elements unique to Earthworks, and which could be considered value-added are strictly terrestrial.

The provincial government of British Columbia and the Ministry of Education have demonstrated a remarkable willingness to embrace change, more change, and even return to a pre-change status with an apparent lack of embarrassment. They have demonstrated an unnerving eagerness to mount the ideological pendulum and swing with the forces of political gravity. It is interesting to note, however, how traditional notions of visual art have persisted in the curriculum, and how slowly change is recognized or instituted in the arts. It is not difficult to anticipate resistance to the idea that a "pile of rocks" represents any sort of art or aesthetics. Earthworks, as well as other post-modern sculptural practices should be recognized, where appropriate, for their value both in society and in the curriculum. They should not, however, be divorced entirely from their historical contexts. Jones (1993) is alarmed by what he perceives as the ignorance of sculptural tradition on the one hand, and the dismantling of that tradition on the other. He fears that:

Some concepts, like solidity and tactility, have been lost altogether. Instead we substitute: space for mass; cubic for

spherical; line for axis; rigidity for plasticity; juxtaposition for transition; concavity for convexity; plane for surface; structure for form; distance for depth; and circumambiance for viewpoint. All in all we are losing the concept of sculptural object, and perhaps, the identity of sculpture itself. (1993,p.30)

His concerns appear well founded when we look at conceptual ecological art, social action art, and even some of the more ephemeral art produced by Earthworks artists. Throwing water or mud or sticks into the air and photographing the event, for example, has been offered to the public as sculpture. The absence of object from a sculptural work should signify that the work in question is not, in fact, sculpture at all. It could, of course, be argued that in the example above there were multiple arrangements and relationships of object and space, one or two being permanently documented in the photograph. Goldsworthy would remind us that this kind of sculpture, in which he has participated, reminds us of the transitory nature of all things and that time and permanence are illusory. One cannot disparage the merits of process and activity, but the educational value of split-second ephemerality is, in the end, rather lacking in substance. There are many examples of ephemera which I do recognize as sculpture despite their transient nature. In each case, however, we are provided with an object, some form to wrap our senses

around. I recognize that in education we should remain flexible and open to new developments, but we must be equally alert to empty gestures and be willing to draw the curricular line with grace and conviction.

Jones is, I believe, overstating his point. Semantics aside, I cannot seriously regard the substitution of concavity for convexity as a realistic or reasoned criticism of modern sculpture. His underlying point, however, merits consideration for its educational implications. The origins of sculpture, and its embodiment of mass, physical presence, and "objectness" should remain immutable if we are to continue to use the term "sculpture" in a meaningful manner.

There are a handful of Earthworks artists, particularly David Nash, who work within the parameters of traditional sculptural practice, yet approach their work with fresh ideas and a unique perspective on material and form. They deal with problems, some new and some old, and seek solutions which conform to notions of permanence and three dimensionality as sculptural prerequisites. Such artists would be among the first chosen to represent Earthworks to conservative official agencies. Government and ministry officials are, I believe, much more likely to accept Earthworks as art and art practice if they recognize its relationship to established art beliefs, systems, and traditions. Evaluation, too, remains a fundamental concern of

educators, and developing new value systems for "new" art is quite out of the question considering the dense bureaucratic apparatus involved in dealing with such matters.

Like Jones, Heartney (1993) has concerns with what she perceives as the "dematerialization of public art" (p.45), particularly sculpture. My concern is that Earthworks sculpture not be arbitrarily lumped together with other environmental art works that do not represent sculptural principles and practices. Gablik and Sonfist do not feel it necessary to make such distinctions. I believe it to be an important distinction however, specifically because of its educational implications.

