

WALTER DE MARIA: *THE LIGHTNING FIELD*

by

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ABSTRACT

Walter De Maria (b.1935) is best known for *The Lightning Field*, a large-scale, remote outdoor work constructed in New Mexico, USA, and completed in 1977. Both De Maria and *The Lightning Field* have largely been critiqued solely within the art-historical framework of 'Land Art'. This thesis argues that such a framework has been too homogeneous and too narrow in its scope to do justice to the true complexities either of the artist's practice or of the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*, which involves considerably more than the dramatic spectacle of lightning. It proposes that De Maria's wide-ranging artistic career during the 1960s – in Minimalism and in 'Happenings', in proto-Fluxus and as a musician – provides a crucial context for an understanding of *The Lightning Field*. In particular, it argues that De Maria's engagement in music is of far greater significance than has so far been recognised, and that an exploration of the work of experimental composers John Cage, La Monte Young, and Steve Reich facilitates a richer understanding of many aspects of the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*.

The thesis reviews the literature on 'Land Art' (Chapter Two), before going on to provide a much more detailed account of De Maria's career – in music as well as in art – prior to the making of *The Lightning Field*, in order to give some flavour of the true breadth of his interests and friendships (Chapter Three). It also provides a thorough reassessment of what has mistakenly been construed as De Maria's critical 'silence' (Chapter Four). After giving brief details of *The Lightning Field's* construction and visiting arrangements (Chapter Five), the next four chapters (Chapters Six to Nine) explore a number of hitherto neglected aspects of the visitor's experience of the work – driving, walking, watching, slowing down, listening, imagining – especially in relation to spatiotemporal concerns in experimental music. De Maria's aesthetic has been remarkably consistent throughout his career, despite the variety of means used to explore it, and the concluding chapter of this thesis (Chapter Ten) examines some of De Maria's more recent works in order to demonstrate his continuing concern for the complex dynamic between art, audience, and environment.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

Relevant seminars and conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. Introduction

The American artist Walter De Maria (b.1935) is undoubtedly best known for *The Lightning Field* (completed 1977) (*Figures 1–6*), located in the remote upland of New Mexico, USA. The Dia Art Foundation, which commissioned and continues to maintain *The Lightning Field*, asserts that it is ‘recognized internationally as one of the late twentieth century’s most significant works of art’.¹ With just one or two exceptions, *The Lightning Field* has been interrogated entirely within the framework of the art practice widely known as ‘Land Art’ (also sometimes called ‘Earth Art’ or ‘Earthworks’), and it features prominently in all the major survey texts on ‘Land Art’. Monumental in scale, site-specific, and remotely located in a sparsely populated, semi-arid landscape, the work would seem almost perfectly to define the genre. Within this critical framework, *The Lightning Field* is usually described – and illustrated – almost solely in terms of the dramatic spectacle provided by a lightning strike hitting the work: indeed, given the work’s title, combined with De Maria’s carefully considered choice of a lightning-prone location, it is hardly surprising that the experience of lightning is invariably regarded as its *raison d’être*.

Many of the arguments proposed under the banner of ‘Land Art’ are undoubtedly pertinent for an interrogation of De Maria and *The Lightning Field*, and lightning is undoubtedly a possible experience for the visitor to that artwork. However, the continuing analysis of artist and artwork almost solely within the somewhat generic

¹ The Dia Art Foundation: *The Lightning Field*. [Online] www.lightningfield.org [07.02.06].

framework of 'Land Art', combined with the relentless emphasis on the sublime experience of lightning, has created three serious shortcomings. Firstly, scant regard is paid to De Maria's involvement in a far wider realm of artistic practice and critical debate beyond 'Land Art' – an involvement that has considerable relevance for an understanding of *The Lightning Field*. Secondly, it has largely bypassed any serious discussion of the extraordinarily complex and active interaction between *The Lightning Field* and those who visit it – between artwork and audience – for lightning is just one among numerous possible experiences that may unfold during the course of a visit. Thirdly, it has entirely overlooked the relevance of an interdisciplinary approach to De Maria and *The Lightning Field*, especially one that addresses some of the concerns shared by experimental composers during the period in question. The objective of this thesis is therefore to highlight these shortcomings and to provide a far richer and more nuanced understanding of both the artist and *The Lightning Field*.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s De Maria was not merely engaged in the planning and construction of large-scale artworks in the Midwest deserts. He was also involved in creating a remarkably diverse collection of Minimalist drawings and sculptures which were exhibited in conventional gallery spaces; he took part in 'Happenings' and in the early years of the Fluxus movement; he worked with film and photography; he was a professional jazz musician; and he also contributed to critical debate via what can best be described as alternative print media. In fact, De Maria was a significant figure in what was an extraordinarily innovative arts scene in New York – a scene in which interdisciplinarity was often celebrated, for the conventional boundaries between the visual arts, performance, experimental music, jazz, dance, film, and text were often deliberately blurred, providing a challenge to the purist assumption that the

arts as defined by sense are an *a priori* given,² as voiced by G.W.F. Hegel³ in the nineteenth century and Clement Greenberg in the twentieth.⁴

For De Maria, the aesthetic of the group known as Fluxus was particularly significant, especially in its formative years in the early 1960s. Not only did many early Fluxus works combine the acoustic with the visual, but in addition the experiential was foregrounded, with the audience neither treated, nor expected to behave, as passive 'receivers', but often actively involved in the creative process and its outcomes. In De Maria's own Fluxus compositions, decision-making, active participation, risk, and even, at times, real danger, were explored as major components of the audience's involvement, yet these were often held in tension with the artist's desire to retain a measure of control over those experiences, coupled with a considerable degree of ambiguity about meanings and outcomes. Likewise, the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field* also involves decision-making, uncertainty, potential danger, and a continual tension between control and freedom. Moreover, when De Maria chose the location for the work, in New Mexico, he was very well aware not just of the site's potential for the visual drama that lightning would provide, but also of the spectacular acoustics of thunder that would accompany a lightning strike: in other words, he recognised that this place – like many early Fluxus works – was experienced through sound as much as through vision. Equally importantly, however, De Maria was also aware of the location's more elusive sights and sounds – for neither lightning nor

² Shaw-Miller, Simon. *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, p.131.

³ In *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, Hegel writes: 'The specific characterization of the senses...and of their corresponding material...must provide the grounds for the division of the individual arts.' Cited in Shaw-Miller, 2002, p.131, and footnote 29 on p.263. G. Hegel. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans. T. M. Knox, Vol. 2 (Oxford, 1975), p.621.

⁴ In 'Modernist Painting' (1960), Clement Greenberg, who helped to popularise the term 'medium specificity', asserted that each art should hold to its own 'unique and proper area of competence'. This essay has come to typify the Modernist critical position on the visual arts. Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', in *Forum Lectures* (Voice of America), Washington DC, 1960. Reprinted in C. Harrison and P. Wood (eds). *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003, pp.773–779.

thunder were by any means guaranteed, even during July and August which are the most lightning-prone months of the year in this location. He would, for example, have been well aware of the impact of the very small and seemingly insignificant visual details of the work, having explored the concept of invisibility in a number of earlier drawings. He had also previously taped the mesmerising chirrup of crickets and the hypnotic swash and backwash of waves and incorporated these subtle soundscapes into two audio-works (*Cricket Music* (1964) and *Ocean Music* (1968) respectively),⁵ and he would therefore certainly have been open to the wide variety of acoustic possibilities – ranging from *ffff* right down to *pppp* – afforded by New Mexico’s isolated upland. In the extant survey texts on ‘Land Art’, however, virtually no accounts of *The Lightning Field* have made any reference to any of its acoustic qualities.

Unlike any other work of ‘Land Art’, where visitors are free to come and go as they wish,⁶ a visitor to *The Lightning Field* must stay at the site itself for the best part of 24 hours, having already undertaken a lengthy ‘road trip’ to reach the work. Consequently, the extended spatiotemporal frame for experience takes on a heightened significance. *The Lightning Field*’s intimate and complex relationship with space and time finds its analogy in the spatiotemporal context of much experimental music of the 1960s and 1970s: in works by John Cage, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich. There is undoubtedly a long history of artists and musicians exploring acoustic-visual relations,⁷

⁵ De Maria, Walter. *Cricket Music* 1964 (24:34) and *Ocean Music* (1968) (20:29). Self-released album, under the title *Drums and Nature*.

⁶ It remains to be seen whether two extremely large-scale and as yet unfinished works – Michael Heizer’s *City* in Nevada and James Turrell’s *Roden Crater* in Arizona – will charge an entry fee and restrict viewing times once they are completed.

⁷ Several recent exhibitions and events have explored this connection. For example, ‘Eye-Music: Kandinsky, Klee and all that jazz’ (held at Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK, from 30 June – 16 September 2007, and Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, UK, from 2 October – 9 December) encompassed a wide range of twentieth-century artists who translated their passion for music into a visual language. Among them were Paul Klee, Vassily Kandinsky, František Kupka, Piet Mondrian, Eduardo Paolozzi, Alan Davie, and John Tunnard. See Guy, Shaw-Miller, and Tucker, *Eye-Music: Kandinsky, Klee and all that Jazz*. Chichester: Pallant House Gallery, 2007.

and in *The Sound of Painting* (1999)⁸ Karin Maur provides an introduction to the work of visual artists for whom music became a key source of inspiration. Meanwhile, in *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* (2002)⁹ Simon Shaw-Miller tackles the subject from the opposite direction, as it were, focusing principally (but not exclusively) on composers and musicians for whom visual art proved stimulating, among them Richard Wagner, Alexander Scriabin, Joseph Matthias Hauer, John Cage, and La Monte Young. However, neither Simon Shaw-Miller nor Karin Maur addresses the significance of sound for an exploration of any work of 'Land Art'. Indeed, it is only in the last few years that the relevance of aspects of music to an understanding of De Maria's work has begun to be addressed, notably by Alan Licht and Jane McFadden. In *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories* (2007)¹⁰ Alan Licht regards De Maria as a pivotal figure in forging connections between sound, art, and environment in the 1960s. For Licht, De Maria's wide-ranging early career – in proto-Fluxus, in music, and in his explorations of site and earth – anticipated not only the move outdoors by many 'Land Artists', but also their preoccupation with earth as the visual equivalent of noise in music. However, Licht does not refer to *The Lightning Field* at all, either in his book or in his essay 'Sound and Space', also published in 2007.¹¹ Jane McFadden, in her PhD thesis *Practices of Site: Walter De Maria and Robert Morris, 1960–1977* (2004),¹² and in her essay 'Toward Site' (2007),¹³ has recognised the crucial importance of De Maria's involvement in the Fluxus *Anthology* (1963) and in the interdisciplinary arts scene of New York during the 1960s, as well as the breadth of his artistic practice. In particular, she addresses the shared aesthetic of De Maria and La Monte Young. However, she does not explore the acoustic qualities of

⁸ Maur, Karin V. *The Sound of Painting*. Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 1999.

⁹ Shaw-Miller, 2002.

¹⁰ Licht, Alan. *Sound Art. Beyond Music, Between Categories*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007.

¹¹ Licht, Alan. 'Sound and space', in *Modern Painters*, Vol 19 No 9, 2007, pp.74–77.

¹² McFadden, Jane. *Practices of Site: Walter De Maria and Robert Morris, 1960–1977*. PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, May 2004.

¹³ McFadden, Jane. 'Toward site', in *Grey Room*, Vol 27, Spring 2007, pp.36–57.

The Lightning Field, or its connections to a wider world of music beyond Fluxus. This thesis, in contrast, forges major links between the aesthetic of De Maria and that of the experimental composers of the period, asserting in particular that our understanding of *The Lightning Field* necessitates just such an interdisciplinary approach.

2. Working method

The Lightning Field occupies a place at the intersections of art and music, geography and mathematics, architecture and religion. Not surprisingly, therefore, my resources have been somewhat diverse, and I have of course drawn on the available academic literature. However, since one of the major strands of this thesis has been to investigate the experience of the visitor to *The Lightning Field*, I have also looked at non-academic sources of information in an attempt to discover what visitors to *The Lightning Field* have had to say about the artwork. These sources have included newspaper reports and Internet weblogs, as well as my own impressions of the work, for I visited it on 2–3 September 2006. Whilst subjective and relatively unpoliced, these accounts nevertheless provide important evidence of first-hand experience – something of a rarity for many works of American ‘Land Art’, given their geographical remoteness. This experiential evidence facilitates a shift of focus away from solely theoretically driven approaches and towards real-life encounters with *The Lightning Field*: encounters whose nuances and idiosyncrasies are rarely addressed in the conventional ‘Land Art’ literature. For example, in an article titled ‘Drawn to the lightning’, which appeared in the *New York Times* in 2003, Cornelia Dean describes how she and her five companions sat and watched the work from the porch. For them, the experience is *not* of lightning but of light, and the overwhelming impression one gets is that this artwork provides a place for the release of the imagination:

Seen from the porch, the rods marched away in phalanxes to the south. As the sun sank over our right shoulders, the metal spikes started to glow in the golden light. Their pointed tips took fire first, like candles, but soon the spikes themselves lighted up, top to bottom, as if glowing from within. 'This is like a sea, and these ships are moving in the distance,' one of us said. 'They look like centurions coming at you,' said another. 'They look like those golden soldiers from Xian, like grave markers, almost like raindrops, like the Roman armies.' For me, it was as if a piece of formal music, a Bach invention, perhaps, had taken material form and was playing before my eyes, not my ears. 'You can make up stories for every row,' one of us observed, and she was right.¹⁴

Whilst such first-hand accounts have been moderately accessible, this cannot be said of Walter De Maria himself who, perhaps more than any other living artist, is famously reclusive. Indeed, as early as 1972 he stated:

I think that any artist that explains his work is a fool ... I think to be minimalist you should almost nearly be invisible yourself ... It's not necessary for the world to have that many prima donnas screeching around and sort of continuing the abstract expressionist temperament.¹⁵

Given the opportunity, most researchers would probably like to have some kind of access to the artist and/or his personal archives, in the hope of achieving new insights into previously unearthed data, working methods, thought processes, and so on. However, my requests for access to De Maria's archives, or for an interview with him, have been unsuccessful, and this has also been the experience of other researchers and scholars, including the authors of two of the major survey texts on 'Land Art', Suzaan Boettger and John Beardsley, and, more recently, Jane McFadden. In addition, and especially in comparison with some of the other major 'Land Artists' – notably Robert Smithson and Robert Morris, and, to a lesser extent, James Turrell and Michael Heizer – De Maria himself has made remarkably few comments on his practice, and those few 'essays' that he published during the early 1970s have largely been overlooked. Furthermore, in comparison with most of the other major 'Land Artists' (most notably

¹⁴ Dean, Cornelia. 'Drawn to the lightning', in the *New York Times*, 21 September 2003.

¹⁵ De Maria, W. Oral history with Walter De Maria, 1972 Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm. [07.10.2005].

Smithson) there is remarkably little written on De Maria by others outside of the survey texts on 'Land Art'. Although several exhibition catalogues are available (most of which are from exhibitions that took place in Europe since the completion of *The Lightning Field*),¹⁶ there is no monograph on De Maria, and no *catalogue raisonné* exists of his work. A new book by Kenneth Baker, art critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, has just been published, titled simply *The Lightning Field* (2008).¹⁷ Yet this curious book uses the artwork largely as a catalyst for a series of musings on the state of the world post 9/11. At the time of writing (May 2009), Jane McFadden is currently working on a book about 'Walter De Maria and the complex forms of sculptural experience in the 1960s',¹⁸ but publication is not expected until 2010.¹⁹

However, one crucial resource for me has been a lengthy interview that De Maria gave in 1972 to Paul Cummings for the Smithsonian Institution. This interview is held in the Institution's archives and is now available as a transcript online,²⁰ and it has proved to be especially helpful in providing a wealth of information about De Maria's love of, and engagement with, music: indeed, it was my discovery of this interview that sparked the first awareness of the relevance of music – and sound more generally – for *The Lightning Field*, which ultimately enabled me to develop my thesis. In addition, this interview has provided a great deal of detail on the numerous works of art which De Maria made during the 1960s – works which, by and large, have not been discussed in

¹⁶ These include: Germano Celant, *Walter De Maria: 1999 Milano 2000*. Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2000; Thomas Kellein, *Walter De Maria: 5 Continent Sculpture*. Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1988; Franz Meyer, *Walter De Maria*. Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991; Lars Nittve (ed.) (text by J.C. Cooper). *Walter De Maria: Two Very Large Presentations*. Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1989; Harald Szeemann, *Walter De Maria: The 2000 Sculpture*. Zurich: Kunsthau Zurich, 1992.

¹⁷ Kenneth Baker had hoped that the book, which was originally to be jointly published by the University of California Press and the Dia Art Foundation, would include a statement by De Maria. However, De Maria withdrew from this project because he felt that Baker's first draft was too descriptive, and publication was then undertaken by Yale University Press, without any such statement. See Diana Sherman Kash, 'Critiquing Art'. [Online] www.departments.bucknell.edu/communications/bucknellworld/1999-11/feature2.html [15.02.2009].

¹⁸ Third International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities, held at Cambridge University, UK, from 2–5 August 2005. [Online] http://h05.cgpublisher.com/session_descriptions.html [28.03.2009]

¹⁹ Personal email correspondence with Jane McFadden, 30 April 2009.

²⁰ [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm. [07.10.2005].

the available literature. Yet in this interview De Maria comments that he will later regret having been interviewed: 'I think I probably already explained too much as it is and I'm going to read this tape and decide whether to release it to anybody.'²¹

John Beardsley argues that De Maria's refusal to allow access to archives and other documentation, combined with his refusal to give any interviews since 1972, thwarts any independent appraisal of the work and effectively closes down debate.²² However, De Maria's 'attitude of withdrawal' actually creates a space within which the experience of the work becomes open to individual, even idiosyncratic, responses, with each visitor being free to make the work their own in whatever way they wish – and, curiously, this occurs *within* the framework of the strict controls regarding the visit itself, which are discussed later in this thesis, and which effect a subtle collaboration between artist and audience.

3. 'Audience'

Given the continual tension between, on the one hand, the degree of control exerted by De Maria with regard to visiting arrangements for the work, access to archives and so on, and the almost total absence of him (in terms of interviews and archival access) on the other, it is necessary briefly to position this duality in relation to some of the opposing author/audience models that have been proposed during the twentieth century. In *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), E.D. Hirsch Jr. argues in favour of the existence of 'correct' textual interpretation: this is the author's own original meaning, and it is the job of 'readers' to uncover it.²³ As Janet Wolff expresses it, Hirsch

²¹ Oral history with Walter De Maria, 1972.

²² Beardsley, J. 'Art and Authoritarianism: Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field*', in *October*, No 16, Spring 1981, pp.35–38.

²³ Hirsch Jr, E.D. *Validity in Interpretation*. London: Yale University Press, 1967, p.129.

inveighs against 'dogmatic relativists' and 'cognitive atheists' who believe that meaning necessarily changes with every reader and that there is no determinacy or priority of authorial meaning.²⁴

If Hirsch is right, then our primary focus should be to attempt to discover De Maria's intended meaning(s) for *The Lightning Field* – a challenging task, given his deliberate reticence and his evident pleasure in ambiguities. However, depending on how radical a hermeneutics one adopts, there are two alternative views to that of Hirsch, and in either case the central importance of authorial meaning is denied.²⁵ The most radical of these alternatives is provided by Roland Barthes, who, in his influential essay, 'The death of the author', contends that the author's intended meaning is irrelevant and that only readers create the text: 'The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.'²⁶ The other alternative takes the middle ground between the extremes of Hirsch and Barthes, and is proposed by H.-G. Gadamer in *Truth and Method*.²⁷ Gadamer maintains that reader and author constitute meaning *together*, since one's own present and historicity invariably enter the hermeneutic act, and therefore colour the understanding itself. It is this middle ground that I adopt in this thesis. Indeed, the middle ground – bringing reader and author together – is a particularly appropriate position for this thesis to adopt because it was precisely during the 1960s and 1970s that a greatly increased interest developed with regard not only to the physical setting in which art was exhibited in museums and galleries, but also to the active engagement of the viewing public in relation to art in its setting. This interest in the dynamic dialogue between art object, site, and audience was explored not only by a number of artists (among them De Maria, Carl Andre, Donald Judd, and Richard Serra) but also by those directors of museums and galleries who were willing to consider new ways of

²⁴ Wolff, Janet. *The Social Production of Art*. London: Macmillan, second edition 1993, p.98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.99.

²⁶ Barthes, R. 'The death of the author', in *Image/Music/Text*. London: Fontana Press, pp.142–148. (First published in French as 'La mort de l'auteur', in *Mantéla* V, 1968.)

²⁷ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1975. (Original German edition 1960.)

displaying contemporary and conceptual art. As Nicholas Serota argues in *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art*, instead of providing a didactic and/or encyclopaedic account of, say, an art movement or an individual artist's oeuvre, the experience of the audience during a gallery visit was given greater prominence. This experience included the potential for personal interpretation, 'rather than following a single path laid down by a curator.'²⁸

However, in considering how *The Lightning Field* is experienced by its audience, it is also important briefly to consider whom I am writing about when I use the word 'audience'. Firstly, we need to be aware of the deliberate blurring of boundaries between the conventional categories of 'audience', 'performer', and 'artist' that occurred in Fluxus and 'Happenings' as well as in experimental music, and I address this throughout my thesis. Secondly, we need to ask the question: 'What kind of person visits *The Lightning Field*?' In 'The Work of Art and Its Beholder: The Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception', Wolfgang Kemp argues that 'each work of art is addressed to someone; it works to solicit its ideal beholder'.²⁹ Concerning *The Lightning Field*, Kemp's point is a particularly pertinent one, since this is not a work you can visit on a whim or whilst casually driving by. Visitors not only need the inclination to visit, but also the necessary time and money, since a visit is not cheap and it takes the best part of 24 hours – not counting the almost invariably lengthy and moderately difficult journey taken to reach this isolated part of New Mexico at all, a journey which is itself part of

²⁸ Serota, Nicholas. *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000. (First published in 1996.) Serota's short book (first given as the 28th Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture) is particularly pertinent because it provides a recent example of the ongoing debate regarding the experience of art in museology: a debate which is unlikely to cease any time soon. Serota concludes (p.55) with the following words: 'Our aim must be to generate a condition in which visitors can experience a sense of discovery in looking at particular paintings, sculptures or installations in a particular room at a particular moment, rather than find themselves standing in a conveyor belt of history.'

²⁹ Kemp, Wolfgang. 'The Work of Art and Its Beholder: The Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception', in M.A. Cheetham, M.A. Holly, and K. Moxey (eds). *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.183.

‘the work’, as I argue in Chapter Six. One can assume, therefore, that the overwhelming majority of visitors have some prior knowledge of the work, have made plans many weeks or months in advance, and have sufficient money and time to make a visit. As for me, no doubt I am what Kemp calls the ‘ideal beholder’ for *The Lightning Field*. Reasonably well educated, a lover of nature and unpopulated places, not only did I already know of the work through my undergraduate studies, but I also had enough time and money (I was funded by the University of Plymouth) to travel thousands of miles from the UK to New Mexico. In addition, I was brought up in the kind of social environment – what Pierre Bourdieu calls the ‘habitus’³⁰ – where visits to art galleries and similar places of culture were fairly common, so my family therefore had the necessary ‘cultural capital’ to appreciate works of art and to be comfortable in their presence.³¹ Yet, ‘ideal’ or not, I clearly also have my own very specific and personal presence, history, and motivation, and these all affect my relationship to the world around me and the artworks I encounter, as they undoubtedly do for all visitors to *The Lightning Field*. I have occasionally related my own experiences in this thesis, for I believe that, since I am partly concerned with the visitor’s subjective experience of the artwork, my personal impressions have a part to play. I hope, however, that I have achieved a degree of transparency about my own encounter, as well as an awareness of my privileged position as a consumer of this particular cultural product. I see no problem in incorporating my own voice: taking my lead not only from those other visitors to *The Lightning Field* who have written of their time there, but also from those other historians who have not been afraid to write of their own experiences in relation to other artworks – among them T.J. Clark in *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art*

³⁰ Bourdieu, P. and Darbel, A. *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. (First published in France in 1969.)

³¹ Bourdieu, P. *Distinction*. London: Routledge, 1984.

Writing,³² Lucy Lippard in *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*,³³ and Jane Rendell in *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*³⁴ – I believe that at least a few of my own experiences of the work can be integrated into a critical perspective, and that one does not preclude the other.

4. Outline of chapters

The rest of this thesis is divided into nine chapters, as follows:

Chapter Two provides a literature review, principally of the survey texts on ‘Land Art’, in order to pinpoint the major themes that have been addressed there, and to highlight the manner in which De Maria and *The Lightning Field* have been incorporated within this remarkably persistent critical framework. The chapter also points to the shortcomings of such an approach with regard to De Maria, and the manner in which this has had a major impact on one’s understanding of *The Lightning Field*, since the overwhelming emphasis in the literature has been on the artwork’s visual spectacle and drama, rather than on any exploration of its more elusive and subtle qualities, whether visual or acoustic.

Chapter Three overcomes the rather too narrow critical framework identified in the previous chapter by providing much more comprehensive details of De Maria’s life and career prior to the construction of *The Lightning Field*. The chapter’s chronological format functions as a means to tease out the major tropes that later came to have such significance for *The Lightning Field*, and which I discuss in far more detail in subsequent chapters. The chapter also provides an opportunity to establish the major

³² Clark, T.J. *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.

³³ Lippard, L.R. *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*. New York: The New Press, 1999.

³⁴ Rendell, Jane. *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

importance of De Maria's involvement with music and proto-Fluxus, and also to introduce some of the principal figures in American experimental music – especially John Cage, La Monte Young, and Steve Reich – many of whose works provide an important context for subsequent discussions of De Maria's practice.

While Chapter Three provides a much-needed reassessment of De Maria's practice by exploring beyond the usual boundary of the 'Land Art' label, **Chapter Four** provides a parallel reassessment of what has been construed as his critical 'silence' and points to the need to push beyond the usual critical history for the period in question. The first section of the chapter outlines those key debates, largely centred on Minimalism, that have come to be seen as establishing a shift from modernism to postmodernism, and which have become the normative model of art history for the 1960s and 1970s. Within this model, De Maria has indeed been remarkably silent, since – unlike a number of his friends and colleagues – he did not contribute directly to these debates. However, the second section of the chapter proposes an alternative, and far more eclectic (even untidy), view of critical history, within which, rather than being silent, De Maria very carefully engineered a position for himself and his practice. This aspect of his career has been entirely overlooked in any of the survey texts on 'Land Art'. The chapter ends with a brief consideration of the relevance for De Maria of Donald Judd's essay on Barnett Newman's *Shining Forth (to George)*,³⁵ and Susan Sontag's essay 'Against Interpretation'.³⁶

The next five chapters – Chapters Five to Nine – are focused more specifically on *The Lightning Field*. Cumulatively, they bid to reposition *The Lightning Field* – not as a

³⁵ Judd, Donald. 'Barnett Newman', in *Studio International*, Vol 179 No 919, 1970.

³⁶ Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1966.

static, bounded 'object' in space, but as a work whose critical, spatiotemporal, and experiential dimensions should not – indeed, cannot – be readily delineated.

Chapter Four concluded with a very brief outline of Susan Sontag's argument in favour of description and direct encounter rather than interpretation, as well as Judd's anti-interpretive style of writing. **Chapter Five** employs a rather similar anti-interpretive stance, for it briefly outlines, in what can best be described as purely factual terms, the 'where, how, and when' of *The Lightning Field*'s construction in the mid-1970s. It also describes – for those readers who are not familiar with the work – the unusual visiting arrangements, including the ban on photography, as well as De Maria's 1980 *Artforum* essay, also titled *The Lightning Field*,³⁷ which constitutes his only written statement on the work (*Appendix One*). However, this kind of anti-interpretation is ultimately insufficient to account for the complexities of the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field* (if I did not think so, then this thesis would end here), and in the next four chapters I interrogate four major aspects of that experience.

Walter De Maria thought of the journey to get to *The Lightning Field* as a significant component of the visitor's experience of the work, and in **Chapter Six** I explore three interconnected aspects of this necessary journey, each of which extends what are normally thought of as the work's spatiotemporal boundaries. In the first section, I briefly consider the relatively familiar territory of the American 'road trip' in art, literature, and film, in order to demonstrate the somewhat curious tension between motion and stasis for the traveller. Next, I consider the journey to *The Lightning Field* in the light of both cultural tourism and pilgrimage, focusing particularly on the manner in which the work has become 'auratic' through its remoteness and the carefully controlled

³⁷ De Maria, Walter. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum*, Vol 18 No 8 (1980), pp.52–59.

dissemination of images. In the final section of the chapter, I consider some contributions to the *Fluxus Anthology* – by De Maria, Robert Morris, and La Monte Young – in which the concept of the ‘travelling line’ functioned as a means to extend the experience of time and space.

In **Chapter Seven** I investigate three aspects of site at *The Lightning Field*. Firstly, I explore the ambivalence of desert geography, and the manner in which the visitor experiences the complex fusion of art and nature at *The Lightning Field*. Secondly, I explore *The Lightning Field*’s sounds, which, like their visual counterparts, ‘take place’; in particular, I investigate the site of sound at *The Lightning Field* in the light of some of the work of John Cage and La Monte Young, both of whom were fascinated by the relationship between sounds – especially natural ones – and the spaces in which they were made and experienced. Finally, I consider the role of the wooden cabin where visitors stay, notably its role in enabling the visitor to ‘slow down’: just such a ‘slowing down’ was also explored by the composer Steve Reich.

Chapter Eight interrogates the experience of walking around and among *The Lightning Field*’s repetitive grid of poles. This provokes thoughts about the far more static view of the grid which was rehearsed by Rosalind Krauss in her 1979 essay on ‘Grids’.³⁸ It also provokes a reassessment of De Maria’s deployment of repetition throughout his career in the light of Frances Colpitt’s definitions of repetition in her book *Minimal Art* (1990).³⁹ The final section of this chapter considers the experience of walking at *The Lightning Field* in relation to certain aspects of Steve Reich’s music.

³⁸ Krauss, Rosalind. ‘Grids’, in *October*, No 9, Summer 1979, pp.51–64.