Sculpture Chicago hosted a conference in December 1992 to discuss issues surrounding Jacob's "Culture in Action" program. The key questions raised at the conference are the same ones I am raising in terms of, "Is it art, or is it social work?" I am adding, of course, "Is it educationally appropriate and viable?". Heartney (1993) relates that at the conference:

...participating artists scornfully dismissed the imposition of artistic intentions as "imperialistic" and the consideration of aesthetic considerations as beholden to outmoded high culture values. They spoke of their desire to act as a catalyst, to give the members of the marginalized community...a voice of their own. (p.48)

When I read about charges of artistic imperialism I can't help but

think of the lyrics of John Lennon (1968) in *Revolution*, "you know we all want to change the world, but if you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain't going to make it with anyone anyhow". Certainly such charges bordering on the fanatical do not invite reasoned discussion, and would be completely ineffective and inappropriate in facilitating change in educational circles. It is astonishing to read of artists relinquishing their rights to "artistic intentions" yet still considering their work to be art. I am also suspicious of the "gift of Voice" which these artists feel they are imparting to marginalized members of the community. Heartney (1993) suggests that bringing artists into a community for short term collaborative projects "smacks of another kind of paternalism that assumes that artists with a superficial understanding of a community's needs....can supply the conceptual tools to solve its problems"(p.49). Heartney voices slightly guilty feelings about her criticism of the Culture in Action program. Like Heartney I recognize the value of increasing community awareness and involvement in public art, but I have no misgivings about criticizing programs or propositions which attempt to dismantle aesthetic systems and principles which have proven to be valuable and worthwhile. My concern is that gardening, cleaning up polluted streams, or other forms of environmental action taken up under the auspices of visual art or sculpture, not be mistaken for, or seen as a replacement for, the

traditions of Earthworks sculpture merely because they are undertaken in the landscape.

I am somewhat less unsettled when considering the relationship between Earthworks and craft. Craft represents a widely accepted practice in our art programs, particularly in the elementary grades. Craftwork has developed a great deal in the past thirty years and is widely (but not universally) accepted as legitimate art. There are Earthworks artists whose works embody a craft "feel" or appearance. Goldworthy's leafworks or Lynn Hull's bird roosts are as rooted in craft tradition as they are in sculpture. Perreault (1993) argues that craft is not sculpture. He relates that most craftspersons are bored to tears with the whole question of whether or not craft is art, and is not denying the status of craft as visual art. Aside from the more obvious differences concerning form and function however, he suggests "craft is moveable and sculpture is not; craft is meant for the home and sculpture for the plaza and the museum"(p.35). He recognizes that craft and sculpture share some rather important characteristics but insists that the two are quite separate categories of art. For educational purposes Earthworks and craft can co-exist peacefully as long as the integrity of natural materials is maintained and some sense of aesthetic standards are perpetuated. There is much, in fact, to recommend craft, including Paz's (1987) contention that "In craftsmanship there is

a continuous movement back and forth between usefulness and beauty; this back-and-forth movement has a name: pleasure"(p.58).

Another grey area appears when one considers the fact that concrete, steel and clay are all natural materials, born of the earth, but works in these mediums are not usually included in the Earthworks catalogue. This may seem problematic, especially in the case of clay which is extracted and manipulated in its natural form, and is quite literally "of the landscape". A key distinction here is that Earthworks do not usually change the nature of a material, or attempt to transform or alter it from its primeval origins. Despite manipulation the individual elements in Earthworks remain recognizable as leaf, stone, sod, or wood.

One could also question whether or not landscape architecture should be considered as art and if the built environment is a component of, or adjunct to, Earthworks. Guilfoil (1992) suggests that the environment should be considered as both subject and context whether it be natural or built, and, "Throughout the history of art, immediate environment has played a key role in determining where people get their ideas for art, the process for art making, and the value of the forms that are produced"(p.17). She describes several student bricklaying projects where students developed and designed sidewalks and pathways, and later participated in the