³⁹ Colpitt, Frances. *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990.

Chapter Nine investigates the appearance and, more significantly, the non-appearance of lightning and thunder at *The Lightning Field*, especially in relation to John Cage's exploration of 'silence' in his seminal work, *4'33"* (1952).

In **Chapter Ten**, the conclusion, I argue that the concerns that so preoccupied De Maria during the early part of his career, and which achieved their highest expression at *The Lightning Field*, have continued to inform his practice right up to the present day. In particular, I consider a small number of large-scale works and projects from the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. None of these has been addressed in the extant survey texts on 'Land Art'; yet each demonstrates that, despite the sheer variety of means employed by Walter De Maria throughout his career, his aesthetic has been remarkably consistent. Even in these more recent works, there remains, as always, an overriding concern for the active role of the audience in constituting meaning(s), combined with the dynamic relationships between the man-made and the natural, the mathematically precise and the imaginatively uncertain.

CHAPTER TWO

Walter De Maria and the genre of 'Land Art'

1. Introduction

In 1968, at about the same time as the term 'Land Art' was first being proposed to accommodate certain new works, David Bourdon provided one of the most appropriate descriptions of Walter De Maria's practice. In an essay titled 'Walter De Maria: The Singular Experience', Bourdon wrote:

It is difficult to situate De Maria in the cross-currents of present styles, for no mainstream seems broad enough to encompass the full range of his erratic interests and accomplishments over the past eight years. Although he is frequently classed with the minimalists and 'conceptualists', he is not really concerned with pursuing the implications of a particular style, technique or ideology, so much as expressing his unique sensibility in whatever manner seems most appropriate. Each successive work, in fact, is likely to depart considerably in format from the preceding ones. De Maria's work is tangential to several major categories of recent artistic endeavor: box art, primary structures, kinetic or 'time' art, optional art, pictures-to-be-read/poetry-to-be-seen art, idea art, and earthworks. Some pieces bear words, some make sounds, some have movable parts, some are designed to order the environment.¹

Notwithstanding Bourdon's insightful appreciation of the impossibility of pigeonholing De Maria, it is nevertheless the case that the artist, and his best-known work *The Lightning Field*, have been remarkably firmly situated within the genre of 'Land Art', or what Bourdon labels 'earthworks'. Moreover, even though more than four decades have now elapsed since the first works of 'Land Art' were created, and more than three decades have passed since *The Lightning Field* was completed, in all this time the critical approaches to De Maria's practice in general, and to *The Lightning Field* in

¹ Bourdon, David. 'Walter De Maria: The Singular Experience', in *Art International*, Vol 12 No 10, December 1968, pp.39–40.

particular, have – with just one or two exceptions – barely changed. The objective of this chapter is to examine the major tropes of ‘Land Art’ in order to establish why the genre has been such a powerful one with respect to De Maria – and, indeed, a number of other artists. The chapter also points to the inadequacies of the genre for De Maria and *The Lightning Field*, for neither the artist nor the artwork can be fully accommodated within its somewhat homogeneous framework, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate.

2. Origins

The phrase ‘Land Art’ was first used as the title of a made-for-television film broadcast on 15 April 1969, which was produced, directed, and photographed by Gerry Schum from the Fernseh Gallery in Cologne, Germany. Schum invited eight artists – Walter De Maria, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Long, Jan Dibbets, Marinus Boezem, and Barry Flanagan – each to produce five-minute films with the title ‘Land Art’, and De Maria’s *Two Lines Three Circles on the Desert* (Figure 7) formed part of this project. Since then, ‘Land Art’ has been utilised as something of a catch-all expression to describe any site-specific outdoor work, regardless of the huge diversity of forms, materials, intentions, allusions, and experiences that such works incorporate. A trio of other phrases – ‘Earthworks’,² ‘Earth Art’, and ‘Environmental Art’ – has also had some currency. ‘Earth Works’ and ‘Earth Art’ were the titles given to two important exhibitions in 1968 and 1969 respectively, which are discussed later in this chapter, and they imply – even if not entirely intentionally – a specific preoccupation with ‘earth’ as medium (together with rock, mud, sand, stone, rubble, and so on), usually shaped into various piles or heaps (either indoors or outdoors), rather than a concern for the somewhat wider horizon of ‘land’. ‘Earthworks’ has subsequently

² The term ‘Earthworks’ was first coined in 1965 by the science fiction writer Brian Aldiss, who used it for the title of one of his novels, published in 1966. Robert Smithson bought the book prior to boarding a bus to Passaic, and he refers to this at the start of his 1967 article ‘A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey’; published as ‘The Monuments of Passaic: Has Passaic Replaced Rome as the Eternal City?’, in *Artforum*, Vol 6 No 4, December 1967, pp.48–51.

been used in the titles of two major 'survey texts': John Beardsley's *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape* (1984)³ and Suzaan Boettger's more recent *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (2002).⁴ The phrase 'Environmental Art' was deployed in Alan Sonfist's edited volume *Art in the Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art* (1983),⁵ as well as in Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis's *Land and Environmental Art* (1988),⁶ yet the relationship between the artworks under discussion and the environmental movement is an uneasy one, as we shall see. Despite the inadequacies of the term 'Land Art', this seems to be the most inclusive of the possible options, and certainly the term most commonly recognised: indeed, De Maria uses it himself in his 1980 essay on *The Lightning Field*,⁷ no doubt simply because it was the most current at that time. It has been used by Gilles Tiberghien for his 1993 publication, titled simply *Land Art* (which remains the best book on the genre as a whole),⁸ as well as for recent texts by William Malpas,⁹ Michael Lailach,¹⁰ and Ben Tufnell.¹¹ Given its continued currency, 'Land Art' is the phrase that I have adopted throughout this thesis. I have, however, wrapped it in inverted commas in order to signal my unease over its use.

Within the survey texts on 'Land Art', the socio-political complexities of the 1960s have been extensively mined for the insights they ostensibly provide into why young artists such as De Maria, Smithson, Heizer, Oppenheim, Nancy Holt, Robert Morris,

³ Beardsley, J. *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1984.

⁴ Boettger, S. *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, and London, England: University of California Press, 2002.

⁵ Sonfist, A. (ed.). *Art in the Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983.

⁶ Kastner, J. and Wallis, B. (eds). *Land and Environmental Art*. London and New York: Phaidon, 1998.

⁷ De Maria, Walter. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum* Vol 18 No 8, 1980, pp.52–59.

⁸ Tiberghien, Gilles. *Land Art*. London: Art Data, 1993.

⁹ Malpas, William. *Land Art. A Complete Guide to Landscape, Environmental, Earthworks, Nature, Sculpture and Installation Art*. Maidstone: Crescent Moon Publishing, second edition 2007. (First published 2004.)

¹⁰ Lailach, Michael. *Land Art*. Cologne: Taschen, 2007.

¹¹ Tufnell, Ben. *Land Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2006.

and James Turrell – the vast majority were male – began to travel, firstly out of the confines of urban indoor gallery spaces, and subsequently away from the galleries and cities entirely and into remote and relatively inhospitable terrain to make works largely out of the natural materials of earth, sand, stone, water, mud, snow, and grass. In the USA, the 1960s saw increasing economic prosperity after the Second World War, and in some respects this was a time of considerable political optimism, but it was also a time of great anxiety about the future. The ‘space race’ was generally regarded as grounds for national pride, but it also marked a significant chapter in the Cold War. The hippy movement implied an increasing dissatisfaction among the young, yet it also saw the more positive first stirrings of feminism and the ecology movement. The 1960s also witnessed increasing racial tension, the expanding civil rights movement, and, by no means least, escalating protests about the USA’s failing involvement in the Vietnam War.

Of all the survey texts, Suzaan Boettger’s *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* most meticulously undertakes the task of restoring works of ‘Land Art’ to the original contexts of their genesis. Boettger’s argument is premised on the assumption that the very particular social and political conditions of the USA in the 1960s effectively created a climate of counter-culture in which, by the end of that decade, the ‘Land Art’ movement could flourish. Like Suzaan Boettger, Jonathan Miles asserts that although there was no explicit revolution in 1960s USA, this decade was a time of ‘generalised revolution’ – in terms of political emancipation, spiritual regeneration, sexual liberation, alternative lifestyles, community democracy, ecologically based production, holistic therapies, and anti-institutional ‘institutions’ – and that these all

inspired a plethora of new ways of thinking, and also of new artistic movements, among which was 'Land Art'.¹²

Walter De Maria was certainly involved in some aspects of this counter-cultural 'movement', especially after moving to New York in 1960. Yet he seems to have eschewed the drug-taking scene early on, having seen how damaging it could be among fellow musicians,¹³ and although he increasingly sought new locations far from the cities and explored earthen materials and new methods of working, he also continued – like most other 'Land Artists' – to make many indoor works for his patrons (especially Robert Scull) and for the more conventional exhibition spaces of urban art galleries. In particular, De Maria's continuing interest in mathematical structures and the use of precision-engineered materials in a significant number of works throughout the later 1960s and early 1970s (and, indeed, in more recent years) demonstrates that the bulldozing of desert dirt was by no means the sole (or even central) agenda for him during this period, as we shall see in Chapter Three.

Through its emphasis on an 'active' audience, and grounded in a far wider spatiotemporal context than had hitherto been the case, 'Land Art' certainly helped to challenge the usual concepts of what art was (and was not), which, in terms of mid-twentieth-century art-historical research, had been most forcefully mapped out by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried (and I shall have more to say on this in Chapter Four). Yet although 'Land Art' is frequently described as ground-breaking, most of the survey texts – not unnaturally – seek to delineate at least some of its artistic roots. For example, Suzaan Boettger highlights the relevance for 'Land Art' of the largely European *Arte Povera* ('poor art') movement, which used simple, unrefined materials to

¹² Miles, Jonathan. "'68 – 84: What happened to the revolution?', in *ZG*, Summer 1984.

¹³ De Maria, W. Oral history with Walter De Maria, 1972, Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm [07.10.2005].

explore basic substances and physical processes or to emphasise a connection to everyday life.¹⁴ In *Land Art* (1993), Gilles Tiberghien points to the influence of the Russian Constructivists on 'Land Art' as well as on Minimalism. For example, Robert Morris, who, together with De Maria, was involved in making minimalist sculptures in the early years of the 1960s, admired Vladimir Tatlin's use of materials and El Lissitzky's treatment of sculpture as environment.¹⁵ Tiberghien also argues that early contact with Minimalism was extremely important for the fledgling 'Land Artists',¹⁶ yet there has been no major critical interrogation of this connection; indeed, as both James Meyer¹⁷ and Jane McFadden¹⁸ recognise, an exploration of De Maria's involvement in Minimalism is long overdue.

In 1966, just a year or so prior to their first major explorations of the Midwest deserts as possible sites for art, De Maria, Morris, and Smithson showed 'Minimalist' work at the important 'Primary Structures' exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York, and for Gilles Tiberghien this exhibition was especially significant because it brought these three future 'Land Artists' together. However, Tiberghien neglects to mention that De Maria and Morris had been friends and colleagues for a number of years prior to this, as we shall see in Chapter Three. Moreover, although both Gilles Tiberghien¹⁹ and Suzaan Boettger²⁰ mention (albeit very briefly) De Maria's participation in the New York 'Happenings' and his affiliation with Fluxus in the early 1960s, most of the other survey texts on 'Land Art' fail to mention his or others' (especially Morris's) involvement in any of the performance-based activities in New York during this period: at best, they

¹⁴ Boettger, 2002, pp.15–16.

¹⁵ Tiberghien, 1993, p.34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.29–59.

¹⁷ Meyer, James. *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, p.273, footnote 23.

¹⁸ McFadden, Jane. *Practices of Site: Walter De Maria and Robert Morris, 1960–1977*. PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, May 2004, pp.77–78.

¹⁹ Tiberghien, 1993, p.52.

²⁰ Boettger, 2002, p.116.

devote just a sentence or two to these important aspects of De Maria's early career. I shall have much more to say about De Maria's involvement in Fluxus – including the influence of the musician and composer La Monte Young, a key Fluxus member – in subsequent chapters.

As far as De Maria's own involvement in music is concerned, this forms a crucial component of this thesis, yet it is almost entirely disregarded in the literature on 'Land Art'. Of all the survey texts, the only one to mention this aspect of De Maria's career is that by Suzaan Boettger, who merely comments that he was 'also a musician, playing the drums',²¹ that he collaborated with La Monte Young for some 'mixed-media music and theater events' at the San Francisco Art Institute in the late 1950s, and that in November 1968 he wrote to his patron Robert Scull to say that he would be recording a drum track for a record he was making.²² With regard to the parallel development of music during the 1960s and 70s, this is not discussed within the critical framework of 'Land Art', yet it is of major significance not just for an understanding of De Maria but also for the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*, as we shall see later in this thesis. Although Edward Strickland, in *Minimalism: Origins* (1993),²³ explores many aspects of the interconnectedness of Minimalist art and music, he nevertheless has virtually nothing to say about *The Lightning Field*, simply commenting that 'in its expansive but unvaried repetition of simple and indivisible modules', it might occupy the somewhat oxymoronic subset 'epic Minimalism', along with 'works in other media such as La Monte Young's *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*, Newman's *Stations*

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.115–116.

²² Walter De Maria to Robert Scull, 1 November 1968, in Ethel Scull papers. Cited in Boettger, 2002, p.118, and p.275 footnote 65.

²³ Strickland, Edward. *Minimalism: Origins*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.

of the Cross, Ronald Bladen's *The X*, Andy Warhol's *Empire*, perhaps the Rothko Chapel and certainly the Yamasaki Cathedral.'²⁴

Similarly, although Jane McFadden recognises the limitations of the terminology as far as the label 'Land Art' is concerned, and she forges important connections between De Maria and La Monte Young in her recent PhD thesis and in her essay 'Toward Site',²⁵ she has not explored De Maria's own career as a musician or the relevance of this for an understanding of his aesthetic in general or *The Lightning Field* in particular. Like Strickland, she stops short before this iconic work.

Walter De Maria's own interest in large-scale natural landscapes undoubtedly had its origins in his childhood fascination with the Pacific Ocean, while his early involvement in what might be termed performance-based practice, especially Fluxus, had a major influence on later works, as we shall see in the next chapter. Yet despite the complexities of marking beginnings (and this is as true for other 'Land Artists' as it is for De Maria), a number of the survey texts on 'Land Art' attempt to delineate a starting point for the genre at around 1968–69. Suzaan Boettger, for example, considers the start of 'Land Art' to be marked by two exhibitions: the 'Earth Works' exhibition at Virginia Dwan's gallery in New York from 5–30 October 1968, which was curated by Robert Smithson; and the 'Earth Art' exhibition, held the following year from 11 February to 16 March at the Andrew Dickson White Museum at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and curated by Willoughby Sharp at the invitation of the museum's director Tom Leavitt.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.9.

²⁵ McFadden, Jane. *Practices of Site: Walter de Maria and Robert Morris, 1960–1977*. PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, May 2004. See also Jane McFadden, 'Toward Site', in *Grey Room*, Vol 27, Spring 2007, pp.36–57.

The 'Earth Works' exhibition is commonly regarded as a major milestone in the development of the genre, for it included some startling new works such as Robert Morris's *Earthwork*, Smithson's *A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey*, the blueprint for Stephen Kaltenbach's *Earth Mound for a Kidney-Shaped Swimming Pool*, and Claes Oldenburg's untitled one-foot-high plastic cube with dirt and worms. The exhibition also included photographic documentation of works that were either permanently sited in distant locations or which had been destroyed. De Maria, for example, showed photographs of two recent works: *Mile Long Drawing* (1968) (Figure 8), and *Munich Earth Room* (Figure 9) which had been made in Munich, Germany, less than a month earlier. However, he was also the only artist to exhibit a painting at the show – arguably an indication of his increasing unwillingness to conform to expectations. Titled *The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth* (1968) (Figure 10), 20 feet long by 7 feet tall, and painted yellow – the colour of Caterpillar earth-moving equipment – the painting's title was etched onto a small stainless-steel plaque that was affixed to the very centre of the canvas.²⁶ Incidentally, this work was also the only work at the exhibition to sell – to Robert Scull, apparently to repay a \$3,000 debt.²⁷

The following year, the 'Earth Art' exhibition featured works made solely of natural, earthen materials, including Smithson's *Rock Salt and Mirror Square*, Robert Morris's *Untitled* (consisting of a number of piles of earth, anthracite, and asbestos), and Hans Haacke's *Grass Pile*, a mound of earth seeded with a fast-growing winter rye, which was watered throughout the course of the exhibition.²⁸ As for De Maria, he refused to

²⁶ In the summer of 1968 most of the ten artists that would participate at the show prepared work from distant locations: Sol LeWitt was in Holland, Carl Andre in Aspen, Heizer in California and Nevada, Smithson in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and Walter De Maria in Europe. In September, just a month before the show was due to open, De Maria wrote to Dwan's director, John Weber, with instructions for *The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth*. The work was duly made. See Boettger, 2002, pp.146–147. The painting was acquired by the Menil Collection, Houston, Texas in spring 2007. [Online] www.menil.org/collection/modern_contemporary.php. [03.01.09].

²⁷ See [Online] www.artsjournal.com/man/2007/05/acquisition_walter_de_maria_at.html [03.01.09].

²⁸ The 'Earth Art' exhibition was conceived as one of a four-part series (earth, air, fire, and water).

conform to the usual proprieties, for he exhibited a controversial work called *Good Fuck*. This work demonstrated both his increasingly uneasy relationship with the authority imposed by the conventional gallery system and his continued interest in creating anxious moments for his audience. In order to construct the work, De Maria arrived at the museum during the opening of the exhibition, and while visitors watched from behind the closed doors of the gallery assigned to him, he raked the earth that assistants had provided into a smooth shallow rectangle. Then he used the tip of the rake handle to write in capital letters across the earth the words GOOD FUCK. When Thomas Leavitt informed De Maria that the room would be closed off during an elementary school group's visit, De Maria withdrew from the show and instructed that his piece be swept up and discarded.²⁹

3. An active audience

Unlike the Dwan Gallery 'Earth Works' exhibition, 'Earth Art' incorporated a number of outdoor works, which required that the audience 'take a walk' on a much larger spatiotemporal scale than would have been necessary for the viewing of any works exhibited indoors. For example, Michael Heizer constructed *Depression*, a trench about 8 feet deep and 75 feet long, excavated behind the building and necessitating a walk in order for it to be viewed. Possibly in a show of solidarity with De Maria, Heizer – a good friend of De Maria's – also withdrew from the exhibition, but his excavation was refilled with difficulty, as the removed earth had become part of others' works. Two Europeans also exhibited at the show: Jan Dibbets and Richard Long. Dibbets' *Construction of a Wood* incorporated a deliberate play on perspective and required viewers to walk through the woods to the site of the work; Dibbets considered this walk to be a part of the piece. Similarly, Long's *Untitled, 27 East Avenue, Ithaca, New York*

²⁹ Boettger, 2002, p.165.

[the museum's address] also required 'audience participation'; in the early morning before the exhibition opened, Long placed twelve pieces of grey schist over the space of a large rectangle, but it was not possible to see the whole piece from any one place, so viewers had to walk around it.³⁰

A number of the survey texts refer to the experience of visitors to works of 'Land Art'. John Beardsley, for instance, describes the visitor's perception of time at Morris's *Observatory* (1971),³¹ the experience of walking around Richard Fleischner's labyrinthine *Sod Maze* (1974),³² the 'grand awfulness of the natural surroundings' at Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76),³³ and the 'environment of rapture' created by Turrell at *Roden Crater* (1974–present).³⁴ Mark Rosenthal comments on the 'powerful suggestion of interior space' in works such as Mary Miss's *Sunken Pool* (1974), Smithson's *Broken Circle–Spiral Hill* (1971), and Heizer's *Complex One/City* (1972 and ongoing).³⁵ Similarly, Gilles Tiberghien argues that Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) is designed to be entered, and in his foreword to *Land Art* he writes that, for most works of 'Land Art', the audience needs to follow 'in the footsteps of the artists',³⁶ since it is not just the spectator's vision but also his or her presence that is required. Tiberghien also recognises that many of the works 'are quite demanding of the spectator', and that the journey to reach them is part of the experience:

They do not give themselves over as they are; the viewer must struggle to see them, to the point of traveling numerous miles in the heat, desert, and dust before finally 'discovering' them.³⁷

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.165.

³¹ Beardsley, 1984, pp.26–27.

³² *Ibid.*, p.30.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.39.

³⁵ Rosenthal, M. 'Some Attitudes of Earth Art: From Competition to Adoration', in Sonfist, 1983, pp.64–65.

³⁶ Tiberghien, 1993, p.9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.17.

With regard to audience engagement, perhaps most noteworthy (and among the most controversial) is the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Their temporary large-scale projects – for example, *Wrapped Coast* (1968–69), *Valley Curtain* (1970–72), and *Running Fence* (1976) – required extensive teams of climbers, labourers, manufacturers, and volunteers in order to be constructed. Furthermore, these works also required lengthy and costly negotiations for permissions to be granted before work could begin.³⁸

As far as De Maria's practice is concerned, an interest in the physical engagement of the 'audience' was neither original, nor confined to the discipline of visual art; it was, after all, of major importance for 'Happenings' and for Fluxus at the start of the 1960s, as well as for Minimalism, and it was also a key component of much of the experimental music of composers such as John Cage, Steve Reich, and La Monte Young, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. Moreover, within the survey texts, accounts of first-hand experience are largely descriptive rather than analytical, giving little opportunity to explore experiential evidence in any depth; indeed, this is especially the case with *The Lightning Field*, which seems to attract the kind of writing recently seen in Kenneth Baker's 2008 book, titled simply *The Lightning Field*.³⁹ Somewhat curiously, Baker largely employs De Maria's *The Lightning Field* as a catalyst for a series of musings on the state of the world following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA.

³⁸ For example, the planning process for *Valley Curtain*, at Rifle, Colorado, began in 1970, and took 28 months to come to fruition. It could not be built until Christo and Jeanne-Claude could convince the relevant public authorities and private landowners that it would not interfere with the highway beneath it. Construction involved 35 construction workers and 64 temporary helpers and was finished on 10 August 1972. The very next day, a gale swept through the valley and the curtain had to be dismantled. *Running Fence*, which crossed countryside, farms, villages, and highways, was not permitted to cause any environmental damage or to interfere with the practicalities of daily life for the inhabitants of the area, even though it was only installed for two weeks. Each work therefore demands the involvement of a large and often international workforce: lawyers, experts on environmental health and public safety, engineers, manufacturers, climbers, and general helpers. Christo and Jeanne-Claude regard this engagement as an integral part of the final sculpture, and in so doing they question the usual distinctions between 'artist' and 'audience', as well as the notion of permanence. Vaizey, M. *Christo*. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1990, p.8.

³⁹ Baker, Kenneth. *The Lightning Field* (with a preface by Lynne Cooke). New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008.

4. The role of patronage

Within the critical framework of 'Land Art', the role of patronage, including that of wealthy collector Robert Scull⁴⁰ and dealer Virginia Dwan,⁴¹ has been examined in some detail, especially by Suzaan Boettger in her essay 'Patronage: Behind the Earth Movers'.⁴² Patronage for 'Land Art' was unusually complex because, with works such as *The Lightning Field*, *Double Negative*, and *Spiral Jetty*, the conventional display and potential sale of art was disrupted by the works' physical remoteness and the impossibility of uprooting them from their geographical locations. Suzaan Boettger argues that Virginia Dwan's 'adventurous patronage and widespread promotion', supported by a substantial family inheritance, were instrumental to the development of 'Land Art',⁴³ while Maura Coughlin goes as far as to describe the ongoing link between 'Land Artists' and their urban patrons – notably Dwan and Scull – as the 'umbilical cord of gold'.⁴⁴ By the late 1960s, De Maria had gained the support of both Scull and Dwan in the USA, but he also acquired a dealer in Germany, Heiner Friedrich, and subsequently made many trips to Europe and made many works of art there: indeed, in the latter decades of the twentieth century, De Maria has had a number of one-man exhibitions in Europe: in Milan, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, and Stockholm.⁴⁵ It was Heiner

⁴⁰ Robert Scull made his fortune out of developing his father-in-law's taxi fleet in New York in the mid-to late 1940s, and subsequently went on to collect and support new art, including works of 'Land Art'. By 1968, Scull and his wife Ethel (whom he nicknamed 'Spike') were being characterised by the journalist Tom Wolfe as 'the folk heroes of every social climber who ever hit New York... In a blaze of publicity they illuminated the secret route: *collecting wacked-out art*.' Tom Wolfe. 'Bob and Spike', in *The Pump House Gang*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1968. This chapter was originally published as 'Upward with the Arts, in *New York*, the Sunday magazine section of *World Journal Tribune*. For more on Scull, see Boettger, 2002, pp.111–115.

⁴¹ Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* was the first large-scale 'environmental work' that Dwan funded, and it cost her c.\$27,000. In 1970 Dwan contributed to Peter Hutchinson's *Paricutin Volcano Project*. She was also instrumental in the construction of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* in the same year, as well as Heizer's *Complex One/City* (1972 and ongoing) and Charles Ross's *Star Axis* (1971 and ongoing). Suzaan Boettger. 'Patronage: Behind the Earth Movers', in *Art in America*, Vol 92 No 4, April 2004, p.55.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.54–63.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.54–63.

⁴⁴ Coughlin, M. 'Landed', in *Art Journal*, Summer 2005, p.105.

⁴⁵ These include: Germano Celant, *Walter De Maria: 1999 Milano 2000*. Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2000; Thomas Kellein, *Walter De Maria: 5 Continent Sculpture*. Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1988; Franz Meyer, *Walter De Maria*. Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991; Lars Nittve (ed.) (text

Friedrich who subsequently founded the Dia Art Foundation, which commissioned *The Lightning Field*. Both Friedrich and, later, the Dia Art Foundation have also done much to support a much wider arena of the arts, including the work of composer La Monte Young who, like De Maria, also often worked on a large scale. For example, Dia spent US\$4 million on the 'Dream House', a building on Harrison Street in Lower Manhattan in New York that housed the light projections of Marian Zazeela (Young's partner) and where Young's electronic music played 24 hours a day. This important connection, via patronage, between De Maria and Young has, however, been almost totally overlooked in the texts on 'Land Art'. A recent exception is Anna Chave who, in 'Revaluing Minimalism: Patronage, aura, and place',⁴⁶ argues that the patronage of Friedrich and the Dia Art Foundation – especially their support of large-scale, site-specific, and often remote works – has strengthened the sense of 'aura' surrounding such works and turned the visitor's experience of them into something akin to a visit to a pilgrimage site or sanctuary. Chave describes this spiritualised patronage of art in somewhat negative terms, and I return to this in Chapter Six.

5. Scale

The massive scale of many works of 'Land Art', including *The Lightning Field*, is often considered to be one of their defining features. Indeed, the Dia Art Foundation, which commissioned and maintains *The Lightning Field*, is specifically committed to the support of works whose nature and scale exceed the limits normally available within the traditional museum or gallery. This emphasis on scale has undoubtedly been a major factor in the widespread tendency to compare such works, not only with their Minimalist 'predecessors' – for example, Tony Smith's *Smoke* (1967) and Ronald

by J.C. Cooper). *Walter De Maria: Two Very Large Presentations*. Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1989; Harald Szeemann, *Walter De Maria: The 2000 Sculpture*. Zurich: Kunsthau Zurich, 1992.

⁴⁶ Chave, Anna. 'Revaluing Minimalism: patronage, aura, and place', in *The Art Bulletin*, September 2008, pp.466–486.

Bladen's *X* (1967)⁴⁷ – but also with the equally large-scale structures of prehistory and ancient history. Mark Rosenthal, for example, writes of 'Land Art' in general:

These quasi-architectural structures support comparisons with ancient and tribal monuments that seek accommodation with, signify worship of, or aspire to protection from natural deities.⁴⁸

Gilles Tiberghien draws comparisons between Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969) and Ancient Thebes in Egypt (Heizer's father was an archaeologist, and the young Heizer used to accompany his father on field trips),⁴⁹ while John Beardsley compares Heizer's *Complex One* (1972–76) with the ancient monument of Teotihuacán near Mexico City.⁵⁰ Similar comparisons between 'Land Art' and prehistoric monuments are made by Lucy Lippard in *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (1983),⁵¹ and by Colin Renfrew in the more recent *Figuring It Out. What are we? Where do we come from? The parallel visions of artists and archaeologists* (2003).⁵² With regard to De Maria, Wim Beeren asserts:

the monumentality of his works has an impact which does not imply an individual, but which compels us to look at them by the sheer virtue of their presence. This is how we look at ancient monuments which have been preserved and whose makers we shall never know.⁵³

⁴⁷ Both of these works were shown at the exhibition 'Scale as Content' at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC. The works were located in the main hall of the gallery, and visitors were able to walk under and through these massive works, drawing attention to the bodily experience of this encounter with art and space. See Frances Colpitt. *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990, p.78.

⁴⁸ Rosenthal, in Sonfist, 1983, p.64.

⁴⁹ Tiberghien, 1993, p.89.

⁵⁰ Beardsley, 1984, pp.16–17.

⁵¹ Lucy Lippard compares many of Richard Long's works with structures such as the Nazca lines and mazes of Peru, as well as the mazes and labyrinths in Britain and elsewhere. L.R. Lippard. *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*. New York: The New Press, 1983.

⁵² Colin Renfrew argues that analysis of the use of space and materials in, for instance, the work of Richard Long, can shed valuable light on one's understanding of prehistoric sites and monuments, and vice versa. Renfrew also emphasises the importance of the personal encounter (bodily and otherwise) in both prehistoric sites and much of contemporary art, including works of 'Land Art'. Colin Renfrew. *Figuring It Out. What are we? Where do we come from? The parallel visions of artists and archaeologists*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2003.

⁵³ Beeren, W. and Schoon, T. *Walter De Maria*. Exhibition Catalogue. Rotterdam: Museum Boymans – van Beuningen, 1984, p.2.

However, Brian Wallis points to the danger of focusing too much on the monumental aspects of 'Land Art', arguing that this can easily lead one to overlook their more subtle qualities.⁵⁴ Misplaced focus on monumentality is particularly pertinent for *The Lightning Field*, and in subsequent chapters I explore the significance of small-scale features in the visitor's experience of the work: features that, by and large, have not been considered in the extant literature.

6. Site-specificity and the role of photography

Another common feature of works of 'Land Art' is their 'site-specificity'. Like monumental prehistoric sites, they are usually thought of in terms of their rootedness to their geographical location. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was undoubtedly a growing desire to explore the dynamic dialogue between an artwork and a wider geographical location, and artists such as De Maria, Heizer, Smithson, Holt, Oppenheim, Turrell, and Morris shared the conviction that sculpture could not only have what Brian Wallis describes as 'a life away from the institution, out in the world', but also one that was 'inflected by a variable and "organic" location'.⁵⁵ Writing in 1967, in an *Artforum* essay titled 'Sculpture's Vanishing Base', Jack Burnham explored the increasing breakdown of the distinction between sculpture and its base, and showed how the boundaries between 'art' and its surroundings were becoming progressively blurred.⁵⁶ And, by the end of the decade, Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1969) was regarded as a 'bible' for many of the 'Land Artists'.⁵⁷ However, with regard to *The Lightning Field*, the true complexities of its relationship with 'site' have largely

⁵⁴ Kastner, J. and Wallis, B. (eds). *Land and Environmental Art*. London and New York: Phaidon, 1998, p.29.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁵⁶ Jack Wesley Burnham explores the relationship between sculpture and its base in the work of the Constructivists and, subsequently, Naum Gabo (eg. *Torsion*, 1929) and Antoine Pevsner (eg. *Construction for an Airport*, 1935), and he argues that such works reflect a growing interest in the intimate tension between a work and its surroundings, an interest which clearly came to be a key issue for 'Land Art'. J.W. Burnham. 'Sculpture's Vanishing Base', in *Artforum*, Vol 6 No 3, November 1967, pp.47-55.

⁵⁷ Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

been underplayed. For example, the physical limits of the work are in fact impossible to delineate, while the rather unusual role of the wooden cabin where visitors stay has been almost completely disregarded even though time spent there is very much a part of the whole visitor experience. Most significantly, the connections between the experience of site at *The Lightning Field* and the experience of experimental music's spatial context have gone unnoticed. I address all of these concerns in subsequent chapters.

Notwithstanding their alleged 'site-specificity', it has been recognised that many works of 'Land Art' are in some senses 'dislocated' from site, since their very geographical remoteness means that few people have the opportunity to see them *in situ*. Such works are therefore usually encountered, not through their 'site-specificity' at all, but through what Elizabeth Baker describes as the 'second-hand' medium of 'photographs, posters, articles, films, [and] video tapes'.⁵⁸ Indeed, Gilles Tiberghien emphasises the rather paradoxical fashion in which 'Land Art'

fled the museums and galleries, claiming a desire to escape from the market system ... only to return to these spaces – albeit through another door – to exhibit photographs and various documentation related to their works.⁵⁹

As already mentioned, the 1968 'Earth Works' exhibition at the Dwan Gallery consisted partly of photographs of works that were either permanently sited in distant locations or which had been destroyed (among them De Maria's *Mile Long Drawing* and *Munich Earth Room*). This not only frustrated conventional market expectations in the gallery, but also established what Brian Wallis describes as a strange sense of absence, even loss, and posed a peculiarly disorienting problem about what constituted the 'real' work of art.⁶⁰ *The Lightning Field* is unique in this respect, on account of the ban on

⁵⁸ Baker, E.C. 'Artworks on the Land', in Sonfist, 1983, p.74.

⁵⁹ Tiberghien, 1993, p.235.

⁶⁰ Kastner and Wallis (eds), 1998, p.24.

photography at the site and the dissemination of just six official photographs (*Figures 1–6*). The limited number of available photographs has certainly enhanced the auratic quality of the artwork, and I consider this in more detail in Chapter Six. Moreover, this ‘scarcity value’ has also caused the photographs themselves to achieve some kind of iconic status, not only as signifiers of a particular kind of experience at *The Lightning Field*, but also sometimes as signifiers of things well beyond the work. As Jane McFadden recognises,

the photographs of *The Lightning Field* that have become pervasive in the visual record of late twentieth-century art have an entirely different set of meanings from those attributed to the work itself ... Of the many examples of the use of the photographs of *The Lightning Field* without analysis, perhaps none are so flagrant as Robert Hughes’ *American Visions*, which flaunts the photographs of the work and the sublime association of the lightning strike on its front jacket while barely mentioning the work inside.⁶¹

A similar accusation can, however, also be levelled at a number of the ‘Land Art’ survey texts, as well as to more general survey texts on twentieth-century art, for the vast majority of these books illustrate *The Lightning Field* through reproductions solely of the most dramatic images of lightning, rather than using those calmer images that do not show lightning: for example, dramatic images of lightning strikes grace the front cover of Alan Sonfist’s *Art in the Land*⁶² and John Beardsley’s *Earthworks and Beyond*,⁶³ as well as the frontispiece of Kastner and Wallis’s *Land and Environmental Art*.⁶⁴ The major exceptions to this are Tiberghien’s *Land Art*,⁶⁵ which gives equal weight to the images without lightning, and Boettger’s *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*, which uses no images of the work at all.⁶⁶ Boettger, however,

⁶¹ McFadden, 2004, p.25. The book to which she refers is Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America*. New York: Random House, 1997.

⁶² Sonfist, 1983.

⁶³ Beardsley, 1984.

⁶⁴ Kastner and Wallis, 1998.

⁶⁵ Tiberghien, 1993.

⁶⁶ Boettger, 2002. Somewhat confusingly, the title of Boettger’s book implies that she is solely concerned with works made in the 1960s; however, she also considers a number of works made in the 1970s, including *The Lightning Field*.

blames De Maria for the fact that the most commonly used images are those of dramatic nocturnal views of lightning bolts, for she asserts that De Maria's policy of extreme control over the experience of the work and the creation and dissemination of pictures of it has limited its representation to these spectacular images.⁶⁷ However, even a cursory glance back to De Maria's 1980 essay on *The Lightning Field* shows that only two of the four photos that accompany the text show lightning, and neither of these shows the lightning in the dark. Moreover, of the six images available for purchase, only two show lightning at all. It is therefore subsequent interpretations, rather than De Maria himself, that have focused on the spectacle of lightning. The result of this is that, despite De Maria's own stance, the experience of lightning has largely come to be seen as *The Lightning Field's* *raison d'être*, even where the work's capacity for less dramatic moments has, albeit briefly, been acknowledged. In Chapter Nine I question the centrality of lightning in the possible array of experiences for the visitor.

7. Desert sublime

Why did 'Land Artists' want to make works in such isolated desert landscapes as the empty uplands of New Mexico (*The Lightning Field*), the Great Salt Lake in Utah (Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*), Mormon Mesa in Nevada (Heizer's *Double Negative*), or the Painted Desert in Arizona (Turrell's *Roden Crater*)? It would of course have been much easier to make works closer to urban areas, and in less inhospitable terrains. The reasons for this are complex, and within the survey texts on 'Land Art' this issue has given rise to some conflicting views. Certainly De Maria, like Heizer,⁶⁸ felt an increasing dislike for the gallery system of New York. It is also possible that he wanted to make artworks

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.243.

⁶⁸ By 1970 Michael Heizer clearly expressed a desire to draw back from a world in turmoil, stating that he 'started making 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 in the desert and started making things in dirt.' Quoted in D.C. McGill. *Michael Heizer: Effigy Tumuli: The Re-emergence of Ancient Mound Building*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990.

that avoided any kind of overt political statement, and perhaps he felt that a 'retreat' to the *tabula rasa* of the desert would enable him to do so. John Beardsley⁶⁹ certainly finds in 'Land Art' echoes of Henry Thoreau, who revered nature as an escape from society, whose creed was 'simplify, simplify', and who championed 'absolute freedom and wildness'.⁷⁰ Beardsley also argues that at times of political and social turmoil (in the USA, the 1960s were certainly such a time) artists retreat into the Sublime,⁷¹ and he regards *The Lightning Field* as a twentieth-century version of this retreat, citing Christopher Hussey's seven attributes of the Sublime, which are themselves based on a reading of Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, first published in 1757. These are:

obscurity, both physical and intellectual; *power*; *privations*, such as darkness, solitude, and silence; *vastness*, either vertical or horizontal, both of which diminish the relative scale of the human observer; *infinity*, which could either be literal or induced by two final characteristics of the sublime: *succession* and *uniformity*, both of which suggest limitless progression.⁷²

For Beardsley, *The Lightning Field* is *obscure*, 'both in the sense of being difficult to perceive – especially at midday – and in being remote and troublesome to reach'; its central image is *power* – 'the sometimes lethal power of lightning'; the *privations* of solitude and silence are 'integral to the experience of the work'; it is *vast*, 'both in its own dimension and the setting it employs', and 'everywhere is the inference of *infinity*'; and 'the poles stand in stately *succession*, *uniform* in height and in the distance between them.'⁷³

⁶⁹ Beardsley, 1984, pp.10–11.

⁷⁰ Thoreau, Henry David. 'Walking', in Henry S. Canby (ed.). *The Work of Thoreau*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937, pp.659–660.

⁷¹ Beardsley, 1984, pp.59–63.

⁷² Hussey, Christopher. *The Picturesque*. New York and London: Putnam's, 1927, pp.58–59. Cited in Beardsley, 1984, p.62.

⁷³ Beardsley, 1984, p.63.

A number of other critics have also invoked the Sublime to describe the experience of being at *The Lightning Field*. Suzaan Boettger, for example, writes:

De Maria has provided a dramatic setting, one that calls up sources of the experience of the sublime: vastness, the awesome power of nature, particularly in its destructive, terrifying aspects of thunder, lightning, and obscurity.⁷⁴

Similarly, Michael Govan writes that, with *The Lightning Field*, 'precise design and measure serve, among other things, to channel the sublime cosmic scale and explosive power of the natural environment into the artwork.'⁷⁵ This persistent focus on the Sublime can certainly help to account for the more dramatic and large-scale features of *The Lightning Field*, but, like the usual reproductions of the photographs to which I referred earlier, it perpetuates a very one-sided view of the work which is not corroborated by first-hand accounts. An important feature of this thesis is therefore the inclusion of these first-hand accounts, by 'ordinary' people rather than 'art historians'. To date, these 'ordinary' voices have had no place in the art-historical literature on this artwork, yet their 'untrained' perspectives provide convincing testimony of the dynamic relationship between artwork and audience, unclouded by theoretical approaches. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to speculate further on the extent to which this might be true for other works of art; however, one might nonetheless contemplate the notion that 'expert opinion' often loses something of the directness (and potential for joy) of first-hand experience.

For Jeffrey Kastner and others, the growing interest in the wider environment beyond the frame of the gallery is linked to a rather romanticised nostalgia for a more natural existence than was generally available in the industrial and consumerist society of mainstream America or Europe. This nostalgia led to a move outdoors and into the

⁷⁴ Boettger, 2002, p.243.

⁷⁵ Govan, Michael. 'Walter De Maria'. [Online] www.diacenter.org [07.10.2005].

natural world, especially the unacculturated desert. It was also seen as a desire to embrace an anti-urban aesthetic, and as a break with the idea of New York as the central pivot for culture. Michael Heizer, for example, commented:

I felt like a foreigner in New York. I was from the West coast and I liked the West. I didn't know much about the East and I didn't like what I saw. It looked like it was degenerating.⁷⁶

Yet, as Erika Doss comments in *Twentieth-Century American Art* (2002), this focus on the rural West was nothing new. Several decades earlier, artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe and, in a somewhat different vein, the Regionalists Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood had also looked to the rural environment as opposed to the urban one for their inspiration, and to the Midwest USA as opposed to the East, turning their back on New York.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Maura Coughlin correctly warns of the danger of talking about the rural world 'out there' versus the urban art world of New York as if they were in binary opposition to each other, since this implies that 'exterior nature' is 'weighted with a greater authenticity of place'.⁷⁸ She argues that 'Land Artists' simply 'reinvented the West (yet again) as a mythic, timeless, almost empty space, other to the cultured, cluttered modernity of New York'.⁷⁹ In reality, most of the 'Land Artists', including De Maria, spent a lot of time in Max's 'Kansas City' bar in Manhattan. Indeed, at the start of the 1960s a number of artists and musicians, including De Maria, Robert Morris, and La Monte Young, moved from the West Coast to live in New York, specifically so that they could become involved in its vibrant, and often challenging, arts scene. Moreover, both Gilles Tiberghien and Suzaan Boettger argue that the tendency to 'depoliticise' 'Land Artists' is over-simplistic, for a number of

⁷⁶ Cited in Brown, J. (ed.). *Michael Heizer: Sculpture in Reverse*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

⁷⁷ Doss, E. *Twentieth-century American Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.108–113.

⁷⁸ Coughlin, M. 'Landed', in *Art Journal*, Summer 2005, p.105.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

them were most certainly politically engaged.⁸⁰ For example, Robert Morris was involved in the Art Strike of 1970, which was a protest against the American involvement in the Vietnam War, the recent bombing of Cambodia, and the shooting of four student protestors at Kent State University.⁸¹ More recently, Michael Heizer has been involved with debates about nuclear test sites in Nevada, which currently threaten his ongoing *Complex One/City*. As far as De Maria is concerned, however, given his general reluctance to make statements regarding his art practice, there is little explicit evidence of political involvement, apart from the last moments of his film *Hard Core* (1969), which make an oblique reference to the Vietnam War (also see Chapter Three).⁸²

8. Horizontality and earth

The construction of large-scale outdoor works in remote desert locations has been regarded as part of a growing desire to make works that emphasised horizontality rather than the more familiar verticality of sculpture. Even within the gallery spaces, artists such as Carl Andre started to 'squeeze out' any sense of verticality in works like *Lever* (1966) and *64 Steel Square* (1967), while with *Log Piece* and *Joint*, both made in 1968, Andre took the horizontal line out of doors. Jeffrey Kastner comments that by the middle of the 1960s De Maria, like Andre, Smithson, Holt, and Heizer, was also beginning to respond to the horizontality of the land,⁸³ and this can be seen in *Mile Long Drawing*, as well as *Cross* (1968) and *Las Vegas Piece* (1969) (Figures 8, 11, and 12). A strong sense of horizontality is also achieved at *The Lightning Field*, where, despite the vertical nature of each individual pole, the overall impression of the whole array is

⁸⁰ Boettger, 2002, pp.30–31.

⁸¹ On 22 May 1970 Morris led a group of demonstrators to the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, demanding that the museum should close for the day in solidarity with them. See Maurice Berger. *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989, p.107.

⁸² Tiberghien, 1993, p.265.

⁸³ Kastner and Wallis (eds), 1998, p.14.

of a massive, flat ‘bed of nails’. Yet unlike many other ‘Land Artists’ – notably Holt, Smithson, Oppenheim, and Long⁸⁴ – De Maria was rarely drawn to the horizontality provided by maps. Moreover, in contrast to *Las Vegas Piece* and *Cross*, which are known from aerial photographs, such a view of *The Lightning Field* would be utterly useless, a point made by De Maria in his own essay on the work, in which he writes: ‘Because the sky-ground relationship is central to the work, viewing *The Lightning Field* from the air is of no value.’⁸⁵ However, De Maria’s deployment of the ‘grid’ at *The Lightning Field*, combined with his deliberate muddling of imperial and metric systems of measurement, clearly demonstrates his interest in how the landscape of the USA was historically measured and mapped and subsequently sold in mile-square sections:⁸⁶ a point recognised by John Beardsley who refers to Jefferson’s National Survey of 1785.⁸⁷

By the late 1960s, many artists, including De Maria (for example in the first of his three ‘Earth Rooms’: *Munich Earth Room*), were increasingly using the earth itself as their medium; indeed, a growing interest in the use of natural materials had clearly been evident in the works on display at the 1968 ‘Earth Works’ exhibition and at the 1969 ‘Earth Art’ show, as we saw earlier in this chapter. For Gilles Tiberghien, this implied a search for ‘a specificity of art through objects that are no longer specifically artistic’.⁸⁸ Similarly, Suzaan Boettger addresses what she calls the ‘motif of the pile’, since a common feature of many ‘Earthworks’ was the shaping of material into mounds or heaps of various shapes and sizes. Morris’s *Earthwork*, for instance, was a large pile of

⁸⁴ Nancy Holt uses a series of maps for her *Buried Poems* (1969–1971), and Robert Smithson employs maps in his film of *Spiral Jetty*, including a Jurassic map on which mythical continents are visible. Dennis Oppenheim uses maps in *Contour Lines Scribed in Swamp Grass* (1968), while for Richard Long maps are an integral part of many of his works (e.g. *Sound Circle: A Walk on Dartmoor*, 1990).

⁸⁵ De Maria, Walter. ‘The Lightning Field’, in *Artforum* Vol 18 No 8, 1980, p.58.

⁸⁶ For an introduction to this aspect of the USA’s history, see Andro Linklater. *Measuring America: How the United States was Shaped by the Greatest Land Sale in History*. London: HarperCollins, 2002.

⁸⁷ Beardsley, 1984, p.62.

⁸⁸ Tiberghien, 1993, p.21.

earth and industrial detritus, and in his essay 'Anti Form', Morris describes the growing interest in both rigid and non-rigid materials (for example, Claes Oldenburg's *Giant Soft Fan*, 1967); in balance, tension, and mass (in works such as Richard Serra's *One-Ton Prop* and *Stacked Steel Slabs*, both 1969); and in gravity, weight, and decay (for example, in Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* of 1969 and *Partially Buried Woodshed* of 1970).⁸⁹ For De Maria, however, it was not 'earth' alone that concerned him, for he was often interested in the juxtaposition of the natural features of a landscape with the interior gallery space, as can be seen in the three 'Earth Rooms'. Similarly, at *The Lightning Field*, 'earth' is certainly involved, yet this 'earth' is set against the extreme contrast of the precision-engineered poles – a contrast between the natural and the machine-made that has fascinated De Maria throughout his career, but which has largely been overlooked in the survey literature on 'Land Art' in favour of a continuing preoccupation with the 'earth' alone. Moreover, the survey texts on 'Land Art' make no mention of the parallel exploration of 'noise' in music – which is arguably the musical equivalent of 'earth' in 'Land Art'. Noise is often thought of as the very opposite of music, or, worse, what music degenerates into when it is not under the control of the composer's and/or musician's authority. While visual artists began increasingly to use earth, mud, water, and grass as the new material for making art, so experimental composers such as Reich, Cage, and Young used sounds that are not conventionally thought of as musical at all – the flap of a pigeon's wings, the glugging of water, even the (inaudible) flutter of a butterfly in flight.

9. Time

The Lightning Field is experienced through an extended period of time, since visitors have to stay at the wooden cabin overlooking the field of poles for the best part of 24

⁸⁹ Morris, R. 'Anti Form', in *Artforum*, Vol 6 No 8, April 1968, p.35.

hours (further details of the visiting arrangements are provided in Chapter Five). ‘Time’ has held a fascination for many ‘Land Artists’, and, of all the ‘survey texts’, Gilles Tiberghien’s *Land Art* gives the fullest account of this fascination.⁹⁰ Tiberghien remarks on the significance of the 1962 publication of George Kubler’s *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*,⁹¹ and he also assesses the growing interest in some aspects of the process-oriented nature of art in the 1960s, especially those inherited from the previous generation’s fascination with action painting (for instance, in Hans Namuth’s film of Jackson Pollock). Works such as Oppenheim’s *Time Pocket* (1968), *Boundary Split* (1968), and *Annual Rings* (1968) use time as a measure of movement, while Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76), Morris’s *Observatory* (1970–77), and Charles Ross’s *Star Axis* (1971 and ongoing) are among a number of works of ‘Land Art’ that introduce the observer/participant to the cosmic dimensions of time. With regard to *The Lightning Field*, Tiberghien certainly recognises the importance of the visitor’s experience of certain aspects of duration combined with the diurnal cycle. He writes:

The field of lightning rods is itself a work of art, but one which cannot be understood except through a whole range of visibility that extends from an almost total eclipse, at the hour when the sun hits it from directly above, to a spectacular event, at the moment when lightning strikes it.⁹²

However, in all the survey texts, many other significant aspects of duration at *The Lightning Field* have either been underplayed or ignored. These include De Maria’s early explorations of process and duration in a number of his Fluxus texts (Suzaan Boettger only mentions one of these: ‘Art Yard’); the extension of duration via the ‘road trip’ to get to the work at all (this is briefly mentioned in some texts, but not analysed in any depth); the time limit of just under 24 hours, which is not open to negotiation, and which therefore turns the experience into something more like a visit to the theatre; the

⁹⁰ See chapter four – ‘Time at work’ – in Tiberghien, 1993, pp.129–162.

⁹¹ Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962.

⁹² Tiberghien, 1993, pp.140 and 142.

'slowing down' of time at the cabin and while walking among the poles; and, throughout, the significant associations that can be made with music, which is traditionally considered to be the most temporal of the arts. These aspects of duration are explored in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

10. USA versus Europe

Many 'Land Art' critics argue that the experience of American 'Land Artists' is quite different to that of their European counterparts. For example, it is frequently asserted that Europeans such as Jan Dibbets, Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Long, Giuseppe Penone, and David Nash generally use smaller-scale sites, make more ephemeral works, and treat the European landscape – much of which, in contrast to the deserts of the Midwest USA, is already marked and used – in a more sensitive way. Certainly, a number of Goldsworthy's works are ephemeral, delicate, and craft-oriented (for example, *Heron Feathers*, 1982), while David Nash incorporates elements of the organic and the pastoral in much of his work (e.g. *Standing Frame*, 1987). Yet in the most recent of the survey texts on 'Land Art', Ben Tufnell correctly warns against establishing a simplistic polarity between American and European strategies, citing the example of Michael Singer, an American artist whose landscape-based practice of the 1970s has much in common with the work of Goldsworthy.⁹³ This is also pertinent for De Maria, who, as we shall see, was fascinated by small details, whether visual or acoustic, sometimes even pushing towards invisibility and silence.

The British artist Hamish Fulton is, however, deeply critical of much American 'Land Art', for he regards the monumental works of De Maria, Smithson, and Heizer as a

⁹³ In the early 1970s, Singer made a series of works at the Beaver Bogs, Marlborough, Vermont, and at Saltwater Marshes on Long Island. Works such as *Situation Balance Series Beaver Bog* (1971–73) were made by cutting down small trees and balancing them, 'attempting to create stacked configurations that would look "natural", as if they had been created by windfall.' Ben Tufnell. *Land Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2006, p.87.

continuation of Manifest Destiny: 'the so-called heroic conquering of nature'.⁹⁴ Fulton also comments that although these artists generally work outside the city their work is still inescapably urban: 'Rapture before nature', he argues, has always been felt most strongly by those most alienated from it – in other words, by inhabitants of big cities. For Fulton, such artists are simply following in the footsteps of nineteenth-century Americans such as Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt, who, with their sweeping, majestic landscapes painted on massive canvases, became associated with the 'magisterial gaze',⁹⁵ or what Joshua Taylor calls the 'American dream of infinite expansion to the West, of new discoveries and potentials, of a triumphant march of westward progress'.⁹⁶ Coupled with this, American 'Land Art' has often been accused of being environmentally destructive, even though, in the USA and elsewhere, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a rapid rise in ecological concern. Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was published in 1961,⁹⁷ while 1962 saw the publication of Rachel Carson's seminal *Silent Spring*,⁹⁸ and Boettger describes these two books as 'the great catalyzers of the environmental movement, respectively urban and wilderness'.⁹⁹ An interest in ecology, in some shape or form, did however have a long and illustrious pedigree in the USA prior to Jane Jacobs and Rachel Carson, with the championing of wilderness by writers such as Henry David Thoreau (1817–62), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82), and Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), with the establishment of the National Park movement at Yellowstone in 1872, and with the work of conservationists such as John Muir (1838–1914), who founded the Sierra Club in 1892. An artistic interest in the value of wilderness was also widespread: initially as

⁹⁴ Hamish Fulton, in Michael Auping, 'An Interview with Hamish Fulton', in *Common Ground: Five Artists in the Florida Landscape*, exhibition catalogue. Sarasota, Florida: John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1982, p.87. Also cited in Beardsley, 1984, pp.42–44.

⁹⁵ Boime, A. *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting c.1830–1865*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

⁹⁶ Taylor, J. 'A Land for Landscapes', in Sonfist, 1983, p.4.

⁹⁷ Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1993. (First edition 1961.)

⁹⁸ Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. London: Penguin, 2000. (First edition 1962.)

⁹⁹ Boettger, 2002, p.149.

evidence of God's greatness and grandeur – for instance, in the art of Thomas Cole (1801–48) – and subsequently as evidence of a more generalised source of spiritual and/or moral succour in the work of, for example, the photographer Ansel Adams (1902–84). Boettger acknowledges the failure of 'earthworks' to connect with the early years of the environmental movement following the publication of *Silent Spring*, commenting that they 'unintentionally enacted society's ambivalence about the environment'.¹⁰⁰ However, from the early 1970s, a number of 'Land Artists' became actively involved with land reclamation projects. For instance, in 1972 Smithson contacted mining companies in the USA to try to persuade them to restore the land they had destroyed, and, furthermore, to convince them of the value of allowing earth sculptures to be built on these sites. Smithson envisioned a widespread movement to involve artists in the reclamation and improvement of devastated industrial sites, and, after his premature death in 1973, the Senate proposed a full definition of Land Reclamation. In the later 1970s and 1980s Robert Morris, Mary Miss, Michael Heizer, Alan Sonfist, and others were commissioned to undertake works of land reclamation.¹⁰¹ De Maria was not involved in any reclamation projects, but neither did he adversely affect the natural landscape with his outdoor works. *Mile Long Drawing* (1968), *Cross* (1968), and *Las Vegas Piece* (1969) faded away long ago, while *The Lightning Field's* 400 poles have not altered the ecology of the New Mexico upland in which they are sited, either during construction or subsequently.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.208.

¹⁰¹ For example, Robert Morris was asked by the Art Commission of King County, Seattle, to reclaim a sand quarry, which he did in 1979. Similarly, Heizer's *Effigy Tumuli* was commissioned in 1983 as part of an effort to reclaim 150 acres of strip-mined land on the Illinois River, whilst simultaneously highlighting its links to prehistoric structures. And Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscape* (1965–present) sought to create a harmonious environment in the thoroughly urban setting of New York.

11. Conclusion

There has been some acknowledgement of the limitations of the phrase 'Land Art'. Most significantly, in *Land and Environmental Art*, Brian Wallis asserts that 'Land Art' was never an art movement in any traditional sense, since it encompassed a range of artists who often had widely differing objectives, methods, and interests, and that 'Land Art' therefore needs to be seen as a variable, complex, and fraught term – as Wallis expresses it, 'an imperfect hyponym for a slippery and widely interconnected brand of kinship'.¹⁰² In fact, although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop this idea further, it could well be argued that those concerns which separate artists such as De Maria, Smithson, Heizer, Turrell, Holt *et al* are ultimately far more significant than those which unite them. Some attempts have also been made to broaden the conventional scope of 'Land Art'. For example, Ben Tufnell has expanded the remit for 'Land Art' in three ways: by looking at works made in recent years, which helps to overcome the usual view of 'Land Art' as a product solely of the late 1960s and 1970s; by exploring the work of more non-Americans, thereby demonstrating that this is not solely an American phenomenon; and by including more female artists, thus countering the common criticism that 'Land Art' is predominantly a male preserve.¹⁰³

Recently, Jane McFadden has sought to unsettle the appropriateness of the 'Land Art' label for artists such as De Maria. She criticises Suzaan Boettger's continued adherence to an understanding of the practice in relation almost solely to medium, and she asserts

¹⁰² Kastner and Wallis (eds), 1998, p.12.

¹⁰³ Tufnell, 2006. Several other attempts have been made to reconfigure 'Land Art' to include more female artists. For example, in *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: The New Press, 1983) Lucy Lippard provides a feminist perspective in her analysis of the links between contemporary art (including 'Land Art') and prehistory. Carol Hall's survey of 'Environmental Artists' (in Sonfist, 1983) gives detailed accounts of the work of artists such as Alice Aycock (e.g. *Maze*, 1972), Nancy Holt (e.g. *Views Through a Sand Dune*, 1972), and Mary Miss (e.g. *Sunken Pool*, 1974). Jeffrey Kastner (in *Land and Environmental Art*, London and New York: Phaidon, 1998) also seriously considers the involvement of women artists in 'Land Art': for example, Betty Beaumont (e.g. *Ocean Landmark Project*, 1978–1980), Bonny Sherk (e.g. *The Farm*, 1974), and Agnes Denes (e.g. *Wheatfield: A Confrontation*, 1982).

that Boettger falls prey to simplified interpretations of the works themselves.¹⁰⁴ McFadden cites Willoughby Sharp, curator of the 1969 'Earth Art' exhibition, who commented: 'There is no earth art, there are just a number of earthworks, an important body of work categorized under a catchy heading.'¹⁰⁵ And she argues that 'Historical scholarship would benefit from paying attention to his dismissal of the category.'¹⁰⁶ McFadden has also gone some way towards a repositioning of De Maria's art practice in relation to the wider multidisciplinary – and, indeed, often interdisciplinary – arts scene of the 1960s, and this is to be greatly welcomed.¹⁰⁷ However, with regard specifically to *The Lightning Field*, although she recognises the importance of extended duration for the visitor's experience of the work, and elsewhere in her thesis she emphasises the significant links between the practice of La Monte Young and that of De Maria (especially with regard to proto-Fluxus), she does not address any of *The Lightning Field's* acoustic possibilities, or make any connections to a wider world of sound and music.