actual laying of bricks. In one case students made and imprinted their own clay bricks with personal icons and designs. These activities were developed in a program described as Environmental Design Education. It is quite apparent that within an Environmental Design Education program there would be a great deal of flexibility for educators to develop programs which are meaningful and responsive to the communities in which they live. The natural and built environments intersect in most communities and some may feel that working with both elements in conjunction may make the most sense. There is also a case for working with each element individually and I'm confident that teachers who recognize the value of Earthworks can be depended upon to make informed and reasonable decisions on such matters. Sullivan (1993) points out that "art education needs no overt conceptual straight-jacketing"(p.16). Educators can and should be trusted to resolve issues concerning the constituents of acceptable art practice. I believe that art teachers on the whole, are able to select activities and materials which will provide worthwhile experiences for their students.

I am not suggesting that an Earthworks unit is essential to the visual arts curriculum or that it should be mandated in any way, only that it provides a wealth of opportunities for exploration and discovery. To be accepted as curricular content there remains a need to be ever more specific regarding the aims,

materials, and activities of Earthworks. I have established the lineage of Earthworks within the sculptural tradition and feel no need to explicate the intelligence of including a sculptural component in the art curriculum. There are, however, several aspects of Earthworks which are unique in their educational applications.

Art is an appropriate avenue to acquire meaningful insight into the natural world. Barnes (1987) suggests, "The richness of nature, for instance, can be experienced through art precisely because of art's appropriateness as a way of knowing the world" (p13). While many educators recognize the aesthetic value of direct experience in the natural world, very few have produced activities to support such experiences. McCoubrey (1994) in Honouring The Environment Through Art offers 25 activities which address environmental concerns. Only two of the activities deal in any way with the natural environment. The first of these activities requires students to think of a beautiful part of the environment, sketch it, then create a watercolour poster with the title, *Help Save This Place* (p.22). The second activity is a clay mural:

- Ask the students to think about the various components of the natural environment, such as rocks, trees, waterfalls, flowers, birds, butterflies, etc., then choose one or two they would like to work with in this project.

- Give each student a slab of clay on which they are to draw an image of their chosen subjects. Create the image in relief by carving away the clay or building it up.
- Let the slabs dry, kiln fire them, glaze, stain, or paint the bisqued slabs.
- Pre-planning of the mural will be necessary to ensure that all the slabs will work together to create the mural.
- Display the mural as a representation of nature. (p.24)

I don't mean to criticize McCoubrey for the activities she has presented, only suggest that an Earthworks approach allows rocks and trees to represent themselves, not appear as a relief on a piece of clay.

In a public library copy of Andy Goldsworthy: A Collaboration With Nature (1990) I found a small card, the type used on school bulletin boards. The card was bordered in autumn colours and was covered with a leaf motif. It bore the simple inscription:

Andy Goldsworthy Revisited

by Div. 3

Maple and Aspen

Leaves

My imagination was stirred thinking of the many possible leafworks that could have been created by Div. 3, knowing the many examples which can be found in Goldsworthy's book. It is

interesting to note that Div. 3 has been involved with Earthworks at least once before and found it to be stimulating enough for a revisit. I have an intuitive feeling that Div. 3 worked and played with real leaves and that their work was more creative and more satisfying than what could be produced by the somewhat prescriptive activities suggested by McCoubrey.

McCoubrey is not alone in her failure to use the actual environment in her environmental art activities. Barnes (1987), despite his quote above, completes his entire book on teaching art without a single activity which actually takes children out into the landscape. York, Harris, and Herrington (1993) in Art and The Environment: A Sense of Place suggest four activities which have students looking at and reacting to landscape paintings and photographs. In addition to discussion questions, the following activity is presented:

Based on a student's drawing of an actual landscape or a photographic (magazine) image of a landscape, have the student re-compose the image by changing or making additions to the natural elements so that the new image reflects the student's personal attitude towards the environment. (p.54)

Again, I am using this example, not as criticism, but to demonstrate that many educators are yet to capitalize upon the expressive nature and accessibility of Earthworks sculpture.