Having overlooked the true breadth of Walter De Maria's interests, friendships, and practice, the somewhat homogeneous critical framework of 'Land Art' effectively inhibits any in-depth analysis of the audience's encounter with *The Lightning Field*. Although many of the themes discussed under the banner of 'Land Art' are undoubtedly pertinent – and this chapter has drawn attention to these – the continued positioning of this important artwork solely within this framework has resulted in an almost overwhelming focus, both in words and in images, on *The Lightning Field's*

¹⁰⁴ With regard to *The Lightning Field*, McFadden asserts that Suzaan Boettger reiterates the same kind of 'critical fury' shown by John Beardsley, and that she is, furthermore, 'unquestionably unaware in her description of the caretaker at the site as a "cowboy caretaker [nameless] with a Marlboro Man physique and Soho black attire"'. McFadden goes on: 'Surely she might consider that one possibility of site is exposure to difference – whether formal, cultural, geographical, or social.' McFadden, 2004, pp.2–3 and p.135 footnote 330.

¹⁰⁵ Sharp, Willoughby. 'Notes Toward an Understanding of Earth Art', in *Earth Art*. Ithaca: Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, 1969.

¹⁰⁶ McFadden, 2004, p.2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

monumental scale, its sublime qualities, and its potential for dramatic visual spectacle, and in a concomitant downplaying of its capacity to provide a far more complex, and potentially more rewarding, range of experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

Walter De Maria's life and career: 1935–1974

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I critiqued the manner in which Walter De Maria, together with his best-known work, *The Lightning Field*, has been subsumed within the remarkably persistent critical framework of 'Land Art'. In contrast to the rather too homogeneous series of concerns identified there, this next chapter provides a far more wide-ranging account of De Maria's life and career prior to the making of *The Lightning Field*. This demonstrates the true breadth of his interests and influences – not only in visual art, but also in music – and also shows what a rich and varied body of work was produced by him during this period, most of which falls well outside the category of 'Land Art' but which nevertheless is of major significance for an understanding of *The Lightning Field*.

The chapter adopts a chronological format. This is not, however, intended merely as a biographical account of De Maria up to 1974 – although none exists in the extant literature, and therefore it does fulfil this need. Rather, it provides an opportunity – through an analysis of key decisions, individual works, exhibitions, and friendships – to demonstrate the relevance of De Maria's early development, as an artist *and* as a musician, for any subsequent interrogation of *The Lightning Field*. Throughout the chapter, major tropes are introduced, whose importance for *The Lightning Field* is addressed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. These include: the frequent connections between the visual and the acoustic experience; the significance of the wider spatiotemporal context in which artwork and audience coexist; the continual tension between the man-made and the natural; the undercurrents of ambiguity and

danger; and, most significantly, the centrality of the active 'audience'. In this chapter I also provide brief accounts of some of the most influential figures in experimental music during this period – John Cage, and the 'Minimalists' La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich: their explorations of the acoustic aspects of spatiotemporal experience offer a new context for an understanding of *The Lightning Field*, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate.

2. 1935–1960

Walter De Maria was born in Albany, in the northern East Bay area of California, on 1 October 1935. He attended Richmond High School, and later went to the University of California, Berkeley. For many West-Coast artists, writers, and musicians, California was an exciting environment to be in at this time, especially with the development of the North Beach area and the arrival of jazz, drugs, and the influential Beat Generation writers. This was certainly a place of liberation and experimentation. In 1972, De Maria commented:

It was a good place to be. I think had I been brought up a second-generation Italian American in New York City or in Philadelphia or Boston or an eastern city, I probably would not have been an artist; I probably would not have had the range of experience that I had living in California because of the great openness of California.¹

However, for De Maria, California's 'openness' was not just cultural, but also physical: '...you're really dominated by the physicality of San Francisco, the sunsets over the bridge, and this incredible nostalgia, this great romantic sense, the fog, the hills, the architecture'.² In particular, he loved the Pacific Ocean, sometimes seeing it as an infinite space: '...the real notion of an infinite space is perhaps one of the few thoughts

¹ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972, Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm [07.10.2005].

² *Ibid.*

that is worth thinking about more than once.’³ De Maria’s fascination with open space continued into his art practice: it is evident not just in *The Lightning Field* and those other works made in the deserts of America and elsewhere, but also, for example, in the expanses of plain white paper which he explored for his series of ‘invisible drawings’, as we shall see later in this chapter.

This early period of De Maria’s life in California is, however, perhaps most significant on account of his interest in music: indeed, in interview in 1972 he asserted that ‘it all started with music’.⁴ De Maria started playing piano at seven, and took up the drums and percussion at ten, but two years later he stopped playing piano in order to focus more fully on drumming. He played in the school orchestras, then the school dance bands, and also in the Richmond Symphony Orchestra at the weekends. He had a private drum teacher who was percussionist at the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, and by the age of 16 he was a member of the Musicians’ Union and he was getting regular paid work. Notwithstanding their capacity for volume, the drums (and here I refer specifically to the drums as played in most forms of jazz) can arguably be regarded as the most ‘minimal’ of musical instruments, since they take virtually no part in either harmony or melody: instead, their role, first and foremost, is to establish and maintain meter. Indeed, De Maria cited his reasons for giving up piano and turning to the drums in terms that support the minimalist quality of the drums:

I really didn’t have the facility to be a piano player; I didn’t feel it. It was a mystery to read those notes and make your fingers do all that.⁵

By establishing and maintaining meter, the jazz drummer uses his or her instrument in a repetitive way, and this is highly significant for De Maria who subsequently came to

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

explore other aspects of repetition in many artworks, including *The Lightning Field*; I discuss this aspect of his practice more fully in Chapter Eight.

De Maria's musical interests were focused largely on jazz, although he was also knowledgeable about electronic music and contemporary classical music. De Maria became interested in jazz while at Berkeley University, where he graduated in European History in 1956, and during this time he continued to play drums professionally. San Francisco was a major jazz centre in the 1950s and De Maria regularly frequented jazz clubs where he heard Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Count Basie, and many other major jazz performers. He commented:

I can't really emphasize the role of music enough, because to be going around and be carrying your drumsticks and you've got a set of drums in your car and you go to meet other musicians; you have jam sessions; you have the idea of what it is to be the creative artist. You have to create your own style, you have to have your own.⁶

For De Maria, jazz was the most lively, inventive music at the time: it was 'sort of an outside ... it wasn't just the background music of television detective movies; at that time it was just really creating something.'⁷ The experimental composers La Monte Young, Steve Reich, and Terry Riley also played in jazz groups in their teens, and for them, too, it was a profound influence on their work in the 1960s. Jazz – especially improvisational jazz of the kind that attracted De Maria – allowed for individual interpretation within a carefully defined structure, and this kind of amalgamation of control and freedom would come to have great relevance for the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

De Maria's first encounter with electronic music was in 1956, when he went to see a performance of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. They had set up giant speakers on the stage:

they played a tape of a certain symphony and the first five minutes they lip-synced it, you know, they pantomimed the whole thing. It was all being played over the speakers, and then they all stopped playing and the symphony continued playing over the tape and before a live audience. And when I heard that, I realized there was no need for the orchestra to be there any more.⁸

De Maria was not personally tempted to experiment with tape or amplification: he thought of it as the 'neurotic school' of music, and he expressed a preference for what he called a more 'static' or 'controlled' kind of sound.⁹ Yet he was certainly very well informed about electronic music, and subsequently he and La Monte Young would 'talk hours and hours and hours'¹⁰ about what was going on in this new field of music. De Maria described how, in the early 1950s, the use of tape recorders had been seen as 'utterly blasphemous in all of the composition departments or academic music departments',¹¹ yet by the end of the decade it was at the cutting edge of musical experimentation in many academic departments. However, two important aspects of electronic and recorded music did become significant for his own art practice – including *The Lightning Field*. Firstly, the mechanical quality of electronic music finds its analogy in De Maria's fascination with machine-tooled materials, especially precision-engineered steel of the kind used in many of his works throughout the 1960s and also for *The Lightning Field*'s 400 poles. Secondly, the advent of recorded music provided an arena for listening in which a person could be totally alone. The audience's solitude was something that De Maria sought at *The Lightning Field*; as he wrote in his

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

1980 *Artforum* article on the work (*Appendix One*), 'It is intended that the work be viewed alone, or in the company of a very small number of people'.¹²

While at Berkeley University, De Maria became very close friends with fellow student La Monte Young, and it was largely thanks to Young that De Maria became well acquainted with the contemporary classical music scene. At that time Young was studying for his Master's degree in music,¹³ and De Maria held him in very high regard, describing him as 'the premiere musician of modernist classical music, absolutely the best.'¹⁴ Born on 14 October 1935, in a log cabin in the town of Bern, Idaho, Young is an exact contemporary of De Maria. As a child, Young was fascinated by the landscape of sound, and he has described how he was greatly impressed by noises like the incessant whistling of the wind through the logs of the cabin where he lived, the rhythmic sound of grasshoppers outside, running water, the rustling of trees, and even the humming of telephone poles. He comments:

I remember standing by a single telephone pole and listening to it humming. The same with the crickets. I remember going out at night with my dad to do the chores and listening to the crickets outside. Then later, I worked in a machine shop after school ... and there I used to operate a lathe. I would whistle and sing tones over this lathe. I didn't realise that I was singing over drones then, but I was.¹⁵

La Monte Young stands apart from the other minimalist composers – Reich, Riley, and Glass – because he only very rarely explored their main *modus operandi* – namely,

¹² De Maria, W. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum* Vol 18 No 8, 1980, p.58.

¹³ As well as being a fine musician at a young age, Young was also a strong achiever in visual art, and, like De Maria, for a time he was uncertain whether he would follow a career in music or in art, but eventually settled on music. Whilst studying for his Master's degree at Berkeley, in 1959 Young also attended summer courses at Darmstadt with Karlheinz Stockhausen, and he also encountered the lectures, music, and writings of John Cage, as well as meeting David Tudor (Cage's pianist). At Tudor's suggestion, Young corresponded with Cage, and later presented some of Cage's music on the West Coast; and in turn Cage and Tudor included some of Young's works in performances in the USA and Europe. Young also studied electronic music with Richard Maxfield (1927–69), one of the pioneers of electronic music.

¹⁴ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

¹⁵ Duckworth, William. *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995, p.222.

repetition.¹⁶ Instead, he used sustained sounds, and sustained volume (both *ffff* and *pppp*), combined with silences, to create particular psycho-acoustic effects for his audience.¹⁷ De Maria has described how Young's use of heavy amplification in some works produced 'massive sounds' that made it feel as though 'the sound was actually going right through you.'¹⁸ He also acknowledges the influence of Young's music in terms of his own work:

In La Monte's music you were totally saturated with the music, and all I wanted out of my own work was that if you came to an exhibition that you'd absolutely never forget it.¹⁹

In the same interview, De Maria also refers to Young's personal energy, as well as the energy of his music, and the fact that it was this contact with Young and his music that led to his own interest in temporality. Young was also interested in the wider environment in which music was played, and in the physical experience of 'listening' to music, as well as the interconnections of sound and vision. He created the Theater of Eternal Music with his partner Marian Zazeela, and set up various versions of the 'Dream House', the location for a series of 'sound-and-light environments'. Young's influence and career is of great significance in this thesis, especially with regard to his explorations of extended duration through sustained sound, which I discuss in Chapter Six.

¹⁶ *Arabic Numeral (any integer), to H.F.*, also widely known as 'X for Henry Flynt', is one of only two works by Young to use repetition, the method favoured by all the other minimalist composers (the other is *Composition 1961 #1-29*). In spite of this, 'X for Henry Flynt' is, according to Keith Potter, 'a particularly fine and characteristic example of Young's tendency to concentrate on and delimit the work to be a single event or object.' Keith Potter. *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.48.

¹⁷ In the early 1960s Young was not the only musician to explore music's capacity for extended duration. John Coltrane's 1961 *Africa/Brass*, with its sustained E, showed that music could stay put harmonically but still create enormous variation and interest, while Terry Riley's seminal work, *In C* (1964), lasting for more than 40 minutes, most dramatically adopts the theme of static harmony that Coltrane had so beautifully demonstrated in *Africa/Brass*.

¹⁸ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Walter De Maria did not actively participate in classical music after leaving school, for it never seemed to fulfil him in a way that jazz did:

I made an interesting observation that the jazz was an alive form of music, a music which was creating itself, which demanded all the technique of classical music but much more inventiveness, and the idea of reading the score of classical music became oppressive ... Performing as a classical musician is like all the aspects of being a plumber, of being a carpenter. I mean there are blueprints and it was up to you to saw at this measure, you know, and build that little house. I really recognized the distinction between the composer and the musician; the musician was there just to interpret what the composer had done and I didn't have the facility to compose.²⁰

Despite De Maria's decision not to participate directly in contemporary classical music, he was nonetheless very well aware of the importance of John Cage, whose influence stretched well beyond the world of music to the whole of the contemporary arts world. Cage (1912–92) was a pioneer of chance music, electronic music, and the use of non-conventional musical 'instruments'. More than anyone else in the 1950s, he blurred the boundaries between composer, musicians, and audience. A similar 'blurring' of the distinctions between creator and consumer occurs in many of De Maria's works – and most especially *The Lightning Field* – where active audience engagement, through which the 'audience', together with the artist, establishes meaning(s), is of major significance. John Cage also explored the relevance of the location for art and music, not as an incidental feature but as something of fundamental importance in any 'performance' of his work. Indeed, he relished the many potential crossovers between theatre, dance, visual art, and music. The importance of Cage for an understanding of *The Lightning Field* is addressed in Chapters Seven and Nine of this thesis.

Whilst still at high school, De Maria's first contact with the history of the visual arts was through a French teacher, who aroused in him an interest in French painting.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

During school he spent a lot of time drawing: in fact, it was this early passion for drawing, rather than painting or sculpture, which first inspired him to become an artist. In 1956, after completing his first degree, De Maria was faced with the conflict of whether to stay with music or go seriously into art. He chose art, and began a Master's degree in art at Berkeley, where he took 'nothing but painting courses for two solid years',²¹ gaining his degree in 1959. At Berkeley, De Maria's principal tutor was David Park (1911–60), who revived an interest in figurative painting and formed the Bay Area Figurative Movement, along with Richard Diebenkorn (1922–93), Elmer Bischoff (1916–91), Wayne Thiebaud (b.1920), and James Weeks (1922–98). However, although De Maria deeply admired Park's work, he did no representational paintings while under Park's tutelage. This early creative decision – in favour of non-representational art – parallels what is often regarded as the essentially non-representational quality of music. Indeed, De Maria even regarded his art practice as akin to jazz, and that he was 'improvising with the paint':

It was a way of painting that was very close to jazz. You'd start to paint with all blue, then you put white into it, and then the black would come into it and then, if you didn't like it, put blue back on top of it so that the notion of its give-and-take was a very valid form, a very free form of painting in that whole tradition of Expressionist work. You know, attack the canvas, jump on it, use a very free gesture. In fact, I found the rhythm of the painting very similar to the jazz; you mark in the same way you might play and so actually I didn't fight it at all. I found it very conducive to me at that time.²²

In addition, De Maria likened the physicality required for playing a jazz drum solo to the bodily involvement required in throwing paint in the Abstract Expressionist style of Jackson Pollock:

²¹ As far as I am aware, no paintings from this period still exist. In fact, the only painting by De Maria that I have come across is *The Color Men Choose when they Attack the Earth* (1968), exhibited at the Dwan Gallery 'Earth Works' exhibition in October 1968.

²² Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

Now if you do a drum solo, you take all the elements, all the techniques that you have, all the possible colors of the drums, the tom toms, the cymbals, the bass drums, the snare drum and then you have to mix all these elements together. You have to change it from playing fast to slow, you have to change it from playing loud to soft, you have to change it from playing complicated things against simple things and not only that, you have to play all your hands and feet against each other in different counter-rhythms. So, being able to do something like that, I had a notion of what it was to improvise, to take many elements, put them together into a work, the solo being the work. And it's difficult to do a good drum solo. The point I wanted to make was that then the idea of taking the range of the palette, of having twenty cans of paint in front of you and twenty brushes and then having your choice of what colors to take and then what forms to make on the canvas, the whole notion of abstract expressionism just looked like a chain.²³

3. 1960–1967

In October 1960, a year after completing his Master's degree, Walter De Maria moved to New York and was soon involved with its vibrant avant-garde arts scene. La Monte Young had moved there just a few months previously, and De Maria has commented that this made it easier for him to follow.²⁴ In New York, De Maria continued to play the drums, playing sessions with innovative jazz trumpeter Don Cherry (1936–95) and saxophonist Ornette Coleman (b.1930). De Maria's friend Robert Morris (b.1931) had also recently moved to New York, and for a while from 1961 to 1962 they met every day. De Maria had first met Morris in California in the late 1950s, where they became very good friends (at least for a while),²⁵ and Morris later became one of the major figures in early Minimalism, in 'process art', and subsequently, like De Maria, in 'Land Art'. Morris was married to the dancer Simone Forti (b.1935) at that time, and De Maria

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ There is some conflict regarding the extent of this friendship. Later in his interview with Paul Cummings, De Maria commented that he and Morris were in a 'competitive situation', while Jane McFadden asserts that Morris has avoided acknowledging his ties with De Maria during this period. See Jane McFadden. *Practices of Site: Walter de Maria and Robert Morris, 1960–1977*. PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, May 2004, p.5 footnote 9.

frequently met up with both of them:²⁶ these were important friendships in terms of the exposure they provided to a wide variety of multimedia artistic experimentation. At this time both De Maria and Morris were heavily involved in making boxes, usually of plain, unpainted plywood. For example, Morris made *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* (1961) (*Figure 13*),²⁷ which incorporated not just the visual element of process, but also its actual sounds. Among the works made by De Maria was the only one to which he did not give a title – *Untitled* (1961) (*Figure 14*) – which was first exhibited in 1961 at the AG Gallery, run by George Maciunas (1931–78).

De Maria was friends with many artists, musicians, dancers, and other performers in New York, and, together with his wife Suzanne, he soon became involved in the series of ‘Happenings’ that were taking place in the city, including Bob Whitman’s *Flower* (1963) (*Figure 15*),²⁸ which emphasises De Maria’s growing concern for the active, moving body. He comments:

It was like it was all being created around you; you were in it and maybe you had to at least move closer to people and change your position ... the idea of being absolutely part of it, that was the important part of the ‘Happenings’, that you were absolutely part of it.²⁹

In fact, before arrival in New York, in 1959–60, De Maria had staged three ‘Happenings’ of his own, with La Monte Young, at Stanford (University of California), and at California School of Fine Art. He described these as ‘meditative Happenings’:

²⁶ As well as contributing to Fluxus, Forti had worked in California with Anna Halprin, who was doing pioneering work in the teaching and performing of dance improvisation in the San Francisco Bay area, and who became extremely influential on the composers Terry Riley and La Monte Young. After moving to New York, Forti began her association with the Judson Dance Theater Group which revolutionised dance in the 1960s, and she also studied composition at the Merce Cunningham studio with musicologist/dance educator Robert Dunn, who was introducing dancers to the scores of John Cage.

²⁷ *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* is a nine-inch walnut cube containing a 3-hour tape recording its actual construction. The first person in New York to see the piece was John Cage. Morris recalled: ‘When [Cage] came, I turned it on...and he wouldn’t listen to me. He sat and listened to it for three hours and that was really impressive to me. He just sat there.’ See Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989, pp.30–31.

²⁸ Three photographs of this work are published in Michael Kirby’s *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co, Inc., 1965, pp.162–163.

²⁹ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

‘There were very few elements ... very long periods of silence going on for a long time, not a lot of acting, not a lot of elements, not a lot of expression.’³⁰ Particularly important to him was

the idea that maybe the art world is going to express itself with the spectator totally engaged; you know, with the actor just a few feet from you, with the sound all around you.³¹

Moreover, the engagement of the ‘spectator’ should ideally also be ‘moving’ in terms of its emotional impact, and this is of major significance for *The Lightning Field*, as we shall see later in this thesis. In 1972, De Maria commented:

If you actually aren’t carried away, if you actually aren’t physically moved and you know, like, you know, just, you know fearing for your life and sanity, then it’s almost like not ‘working’. That’s the Fifties phrase: ‘working’. Does the painting work? Like, if you actually don’t lose your breath, if you don’t lie down and die, if you actually aren’t run out of the place, you know, if your heart rate doesn’t go up, if you actually don’t lose your breath ... If it doesn’t fulfill those simple requirements, if it doesn’t even give you the feeling you’d have swimming in the ocean or riding a horse, or any of the heavy drug experience you might have, if it doesn’t match any very important massive, powerful experience you’ve had in your life, then it isn’t a real work.³²

Even more significant than De Maria’s participation with the New York ‘Happenings’ at this time was his involvement with the loosely connected group of artists, musicians, dancers, and writers who worked under the banner of ‘Fluxus’. The term ‘Fluxus’ was first coined in 1961 by George Maciunas as the title for a proposed magazine, but was soon adopted to describe the range of activities associated with those artists who shared

³⁰ The exact locations of these ‘Happenings’ is not clear. Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

Maciunas's vision. Many of the group's members³³ were former students of John Cage, having attended his 'Experimental Composition' classes at the New School for Social Research in New York in the late 1950s. Fluxus performances were called 'Events', to distinguish them from 'Happenings', and De Maria's contribution to many of these was as a musician rather than a 'visual artist': music was therefore still clearly of major importance to him.³⁴ In 1963, Maciunas, together with Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young, published *An Anthology of chance operations, concept art, anti-art, indeterminacy, plans of action, diagrams, music, dance constructions, improvisation, meaningless works, natural disasters, compositions, mathematics, essays, poetry* (referred to hereafter as the *Anthology*). Both Robert Morris and La Monte Young wrote 'works' intended for publication in the *Anthology*, and in Chapter Six I discuss these in relation to the extension of duration at *The Lightning Field*. As for De Maria, George Maciunas wrote a homage to him in the *Anthology*:

HOMAGE TO WALTER DE MARIA, by George Maciunas, Jan. 13, 1962

Bring all boxes of Walter de Maria, including the 4 ft. × 4 ft. × 8 ft. box to performance area by the most difficult route, like via crowded subway or bus, through skylight, window or fire escape; and then take them back same way as soon as they are brought in.³⁵

The 'box' to which Maciunas refers is De Maria's *Untitled* (1961), discussed above. The 'homage' draws attention to De Maria's own developing interest in physical action, repetition, and a degree of difficulty and discomfort, all of which would later be significant for the visitor's encounter with *The Lightning Field*.

³³ There were 25 contributors in total: George Brecht, Claus Bremer, Joseph Byrd, Earle Brown, John Cage, David Degener, Walter De Maria, Henry Flynt, Simone Forti, Dick Higgins, Toshi Ichiiyanagi, Terry Jennings, Ray Johnson, Jackson MacLow, Richard Maxfield, Robert Morris, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Terry Riley, Dieter Roth, Malka Safro, James Waring, Emmet Williams, Christian Wolff, and La Monte Young.

³⁴ A list of these events is available from the Yoko Ono file, Jean Brown papers, Getty Research Institute.

³⁵ Maciunas, George. 'Homage to Walter De Maria', in Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Bronx, New York: La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, 1963.

Walter De Maria's own contribution to the *Anthology* was eight short texts or 'compositions' (*Appendices 2–5*). Between them they occupy just three pages, yet they are enormously important in terms of the direction that De Maria's artistic practice subsequently took, especially in relation to the themes that he addressed in *The Lightning Field*, for – like Maciunas's 'homage' – they explore the physical involvement of the performer/audience, and the interconnections between time and space, sound and vision, uncertainty and danger. In 'Art Yard' (*Appendix 2*), De Maria plans the digging of a big hole, yet neither the actions nor the time frame in which they may occur are at all certain. The 'audience' will perhaps 'grab shovels' and 'dodge explosions', while 'inexperienced people like La Monte Young will run the steamshovels'; and the action 'might last any amount of time'. In this text De Maria also expresses his interest in 'individual variation' – which, as we shall see, is of major significance for the audience's encounter with *The Lightning Field* – as well as a desire to make a very large-scale work ('...if someone owns an acre or so of land...').

In another *Anthology* text, titled 'On the importance of natural disasters' (*Appendix 3*), De Maria proposes the exploitation of large-scale natural catastrophes to make an artwork, and this later found expression in his use of the dramatic, and potentially catastrophic, natural power of lightning in *The Lightning Field*. Another *Anthology* text, titled 'Beach Crawl' (*Appendix 4*), provides an early example of many of the themes that later came to fruition at *The Lightning Field*. For example, not only does it demonstrate De Maria's growing interest in natural settings rather than man-made or urban ones, but it also highlights his desire to create art in which the audience is actively involved in a performance through time and space, and is required to make decisions about the details of this performance. I shall return to 'Beach Crawl' in Chapter Six.

Another of the *Anthology* texts – ‘Piece for Terry Riley’ – also draws attention to the interconnectedness – indeed, inseparability – of sound and vision, for we *hear* baseball as well as see it. This short text – entirely overlooked in the extant literature on De Maria – also points to the connections between musicians and visual artists, both on a professional and a personal level. When De Maria wrote this text, Terry Riley, together with Steve Reich and Philip Glass, was developing into a significant figure in the avant-garde art scene in the USA.³⁶ During 1959 and 1960 he and La Monte Young worked with the choreographer Anna Halprin, a collaboration that gave great scope for experimentation and improvisation: for example, Riley and Young composed the music for Halprin’s *Stillpoint* and *Visions* (both 1960). When Riley came to New York, in 1964, he began to experiment with the possibilities of electro-acoustic music, and later on he also trained with Pandit Pran Nath, as had Young and Zazeela. Although Young and Riley share an interest in the physical and psycho-acoustic effects of music, they have very different attitudes to these effects: while Young focuses more on aspects of duration, Riley explores the possibilities of repetition, as a means to ‘rouse emotional vibrations in the listener’,³⁷ in works such as the seminal *In C* (1964). In Chapter Eight I refer to this work in relation to De Maria’s own deployment of repetition.

One of the musicians who played at the premiere of Riley’s *In C* was the composer and musician Steve Reich who, like De Maria, took up drumming and piano as a child. Also like De Maria, Reich gave up piano in order to focus exclusively on drums and

³⁶ Terry Riley was born in Colfax, California on 24 June 1935. He studied composition at the San Francisco State College from 1955 to 1957, and later at the San Francisco Conservatoire of Music with the Austrian-American pianist Adolf Baller. Riley finished his musical studies at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1961, two years after De Maria. From 1962 until 1964 Riley toured Europe, and while in Scandinavia he took part in various ‘happenings’, street theatre, and jazz concerts, playing saxophone and piano. He also gave the first of his ‘All-Night Concerts’. During these concerts, Riley performed mostly improvised music from evening until sunrise, using an old organ harmonium and tape-delayed saxophone. If he needed to take a break, he played back-looped saxophone fragments recorded throughout the evening. For several years he continued to put on these concerts, to which people came with sleeping bags.

³⁷ Mertens, W. (trans. J. Hautekiet). *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. London: Kahn & Averill, 1983, pp.36–37.

percussion.³⁸ Like Riley, Reich experimented with various aspects of repetition, and also with electronic music in the form of tape loops, which by chance led him to the discovery of the process of ‘phase shifting’,³⁹ which he used in important early works such as *It’s Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Piano Phase* (1967), and I discuss these in Chapter Eight. Another significant work by Reich from this period is *Pendulum Music* (1968) (*Figure 16*), which demonstrates the composer’s desire not only for impersonality and the removal of (the artist’s) subjectivity from his music – the same impulse that seems to inform much of De Maria’s work – but also for ‘slowing down’; I explore this in Chapter Seven, for ‘slowing down’ is a significant aspect of the visitor’s experience of *The Lightning Field*. Like Young and Riley, Reich is also interested in the physical and emotional impact of his music on its audience. After making *Pendulum Music*, Reich began to favour working with live musicians and conventional instruments, and he also began to return to harmony and orchestration. However, he continued to use repetition as a key trope in works composed during the 1970s, such as *Four Organs* (1970), *Drumming* (1971), and *Clapping Music* (1971), and also in *Music for 18 Musicians*, which was written between 1974 and 1977, at almost exactly the same time as De Maria was making *The Lightning Field*. Although Steve Reich has at times expressed some reservations about establishing connections between movements in music and those in the visual arts,⁴⁰ in 1972 he saw a clear connection between his own work and

³⁸ Steve Reich studied with Roland Kohloff, principal timpanist of the New York Philharmonic. After obtaining a BA in philosophy at Cornell University in 1957, Reich studied composition with Hall Overton in New York from 1957 to 1958, and then with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti at the Juilliard School of Music from 1958 to 1961. Reich continued his education at Mills College in 1963, where he gained his Master’s degree in composition, having worked with Darius Milhaud and Luciano Berio who wrote in the mathematically rigorous 12-tone style that was all the rage in the late 1950s. Reich’s passion for the drums also led him to explore drumming within non-Western musical traditions. Unlike De Maria, Reich soon became involved in using tape-recorded sounds, and he worked for a time at the San Francisco Tape Music Center along with Pauline Oliveros, Ramon Sender, Morton Subotnick, and also with Riley.

³⁹ Reich’s phase-shifting technique, together with the free use of textual snippets (as in *Come Out* and *It’s Gonna Rain*, as well as in important later works such as *Different Trains* (1988) and the *Daniel Variations* (2006)), and his growing interest in repetition, are the most important characteristics of his early career up to the start of the 1970s.

⁴⁰ For instance, in a 2000 interview Reich comments ‘...if you listen to *Piano Phase* or *Violin Phase* and you look at Sol LeWitt, you’re going to note some similarities. That just means people who are alive at a

Minimalist art, especially the work of Sol LeWitt.⁴¹ In subsequent chapters I consider the significance of a number of works by Reich with regard to the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*.

From 1962, Walter De Maria started on a series of works which he called 'invisible drawings'. These consist of very light pencil drawings and/or words – often just a single, shakily lettered word: SKY or MOUNTAIN or RIVER⁴² – on large pieces of white paper in thin silver and gold frames.⁴³ David Bourdon comments on these drawings:

The 'invisible drawings' are probably as close as De Maria can get to 'pure thought' without his art becoming immaterial. De Maria himself comes perilously close to preciousness in the 'invisible drawings' Were it not for the more obvious and substantial quality of his other works, one might be tempted to dismiss the drawings as the ill-conceived product of a lesser 'ultraconceptualist'. The spareness of form seems skimpy, and the idea itself insubstantial. However, the drawings are disturbingly provocative, raising too many doubts to be easily dismissed.⁴⁴

The drawings anticipate two aspects of the experience of being at *The Lightning Field*: firstly, the importance of bodily movement on the part of the 'viewer', and secondly, the fascination with large-scale, seemingly blank spaces. When the viewer first looks at any

certain period of time and have their antennas up and functioning are going to get similar input messages and they're going to react to those messages. Beyond that, it's all individual, and that's what's interesting.' Cited in Rebecca Kim. 'From New York to Vermont: Conversation with Steve Reich'. [Online] www.steverreich.com [19.09.07].

⁴¹ In an interview with Emily Wasserman in *Artforum* in 1972, Reich comments: 'There is some relationship between my music and any Minimal art. What is close with Sol [LeWitt] is the spirit in which he will set up an idea and work it through rigorously. He has concentrated on a very direct and complete working out of a given concept. He has also said that "there are many side-effects that the artist cannot imagine – these can be used as ideas for new pieces". Now that's what happens in *Drumming*, with the resultant patterns. I know precisely what the marimbas, drums, and glockenspiels are doing. I know the notes and rhythms involved: but the number of resultant patterns set up by the relationship between them all is more than I could spend my lifetime trying to figure out. And that's what makes the piece interesting; there's more in it than I put in.' Emily Wasserman, 'An Interview with Composer Steve Reich', in *Artforum*, Vol 10 No 9, May 1972, p.48.

⁴² Benedikt, Michael. 'Sculpture as Architecture: New York Letter, 1966–67', in Gregory Battcock (ed.). *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*. London: Studio Vista, 1969, p.71. (First published by E.P. Dutton, New York, 1968.)

⁴³ I have found only one mention of these frames, in Carol Hall's essay, 'Environmental Artists: Sources and Directions', in Alan Sonfist (ed.). *Art in the Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983, p.17.

⁴⁴ Bourdon, David. 'Walter De Maria: The Singular Experience', in *Art International*, Vol 12 No 10, December 1968, p.43.

of the drawings, they appear empty. It is only when one approaches very close to the works that one can detect the pencil marks on the paper at all. Just as one has to physically move into the desert in order to find De Maria's later works of 'Land Art' – so too does one have to move closer to these drawings in order to 'find' the pencil marks. Bodily involvement is therefore absolutely essential – one does not merely observe. Moreover, the artist activates the viewer, but refrains from providing him or her with a mental image.⁴⁵ De Maria commented on the drawings' quality of existing but not easily being seen. They are:

drawings in which what was put on the page was so light, it was just on the threshold of visibility and the interest there was in the way the idea of drawing was as important as the drawing and the notion that you doubled your sense, you didn't know if it was there or wasn't there. In a way it was something like the land work in that it is there but no one can see it. The whole notion of invisibility has become more and more important to me.⁴⁶

De Maria also made a conceptual link between the invisible drawings and the openness of the desert, commenting that 'the idea of a yard-square piece of paper is ... a close approximation of the whole field of vision in a desert.'⁴⁷ He clearly revelled in the sensual experience of vast space – the kind of 'vast spatial experience' encountered on a visit to *The Lightning Field* – even when it was confined to the size of a large piece of paper, and he saw the experience as being a positive and exciting one:

The real notion of an infinite space is perhaps one of the few thoughts that is worth thinking about more than once. And to some extent art seems to close in on itself. I mean like if you have an object, and the object is there and you look at the object, it is almost as if your eye collapses the object in, and the thought that if the work was very light and the idea was expansive and the work was not only the work but the idea of a larger situation, to some extent that combination of the work and the lettering might be that it might create a vast spatial experience

⁴⁵ *Diagrams and Drawings: Carl Andre, Christo, De Maria, Don Judd, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, et al.* Exhibition catalogue: Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller (Otterlo). 13 August – 24 September 1972.

⁴⁶ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

which is something like if you were to be breathing air off a sailboat in the middle of the ocean.⁴⁸

At the same time as De Maria was working on his 'invisible drawings', he continued to make various boxes of plain, unpainted plywood – beginning with the 1961 *Untitled* discussed earlier in this chapter – and he describes these as 'very clean, quiet, static, non-relational sculptures'.⁴⁹ For example, *Boxes for Meaningless Work* (Figure 17) (the same title as one of his texts for the Fluxus *Anthology*) consists of two adjoining unpainted topless wooden boxes, sitting on a four-inch-high wooden base, and containing blocks of raw wood. The base is inscribed:

BOXES FOR MEANINGLESS WORK. TRANSFER THINGS FROM ONE BOX TO THE NEXT BOX BACK AND FORTH, BACK AND FORTH, ETC. BE AWARE THAT WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS MEANINGLESS.

David Bourdon regards this work as a key piece not only in De Maria's development but also in the development of Minimalist sculpture as a whole. For Bourdon, the work appeared 'dumbfoundingly simple' at a time when junk sculpture and assemblage were the height of fashion. Bourdon writes that

unlike many motorized sculptures which lunge into an entertaining tapdance when the spectator trips a foot pedal or photocell, the burden of responsibility is placed not on the sculpture but on the spectator ... Utterly inert, the work forces the viewer to make a fundamental choice as to whether or not he is going to physically 'respond'. The invitation to perform some action is not readily accepted, for the work promises nothing, hints at no unforeseen surprise and, in fact, remains essentially unchanged after the act. Consequently, the response calls for a certain amount of faith, a belief that the 'meaningless work' may have some ineffable meaning or value. Conceivably, the shifting of the wood blocks could fulfill some spiritual, poetic or even physiological need.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Bourdon, 1968, p.40.

This important work anticipates the elements of active audience experience in the face of uncertainty over outcomes, of repetition and simplicity, and of an uncharted ‘task’ performed alone, all of which would come to be so important for *The Lightning Field*, where the ‘burden of responsibility’ lies heavily with the audience.

In *Move the Ball Slowly Down the Row* (1962), the spectator is invited to demonstrate his or her personal notion of slowness. The work consists of a small wooden row of eight nearly regular bins, a single metal ball, and the inscription ‘Move the Ball Slowly Down the Row’.⁵¹ De Maria comments:

It can be your conception of slowness of any duration. One’s choice enters in. You might move it in a minute, or every day or every four months. It could be spread out over a year or ten years. Time can stretch more than most people think.⁵²

De Maria also observes that ‘the great appreciation for slow time is the contribution of the drug sensibility of the ’60s’,⁵³ although it is not clear whether he indulged in drugs himself.⁵⁴ As already mentioned, the experience of ‘slowing down’ is of major significance for a visitor to *The Lightning Field*, and I address this aspect of the work more fully in Chapter Seven. Another work from this period was *Ball Drop* (1961) (*Figure 18*), a 76 × 24 × 6.2-inch box that came with two square slots just below the top and middle and an invitation to drop the ball into the upper slot. Audience involvement is once again crucial, but this time the impact of one’s actions is startling. One expects to hear the ball rumble through a maze of channels hidden in the box until it reappears in the hole below: once again, sound (and the anticipation of sound) is an important

⁵¹ Like a number of De Maria’s works from 1961–2, this box was made initially in wood, and later fabricated in aluminium or steel through the patronage of Robert Scull, beginning in 1965.

⁵² Walter De Maria. Cited in Bourdon, 1968, p.40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ In interview with Paul Cummings, De Maria notes that drug taking was extremely destructive of many musicians’ careers, but his contribution to *Arts Magazine* in 1970 shows him smoking a small pipe. Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

component of experience. However, this expectation is exploded by the loud crack which sounds as the ball drops directly from the upper hole to the lower one. Kenneth Baker regards this as an example of our 'irrational habit of ascribing complexity and obscurity to what is out of sight.'⁵⁵ The work also emphasises the possibility of unexpected outcomes, a possibility which *The Lightning Field* exploits to the full in terms of the expectation of lightning, which I discuss in Chapter Nine.

In January 1963, De Maria put on an exhibition with Bob Whitman in a rented loft at Nine Great Jones Street in New York. Whitman is best known for his theatre pieces of this period, and for combining visual images and sound, as well as film and unusual props. At the exhibition, Whitman showed five or six stuffed vinyl sculptures.⁵⁶ As for De Maria, of the fifteen pieces of sculpture that he exhibited, nine were 'ball boxes', and all of them incorporated sound of some description. A precedent for these works can be found in Marcel Duchamp's *With Hidden Noise*, conceived in 1916 but not fabricated until 1964, the year after De Maria's exhibition with Whitman. Consisting of a ball of twine pressed between two brass plates which are joined by four screws, *With Hidden Noise* – like De Maria's 'ball boxes' – challenges the idea that sculpture is silent, and in so doing explores the relationship between a work and its audience in a dynamic way. With regard to De Maria's 'ball boxes', David Bourdon comments: 'The sound is always live and directly instigated by the spectator.'⁵⁷ During the few months that De Maria and Whitman rented the loft (January to June 1963) they also held jazz concerts with Don Cherry, as well as a film series of Joseph Cornell's films.⁵⁸ De Maria's loft also played host to the philosopher, artist, and musician Henry Flynt's reading of 'From Culture to Veramusement', on 28 February 1963. According to De

⁵⁵ Baker, Kenneth. *Minimalism: Art of Circumstance*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1988, p.82.

⁵⁶ Walter De Maria. Cited in Bourdon, 1968, p.40.

⁵⁷ Bourdon, 1968, p.41.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* De Maria and his wife Suzanne were film archivists for Cornell's collection of 2,000 movie stills from 1962 to 1967.

Maria, 'All the Happening people came'.⁵⁹ clearly, he enjoyed the multidisciplinary aspect of such occasions, as well as their social nature.

Later that year, Walter De Maria made his first visit to the American deserts on a drive from New York to California. This was a transformative experience for him: 'it was the most terrific experience of my life, experiencing the Great Plains and the Rockies, but especially the desert.'⁶⁰ Shortly afterwards, he made a 'Proposal for mile-long wall in the desert'. This project, which De Maria planned through a series of pencil drawings, was for a pair of white concrete walls – 12 feet high and 12 feet apart – set in the middle of the Nevada desert. The walls would be one mile long, creating a stark, seemingly endless stretch of corridor; the visitor would be able to walk between the walls, but would also be free to turn back at any point. The project anticipates the sense of uncertainty about walking which De Maria addresses in *The Lightning Field*, and which I consider in Chapter Eight of this thesis. It was later adapted to form one of De Maria's first works of 'Land Art' in 1968: *Mile Long Drawing* (Figure 8).

In 1964, De Maria's growing interest in the sights and sounds of the outdoor world developed in a work that is rarely mentioned but which is an important milestone in his artistic development, for it shows his interest in the acoustics of the natural world, an interest which he shared with Young and Cage. This was an audio-tape, called *Cricket Music* (sometimes called *Drums and Crickets*).⁶¹ Lasting 24 minutes 34 seconds, the work consists of De Maria playing drums in combination almost solely with a field recording of the everyday sound of the chirruping of crickets, and a passing light aircraft towards the end. The meter occasionally shifts, the volume sometimes alters a

⁵⁹ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ De Maria, Walter. *Cricket Music*. 1964 (24:34). Self-released album, together with *Ocean Music* (1968), under the title *Drums and Nature*.

little, as does the pitch, and gradually the sound of crickets becomes dominant, eventually almost entirely drowning out the drums, which do however reappear at the very end before fading away into silence. The listener is not sure whether he or she is listening to music or nature or both, or whether there is in fact any distinction between the two. As with much of the music of Cage, Riley, Reich, and Young, *Cricket Music* abandons most of the usual musical conventions; dynamics, melody, and harmony are all virtually discarded.

The mid-1960s saw De Maria involved in some remarkably diverse artistic endeavours, which clearly demonstrate the difficulty of pigeonholing him in terms of style, even though many of them share a preoccupation with time: and, as we shall see, time is a major component in the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*. The relentless passage of time – and its inexorable impact on one's appearance – is explored in *Silver Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1965) (Figure 19). Commissioned by Robert Scull, the work consists of a 40-inch-high cornice and draperies which, when opened, reveal a rectangular plate of silver mounted on a velvet-covered support. Like its namesake in Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), the silver plaque becomes increasingly tarnished over time, turning black as it corrodes. There is an engraved steel plate on the back of the piece which states that the chemical process may be photographed: indeed, Robert Scull regularly documented the progressive discoloration in photographs.⁶² *Land Piece* (1966) (Figure 20) consists of a V-shaped notch cut into a small chunk of laminated wood, whose coloured layers resemble the geological strata of a canyon. The work displays the passage of geological time, but does so through the seemingly contradictory impulse of miniaturisation. *Gothic Shaped Drawing* (1965) (Figure 21) consists of a plain, arch-shaped sheet of paper in a thin metal frame. Daniel

⁶² Bourdon, 1968, p.41.

Marzona describes the work as ‘an opaque white shield’ of paper that ‘makes one wonder if anything might be on the reverse side.’⁶³ He continues:

A simple outline and a precise title are the means De Maria employs to define the conceptual and rather mysterious terrain the viewer is invited to explore. Like a religious symbol or a philosophical question, the piece challenges the observer, who is compelled to investigate its meaning as well as his own existence in the phenomenological reality they both temporarily share.⁶⁴

The viewer is confronted with a quasi-religious theme that combines with mystery, geometry, and reductive purity – surely an apt description of *The Lightning Field* as much as of *Gothic Shaped Drawing*. Another work that makes reference to time and to religion is *Candle Piece* (also 1965) (*Figure 22*), in which a flickering flame illuminates a stainless-steel plaque inscribed ‘DEAR GOD’: the candle dies out at some unknown time in the future – an intimation of mortality. During this year, De Maria also made the aluminium floor piece called *Cross* (1965) (*Figure 23*), in the shape of a Latin cross with a movable ball inside it: bizarrely, the work juxtaposes piety and death with the pinball machine.⁶⁵ *Suicide* (1966) (*Figure 24*) consists of a dark mahogany booth 9 feet 4 inches high, with three angled walls and a carpeted base. On the centre panel there is an inscribed metal plate. The viewer has to step up into the booth – to move through space and time – in order to read it. The sign reads: ‘SUICIDE’. Similarly, *Death Wall* (1965) (*Figure 25*) consists of a small stainless-steel plinth marked by a notch-like opening with the word ‘DEATH’ engraved over it. Death, often combined with chance, was certainly a preoccupation in a number of works during this period. Similarly, at *The Lightning Field*, in the unlikely event of a lightning storm, being struck dead by lightning would be a possibility if shelter were not taken in the wooden cabin.

⁶³ Marzona, Daniel. *Minimal Art*. Köln: Taschen, 2006, p.46.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Benedikt, in Battcock, 1969, p.71.

By the mid-1960s, De Maria was receiving growing recognition in the avant-garde art world of New York. He exhibited at 'The Box Show', held at the Byron Gallery, and he had his first solo exhibition at the Paula Cooper Gallery (also sometimes referred to as the Paula Johnson Gallery). As part of this exhibition, De Maria hung large, empty, wooden 'frames' (approximately 4 × 6 feet) on the walls of a corridor; they framed nothing, other than, as Jane McFadden expresses it, 'the experience of interacting with art in a gallery.'⁶⁶ Here, as with many of his *Fluxus Anthology* 'texts', De Maria refuses to allocate meaning(s); instead, it is up to the audience to consider what – if anything – the frames should 'frame'.

However, despite De Maria's growing artistic success, music was still hugely important to him, and he continued regularly to play drums. In 1964 he planned to form a band with Terry Riley and the instrumentalist John Cale, both of whom had taken part in La Monte Young's 'Theatre of Eternal Music'.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the band never got off the ground because they all had their different perspectives on what they wanted to do. In 1966 De Maria played drums with the short-lived basement rock protest band The Insurrections, formed by Henry Flynt,⁶⁸ and he can be heard on their album, *I don't wanna*.⁶⁹ He also joined a band called The Primitives (soon renamed Velvet Underground), fronted by Lou Reed (who was Henry Flynt's guitar teacher), and with John Cale as one of its members. This was some six months before Andy Warhol became involved with the group and became their manager. Velvet Underground was at the forefront of avant-garde pop; it was the first band to use heavy electronic feedback

⁶⁶ McFadden, 2004. See also Thomas Neumann. 'Reviews and Previews', in *ArtNews* Vol 63 No 10, February 1965, p.16; and Vivien Raynor. 'In the Galleries', in *Arts Magazine* Vol 39 No 6, March 1965, p.63.

⁶⁷ Strickland, Edward. *Minimalism: Origins*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, pp.156 and 194.

⁶⁸ Henry Flynt also contributed to the *Fluxus Anthology*, with a text titled 'Concept Art'. However, while Flynt did permit Fluxus to publish this work, and he sometimes took part in Fluxus exhibitions, he claims no affiliation with the Fluxus sensibility. Owen Smith. *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*. San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998.

⁶⁹ Henry Flynt and the Insurrections. *I don't wanna*. Locust Music (1966).

and it subsequently became hugely influential in the rock and pop world, as much in terms of visual spectacle as for the 'sound' it produced. Yet, as before, De Maria felt deeply conflicted about whether to follow a musical path or a career in visual art, and he decided – again – to go 'back to the art'.⁷⁰ He left Velvet Underground just before the band signed a recording contract with MGM's Verve Records.⁷¹

In 1966 De Maria made a 'series' of works out of metal, which he titled *High Energy Bars* (Figure 26). Austere and beautiful, they were sold with floridly designed 'certificates' to their owners, who were exhorted to display them and to carry them around with them. Each one was engraved 'High Energy Bar, to be made in infinite numbers', and the certificates were numbered, dated, and signed by De Maria. De Maria liked the idea of making open-ended 'multiples' that could, theoretically, go on for ever. Once again, his desire for a sense of infinity is shown to be at work. The *High Energy Bars* were among an increasing number of works made with highly polished, precision-engineered stainless steel and aluminium, among them *Museum Piece* (1966) (Figure 27), *Zinc Pyramid* (1966) (Figure 28), and *Instrument for La Monte Young* (1966) (Figure 29). In the latter work, sound is as significant as visual appearance, for the sound of the ball sliding through the channelled aluminium box is picked up by a contact microphone and amplified 50 times.⁷² The commissioning of works in metal came from the collector Robert Scull, whom De Maria had met in 1965, after the show at the Paula Cooper Gallery. De Maria has commented that he liked the way that aluminium and steel don't really have a colour of their own, but are effectively the colour of light, reflecting what is around them; the materials therefore have a

⁷⁰ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

⁷¹ The group's debut album, in March 1967, titled *Velvet Underground and Nico*, has become one of the most influential rock albums in history, appearing at no. 13 on *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the 500 greatest albums of all time.

⁷² Bourdon, 1968, p.41.

relationship with the world in which they are placed, and this intimate relationship between art and its surroundings is of key significance for *The Lightning Field*. The use of metal also meant that De Maria was now able to make use of specialist machinery – and specialist workers – in specialist metal-working shops, which would prove to be crucial for the manufacture of the 400 stainless-steel poles at *The Lightning Field*.

Also in 1966, De Maria exhibited at the ‘Primary Structures’ exhibition of Minimalist art at the Jewish Museum in New York.⁷³ As I mentioned in Chapter Two, this is often regarded as a ground-breaking show: according to James Meyer, the Primary Structure ‘replaced the traditional, pedestal scale of sculpture with architectural scale, muddled tones with bright or severe colors, baroque excess with tasteful austerity.’⁷⁴ In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Kynaston McShine writes in general terms about the manner in which many of the sculptures on show

intrude aggressively on the spectator’s space, or the spectator is drawn into sculptural space. Often the structure acts ambiguously, creating a spatial dislocation for the spectator with complex meanings.⁷⁵

De Maria exhibited a work called *Cage II* (1965–66) (*Figure 30*), which was one of the first works in metal to be commissioned by Robert Scull; a wooden precursor to this work was made in 1962, titled *Statue of John Cage*.⁷⁶ Regarding De Maria’s contribution to the exhibition, McShine comments:

⁷³ Among those also exhibiting at the primary structures exhibition were: Donald Judd (*Untitled*, 1966), Sol LeWitt (*Untitled*, 1966), Robert Smithson (*The Cryosphere*, 1966), Carl Andre (*Lever*, 1966), Morris (*Untitled: 2 L Beams*, 1965), Anthony Caro (*Titan*, 1964), Tony Smith (*Free Ride*, 1962, at the museum entrance), Dan Flavin (*corner monument 4...*, 1966), Ellsworth Kelly (*Blue Disc*, 1963), Judy Chicago (*Rainbow Pickets*, 1966), and Anne Truitt (*Sea Garden*, 1964).

⁷⁴ Meyer, James. *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, p.24.

⁷⁵ McShine, Kynaston. *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: Jewish Museum, 1966, p.1.

⁷⁶ In January 1963, prior to exhibiting this work, De Maria wrote John Cage a letter: ‘Dear John Cage, I think it is only fair that I tell you that I have made a statue of you. Like the other sculptures and boxes that I am showing at this show, the sculpture was made about a year ago. It is 7 feet one inches tall. I do hope

An ambiguous and mysterious environmental situation is very quietly and intensely created by Walter de Maria's *Cage*. Here the light on the steel enhances the openness of the cage-like structure, making the space inside seem more inviting. Yet, since the structure is not of human proportions, we are simultaneously rejected and left outside to look and to reflect.⁷⁷

Whilst appearing purely minimalist in form, *Cage II* stretches well beyond the boundaries of a 'minimalist' framework, emphasising the difficulty of categorising De Maria under any one artistic banner, for this work could be read on several levels: as portrait; as geometric abstraction; as a conceptual work; as an exploration of the inside/outside dialectic; as a frame around emptiness. This work is ambiguous on another level too, since De Maria had an ambivalent attitude towards John Cage himself, which is more clearly expressed in his preliminary drawings for the work (*Figure 31*): however, it is not clear whether they ever actually met. De Maria commented:

Cage was interested in all the freer forms of modern music. So, being around music and around tape recorders and everything, I was sympathetic to him and also he was a great storyteller.

But he goes on to say:

I never did like his music actually. But the ideas were always well stated. Then, when I made my statue of John Cage, I think it was partly a recognition of the fact that Cage may have been caging a lot of people.⁷⁸

For James Meyer, the metal version of the work marks a sense of distancing as well as of increasing self-confidence on the part of De Maria: 'It was no longer necessary to erect a statue in honour of Cage.'⁷⁹

that this does not offend you. Should you not be able to see the show, I am enclosing a photo of the statue, which I would like you to keep.' Letter from Walter De Maria to John Cage, 2 January 1963. Reprinted in Franz Meyer. *Walter De Maria*. Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991, p.14.

⁷⁷ McShine, Kynaston. *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: Jewish Museum, 1966, p.4.

⁷⁸ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

De Maria continued to make boxes and 'invisible drawings', and like many other artists at the time – among them Carl Andre, Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, and Donald Judd – he began to demonstrate an increasing concern with the physical environment in which his artworks would be exhibited. In autumn 1966, for example, he had an exhibition at the Cordier-Ekstrom Gallery in the Parke-Bernet building in New York: this was his first real 'uptown' show. He exhibited about fifteen metal sculptures and a series of the 'invisible drawings'. The exhibition was installed with an extremely sensitive awareness of the physical nature of the gallery space in which it was located, and in his 1972 interview with Paul Cummings De Maria commented on the beautiful way in which light streamed into the gallery.⁸⁰ Among the works was *Blue Glass for Joseph Cornell* (1966) (*Figure 32*), an open stainless-steel cuboid within which was a flat, blue, circular glass. The show's centrepiece, however, was *Pyramid Chair* (1966) (*Figure 33*), a black ziggurat, with many dozens of tiny steps: at the very top, head-high, was a shiny vinyl chair, with chrome frame. This work anticipates *The Lightning Field* in its potential for unpredictable – and potentially catastrophic – drama, albeit on a much smaller scale. Michael Benedikt writes:

It was like a throne. A theatrical tension entered through the fact that the feet of the chair were at the corner-tips of the base upon which it stood. There was drama in the imminent falling-off.⁸¹

At the exhibition De Maria also showed his largest work to date, a serial floor piece titled *4–6–8 Series* (1966) (*Figure 34*). This is the first work by De Maria in which numbers play a part, and mathematical progressions of one kind or another subsequently came to be of major importance for him, as we shall see in Chapters Eight and Ten. The work consists of 18 stainless-steel slabs or 'units', each with three upright bars. Each

⁷⁹ Meyer, Franz. *Walter De Maria*. Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991, p.14.

⁸⁰ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

⁸¹ Benedikt, in Battcock, 1969, pp.68 and 71.

‘unit’ is the same height (41cm), length (50.8cm), and breadth (11.15cm), and each bar is either four-, six-, or eight-sided in section (ie. square, hexagonal, or octagonal). The bases can be positioned right next to each other, or alternatively with space between each one.⁸² In its use of geometric, repetitive, vertical metal poles, this important work anticipates *The Lightning Field*. In addition, as with *The Lightning Field*, one needs to walk through the sculpture, and experience the constantly changing configurations of the poles, rather than merely view it. Michael Benedikt writes: ‘One walked into De Maria’s show through them [the poles], as if down a long avenue of sphinxes reinterpreted.’⁸³

The ‘invisible drawings’ that were shown at the Cordier-Ekstrom exhibition were titled *The Large Landscape*, and they were exhibited in a square room with just two drawings on each wall.⁸⁴ They consisted of eight framed sheets of blank paper, just above the middle of each of which De Maria inscribed a single faulty pencilled word: GRASS, SKY, CLOUD, RIVER, TREE, FIELD, MOUNTAIN, SUN.⁸⁵ Here De Maria uses words in a wholly factual manner, yet the words nevertheless have the potential to unleash a flood of unwritten associations and references. The stripped-down, ‘minimalist’ quality of De Maria’s writing on these drawings is also very much in evidence in his 1980 *Artforum* essay on *The Lightning Field*, in which dry factual statements of measurement are placed in deliberate juxtaposition with an unspoken world of possible experience: I discuss De Maria’s essay in the next chapter.

⁸² Bourdon, 1968, p.42.

⁸³ Benedikt, in Battcock, 1969, p.71.

⁸⁴ Bourdon, 1968, p.43

⁸⁵ Boettger, S. *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, and London, England: University of California Press, 2002, p.116.

4. 1967–1974

The following year, in 1967, De Maria drove across the USA for the second time in his life, and this time he was accompanied by Michael Heizer. From 1967 to 1969 Heizer and De Maria were very great friends; Heizer lived on Mercer Street just four blocks away from De Maria, and they saw each other almost every night and had endless discussions about their art practice. The appeal of the desert was rapidly growing on De Maria, and in his 1972 interview with Paul Cummings he commented that

the desert is the most aesthetic place in the world, outside of the ocean, maybe more than the ocean, and when you're in the middle of the Sahara desert you know that it's one of the most beautiful places in the world.⁸⁶

He goes on:

I think it was a real desire to have space and everything that goes with space, because you realize that the doing of your work in New York depended on the state of your studio and it depended on the state of your gallery. It meant that your work was to be judged within the context of the space of the gallery.⁸⁷

However, this period was also a time of personal crisis for De Maria, as it saw the start of his marital break-up (he had married Suzanne in 1961). He thought about going to vast open spaces, especially remote deserts, as a means of escape not just from the conventional space of galleries but also from his personal problems. He commented:

starting in '67 I think I came to my crises with New York and my real thoughts were like going to Salt Mines in Canada or going to the North Pole and the South Pole, the idea of going to the Sahara Desert, the notion of experiencing space.⁸⁸

This interest in the wide-open spaces of the natural world was of course not new for De Maria: four years previously, he had made an 'invisible drawing' which incorporated

⁸⁶ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

the idea of taking a mile-long rope and running it into the wilderness of the forest, and he had also made many drawings of mountains and deserts, such as *Gray Mountains with Jet Plane* (1962) (Figure 35), as well as the somewhat humorous sculpture *North Pole – South Pole* (1962) (Figure 36), which is presumably aligned north-south in the exhibition space and encompasses a whole world within its 240-cm span. Furthermore, as we have already seen, his early impressions of the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean made a big impact on him even as a child, and this love of the open ocean revisited him in 1968, when he made a second audio-tape, titled *Ocean Music*.⁸⁹ Coupled with De Maria's increasing engagement with the desert at this time, *Ocean Music* articulates a desire for the artistic expression of an infinite, even transcendent, space. The work is sometimes regarded as a 'companion piece' to the *Cricket Music* of 1964; similar in length (20 minutes 29 seconds), it combines the sound of De Maria playing drums with the sound of waves crashing on the seashore. The piece starts with the waves alone, and it is only after about eight minutes that the sound of cymbals becomes audible, and then gradually the drumming becomes more obvious after eleven minutes, in a kind of symbiosis or fusion of nature and drummer. Towards the end, the drums become more dominant than the waves, before both gradually fade away to silence. I discuss this work again in Chapter Eight.

In 1968 De Maria exhibited at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery, Los Angeles. Wilder had commissioned him to make ten new works for the show, which was, in De Maria's words, 'very successful', since it earned him enough money to head inland from Los Angeles and explore the Mojave Desert and the area around Las Vegas for the first time. Soon De Maria started spending an increasing amount of time in the desert, often in the

⁸⁹ De Maria, Walter. *Ocean Music*. 1968 (20:29). Self-released CD, together with *Cricket Music* (1964) (24:34), under the title *Drums and Nature*.

company of Michael Heizer.⁹⁰ At El Mirage Dry Lake in the Mojave Desert, with Heizer's help, De Maria made *Mile Long Drawing*, which is a reconfiguration of his 1964 'proposal' for *Mile-Long Parallel Walls in the Desert*. The work – also sometimes known as *Two Parallel Lines* – consists of two parallel lines 4 inches wide and 1 mile long, 12 feet apart from one another; it is known principally through a photograph of De Maria stretched out flat on the ground between the lines, as if measuring the space with his own body (*Figure 8*). According to Ben Tufnell, this iconic image 'seems to assert the necessity of physical contact with the work'.⁹¹ Although the image shows the artist's physical engagement with the earth, physical engagement was also the principal experience for the visitor too, for whom the work could only be experienced completely by walking its length. On a later trip that same year De Maria made *Cross* on El Mirage Dry Lake, Nevada (*Figure 11*), which consists of two lines of white chalk 3 inches wide, forming a huge cross 500 feet wide and 1,000 feet long, and, in shape at least, recalling the earlier indoor metal *Cross* of 1965 (*Figure 23*). Heizer and De Maria telegraphed Richard Bellamy, a freelance promoter of New York art (owner of the Green Gallery which ran from 1960 until 1965), who at that time was at the Noah Goldowsky Gallery on Madison Avenue. The telegraph read: 'LAND PROJECT POSITIVE ... DON'T UNDERESTIMATE DIRT'.⁹² All of these large-scale outdoor works required a long drive in order to reach them, followed by some kind of walk: both the drive and the walk – together with the desert landscape in which they take place – are key components of the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*, and are discussed in subsequent chapters.