Drawing is still the dominant mode of expression for many concepts which may be more effectively addressed through sculptural forms and explorations.

The key elements in approaching Earthworks activities are not dissimilar from those employed in other more conventional art activities. When working with new materials students should be given the opportunity to handle, manipulate, and gain an understanding of the medium. The very successful early childhood program in the Italian town of Reggio Emilia provides children "...many opportunities to discover the properties of artistic materials, in the belief that exploration is essential for emerging aesthetic awareness"(New, 1990,p.6). Every field trip planned for the Reggio Emilia pre-school classes involves art activities. Art is valued both as a process of discovery and for its expressive qualities. Children are encouraged to explore and use "symbolic representations" to express meaning and understanding of subjects as diverse as poppy fields, rain, and shadows. Petals, leaves, stones, and a variety of other found objects are carefully displayed as "memories" of field trips, acknowledging "the importance children attribute to the objects as well as the aesthetic qualities (shape, texture, color) of the objects themselves"(Gandini, 1984,p.17). The educational programs of Reggio Emilia have received international attention and have garnered further acclaim through traveling exhibitions

entitled *The Hundred Languages of Children*. Their holistic approach to art and learning does not represent new thinking, yet rarely has such an approach been so successfully realized as it has been in Reggio Emilia.

Exploration of materials is a vital component of an Earthworks activity not only for the discovery of aesthetic elements, but also for discovery of a material's expressive potential. Depending upon the location selected there will usually be a wide variety of materials for students to investigate. Leaves, bark, rotted wood, ferns, branches, stones, earth, sand, and moss all have unique tactile and organic properties. Shadbolt (1991) encourages students to use their sight, smell, and taste, and to be conscious of motion, rhythm, quality of atmosphere, and silence (p.1). Developing an awareness and appreciation of the natural environment is an integral characteristic of Earthworks art.

Providing examples of excellence for study and emulation is a common teaching approach to both drawing and painting (Smith, 1986), and can certainly be applied with equal effectiveness to Earthworks activities. As mentioned earlier, much of David Nash's sculpture exhibits traditional sculptural qualities and relationships while retaining the natural qualities and characteristics of wood. Sculptures such as *River Tunnel* (1982), *Running Table* (1978), and *Ladders* (1984), employ tree trunks and naturally articulated branches in an original and expressive

manner. One can easily recognize Nash's application of mass, texture, space, and gravity in *River Tunnel*. The illusion of flight is striking and almost comical in *Running Table*, and the narrative characteristics of *Ladders* make them appear equally prepared for animation. Students could also discuss these sculptures in terms of Jones' (1993) concepts of tactility, axis, plasticity, transition, convexity, surface, and depth (p.30). Other sculptural properties such as edge, silhouette, shape, and colour, as well as emotive content and symbolic reference, are also relevant and applicable. Nash has returned to ladder and table themes on several occasions to rework and expand upon his original ideas. I would suggest that both of these themes are very appropriate for student discussion and exploration.

Many of Goldsworthy's sculptures, such as *Balanced Rocks* (1978), *Sycamore leaves stiched together with stalks hung from a tree* (1986), and *Slate Cone* (1988), provide further exemplars for students without reliance upon an overly esoteric conceptual framework. These are sculptures which can be evaluated in terms of the sculptural properties mentioned above, yet present in a stimulating and accessible manner. I suspect that both Div. 3 above and their teacher were seduced and inspired by Goldsworthy's leafworks.

Using exemplars from artists like Goldsworthy and Nash can re-orient students to see and appreciate the aesthetic qualities

both in natural forms as well as in sculptures of their own creation. There is also value, however, in discussing works which fall below the threshold of excellence, and in recognizing, as Goldsworthy does, the lessons of failure as well as those of success.