⁹⁰ During these and similar trips undertaken during 1968 and 1969, Heizer made numerous works, including the entropic *Five Conic Displacements* (1969; Coyote Dry Lake, Mojave Desert, California) and his series of *Nine Nevada Depressions* (1968) which demonstrated his growing interest in negative spaces which would soon be most fully expressed in *Double Negative* (1969).

⁹¹ Tufnell, Ben. *Land Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2006, p.6.

⁹² Telegram to Richard Bellamy from 'WALTER AND MIKE', dated 6 April 1968, Williams, Arizona, in Miles Bellamy Collection, New York City. Cited in Boettger, 2002, p.112.

The importance of 1968–69 for ‘Land Art’ in general has been amply rehearsed by Suzaan Boettger, for whom it signalled a critical moment. As we saw in Chapter Two, Boettger regards Virginia Dwan’s ‘Earth Works’ exhibition of 1968 as the starting point for the ‘movement’ as a whole, along with the ‘Earth Art’ exhibition the following year. De Maria showed work at both exhibitions (see Chapter Two), and in 1969 he also exhibited at the *Other Ideas* exhibition at the Detroit Institute, along with Heizer, Smithson, and Andre.⁹³ However, none of the extant literature on De Maria’s involvement in ‘Land Art’ makes any mention at all of the fact that 1968 was also a crucial period for him in an altogether different respect, for it was during this year that he decided to stop drumming in any major professional capacity and finally focus exclusively on art. Considering his earlier, repeated, soul-searching about whether to be an artist or a musician, and the enormous importance of music in his life so far, this must have been a momentous decision. Yet an ongoing awareness of music – and of sound more generally – continued to inform his practice, and in Chapters Six to Nine I address this issue in detail in relation to the visitor’s experience of *The Lightning Field*.

In 1968 De Maria’s physical horizons were expanding not just towards the Midwest deserts, but in other directions too, for he went to Europe in late April and stayed until nearly the end of the year. Subsequently, between 1968 and 1972, De Maria visited Europe for four or five months each year. He had become curious about what was happening in the art world there, especially with artists like Jan Dibbets and Richard Long. De Maria acquired a German dealer, Heiner Friedrich, and on 28 September 1968, in Friedrich’s gallery on Maximilianstrasse, Munich, he made the first of his ‘Earth Rooms’, titled the *Munich Earth Room*. For this, he filled a room of the gallery with 1,600 cubic feet of unadulterated earth to a depth of almost 2 feet, using the

⁹³ Tiberghien, Gilles. *Land Art*. London: Art Data, 1993, pp.54–55.

window ledges as reference points. A glass plate of the same height at the gallery entrance allowed the soil to be viewed, but prevented visitors from entering the rooms containing the soil. A poster outside the room showed a floor plan and side elevation of the space filled by the earth (*Figure 9*). The press release, written by Friedrich, quotes De Maria as saying: 'The dirt (or earth) is there not only to be seen but to be thought about.'⁹⁴ Unlike *4-6-8 Series*, or the works made in the desert so far, the viewer was unable to enter the work or walk around it but had to view it from the glass barrier that held the earth in and kept the viewer out. The work's combination of the materiality of earth and its conceptual possibilities anticipated this dual quality of *The Lightning Field*: and, as with so much of De Maria's work, paired-down visual simplicity yielded conceptual complexity.

The following year, De Maria planned and executed a number of spatially challenging and diverse works in the desert, which between them cover not just what is conventionally seen as 'Land Art', but also the media of satellite photography, television, and film. Of all the 'Land Artists', De Maria worked (or at least planned to work) at the largest scale, as *Three Continents Project* (1969) demonstrates.⁹⁵ For this truly monumental work, De Maria began by digging a one-mile-long trench, oriented north-south, in the Algerian Sahara. Another trench dug in India and a one-mile square traced on the ground in the USA were to constitute the whole work, which, after photographing it from satellite and superimposing the three parts, would have produced a cross within a square. The project was never completed: De Maria was in fact briefly imprisoned in Algiers because he was suspected of being an oil speculator when he began making the first cut for the project. According to Gilles Tiberghien, De Maria has been reluctant to talk about this hugely ambitious project, and all that he has ever

⁹⁴ Gallery Heiner Friedrich press release, undated, in Dwan Gallery archives. Cited in Boettger, 2002, p.275 footnote 59.

⁹⁵ Tiberghien, 1993, p.52.

provided has been documentary evidence of figures, weights, sizes, volumes, and so forth – similar to the documentation provided for visitors to *The Lightning Field*.⁹⁶

Another large-scale desert project was *Las Vegas Piece* (1969) (*Figure 12*), made in Desert Valley, Nevada, but now deteriorated beyond recognition. The work consisted of two trenches, each one mile long, and two others, each half a mile long, intersecting at right angles. Like *Mile-Long Drawing and Cross* – and, later, *The Lightning Field – Las Vegas Piece* took some time both to reach and then to walk around. Other ‘desert works’ include the short film, *Two Lines Three Circles on the Desert* (*Figure 7*), made for Gerry Schum from the recently opened Fernseh Gallery in Cologne (see Chapter Two). At the beginning of the film the camera is fixed in one spot, and the landscape is framed in such a way that the horizon divides the screen in half. Two parallel lines converge towards the horizon, and in the centre of the lines, a man (De Maria) walks, filmed from the back. When he has gone a few steps, the camera slowly turns in a circle on its axis. When it has revolved 360 degrees and we return to the same image, the man is already far away; by the second camera revolution he is only a point on the horizon, and when the camera completes its third revolution he has disappeared completely. The walk itself has lasted the length of the film, and by the end the man – the subject itself – disappears.⁹⁷ We are finally confronted with the infinite empty space that De Maria so desired, and which he later explores in *The Lightning Field*. De Maria’s other film, *Hard Core* (also 1969) (*Figure 37*), was a collaborative effort with Michael Heizer; it was filmed in the Black Rock Desert north of Reno, Nevada, and it used De Maria’s *Ocean Music* as its soundtrack. De Maria was clearly interested in the film’s duration. In a letter to the collector Giuseppe Panza, he commented:

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.53–54.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.253.

It is my hope that you might find it possible to construct a screening room whereby people might be able to see and hear the film ... just as they might spend 20 minutes looking at Rothko paintings.⁹⁸

The film begins with a series of panoramas of empty desert and sky. After a few minutes a pair of cowboy boots appears for a few seconds. As in the immensely popular 1966 Clint Eastwood western, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, the camera level is low. The camera rotates 360 degrees and another pair of boots appears. A second rotation occurs, and the camera shows us a revolver loaded and replaced in its holster. After the next rotation a rifle is loaded. After every 360-degree turn the viewer successively sees the expression of each of the two protagonists (De Maria in black hat, Heizer in white hat), until the final scene when the two men shoot for a bit at an unseen target (presumably each other). Just before the end of the film we see the face of a young Asian girl, which, according to both Gilles Tiberghien and Jane McFadden, may or may not be an allusion to the Vietnam War.⁹⁹ As with *The Lightning Field*, meaning is unclear.

In April 1969, De Maria had a solo show at the Dwan Gallery. *Time* magazine headlined its review of the show 'The High Priest of Danger'.¹⁰⁰ Among the works on show was *Bed of Spikes* (1968–69) (*Figure 38*). This work was displayed behind a curtained doorway, and visitors were only allowed to enter after signing an 'unconditional release' absolving De Maria and the gallery from all responsibility in case of an 'accident' (*see Chapter Nine for the full text of this 'release'*). The work consists of five metal plates on the floor, with progressive numbers of pointed steel

⁹⁸ Letter from Walter De Maria to Giuseppe Panza, 4 August 1971, Giuseppe Panza Papers, Getty Research Institute. The Fall 1971 edition of *Avalanche* reported that during 1970 *Hard Core* was screened at Cinema Odeon, Turin, the Edinburgh Film Festival, Scotland, and the City Cinema, Cologne. See McFadden, 2004, pp.155–156.

⁹⁹ See Tiberghien, 2002, p.265, and McFadden, 2004, p.155.

¹⁰⁰ *Time* magazine. 2 May 1969, p.54.

spikes projecting vertically upwards from each one.¹⁰¹ Like the *4-6-8 Series*, made two years previously, *Bed of Spikes* anticipates *The Lightning Field's* array of repetitive metal spikes, as well as the element of danger, and the crucial importance of the viewer's bodily movement, through which a continuous oscillation between order and chaos is established (and I return to this in Chapter Eight). De Maria commented:

the interesting part is that they are beautiful works for total looking in the round because the perspective in the files shift[s] and when you're on the short side you see seven, six passageways, seven rows of spikes, then moving around the other way you see thirteen rows and then you see all the spatial variations of these diagonal ranks that form too, so that spatially it's really a successful piece in reading it, in reading the sculpture in the total round ... It's hard to make a piece in the total round because often a piece really has a good side.¹⁰²

From 1971 to 1972, De Maria made plans for a work called *Olympic Mountain Project* (Figure 39). For this massive work, he planned to drill a 9-foot wide, 400-foot deep shaft through a volcano-shaped mountain made of rubble and covered with earth and grass. The shaft would be covered on top by a 12-foot diameter metal disc. Proposed for the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, the work was never realised, but it demonstrates a growing interest in massive scale, combined with the use of metal. Also in 1972, De Maria had a one-man show at the Kunstmuseum, Basel, Germany, where he exhibited a number of works, including *Bed of Spikes*, the *4-6-8 Series*, *Cross*, and *Museum Piece*, 45 drawings, and four new works: *Star* (1972) (Figure 40), and a 'geometric set' of *Circle*, *Square*, and *Triangle* (all 1972).¹⁰³ In 1974, he had another one-man show in Germany, this time at the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, for which he constructed the *Darmstadt Earth Room*, the second of his three 'Earth Rooms' (Figure

¹⁰¹ Each plate measures 78.5 x 41.5 x 2.5 inches; each point measures 10.5 x 0.9 x 0.9 inches. The number of points is successively 3, 15, 45, 91, and 153, from the first to the last plate, and the number of points along the short side of each plate is 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 respectively. The number of rows of points on each sculpture is equal to two times the number of points along the short side minus one. For example, the sculpture that has five points along the short side has nine rows [(5 x 2 = 10) - 1 = 9 rows]. The exception to this rule is the sculpture that has only one point along the short side and that has three points in total.

¹⁰² Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

¹⁰³ Like the earlier *Museum Piece*, *Instrument for La Monte Young*, and *Cross*, each of these works is made of stainless steel, with a movable ball that can be rolled around within the geometric shape.

41). The third and last 'Earth Room' was made in New York in 1977 at Friedrich's SoHo Gallery on Wooster Street. It is still in existence, and is maintained by the Dia Art Foundation (*Figure 42*). By this time, De Maria was increasingly interested in the deployment of metal in various mathematical and/or geometric progressions. For example, *5-9 Series* (1973-74) (*Figure 43*) consists of five sculptures made of polished aluminium with movable, solid aluminium balls, the sculptures increasing from a five- to a nine-sided form. Metal and mathematics were also at the forefront of De Maria's mind when, in 1973, he secured funding from Virginia Dwan for the construction of a temporary 'test site' for *The Lightning Field* in Arizona (see Chapter Five), and it was as a result of this experiment that the full-scale, permanent work in New Mexico, commissioned and maintained by the Dia Art Foundation, came to be built.

Having explored the breadth of Walter De Maria's interests, friendships, and artistic practice up to 1974, the inappropriateness of any attempt to pigeonhole either the artist or his career becomes abundantly clear. Having done precisely this, however, the conventional critical framework of 'Land Art', within which De Maria has usually been interrogated, has done him a disservice. I hope I have helped to rectify this in this chapter, and in subsequent chapters I explore, in greater depth, the themes that have been identified here.

Notwithstanding the diversity of De Maria's practice, there is, however, one fundamental preoccupation that holds his entire oeuvre together, whether we are considering his music or his drawings, his wooden boxes or his metal sculptures, or his various works made in the desert – and that is his concern for the role of the 'audience'.

Writing in 1972, two years *before* De Maria started work on the construction of *The Lightning Field*, Grégoire Müller recognises not only the diversity of De Maria's art, but also the importance of the integration of art object and viewer. In *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies* Müller writes:

His works refer to Minimal Art, to Conceptual Art, to Kinetic Art, and to Earth Art; yet all these qualities are only secondary aspects of his work, referring mostly to problems of forms and styles. Walter de Maria's art requires the spectator to go beyond what is immediately apparent. In his early drawings, only the blank surface of the paper is apparent until one comes very close to it. From a distance, the *Beds of Spikes* [sic] look like Serial-Minimal artworks. De Maria's land works cannot be seen unless one goes to the desert. In each case, a passive art lover is offered a visual or an intellectual satisfaction that comes close to what other artists – Minimalists or Conceptualists – could propose, but this is of no importance to De Maria. What he is attempting is to restore the full power of revelation, which art has lost in our culture through a long tradition of symbolism and aestheticism.¹⁰⁴

In order to 'restore the full power of revelation', as Müller expresses it, the beholder is invited – indeed, compelled – to do far more than merely 'observe'. For instance, he or she needs to walk towards something (the 'invisible drawings'), round something (4–6–8 *Series* and *Bed of Spikes*), or even, in the case of *Las Vegas Piece* or *Mile Long Drawing*, take a drive into the desert before then embarking on a walk of unspecified duration. He or she is asked to carry or move something – a box, a bar, a ball, or random items – from one place to another, and perhaps (but not necessarily) back again (*Boxes for Meaningless Work*; 'Beach Crawl'; *Instrument for La Monte Young*; *Cross*; *Move the Ball Slowly Down the Row*). In the case of *Ball Drop*, one might think one is being invited to play some kind of pinball game, only to find that the ball doesn't behave at all as expected. In De Maria's proposal for 'Art Yard', one is expected to dig or crawl in the dirt, and then dodge explosions or rescue one's children. One might be invited to have a seat at the top of a stepped ziggurat (*Pyramid Chair*), only to discover that the

¹⁰⁴ Müller, Grégoire. *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*. New York and London: Praeger, 1972, p.28.

steps are in fact too narrow to climb and the chair is so unstable that sitting on it is nigh impossible. One might simply be required to observe the reflection of one's decaying face in a decaying mirror (*Silver Portrait of Dorian Gray*), or mark the passage of time with a flickering candle (*Candle Piece*). In all the examples given above, the works not only bring complexity to the way we interact with the physicality of the art objects themselves, but they also change the way we perceive ourselves and our place in the world, and put us in a state of intense self-examination in which we seem to be watching ourselves. Moreover, in almost every instance of our interaction with De Maria's work, the three-way relationship between art object, beholder, and the environment is an anxious one, with numerous doubts about outcomes. What will happen if I fall on to the *Bed of Spikes*? What if I get lost in the desert on my way to try and locate *Las Vegas Piece* – and what if I can't even find it? For what length of time should I move the ball slowly down the row, and how slowly is 'slowly'? However, at the same time as all this anxiety, there is in many works a quality of calm, of transcendence even, with chaos and order held in balance with each other. Indeed, Jeffrey Kastner argues that De Maria's oeuvre evokes a continual tension between serenity and anxiety,¹⁰⁵ and this perpetual apprehension is nowhere more clearly felt than when one is walking amongst *The Lightning Field's* array of evenly spaced stainless-steel poles, especially if a thunderstorm is brewing on the horizon. Here the necessity of being far more than a beholder reaches its zenith.

¹⁰⁵ Kastner, J. and Wallis, B. (eds). *Land and Environmental Art*. London and New York: Phaidon, 1998, p.289.

CHAPTER FOUR

Walter De Maria's 'silence'

1. Introduction

In Chapter Two I argued that the 'Land Art' genre, for all its persistence, has failed to do justice to the true complexities of Walter De Maria's practice; and in Chapter Three I addressed this failure by exploring the much wider, and frequently multidisciplinary, arena for art within which De Maria was engaged throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The present chapter is provoked by a similar failure of understanding in relation to De Maria's critical stance within wider discourses on art during this period – and, indeed, subsequently. De Maria is almost invariably considered to be intractably 'silent' with regard either to the meaning(s) of his own artworks or to his opinions concerning wider art-historical debate. This perception of De Maria has been established, and maintained, from within the normative 'model' of art history for this period – a model that marks a trajectory from modernism, via Minimalism, to postmodernism, and which De Maria's 'silence' does little to oppose. Certainly in comparison to a number of other artists – among them Donald Judd, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Morris – whose voices formed an important part of this trajectory, De Maria's apparent refusal to take part is all the more intriguing. However, such a perception of De Maria is caused by a limited understanding of what a number of artists of his generation were actually doing in their varied utterances, or, for that matter, in their refusal to make utterances at all. De Maria was in fact neither indifferent nor hostile to critical discourse: instead, he contributed to a far less 'tidy' version of art-historical discussion – one that embraced a much more eclectic range of arenas and modes for critical dialogue, and which had a great deal in common with the Fluxus aesthetic at the start of the 1960s. Within that

‘alternative’ critical arena, De Maria was highly astute with regard to the possibilities, and limitations, of presenting himself, his work, and his ideas: through text, image, and, indeed, silence itself. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to provide a reassessment of De Maria’s contribution to critical debate.

2. Fermenting debate

Throughout his career De Maria has almost invariably declined interviews or access to his archives. As I mentioned in Chapter One, my own requests for an interview have been refused, and this has also been the experience of John Beardsley,¹ Jane McFadden,² and, no doubt, all others who attempt to gain such access. In addition, De Maria has produced very little written material about his art practice. He published eight short pieces in the 1963 Fluxus *Anthology*, but, as we have already seen in Chapter Three, these are ‘works’ rather than comments on practice. And although he contributed to no less than three publications in 1972 – *Arts Magazine*, *Avalanche*, and Grégoire Müller’s *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies* (and I discuss these later in this chapter) – these contributions were not written texts but largely ‘photographic essays’, and they have been almost entirely overlooked in critical assessments of the artist. De Maria’s 1972 interview with Paul Cummings for the Smithsonian Institution, which has proved extremely useful for my own research, has only recently been released from its restrictions requiring De Maria’s permission to read it,³ and De Maria tightly controls the rights to reproduction of his artworks (not just those of *The Lightning Field*), restricting the number of images available and the contexts in which they may be reproduced. As we shall see in the next chapter, he

¹ Beardsley, John. ‘Art and Authoritarianism: Walter De Maria’s *Lightning Field*’, in *October*, No 16, Spring 1981, pp.35–38.

² McFadden comments: ‘In the course of my research, De Maria has never responded to any of my inquiries to see his archive nor to confirm factual information. These requests, sent through his contacts at Gagosian Gallery, were always met with silence.’ Jane McFadden. *Practices of Site: Walter de Maria and Robert Morris, 1960–1977*. PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, May 2004, p.170 footnote 418.

³ *Ibid.*

withdrew from the proposed publication of images of *The Lightning Field* in *Life* magazine or on billboards in New York's Grand Central Station. The 1980 *Artforum* article on *The Lightning Field* (reprinted in *Appendix One*) is the only instance of De Maria publishing what could be described as a conventional written essay. Since then, he has almost invariably been described as 'reclusive'.⁴ He has published nothing, and, as far as I have been able to ascertain, has given no interviews.

In light of the above, it is hardly surprising that there is a degree of uncertainty about what De Maria's 'attitude of withdrawal' might signify. To date, the most vocal critic of this attitude is John Beardsley, who, in 'Art and Authoritarianism: Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field*', slates De Maria's refusal to allow access to archival material.⁵ And, of course, De Maria's 'silence' is all the more intriguing when positioned against the ferment of debate about art that was gathering momentum in the mid-1960s, a ferment in which many artists became deeply involved. By that time, De Maria was a well-known figure in the New York avant-garde, and he would have witnessed the rapid growth in the importance of artists' voices in what was, as James Meyer expresses it, a particularly combative polemic, with terms such as 'painting', 'sculpture', 'object', 'experience', 'theatre', and 'art' consciously pitted against each other in a veritable war of words about what art was and was not, and about what art should and should not be.⁶ Yet De Maria did not become involved in any of these debates, even though, by the mid-1960s, Donald Judd, Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, and Sol LeWitt (most of whom were personal friends of De Maria) started writing and publishing essays that were immediately seen as important contributions to critical debate, and which – despite

⁴ See, for example, Lynne Cooke's preface to Kenneth Baker, *The Lightning Field*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008, p.viii.

⁵ Beardsley, 1981.

⁶ Meyer, James. *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, p.229.

De Maria's non-participation – were in many respects certainly relevant to his own developing practice.

Robert Smithson was a particularly creative writer during his short life (he died in a plane crash in 1973); indeed, Lynne Cooke asserts that Smithson grounded both his aesthetic and his practice in the belief that art objects only exist in and through discursive networks, a position that seems – on the surface, at least – to be diametrically opposed to that of De Maria.⁷ In 'Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space' (pointedly subtitled 'For many artists the universe is expanding; for some it is contracting'), Robert Smithson overtly critiques Clement Greenberg's manifesto, demonstrating that much of the new art is neither confined to its own 'area of competence' nor has a flat surface, and illustrating his argument with a variety of three-dimensional artworks, together with extracts from a multitude of disciplines.⁸ Similarly, in 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects',⁹ Smithson proposes that 'Earth Art' presents a powerful challenge to Michael Fried's formalist views since it is clearly 'theatrical', not only in terms of the artist's gestural making of the work, but also subsequently in any viewer's encounter with it. Smithson's insistence on theatricality (contra-Fried) is clearly relevant when we consider the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*; certainly, for me, the whole 'event' seemed more like a piece of theatre than a visit to a 'work of art'.

In 1967 Sol LeWitt provided the first recognition of the Conceptual Art movement in his essay, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' (1967), in which he asserts that 'the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the art' and 'what art looks like isn't too

⁷ Cooke, Lynne, in Baker, 2008, pp.viii–ix.

⁸ Smithson, Robert. 'Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space', in *Arts Magazine*, November 1966. Reprinted in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp.34–37.

⁹ Smithson, Robert. 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects', in *Artforum*, Vol 7 No 1, September 1968, pp.44–50.

important'.¹⁰ Two years later, LeWitt published 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' in the first volume of the new journal *Art-Language* (1969), by which time Conceptual Art was becoming more widely recognised as an international avant-garde movement. This essay consists of 35 numbered 'statements', including no. 25, which reads as follows: 'The artist may not necessarily understand his own art. His perception is neither better nor worse than that of others.'¹¹ This last 'statement' resonates with De Maria's own refusal to allocate meaning(s) to his work, preferring instead to embrace polysemy.

Donald Judd's 'Specific Objects', published in *Arts Yearbook* in 1965,¹² is also pertinent for De Maria's practice in the mid-1960s and subsequently. Through a developing interest in three-dimensionality – firstly with reliefs and subsequently with free-standing works – Judd advocates concentration on the volume and presence of the structure and the space around it, and, in so doing, draws attention to the complex relationship between the object, the viewer, and its environment: a dynamic relationship that lies at the heart of the experience of *The Lightning Field*. 'Specific Objects' became what James Meyer calls a 'position paper',¹³ for it forcefully maps Judd's territory and lays claim to his very particular interpretation of terms such as 'object', 'painting', and 'sculpture', with Judd creating the new phrase 'specific object' to separate his art from modernist painting and sculpture. Judd sees painting and sculpture as essentially pictorial in nature, whereas his 'specific objects' are not. The essay's opening gambit – 'Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture' – is a stunningly direct rejection of the Greenbergian narrative of twentieth-century modernism.

¹⁰ LeWitt, Sol. 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', in *Artforum*, Vol 5 No 10, June 1967, p.80.

¹¹ LeWitt, Sol. 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', in *Art-Language*, Vol 1 No 1, May 1969, pp.11–13.

¹² Judd, Donald. 'Specific Objects', in *Arts Yearbook*, Vol 8, 1965, pp.74–82. Republished in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds). *Art in Theory: 1900–2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp.824–828.

¹³ Meyer, 2001, p.134.

Walter De Maria's one-time friend and working 'partner' Robert Morris was also heavily involved in critical debates, and his four-part 'Notes on Sculpture',¹⁴ together with 'Anti Form',¹⁵ have become leading sources of theoretical information on sculpture during that decade; and Morris's emphasis on the relationship between art, location, and beholder, together with his preoccupation with process, is clearly relevant for *The Lightning Field*. In some respects Parts 1 to 3 of Morris's 'Notes' present a different argument to that proposed by Judd's 'Specific Objects' the year before. For example, whereas Judd is antagonistic towards suggestions of a link to earlier European art practice, Morris finds connections between his work and that of the European tradition of the Constructivists Rodchenko and Gabo. Moreover, unlike Judd, Morris is interested in Gestalt theory, through which the parts of an artwork are bound together in such a way that they offer a maximum resistance to perceptual separation. However, the similarities between the positions of Judd and Morris are perhaps more important than their differences (Michael Fried was certainly to think so), for both artists are interested in the character of the sculptural object as a determinant of the experience of the beholder. Morris, for example, writes:

The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. It is in some way more reflexive because one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.¹⁶

By 1969, in 'Notes on Sculpture Part 4: Beyond Objects',¹⁷ Morris shifts focus further away from the object to the space surrounding it. The essay theorises the anti-formal

¹⁴ Published in four parts in *Artforum*: Vol 4 No 6, February 1966, pp.42–44; Vol 5 No 2, October 1966, pp.20–23; Vol 5 No 10, Summer 1967, pp.24–29; Vol 7 No 8, April 1969, pp.50–54.

¹⁵ Morris, Robert. 'Anti Form', in *Artforum*, Vol 6 No 8, April 1968, pp.33–35.

¹⁶ Morris, Robert. 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2', in *Artforum*, Vol 5 No 2, October 1966, p.22.

¹⁷ Morris, Robert. 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 4', in *Artforum*, Vol 7 No 8, April 1969, pp.50–54.

tendency that he began to address in 'Anti Form' and which he now sees developing within the American avant-garde. Morris writes:

Certain art is now using as its beginning and as its means, stuff, substances in many states – from chunks, to particles, to slime, to whatever – and pre-thought images are neither necessary nor possible. Alongside this approach is chance, contingency, indeterminacy – in short, the entire area of process.¹⁸

These artists' engagement in critical debate draws attention to the temporal and contextual realities of the viewer's experience in relationship to art, a crucial consideration in any discussion of *The Lightning Field*. For Craig Owens, however, they also indicated a new focus on language itself. For instance, Part 3 of Morris's 'Notes on Sculpture' is printed as a series of 19 non-sequential paragraphs, suggesting that Morris, like Smithson, was trying to find a totally new way of writing about the new art. Indeed, Owens argues that the focus on language played a significant role in the shift from modernism to postmodernism, and that postmodernism as a whole was signalled not so much by a multiplication of its forms but rather by the eruption of language into the aesthetic.¹⁹ For Owens, this was particularly forcefully expressed in Robert Smithson's writings; and, of course, in comparison not only to Smithson but also to Judd, LeWitt, and Morris, De Maria's alleged 'silence' within this debate is all the more curious.

A particularly significant publication during this period was the summer 1967 issue of *Artforum*, which not only contained important texts by Morris ('Notes on Sculpture, Part 3'), Smithson ('Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site'), and Sol LeWitt ('Paragraphs on Conceptual Art'), but also Michael Fried's 'Art and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Owens, C. 'Earthwords', in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock.) Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1994.

Objecthood',²⁰ which was his riposte to the claims of Morris and Judd. In Fried's view it is a symptom of the decadence of what he called literalist art (by which he meant 'Minimalism') that it theatricalises the relation between object and beholder, in contrast to authentic Modernist art:

Whereas in previous art what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it], the experience of literalist art is of an object in a *situation* – one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*.²¹

For Fried, 'literalist' works threaten the very condition of art, since their preoccupation with site and duration is paradigmatically theatrical: 'The literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art.'²² For Fried, this preoccupation with theatricality was most clearly expressed in Tony Smith's description – in an interview with Samuel Wagstaff – of a night-time journey along the unfinished New Jersey turnpike. The interview first appeared in print in *Artforum* in December 1966:

It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first, I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality that had not had any expression in art. The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.²³

²⁰ Fried, M. 'Art and Objecthood', in *Artforum*, Vol 5 No 10, June 1967, pp.12–23. Republished in M. Fried. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp.148–172.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Wagstaff, Samuel. 'Talking with Tony Smith', in *Artforum* Vol 5 No 4, December 1966, p.19.

As Jane McFadden argues in 'Towards Site', Smith's description of his car journey was pivotal in theorising the expanding field of art later in the decade. Indeed, it became attractive to a number of artists, among them De Maria, who were trying to come to terms with what seemed to them to be the limitations of the autonomous art object.²⁴ And as Lucy Lippard comments, 'Process Art, Earth Art, Conceptual Art, and Performance Art shared a de-emphasis on the final work and an emphasis on how it came to be.'²⁵ Smith's preoccupation with experience clearly supports that category of artworks so derided by Fried – namely, those works that exist both within a particular situation and over an extended span of time. For McFadden, that which Fried found hostile to art and exemplified in Smith's account – 'the contextual specificity of an experience that establishes itself as something like that of an object' – De Maria, among others, found essential to art's expanding potential.²⁶

'Art and Objecthood' was immediately reviled and satirised. It was, for example, challenged by Robert Smithson, who, in a letter to the editor of *Artforum* in the journal's next issue, states that 'What Fried fears most is the consciousness of what he is doing – namely being himself theatrical.' In his usual deliberately eclectic style, Smithson asserts that Fried has delivered 'a long overdue spectacle' himself, and that he has brought on a sort of 'fictive inquisition', or what could be described as 'a ready-made parody of the war between Renaissance classicism (modernity) versus Manneristic anti-classicism (theatre).'²⁷ Other critics included Annette Michelson and Rosalind Krauss. In *Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression*,²⁸ the catalogue essay for Morris's 1969 retrospective at the Corcoran Gallery, Michelson provides a

²⁴ McFadden, Jane. 'Toward Site', in *Grey Room*, Vol 27, Spring 2007.

²⁵ Lippard, L.R. *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*. New York: The New Press, 1983, p.30.

²⁶ McFadden, 2007, p.39.

²⁷ Smithson, Robert. 'Letter to the editor', in *Artforum*, October 1967.

²⁸ Michelson, Annette. *Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression*. Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969.

powerful reversal of 'Art and Objecthood', for she sees Morris's work increasingly affirming what Fried abhors, namely perception occurring in real time. Similarly, Krauss, in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977), argues that postwar art, and indeed twentieth-century sculpture as a whole (from Rodin and Picasso to Nauman and Smithson), is in fact heavily preoccupied with the moving, perceiving body – a theatricalised body.²⁹ Michelson and Krauss's interpretations have become the dominant accounts of 'Art and Objecthood' and the late modernism it came to represent. Subsequently, in Hal Foster's *The Crux of Minimalism*, Minimalism and Fried's text emerge hand in hand as an epistemological 'rupture', a 'crux' connecting and separating the modern and postmodern.³⁰

By the late 1970s, the new embrace of postmodernism was marked by Rosalind Krauss's influential essay, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1978),³¹ in which she uses what is known as a Klein group (*Figure 44*) to expand the framework for 'sculpture'. For Krauss, the 'permission (or pressure)'³² to think one's way into the 'expanded field' was felt by a number of artists between roughly 1968 and 1970 – among them De Maria, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Richard Serra, Robert Irwin, Sol LeWitt, and Bruce Nauman³³ – and for her this marked a veritable 'historical rupture', away from modernism and towards postmodernism – a rupture that, so she argued, stands in sharp contrast to the usual historicist business of constructing genealogies for art. Although Krauss expresses some hesitation in using the term 'postmodernism', she asserts that 'whatever term one uses, the evidence is

²⁹ Krauss, Rosalind. *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.

³⁰ Foster, Hal. 'The Crux of Minimalism', in Howard Singerman (ed.). *Individuals. A Selected History of Contemporary Art 1945–86*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986.

³¹ Krauss, Rosalind. 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1978), in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The MIT Press, 1987.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Krauss also makes the point that other cultures have had no difficulty in thinking in terms of the complex. She writes: 'labyrinths are *both* landscape and architecture; Japanese gardens are *both* landscape and architecture; the ritual playing fields and processions of ancient civilizations were all in this sense the unquestioned occupants of the complex.' Krauss, 1987, p.284.

already in'.³⁴ She incorporates into her 'expanded field' a number of artworks by various artists, including De Maria's *Mile Long Drawing*, Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969), Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), and Christo's *Running Fence* (1972–76), as well as the photographic work of Richard Long and Hamish Fulton.

Certainly, in 1978, Krauss's essay was indicative of a need to extend the critical discourse of art to accommodate many of the new kinds of work being produced in the 1960s and 1970s. However, as Jane Rendell asserts in *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (2006), 'it is important not to use the square [the Klein group] as a map that defines a finite set of categories, but rather to regard it as a mapping that remains open to the emergence of new possibilities.'³⁵ For Rendell, the expanded field is increasingly exploding, with the result that Krauss's categories are no longer held in tension. Rendell goes on:

Today, definitions and categorisations of art are occurring across multiple disciplines rather than within one, requiring new terms and modes of thinking that allow us to identify the particularities and differences of the various related practices in ways that go beyond opposition. To do this I propose that we need to understand artworks as products of specific processes, of production and reception, that operate within a further expanded and interdisciplinary field, where terms are not only defined through one discipline but by many simultaneously.³⁶

Rendell's critique of Krauss's expanded field is particularly pertinent for De Maria's practice, which cannot be accommodated within Krauss's Klein group without considerable residue, since nowhere does Krauss make provision in her 'expansion' for the role played by an active audience, or for the significance of duration, or for overlaps with other art practices beyond the visual arts.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.287.

³⁵ Rendell, Jane. *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006, p.43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Notwithstanding Rendell's call for an exploded 'field', however, it remains the case that the 'standard model' of mid-twentieth-century art that I have briefly outlined above – of modernism through Minimalism to postmodernism – has been a particularly forceful and persuasive one, and that it still persists to this day, a fact recognised, and bemoaned, by Jane McFadden in a recent review of art exhibitions on Minimalism.³⁷ Yet this model is simply too 'tidy' to account either for the complexities of the debates that actually existed at the time, or for De Maria's somewhat reserved, yet nonetheless very carefully engineered, position in relation to those debates. Indeed, in the 'standard model' the desire for historical clarity, eloquently expressed, has almost entirely overshadowed any exploration of the true complexity of art-historical debate or practice from the mid-1960s into the '70s. This is a particular problem for any analysis of De Maria, whose 'silence' within the conventional model of critical history given above is deafening.

3. *Aspen, Avalanche, and Arts Magazine*

Throughout this thesis many of the conventional discourses within which De Maria and his art practice have been positioned are shown to be extremely limited with regard to enlarging our understanding both of the artist and his practice. Not only do they largely overlook the far wider, frequently multidisciplinary, arena in which De Maria participated and which has continually informed his practice, but they also inhibit any full understanding of the role of the audience in constituting meaning(s). With this in mind, what is needed at this stage of this thesis – before focusing more precisely on *The Lightning Field* – is a reassessment of De Maria's 'attitude of withdrawal' in the light of a wider, less tidy critical structure. Indeed, even while the modernism/postmodernism model was being constructed, a far more idiosyncratic and eclectic arena for discourse

³⁷ McFadden, Jane. 'On Museums Handling History', in *X-Tra: Contemporary Art Quarterly*, Vol 7 No 1, Fall 2004. [Online] www.x-traonline.org/past_articles.php?articleID=68. [01.03.2009]

was being established; this embraced informal conversations and interviews, photographic 'essays', audio recordings, films, all manner of written texts, and, of course, 'silence' itself. By examining this 'alternative' arena, it quickly becomes clear that what has almost invariably been construed as De Maria's obdurate refusal to participate in discussions is only tenable when viewed from *within* mainstream debates about art.

By 1968 Walter De Maria was clearly becoming increasingly disillusioned about the conventional methods for the display and commodification of his work. Given this growing sense of disenchantment about how his work could be displayed within the traditional spaces of galleries, it is hardly surprising that, at the same time, De Maria also became increasingly uncertain about how his thoughts and ideas might be represented within the conventional channels for art-historical debate. He did not, however, retreat from making and displaying art: rather, he repositioned it in the remote, inaccessible, desert, so that his audience would have to work particularly hard to engage directly with it, and would be confronted with discomfort and ambiguity. By the same token, his decision to take part in alternative arenas for critical discussion can be viewed as the critical equivalent to locating *The Lightning Field* – or any other of his desert works – remotely in the desert. Rather than using the conventional format of a written essay in an established art journal, he employed alternative kinds of texts, conversations, and images that functioned outside of the mainstream. Moreover, he was particularly concerned to embrace ambiguities of meaning, rather than regarding them as a problem requiring a solution.

De Maria was of course by no means alone in being comparatively resistant to taking part in mainstream debates through mainstream channels; indeed, a growing number of

artists were equally uneasy about the ascendancy of criticism and of the writerly responses that some artists made to established critics. It was largely out of this sense of unease that a number of alternative arts publications came into being. Indeed, from the 1960s into the 1970s, just as there was an explosion of new words and phrases that sought to 'sum up' the new art, so too was there a proliferation of new publications that sought to stake out alternative critical positions, among them *Aspen*, *Arts Magazine*, *ArtRite*, *Art-Language*, and *Avalanche*. These magazines played a significant role in the development and distribution of ideas about art. As Lisa Le Feuve comments,

they are where we find out about [art], see it represented, find opinions, are informed about what we can see and what we have missed and, most importantly, develop a sense of the contemporary movement.³⁸

Aspen, published between 1965 and 1971, is a particularly important example of the new breed of magazine.³⁹ Its extremely diverse mix of material (text, photographs, films, musical scores, and sound recordings) and contributors (dancers, rock musicians, composers, poets, painters, sculptors, and writers) showed that an eclectic range of debates was alive and well. *Aspen* demonstrated a concern for a much less 'clean' version of artistic practice and theory, and, most importantly, one that embraced the concept of 'intermedia', a multidisciplinary exchange between different art forms. Each issue of *Aspen* had a different editor and designer, and a different theme, and each was packaged in a specially designed box. 'The Minimalism Issue' (Fall/Winter 1967) included recordings by John Cage (*Fontana Mix – Feed Nov. 6, 1967*) and Morton Feldman (*The King of Denmark*); an audio recording of Samuel Beckett's *Text for Nothing* #8 (1958) read by Jack MacGowan; a description of an installation at the Dwan Gallery by Sol LeWitt (*Serial Project #1*); Tony Smith's *Drawing for the Maze*; films by Hans Richter (*Rhythm 21*), Robert Morris and Stan VanDerBeek (*Site*), Robert

³⁸ Le Feuve, Lisa. 'Avalanche', in *Art Monthly*, July–Aug 2004, p.7.

³⁹ *Aspen* is available online at www.ubu.com/aspen/intro.html.

Rauschenberg (*Linoleum*), and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (*Lightplay*); and three ‘essays’ – Roland Barthes’ ‘The Death of the Author’, George Kubler’s ‘Style and the Representation of Historical Time’, and Susan Sontag’s ‘The Aesthetics of Silence’. Issue No.8 (Fall/Winter 1970–71), titled ‘Art/Information/Science’, edited by Dan Graham and designed by George Maciunas, is especially interesting. Among its contributors were La Monte Young (a recording of *Drift Studies 31.01.69*), Philip Glass (the score for *1 + 1 for One Player and Amplified Table-Top: Figure 45*), Jackson MacLow (a recording of *Young Turtle Assymetries*), Steve Reich (the score for *Pendulum Music* – which I discuss in Chapter Seven: see *Figure 16*), Edward Ruscha (*Parking Lot*), Yvonne Rainer (a text and photo for *Three Distributions*), Richard Serra (a text titled *Lead Shot*), Robert Smithson (a text with photographs, *Strata, a Geophotographic fiction*), and ‘ecological projects’ by Robert Morris (*Los Angeles Project*) and Dennis Oppenheim (*Forest Project*, *Notes on Ecological Projects*, and *Cancelled Crop*). The magazine’s eclectic presentation – embracing different editors and designers, different formats, different media, and artists from different ‘fields’ – resonates strongly with aspects of the Fluxus aesthetic of the early 1960s.

Although De Maria was not involved with *Aspen*, in 1972 he did contribute to two other ‘alternative’ magazines: *Avalanche* and *Arts Magazine*. Indeed, in 1972 De Maria contributed to no less than four important projects – these two journals, one book, and one major interview – each of which demonstrates the extreme care with which he sought to engineer a position for himself within alternative modes of interpretation. With very few exceptions,⁴⁰ these contributions have been entirely overlooked in assessments of De Maria. *Avalanche* – published 13 times between 1970 and 1976 – was founded by Willoughby Sharp (curator of the ‘Earth Art’ exhibition in 1969) in

⁴⁰ To date, the only references I have found to De Maria’s involvement in these publications are in Jane McFadden’s 2004 PhD, and, very briefly, in Lynne Cooke’s preface to Kenneth Baker’s *The Lightning Field*. See McFadden, 2004; and Baker, 2008.

collaboration with Liza Béar, who became known for her unorthodox style of conducting interviews. The magazine's title was chosen with some care by Sharp, who asserted that the magazine, like an avalanche, should 'break down the old structure'.⁴¹ Indeed, this desire to dislodge comfort – coupled with the title itself – echoes De Maria's own fascination, voiced in his Fluxus composition 'On the importance of natural disasters', for the untameable power of large-scale forces of nature and the unsettling impact they could have on an 'audience'.

Avalanche had a particularly social nature; Lisa Le Feuve describes it as a kind of 'bulletin board' that kept the inhabitants of SoHo – De Maria among them – informed about local events in the wider art world. The magazine was informal in style, and it included interviews with artists, photographs, discussions, adverts, and a section called 'Rumbles' (news from the art world). The interviews that appeared in the magazine were particularly relevant, for they can be understood as a form of 'anticriticism':⁴² that is, their meaning and their effect on the reception of art took place in opposition to the dominant models of criticism and publicity operating within the mainstream art world at that moment. The artist interviews rejected the authority of the critic and offered a more direct line of communication to the public. Indeed, Gwen Allen comments on the volatility of the interview form used in the magazine, especially by Liza Béar, and 'its location between talking and writing, its status as both primary and secondary text'.⁴³ Béar's candid interview style destabilised the primacy and authority of the traditional critical text, and produced some of the most fascinating art-historical documents from the period. As Gwen Allen expresses it:

⁴¹ Sharp, Willoughby, in conversation with Gwen Allen, in 'Against criticism: the artist interview in *Avalanche* magazine, 1970–76', in *Art Journal*, Fall, 2005, p.52.

⁴² The term 'anticriticism' was formulated by Peter Uwe Hohendahl to describe the critical re-evaluation of the institution of criticism in the 1960s by the New Left. See Peter Uwe Hohendahl. *The Institution of Criticism*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982.

⁴³ Allen, Gwen. 'Against criticism: the artist interview in *Avalanche* magazine, 1970–76', in *Art Journal*, Fall 2005, p.53.

Richly idiosyncratic, they convey something of the affective nuance and informal quality of the original conversations they record, allowing us to imagine that we are eavesdropping on history, flies on the wall of a SoHo loft when the acronym was still novel. Often the interviews take place over a meal or over the course of a long afternoon; sometimes they begin with the lighting of marijuana or hash. They seem to be not only about the communication of information but also the communion of intellect – as well as the enjoyment of company.⁴⁴

Gwen Allen asserts that although some might regard these details about ‘language in use’ as peripheral or even inappropriate to an art-historical argument, for her they are crucial to the way the *Avalanche* interviews participate in the representational concerns of the moment, to the way they structure communication about art, and ultimately to their striving, against criticism, to constitute the act of interpretation as a cooperative endeavour.⁴⁵ This sense of cooperative sociability stands in sharp contrast to the other kinds of interviews that appear in most conventional art magazines, which often read as a drill of preconceived questions.

Avalanche celebrated the fact that interviews and other social interactions took place in all sorts of locations and in all sorts of ways: in people’s lofts (including Yoko Ono’s), at ‘Food’ restaurant, at Max’s ‘Kansas City’ bar, and even at the offices of *Avalanche* itself, at 93 Grand Street. Experimental performance artist and musician Laurie Anderson recalls of the period:

The thing that I loved about that time was how much people were involved in each other’s work. All of us did a lot of talking and a lot of writing ... The talking was really a working method and a way of identifying with each other ... The talking is not only a way to figure out what you’re doing, it’s the work itself.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Anderson, Laurie, ‘Interview with Joan Simon’, in Mary Jane Jacobs (ed.). *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective*. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985, p.18.

De Maria's contribution to *Avalanche*, in spring 1972, was not an interview but a 'photographic essay'.⁴⁷ It consisted of twelve photographs, taken in his loft in New York, and showing the following twelve 'scenes': canvases leaning against a wall; a filing cabinet; six fire buckets; a poster of a Hindu god; a fireplace with a model ship on a mantle piece; a map of Nevada hanging on a wall; a table and two chairs by two windows; a bed; a stereo on a table; a television on a floor; a safe on a floor; and a drum (*Figures 46 and 47*). De Maria's name is printed in the lower right-hand corner of the last page of the piece, but no other written text accompanies the 'essay'. The meaning of these photographs is entirely unclear: they do not seem to be artworks in their own right; they do not show work in progress; they do not provide a portrait of the artist; neither do they show any evidence of the artist at work. All they perhaps do is hint at some kind of identity that remains beyond reach, and that keeps the 'reader' – quite deliberately – in a state of maximum perplexity. For Jane McFadden, the photos merely allude to aspects of the artist: 'from painting (canvases), to drawing (flat file), sitting (chairs), sleeping (bed), listening to music (stereo), watching TV, making music (drums).'⁴⁸ The same issue of *Avalanche* contains an interview between Willoughby Sharp and Lawrence Weiner, whose work has been formulated by recourse to language rather than the more conventional idioms of painting or sculpture. Perhaps one might best consider De Maria's 'photographic essay' with Weiner's words ringing in one's ears:

WS: What does the photographic image of this work [*A Square Removal from a Rug in Use*] mean to you?

LW: Nothing, absolutely nothing.

[...]

WS: What experience led you to want to deal with language as an art problem?

LW: None of your business.

[...]

⁴⁷ De Maria, Walter. 'Untitled photographic essay', in *Avalanche*, Vol 4, Spring 1972, pp.52–63.

⁴⁸ McFadden, 2004, p.177.

WS: The general concerns of your work have often been referred to as conceptual. How do you relate to that category?

LW: To be terribly frank, I don't understand it at all.⁴⁹

In the May 1972 edition of *Arts Magazine*, De Maria published another 'photographic essay'. The magazine's cover bears De Maria's name in small black letters centred on a white ground (*Figure 48*), while on pages 39–41 is a series of three photographs showing De Maria in the process of lighting a small pipe (*Figure 49*).⁵⁰ There is no accompanying text for the photographs, but the 'on the cover' entry reads:

Walter De Maria. The artist known in the underground for his 1961/62 minimal work has since 1968 been working in the deserts of the world on large earth sculptures. From Nevada he writes: 'Conceptual art need not be dependent on words or language.'⁵¹

As with De Maria's contribution to *Avalanche*, and in something of a contrast to Lawrence Weiner, here there is a retreat from language toward the photographic image as an alternative mode of commentary. Yet, just as with *Avalanche*, the meanings of the photographs remain utterly ambiguous. They do not show work, or work in progress, or the artist at work. For Jane McFadden, the three images merely play on several possible turns of phrase:

from the admonishment (and here we might imagine to the art world at this time) to 'put it in your pipe and smoke it,' to the suggestion that he (or the others within those pages) were 'blowing smoke.'⁵²

4. *The New Avant-Garde* and the Smithsonian Institution Interview

A similar need for ambiguity – this time incorporating image and text – was explored by De Maria for his contribution to Grégoire Müller's book, *The New Avant-Garde: Issues*

⁴⁹ Sharp, Willoughby. 'Lawrence Weiner at Amsterdam', in *Avalanche* 4, Spring 1972, pp.67 and 72.

⁵⁰ De Maria, Walter. 'Untitled', in *Arts Magazine*, Vol 46 No 7, May 1972, pp.39–41.

⁵¹ De Maria, Walter, in *Arts Magazine*, Vol 46 No 7, May 1972, p.5.

⁵² McFadden, 2004, p.179.

for the *Art of the Seventies*, also published in 1972.⁵³ De Maria talks about this project to Paul Cummings:

the premise of the book was that the photographer would follow you around, take pictures of you in your studio, with your friends on the street, in the truck, driving out west, next to your work.⁵⁴

Among the book's contributors are Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Michael Heizer, Richard Serra, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Keith Sonner, Bruce Nauman, Joseph Beuys, and Mario Merz. Each artist is shown 'at work' – for example, Morris measuring a floor, cigar in mouth, Heizer digging up desert dirt on a motorbike, Smithson eating sandwiches with Serra while drawing a sketch for *Spiral Jetty* on the shore of the Great Salt Lake – and each photograph is accompanied by a brief extract from the book's introduction, written by Müller. De Maria's contribution is utterly different: six full-page, close-up, black-and-white photographs, each photograph framed by a wide black border. The photographs are of his six dealers: Richard Bellamy, Paula Cooper, Arne Ekstrom, Nicholas Wilder, Heiner Friedrich, and Virginia Dwan (*Figure 50*).⁵⁵ In his interview with Paul Cummings, De Maria recounts how he came to the decision to show photographs of his dealers, rather than himself or his work:

I didn't want somebody following me around with a camera for several months, not even for a day, so I thought about it for a long time, of how I could successfully be in the book and not be in the book. I realized that the dealer plays a strange role in the world of an artist. He is the artist's alter ego, he is the artist's representative, not only financially, but in some strange way in terms of his personality.⁵⁶

Accompanying the photographs are two short texts. The first is a list of the six dealers, together with a brief statement: 'I would like to thank them, for our past association and

⁵³ Müller, Grégoire. *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*. New York and London: Praeger, 1972.

⁵⁴ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972, Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm [07.10.2005].

⁵⁵ Müller, 1972, pp.152–157.

⁵⁶ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

for representing me here, for I do not like to be photographed.’⁵⁷ The second is a poem-like text that consists of just eighteen adjectives, three for each dealer, one line for each dealer, and followed by De Maria’s signature (*Figure 51*). On the one hand, the photographs of De Maria’s dealers clearly shift the viewer’s focus of attention away from the artist; but on the other hand, the dealers nevertheless ‘represent’ him. Similarly, the second text describes the dealers rather than De Maria, but it does so in words that relate De Maria’s own, very subjective, view of his six dealers: as De Maria intended, he is indeed both absent and present.

De Maria’s dilemma – how to be there but also not there – is addressed most forcefully at *The Lightning Field*. Here he is ‘present’ in relation to the ‘control’ exerted regarding arrangements for visiting, length of stay, and the ban on photography, but he is utterly ‘absent’ in relation to providing any straightforward indication about what one should do, or how one should feel, or what the work might mean. This desire for both presence and absence was also expressed by De Maria in his interview with Paul Cummings for the Smithsonian Institution in October 1972. On the one hand, De Maria is very comfortable talking about his life and work (indeed, the interview as a whole could be seen as a good example of the kind of informal interview style that was so important for *Avalanche* magazine). He was certainly no recluse throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, for he frequently mentions his lengthy conversations about music, art, and life: ‘hanging out’ with Herman Cherry; dinner with Robert Scull and his family; daily discussions with Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer; frequent and lengthy conversations with La Monte Young, and, later, with Michael Heizer, who lived nearby on Mercer Street. De Maria comments:

⁵⁷ Müller, 1972, pp.150–151.

it was easy for me to maybe walk over after dinner and talk to Mike [Heizer] and Sharon [Heizer's wife] about every conceivable problem in the world ... to fantasize about all the great pieces that could be done, to talk about all of the practical problems of all the people that we had to fight and the structure we were fighting.⁵⁸

On the other hand, the interview also clearly demonstrates an increasing concern about the value of talking about his art practice, and of becoming – perhaps even unwittingly – the primary vehicle through which interpretation of his work would take place; as mentioned in Chapter One, De Maria considers whether to destroy the tape of the interview, and he also comments:

I don't even go out and see people very much unless I have something to say. So I tend to be somewhat of a recluse and tend not to show regularly and so forth ... Or publish a lot of articles and so forth.⁵⁹

5. The *Artforum* essay

By April 1980, when De Maria published his essay on *The Lightning Field* in *Artforum* (see *Appendix One*), his use of words and photographs had become even more careful and considered, and his desire for some kind of personal 'absence' more powerfully felt. This essay is his only written statement on *The Lightning Field*. Subtitled 'Some Facts, Notes, Data, Information, Statistics and Statements', the text occupies just one page of the article, the rest of which is devoted to four photographs. Yet there is nonetheless still a considerable sense of tension here between presence and absence. De Maria's short, sharp statements – about dimensions, weather conditions, method of construction, and so on – serve as a deliberate refusal to allocate meaning for the work. This style of writing is remarkably similar to the anti-interpretive mode of art writing adopted by Donald Judd in his 1964 article on Barnett Newman's *Shining Forth (to George)*. Here Judd's style functions as a deliberate check to the kind of effusive rhetoric sometimes

⁵⁸ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

used about abstraction, for Judd describes the work in terms of scale and materials but avoids imposing any meanings on it. What follows is a brief extract of that essay:

Shining Forth (To George), done in 1961, was shown in New York this year. It's nine and a half feet high and fourteen and a half feet long. The rectangle is unprimed cotton canvas except for two stripes and the edges of a third. Slightly to the left of the centre there is a vertical black stripe three inches wide. All of the stripes run to the upper and lower edges. Slightly less than a foot in from the edge there is a black stripe an inch wide. This hasn't been painted directly and evenly like the central stripe, but has been laid in between two stripes of masking tape. The paint has run under the tape some, making the stripe a little rough. A foot in from the right edge there is another stripe an inch wide, but this is one of reserved canvas, made by scraping black paint across a strip of masking tape and then removing it. There isn't much paint on either side of the white stripe; the two edges are sharp just against the stripe and break into sharp palette knife marks just away from it. Some of the marks have been lightly brushed. The three stripes are fairly sharp but none are perfectly even and straight. It's a complex painting.⁶⁰

Most of De Maria's essay on *The Lightning Field* is expressed in similar terms, consisting largely of simple facts, notes, data, information, statistics – but it also contains four statements, in italic type, which indicate a desire to have at least some voice in constructing meanings, even though it is not entirely certain what those meanings might be:

The land is not the setting for the work but a part of the work.

The sum of the facts does not constitute the work or determine its esthetics.

The invisible is real.

*Isolation is the essence of Land Art.*⁶¹

The photographs of *The Lightning Field* published in De Maria's 1980 essay (see Chapter Five for more on these) are also deeply ambivalent. They are not the work, but neither do they have much to do with representing the work; indeed, De Maria himself

⁶⁰ Judd, Donald. 'Barnett Newman', in *Studio International*, Vol 179 No 919, February 1970, pp.67–69.

⁶¹ De Maria, Walter. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum* Vol 18 No 8, 1980, p.58.

wrote that 'No photograph, group of photographs, or other recorded images can completely represent *The Lightning Field*.'⁶² De Maria's initial aim was to publish the photographs in *Life* magazine and on a giant billboard at Grand Central Station in New York. However, both of these projects fell through. John Cliett, who took the photographs, comments:

Walter pulled the plug on the whole thing. *Life* were really pressing Walter. They wanted him to pose with the piece, they wanted to send their own photographers. And he felt like the people from *Life* were looking at it from sort of a sensationalistic point of view.⁶³

Here we might usefully consider some words by Carl Andre in the interview he gave for the launch issue of *Avalanche* in 1970. Andre comments:

the photograph is a lie. I'm afraid we get a great deal of our exposure to art through magazines and through slides and I think this is dreadful, this is anti-art because art is a direct experience with something in the world and photography is just rumour, a kind of pornography of art.⁶⁴

To the question: 'Do you think that there's no way in which photographs can be an accurate representation of a work of art?' Andre responds: 'None at all. All they are good for is as an aid to the memory.'⁶⁵

The images of *The Lightning Field* highlight the disparity between photograph and actual experience. The photographs are static, two-dimensional, and purely visual. In contrast, the extended experience of time and space, not only once one has arrived at the field of poles but also on the journey there, is four-dimensional, and multisensory, and incorporates a myriad nuances of encounter that simply cannot be conveyed by any photograph, no matter how beautiful or dramatic it is. De Maria knew the difference

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Kastner, J. 'The God Effect: an interview with John Cliett', in *Cabinet*, Issue 3, Summer 2001. [Online] <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/3/god.php> [23.06.2006].

⁶⁴ Andre, Carl, in *Avalanche*, Vol 1, Fall 1970.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

between the photographs and the 'real experience', but he has nevertheless very carefully attended to their presentation in his 1980 essay on *The Lightning Field* and in all subsequent publications, recognising that such 'pornography' still has a function: it might not be 'the real thing', but it is something.

A number of Minimalist artists did not give their works titles, and in so doing they avoided adding meaning. De Maria, however, does this just once, with a work made in 1961 (*Figure 14*). In fact, many of his titles are very carefully considered, and are, moreover, deliberately ambiguous. For instance, *Museum Piece* (1966) (*Figure 27*) manifests how ancient symbolic configurations have undergone various interpretive transmutations: the swastika, emblem of Nazism, was once representative of prosperity, regeneration, and goodwill. The work's title refers to its place in history – where, so De Maria hopes, it will stay, rather than in any present-day politics.⁶⁶ More recently, *A Computer Which Will Solve Every Problem in the World/3–12 Polygon* (1984) (*Figure 52*) can be interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek – even cynical – commentary on the increasingly ubiquitous reliance on computerisation, while for Michael Govan the title of *Seen/Unseen, Known/Unknown* (2000) (*Figure 53*), at Benesse Art Museum on Naoshima Island, Japan, implies that 'the visible is only one aspect or layer of the aesthetic experience, and hence of our existence.'⁶⁷ (I shall have more to say about this last work in Chapter Ten.)

At the start of this chapter I discussed the manner in which the conflict between modernism and an emerging postmodernism – as constructed by the normative model of art history – was expressed through a particularly combative polemic, with words and

⁶⁶ In a letter to Samuel Wagstaff, De Maria writes: 'I hope that *Museum Piece* can maintain its double identity as symbol and abstract shape.' Letter from Walter De Maria to Samuel Wagstaff, 18 January 1969, Samuel Wagstaff Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁷ Govan, M. 'Walter De Maria'. [Online] www.diacenter.org. [11.10.2005].

phrases often set in binary opposition with each other. However, the first and last words of *The Lightning Field* throw into disarray any easy separation of opposites. The use of the definite article for the first word – ‘the’ – implies uniqueness: this is ‘the only one’. However, the last word – ‘field’ – implies exactly the opposite: a whole array of meanings and possibilities. Held in tension with (forever spinning around?) the work’s central word – ‘lightning’ (itself a kind of ‘play’ with expectations, as we shall see in Chapter Nine) – the work’s title refuses to align itself with either monosemy or polysemy. Furthermore, it actually achieves this ‘refusal’ through the very lexical precision that it critiques.