Metacognitive skills are another desirable outcome of art lessons, and are certainly compatible with Earthworks activities. In their work in the environment students should be engaged in "reflecting on decisions and actions"(Sullivan, 1993,p.9). It is important, however, that the teacher provides the framework and the opportunity for reflection and discussion. In Reggio Emilia, "Other roles of the teacher include provoking theory building and engaging children in conversation of the sort that encourages reflection, exchange, and coordination of points of view"(New, 1990,p.8). The whole notion of provoking students is fascinating, as provocation is commonly understood to embody negative connotations. In the sense of rousing someone to action, however, provoking is most appropriate for the art class, providing that reflection and discussion are allowed to follow. Journals are an excellent tool for encouraging reflection and can be used in conjunction with assigned projects or personal explorations.

The current British art curriculum includes personal studies as an integral component of art education. Eisner's (1979)

orientation of personal relevance also recognizes the importance of some degree of negotiation between student and teacher. Children in Reggio Emilia can choose to stay with a specific medium or exploration for as long as it takes to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Personal studies in Earthworks would allow students the freedom to delve into environmental issues in a meaningful manner if they so chose. Too often teachers move quickly from one project or assignment to the next, not allowing students to follow their personal interests. Sullivan (1993) suggests that art education be "meaningful, authentic, critical, and pluralist"(p.5). He further notes, "There is much less acceptance today of the belief that meaning is an absolute entity"(p.11). Students should be permitted the opportunity to interpret the world from a perspective of personal relevance, and also be able to explore how the nature of meaning can be altered through changes in time, place, and context. Earthworks allows art to be considered outside of the constraints of gallery or museum ethics, and has the potential to bring into question the whole area of public art.

Beardsley (1989) suggests that many Earthworks artists are seeking more recognition for their work and that "quite a few of the most significant recent environmental projects have been incorporated into intensively developed urban areas"(p.127). These works are often undertaken in conjunction with the wants

and needs of the community in mind, not as hostile interventions in the tradition of Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981). Beardsley sees the educational benefits of a new environmentally sensitive public art as being, "the reintegration of the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, and landscape design - severed from each other in the modern era"(p.127).

Gablik (1991), Eisner (1979), and Sullivan, (1993) each support some view of social reconstructionism as a tenet of contemporary art practice. The limitations presented by curricular demands restricts the degree to which social reconstruction can actually be realized in the classroom. Environmental issues, however, and a sensitivity to the fragile and interdependent nature of the environment are being addressed, and I believe are beginning to have an effect on the generation of children now in our school system. The compatibility of Earthworks and environmental studies provides educational opportunities which should be fully exploited.

Williams (1994) reports on the "Rivers Curriculum Project" in an Illinois secondary school. The original purpose of the project was to find meaningful ways of integrating Science, Socials Studies, and English. An art teacher had the insight to invite an artist, Ken Reker, to participate in the project. Students were encouraged to visit a river site and collect found objects, both natural and manufactured. They were then required to write

about their objects in terms of their reaction to them, their possible origins, and their juxtaposition. Reker, a sculptor, then proposed that students create "river sculptures" from their found objects. Following the completion of their sculptures they were asked to write an essay on the process they had gone through as well as what the project had meant to them personally. The project was an overwhelming success in each of the designated curricular areas and teachers were impressed with the high degree of ownership and enthusiasm which students generated for the project.

The inclusion of Earthworks in the curriculum can create enthusiasm, personal relevance, and a sense of ownership for students. It can also promote meaningful artistic practice and a heightened aesthetic and social awareness. Grande (1994), however, feels that this is not enough. He states, "We need an art that goes beyond treating nature as raw material for an environmental project and conceives of nature as the end, not the means, of the creative process"(p.13). I agree that in the face of creation we are indeed humble beings, yet we must nevertheless begin the process which teaches a respectful and sensitive approach to our natural environment. Providing students with an awareness of the aesthetic qualities of the simplest natural forms is a step towards appreciating the beauty

of the natural world. As educators, it is incumbent on us to take that step.

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