Since 1980, De Maria has made no further contributions to journals or magazines, books or interviews. In light of his previous precise deployment of word, image, conversations, and titles, this ‘silence’ should, however, not be regarded as a retreat from critical involvement, but rather as a very precisely considered position – an extension of his earlier hesitancy to provide meaning. Indeed, in some senses it could also be considered in the light of Susan Sontag’s argument in ‘Against Interpretation’ (1964). Sontag writes:

None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it *said* because one knew (or thought one knew) what it *did*.⁶⁸

She continues:

Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the urban atmosphere, the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities. In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art. Even more. It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to

⁶⁸ Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1966, pp.4–5

impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of ‘meanings.’⁶⁹

What Sontag proposes is more attention to form, rather than content: ‘accurate, sharp, loving’ descriptions of the appearance of works of art.⁷⁰ In addition, she argues that we need a more sensory experience of art, for ‘what is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more ... In place of hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.’⁷¹

One might question whether De Maria’s work is erotic; however, what is not in doubt is that much of his work – in particular, *The Lightning Field* – seems to be calling for a more direct physical *and* emotional encounter on behalf of its audience. Moreover, in conversation with Paul Cummings De Maria states: ‘I would say that there’s at least ten meanings in any one of my works.’⁷² Perhaps this is the closest we can ever come to understanding De Maria’s personal critical position. It is, however, a very carefully constructed one, emphasising his continual desire for polysemy and ambiguity, rather than for any fixed meaning(s).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁷² Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

CHAPTER FIVE

The making of *The Lightning Field*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this relatively short chapter is twofold. Firstly, for those readers who are unfamiliar with *The Lightning Field*, it provides the necessary factual background to the work's funding and construction, together with details of how the photographs were taken, and an account of the unusual visiting arrangements. Secondly, it serves as my own version of the anti-interpretive style of writing adopted by Donald Judd in his 1964 essay on Barnett Newman's *Shining Forth (to George)*,¹ and – to a large extent – by Walter De Maria in his 1980 essay on *The Lightning Field (Appendix One)*. Indeed, this chapter necessarily draws on the latter for a certain amount of statistical information.² As we saw in the last chapter, this writing style was deployed as a means of avoiding the allocation of meaning(s) to the work, relying almost solely on description rather than analysis.

2. Funding and construction

In November 1973, in a long letter to his dealer Virginia Dwan, who had already supported him on many projects and had agreed to provide funding for future works, Walter De Maria proposed making an outdoor arrangement of tall steel rods. He noted that sculptors who made fewer and more substantial constructions attracted stronger public recognition than those who made several smaller or more ephemeral ones, and he argued that, by making a work on a grand scale, this would stimulate great attention

¹ Judd, Donald. 'Barnett Newman', in *Studio International*, Vol 179 No 919, February 1970, pp.67–69.

² The data that De Maria gives in his essay – on measurements and so on – appear to be accurate. He is, however, a little unclear about the probability of encountering a thunderstorm while at *The Lightning Field* – probably because any more detailed information was simply not available.

from all sectors of the art world, which would benefit both him and her.³ The following year, Dwan funded the construction of the first *Lightning Field* (often known as the ‘test site’), which was installed on the ranch property of two art collectors, Burton and Emily Tremaine, near Flagstaff, Arizona, who loaned the land to Dwan. The work consisted of 35 stainless-steel poles with pointed tips. Each pole was 18 feet tall and they were arranged 200 feet apart on a five-by-seven grid.⁴ It was intended that the poles would attract lightning, hence the name of the work. Later that year, De Maria began planning a much larger version of the artwork – this time in New Mexico – consisting of 400 poles erected in a precisely aligned grid running 1 mile (25 poles) east-west by 1,006 metres (16 poles) north-south (a deliberate muddling of imperial and metric measurements). This final, full-scale, and still extant work was commissioned and funded by the Dia Art Foundation, which still owns and maintains it.

The Dia Art Foundation⁵ was founded in 1974 by the German art dealer Heiner Friedrich (son of the founder of Alzmetall, a manufacturer of industrial equipment), his wife Philippa De Menil (youngest daughter of John De Menil, a Houston oil executive and art patron, and of Dominique De Menil, a prominent French patron of the arts), and Helen Winkler, a Houston art historian. As we saw in Chapter Three, Friedrich had already supported De Maria in the making of the *Munich Earth Room* (1968). With its main base in New York City, Dia now owns a major collection of art from the 1960s and 1970s, including works by Joseph Beuys, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Richard Serra, Agnes Martin, and Andy Warhol. In 1987 Dia opened an exhibition space in a four-storey converted warehouse in Chelsea, Manhattan, and in 2003 it opened the Beacon

³ De Maria to Dwan, 24 November 1973, in Dwan Gallery Archives, New York. Cited in Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, and London, England: University of California Press 2002, p.242, and p.288 footnote 38.

⁴ According to Suzaan Boettger, although the ‘test site’ was subsequently dismantled, the poles are still in Virginia Dwan’s possession. See Boettger, 2002, p.288 footnote 39.

⁵ The Dia Art Foundation. [Online] www.diacenter.org [09.02.2009].

Riggio Galleries in a former Nabisco plant in Beacon, New York. However, in addition to these more conventional gallery spaces, Dia also supports several long-term installations and projects throughout the USA 'whose nature and scale exceed the limits normally available within the traditional museum or gallery'.⁶ These include not only De Maria's *The Lightning Field* but also Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, as well as the ongoing developments of James Turrell's *Roden Crater* project in the Painted Desert of Arizona, and Michael Heizer's *City* complex in eastern Nevada. Dia also supports Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, and two important indoor works by De Maria in New York: *The Broken Kilometer* (1979) (Figure 54) and the *New York Earth Room* (1977) (Figure 42).

Walter De Maria spent several years looking for a suitable location for the full-scale version of *The Lightning Field*. He required a large, isolated, flat site, with a high incidence of lightning activity, and the states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and Texas were searched by truck before the final site, in New Mexico, was selected. On De Maria's behalf, Dia Art Foundation acquired five sections of land (a section is a square mile) northeast of Quemado in Catron County, 200 miles to the west of Albuquerque, an area of extremely sparsely populated, semi-arid land at an elevation of 7,200 feet above sea level and about 8 miles east of the Continental Divide. The site is reasonably flat but is ringed by distant mountains, rising to over 10,000 feet.

The actual construction of the field of poles took place over a five-month period, from June to November 1977, with the help of Helen Winkler, Robert Fosdick (who lived at the site and directed the construction), and Robert Weathers, a local cattle rancher who has been the work's caretaker since its completion. In his essay on the work, De Maria

⁶ Dia Art Foundation. [Online] www.lightningfield.org [09.02.2009].

writes that an aerial survey was undertaken, which, combined with computer analysis, calculated both the positioning of the rectangular grid and the elevation of the terrain.⁷ A land survey then determined the four elevation points surrounding each pole position, so that each pole could be placed at the right height and distance from the other poles. Each measurement was 'triple-checked' for accuracy, yet according to Robert Fosdick visual checks revealed no fewer than eighteen misalignments that then had to be corrected. Fosdick also remarks that once the necessary construction procedures were in place, the installation process proceeded relatively quickly, at a rate of about sixteen poles per day.⁸ The work was completed on 1 November 1977, at a cost of about \$500,000. De Maria stipulated that the work be looked after by a permanent caretaker (Robert Weathers) who resides near the location 'for continuous maintenance, protection and assistance'.⁹

The 400 poles were made in New York of 'type 304' stainless steel. After shipment from New York, several poles were bent and smashed and had to be retooled in a machine shop in Quemado.¹⁰ The poles have an outside diameter of 2 inches, and are spaced 220 feet apart (hence the necessity of the rather curious 1,006 metres in one direction). The shortest pole is 15 feet tall, and the tallest is 26 feet 9 inches; the variations in height were necessary on account of the undulations of the ground. Averaging 20 feet 7.5 inches in height, the tops form a horizontal plane ('like a fakir's bed of nails'),¹¹ which could theoretically 'support an imaginary sheet of glass'.¹² Each pole has a precisely milled solid pointed tip, and within each one is a heavy carbon steel pipe, to give the pole extra strength. Each pole also has a concrete foundation 1 foot

⁷ De Maria, Walter. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum* Vol 18 No 8, 1980, p.58.

⁸ McCord, R. 'The Lightning Field.' [Online] www.sfaol.com/mccord/lightning.html [09.02.2009].

⁹ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

¹⁰ McCord, R. 'The Lightning Field' [Online] www.sfaol.com/mccord/lightning.html [09.02.2009].

¹¹ Hughes, R. *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America*. London: The Harvill Press, 1997, p.570.

¹² De Maria, 1980, p.58.

beneath the surface, which is 3 feet deep and 1 foot in diameter. These foundations are designed to be strong enough to withstand winds of up to 110 miles per hour. Because the foundations are invisible, each pole ‘seems to spring unsupported from the soil of the plain itself’.¹³

The area has a relatively high incidence of thunderstorms, especially in mid- to late summer, and, according to De Maria in his essay, several distinct thunderstorms can sometimes be observed at any one time at the field of poles, but lightning has not been observed to jump or arc from pole to pole.¹⁴ Very occasionally, when there is a particularly strong electrical current in the air, ‘St Elmo’s Fire’ can be observed at the tips of the poles: I have not, however, found any mention of this unusual phenomenon in any of the first-hand accounts by visitors to the work. Lightning strikes have apparently done no perceptible damage to the poles; indeed, traditional grounding cables and grounding rods protect the foundations by diverting any lightning current into the earth. De Maria also comments in his essay that lightning had to be within 200 feet of *The Lightning Field* for it to ‘sense’ the poles.¹⁵

Lightning is by no means guaranteed in the area: according to De Maria, it occurs on only three days out of thirty on average: consequently, most visitors’ experience does not include a lightning storm. In its literature on the work, the Dia Art Foundation writes:

Although lightning storms typically occur in this area from late July through August, and may also occur at other times during the visiting season, we cannot predict the likelihood of lightning at any particular time.¹⁶

¹³ Campbell, C.D. ‘Walter De Maria’s Lightning Field and McCarthy’s Enigmatic Epilogue: “Y qué clase de lugar es éste?”’, in *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*. [Online] www.cormacmccarthy.com/journal/PDFs/Campbell.pdf [23.06.2006]

¹⁴ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Dia Art Foundation. [Online] www.lightningfield.org [07.02.2005].

Dia is insistent, however, that the work does not depend on the occurrence of lightning, but responds to many more subtle conditions of its environment. Indeed, De Maria himself comments that 'the light is as important as the lightning'.¹⁷

3. Photography

In 1978, a relatively unknown photographer called John Cliett was hired to take pictures of *The Lightning Field*, on condition that Dia and De Maria would hold the copyright to any images taken. According to Cliett, 'a lot of famous people like Ansel Adams had been approached, but they would not allow the Foundation to control the photographs'.¹⁸ Cliett, however, was willing to agree to the deal with the copyright, and during the summers of 1978 and 1979 he lived in a trailer at the site and took hundreds of photographs, not just of lightning strikes – although these were certainly requested by De Maria – but also of rainbows, blue skies, and cloud formations. For the photographs of lightning, Cliett used medium- and large-format cameras connected to a trigger device developed by Richard Orville, a NASA scientist responsible for studying lightning with regard to space launches at Cape Canaveral. The trigger device picked up the wavelength of lightning but not of surrounding light.

John Cliett subsequently took part in the selection of those images that would later be published. As we saw in Chapter Four, De Maria did not proceed with his initial aim to publish the photos in *Life* magazine and on billboards at Grand Central Station in New York, because of concerns over the likely misrepresentation of the work as purely sensationalist. Instead, having secured copyright, De Maria published just four of them, in full colour, together with his essay, in the April 1980 issue of *Artforum*. Only two of

¹⁷ De Maria, 1980, p58.

¹⁸ Kastner, J. 'The God Effect: an interview with John Cliett', in *Cabinet*, Issue 3, Summer 2001. [Online] <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/3/god.php> [23.06.2006].

these photographs show lightning. The photograph that has subsequently become the best-known image of the work – showing a dramatic night-time view of a powerful bolt of lightning striking the ground in the middle distance (*Figure 1*) – was *not* published with the 1980 *Artforum* article.

The Lightning Field and the official photographs of it are protected by copyright, and photography of the work (including the cabin where visitors stay) is not permitted. In his essay on the work, however, De Maria does not mention any such prohibition. Copyrighted slides are available from Dia for \$30 per set of eight (six of these are of *The Lightning Field*, only two of which show lightning: the other two photographs in the set are of the *New York Earth Room* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979)). These images are for personal or educational use only, and their publication is prohibited without written consent from Dia. At *The Lightning Field* itself, no check is made to see if visitors have cameras with them or have taken photographs, and a number of ‘unauthorised’ pictures are now circulating on the Internet.¹⁹ De Maria is insistent that ‘no photograph, group of photographs or other recorded images can

¹⁹ I have not given details of these websites here. This decision has, however, been somewhat problematic. On the one hand, visitors may accept that the ban on photography should be complied with because it is part and parcel of the conditions of viewing the artwork (with which one agrees to comply prior to a visit). They may also consider the ban to be part of ‘the work’ itself, and this seems to be the view taken by De Maria. On the other hand, in highlighting the experience of the visitor and the possibility of multiple interpretations (which is what this thesis seeks to do), then it seems somehow inappropriate – even dictatorial – to deny visitors the opportunity to make their own photographic readings and/or records of the work. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter fully into discourses surrounding the politics of photographic reproduction of artworks, it is nonetheless pertinent to acknowledge the existence of some of the broader (and complex) debates concerning this subject. Worth mentioning is André Malraux’s argument in support of the democratisation of art through photography – which he addressed in *Le Musée Imaginaire*, of 1947 – as well as its limits with regard to a too-narrow modernist aesthetic, as discussed by Emma Barker in *Contemporary Cultures of Display* (1999, pp.8–12). In relation to De Maria, the work of Susan Sontag is particularly worth highlighting here. In *On Photography* (1977), Sontag argues that modern photography has created an overabundance of visual material which, among other things, serves to desensitise its audience. And in her essay *The Image-World* she suggests that photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, making the memory stand still. As far as De Maria’s ban on photography at *The Lightning Field* is concerned, these critiques by Sontag seem especially pertinent, since he sought to reduce the numbers of available images in order that the audience’s experience of *The Lightning Field* (through the senses, through imagination, and through memory) would neither be desensitised nor imprisoned.

completely represent *The Lightning Field*.²⁰ However, as with all remote works of 'Land Art', the fact remains that most people's experience of the work is entirely through the photographic image, and, as we saw in Chapter Four, De Maria certainly recognised the necessity of publishing photographic images of the work.

4. Visiting *The Lightning Field*

The only way to see *The Lightning Field* 'in the flesh', as opposed to through the medium of photographs, is to stay overnight – with a maximum of five other people, for one night only – at a wooden cabin, located 200 yards outside the northern edge of the field and centred between the 10th and 11th rows from the east. The cabin has three bedrooms, one with a double bed and two with twin beds. Specific bedrooms are not reserved. Accompanied children are allowed to visit, but pets are not. A 'simple vegetarian supper' and 'a selection of breakfast items' are provided, but visitors can (and do) also take their own food and drink. (I discuss the cabin in more detail in Chapter Seven.)

The visiting period runs from 1 May to 31 October, seven days a week. The Dia Art Foundation originally allowed a day between visits to refurbish the cabin, but more recently they have begun accommodating a new group each day, doubling the original possible 550 visitors per year. Advance reservations (by post or through the Internet) are required, beginning on 1 March for that year's visiting season. At the time of writing (April 2009), costs are \$150 per person in May, June, September, and October, and \$250 per person in July and August, the two months of greatest lightning activity (with a student/child rate of \$100 during all months). These prices show a marked increase on earlier ones: as recently as October 2005, they were \$110, \$135, and \$85 respectively.

²⁰ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

The price increase, together with the increased number of nights per week, suggests that demand has been growing. According to Dia, the actual cost of maintaining the work – including on-site staff, administration, maintenance, insurance, transportation, and accommodation – is c.\$300 per person. Consequently, Dia – not unnaturally – welcomes donations (which are tax-deductible). Funds for maintaining and operating *The Lightning Field* are also in part provided by an endowment established by Ray A. Graham III and the Lannan Foundation.²¹

Visitors to *The Lightning Field* are instructed to arrive at the small settlement of Quemado by 2.30pm on the day of their visit and check in at the Dia Art Foundation's office there – an unassuming two-storey building on the north side of the town's main street. Here they leave their cars and are driven with the other visitors for just under an hour to the site. The road from Quemado is unmarked, in order to protect the isolation of the site, and as it is a dirt road its condition varies depending on the amount of rain: in wet weather it becomes deeply rutted.

The Dia Art Foundation comments that 'visitors are encouraged to spend as much time as possible in *The Lightning Field* alone, especially during sunset and sunrise',²² and in his essay De Maria writes that 'The primary experience takes place within *The Lightning Field*.'²³ Most people walk among the poles and/or around the perimeter, in daylight but also at night-time. The perimeter walk (2,012 metres + 2 miles = c.3.24 miles) takes approximately two hours. What else visitors do is up to them. The following day, at noon, visitors are collected by the caretaker and taken back to Quemado. In his essay De Maria also writes that 'It is intended that the work be viewed

²¹ The Lannan Foundation was established in 1960 by the entrepreneur and financier J. Patrick Lannan, Senior. [Online] www.lannan.org [19.03.2007].

²² Dia Art Foundation [Online] www.lightningfield.org [07.02.2005].

²³ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

alone, or in the company of a very small number of people, over at least a 24-hour period'.²⁴ In addition, he comments that 'part of the essential content of the work is the ratio of people to the space: a small number of people to a large amount of space'.²⁵

The opening sentence of Walter De Maria's essay is '*The Lightning Field* is a permanent work',²⁶ and since its completion in 1977 it has been maintained in its original condition. According to the caretaker, Mr Weathers, the poles are regularly inspected, and any that need adjustment are fixed.²⁷ The Dia Art Foundation is currently attempting to raise \$1.1 million to protect 6,000 acres of land (a three-mile radius) surrounding *The Lightning Field*. The money raised will be used to pay the ranching family who own the land (presumably Mr Weathers) for the right to restrict any real-estate and industrial development. These restrictions will bind all future landowners and become part of the chain of title for the estate. To date, \$900,000 has been raised, which includes \$500,000 from the State of New Mexico.

The Lightning Field differs from all other works of 'Land Art' in two major respects: the peculiar visiting arrangements, especially the necessity of a 24-hour stay in the company of a maximum of five others; and the ban on photography. The work continues to attract visitors and media interest. It has received an estimated 15,000 visitors in total.²⁸

This chapter has largely been descriptive, and it has drawn extensively on the information provided by Walter De Maria in his 1980 essay on *The Lightning Field*,

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Personal conversation with Robert Weathers at *The Lightning Field*, 3 September 2006.

²⁸ Personal email correspondence with Kathleen Shields at the Dia Art Foundation, 21 January 2009.

which constitutes his only written statement on the work. However, such an anti-interpretive approach cannot account for the complexities of visitors' experiences of the work. Rather, the information given in this chapter serves merely as a good starting point for a deeper interrogation of those experiences. In the next four chapters I adopt what is effectively a chronological approach to the experience of visiting *The Lightning Field*, following in the tyre tracks, and then the footsteps, of the visitor: firstly on the journey to get there (Chapter Six), followed by arrival at the cabin overlooking the 'field' (Chapter Seven), walking among and around the poles (Chapter Eight), and, finally, the encounter (or otherwise) with lightning (Chapter Nine).

CHAPTER SIX

Aspects of travel

1. Introduction

In 1972, in interview with Paul Cummings, Walter De Maria asserted that 'the most beautiful thing is to experience a work of art over a period of time.'¹ Referring to *Las Vegas Piece* (1969) (*Figure 12*), he commented:

How much time does a person spend with a piece of sculpture? An average of perhaps less than one minute, maximum of five or ten, tops. Nobody spends ten minutes looking at one piece of sculpture. So by starting to work with land sculpture in 1968 I was able to make things of [a] scale completely unknown to this time, and able to occupy people with a single work for periods of up to an entire day. A period could even be longer, but in this case if it takes you two hours to go out to the piece and if you take four hours to see the piece and it takes you two hours to go back, you have to spend eight hours with this piece, at least four hours with it immediately, although to some extent the entrance and the exit is part of the experience of the piece.²

De Maria clearly regarded the length of time spent at such large-scale, remote artworks as *Las Vegas Piece* as a significant component of the audience's experience, and of course an obvious manifestation of this at *The Lightning Field* is the 24-hour stay in the cabin overlooking the field of poles. But as the above quotation demonstrates, De Maria also thought of the time spent travelling to and from such works – the 'entrances' and 'exits' – as crucial components of the visitor's experience. Clearly, such journeys have to be undertaken to reach almost all works of American 'Land Art' from this period, since so many of them are located in the remote Midwest deserts; De Maria, however, is the only artist to have commented either on the necessity of this journey or of its

¹ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972, Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm [07.10.2005].

² *Ibid.*

importance for the visitor – to have seen it as part of ‘the work’. As with *Las Vegas Piece*, the ‘entrance’ to *The Lightning Field* is long, time-consuming, and somewhat arduous – and it is this spatiotemporal aspect of experience, prior to arrival at the field of poles itself, that forms the principal focus of the present chapter.

In the first section of this chapter, I briefly consider the journey to *The Lightning Field* in relation to the persistent trope – in art, literature, and film – of the American ‘road trip’. Here, two seemingly conflicting impulses – motion and stasis – are frequently held in tension with each other, for although there is an ultimate destination, forward propulsion is tinged with – even sometimes delayed by – something far more meditative than one might expect. Just such a tension between motion and stasis is also experienced by religious pilgrims, and in the next section of this chapter I consider whether travellers to *The Lightning Field* should be considered more as pilgrims than as cultural tourists, or whether, indeed, clear distinctions can be made between these two kinds of traveller. I also question whether *The Lightning Field* has become auratic precisely because the journey to reach it has been established as a kind of pilgrimage, with the photographs of it acting as icons. Finally, I argue that De Maria’s exploration of the ‘travelling line’ as a means to extend the spatiotemporal experience of the audience can be detected in, and best understood in reference to, a number of texts – not just by De Maria himself, but also by Robert Morris and La Monte Young – that were published in the *Fluxus Anthology* at the beginning of the 1960s.

2. The trope of the ‘road trip’

As we saw in Chapter Three, from the late 1960s onwards Walter De Maria made numerous forays into the Midwest deserts of the USA, each of which took a considerable amount of time. In the case of *The Lightning Field*, his search for a

suitable location took no less than five years. But it is not just De Maria who needs to undertake such a journey, since visitors to *The Lightning Field* are not vicarious travellers, or even following directly in the footsteps, or rather tyre tracks, of the artist, but instead are actively engaged in their own journeys through which they, too, broaden the spatiotemporal and experiential boundaries of the work. After all, De Maria deliberately chose an isolated location for *The Lightning Field*, not just because he needed an unpopulated upland site that was prone to lightning strikes, but also because he wanted a location that was difficult to reach – and that established, from the outset, not just a sense of expectation but also a sense of unease for the traveller. Will we be able to get there in time? Will the roads be impassable due to bad weather? Perhaps most importantly, will we be disappointed with what we find (especially after such an investment of both time and money)? As discussed in Chapter Three, feelings of anxiety had been explored by De Maria in a number of earlier works – most notably *Bed of Spikes* (1968–69), but also, for example, in *Pyramid Chair* (1966) and *Ball Drop* (1961) – and such feelings are also a major feature of one's experience wandering among and around *The Lightning Field*'s poles, as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

There has indeed been some acknowledgement – although largely descriptive rather than analytical – that the journeys undertaken by those who want to see works of American 'Land Art' are a significant part of the 'visitor experience'. For example, Roberley Bell describes his 'Great American Road Trip' to see not just *The Lightning Field* but also the Chinati Foundation at Marfa in Texas,³ Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969), and Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76). Bell's description of the

³ The Chinati Foundation is a contemporary art museum, based on the ideas of its founder, Donald Judd. Located on 340 acres of land on the site of former Fort D.A. Russell in Marfa, Texas, the museum opened in 1986. The emphasis is on works in which art and the surrounding landscape are inextricably linked. In addition to works by Donald Judd, the permanent collection includes works by Carl Andre, Ingólfur Arnarsson, Dan Flavin, Roni Horn, Ilya Kabakov, Richard Long, Claes Oldenburg, Coosje van Bruggen, David Rabinowitch, and John Wesley. See the Chinati Foundation website: [Online] www.chinati.org [08.02.2009]

approach to *Sun Tunnels* highlights not only the impact of the setting but also the journey itself:

It is not the object we are in search of, it is the full view. We learned this on day one. We also learned that the road leading in and out of the site is essential to the experience.⁴

Lawrence Alloway recognises that, in terms of a visit to De Maria's 'First Lightning Field' (the 'test field') and *Las Vegas Piece*, 'the distances travelled are a part of the content', and he goes on to describe in some detail the intricacies of the approaches to these two works:

To get there [to *Las Vegas Piece*], you leave the highway at the Camp Elgin turnoff, follow a dirt road through a cattle guard and a deserted corral, and park exactly 1.2 miles beyond a crossroads. Then there is a walk of about three-quarters of a mile. The earth is crumbly, Yucca trees stick up here and there, and the sour odor of sage brush is strong ... De Maria's *First Lightning Field* (another bigger one is planned on another site) is approached with almost as many delays as *Las Vegas Piece*. It is 40 miles out of Flagstaff, Arizona. After the highway you drive along Meteor Crater Road, before turning off on a dirt road. You park by a ruined cottage and cross the Diabolo Canyon. Then there is a walk of a mile or so, uphill, though gently, over dry scrubby ground.⁵

Similarly, Ethan Zuckerman asserts that *The Lightning Field* 'isn't a piece you see casually', not only on account of the need to make advance reservations, and the time spent at the site, but also because of the journey there.⁶ Kenneth Baker relates in some detail his own journey to visit *The Lightning Field* in 1978, shortly after its completion,⁷ while Elizabeth Baker describes her own visits to the 'test field' of *The Lightning Field* and *Las Vegas Piece*: 'The experience of visiting the works is a complicated one, no

⁴ Bell, Roberley. 'The Great American Road Trip', in *Sculpture*, Vol 22 No 3, April 2003, pp.12–13.

⁵ Alloway, Lawrence. 'Site Inspection', in *Artforum*, October 1976, pp.49–55.

⁶ Zuckerman, Ethan. 'Art, copyright and the beauty of inaccessibility'. [Online] <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/?p=487>. [23.06.06].

⁷ Baker, Kenneth. *The Lightning Field* (with a preface by Lynne Cooke). New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008, pp.7–11.

small part of which is the difficulty of getting there.’⁸ Cornelia Dean refers to ‘the mystery of the road trip’,⁹ and Pamela Petro writes:

If art reflects our obsession and questions our relationship to home and the heavens – to the apparent and to the invisible – and travel challenges us and expands our horizons, then visiting *The Lightning Field* is the purest expression of both.¹⁰

The journeys made by Walter De Maria into the Midwest deserts in the late 1960s and early 1970s – together with the subsequent journeys made by ‘art visitors’ – can be regarded as an extension of those undertaken by the Beat Generation writer Jack Kerouac, whose semi-autobiographical novel, *On the Road* (1957),¹¹ has become emblematic of the ‘road trip’ genre in American literature.¹² By the mid-1950s, the North Beach area of San Francisco, close to where De Maria grew up, was the geographical focus for Kerouac and the other Beat Generation artists and writers. Attracted by low rents and a bohemian atmosphere, Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, and other poets and novelists gathered in coffee houses such as Vesuvio, at the City Lights Bookstore, and at various nightclubs, bringing with them stream-of-consciousness verse, jazz music, and jive talk. Like most American artists of his generation, De Maria became well acquainted with their work, as did the experimental musicians La Monte Young and Terry Riley, who were also in the city at this time; indeed, as Russell Jacoby asserts, the cultural climate created by writers such as Ginsberg and Kerouac helped establish the careers of numerous young artists and

⁸ Baker, E.C. ‘Artworks on the Land’, in Sonfist, A. (ed.). *Art in the Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983, pp.79–80.

⁹ Dean, Cornelia. ‘Drawn to the lightning’, in the *New York Times*, 21 September 2003.

¹⁰ Petro, Pamela. ‘New Mexico’s wondrous sky’, in *Daily Telegraph*, 28.07.2007.

¹¹ Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. London: Penguin, 2000. First published in the USA by the Viking Press, Inc., 1957.

¹² Tiberghien, Gilles. *Land Art*. London: Art Data, 1993, p.40.

musicians in late 1950s San Francisco,¹³ before many of them (including De Maria, Young, and Riley) moved to New York just a few years later.

Kerouac's *On the Road* centres on the adventures of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty as they drive back and forth across America. Distance and speed are celebrated, not only for their own sake but also for their capacity to engender flights of imagination. For instance, on a drive from Denver to Chicago in order to deliver a '47 Cadillac limousine, Paradise comments:

In no time at all we were back on the main road and that night I saw the entire state of Nebraska unroll before my eyes. A hundred and ten miles an hour straight through, an arrow road, sleeping towns, no traffic, and the Union Pacific streamliner falling behind us in the moonlight. I wasn't frightened at all that night; it was perfectly legitimate to go 110 and talk and have all the Nebraska towns – Ogallala, Gothenburg, Kearney, Grand Island, Columbus – unreel with dreamlike rapidity as we roared ahead and talked... 'Think if you and I had a car like this what we could do. Do you know there's a road that goes down Mexico and all the way to Panama? – and maybe all the way to the bottom of South America where the Indians are seven feet tall and eat cocaine on the mountainside? Yes! You and I, Sal, we'd dig the whole world with a car like this because, man, the road must eventually lead to the whole world.'¹⁴

The novel was published while De Maria was a student at Berkeley University, studying for his Masters degree in art. Later, in his interview with Paul Cummings in 1972, De Maria acknowledged a debt to Kerouac as he described his own pleasure of driving through the American Midwest desert during the 1960s:

we had this chance to have the great American Kerouac experience of driving, you know, drive, drive and it never stops and four or five days later you can make it if you drive night and day. When I had first driven the country in the summer of '63 from New York back to California, it was the most terrific experience of my life, experiencing the Great Plains and the Rockies, but especially the desert, you know.¹⁵

¹³ Jacoby, Russell. *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

¹⁴ Kerouac, 2000, p.209.

¹⁵ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

The poster for *Munich Earth Room* (1968) (*Figure 9*) shows De Maria lining up his erect right hand with the line running down the road beyond (location unknown), while another photograph, clearly taken on the same occasion (*Figure 55*), shows De Maria lying on the road, this time with the tips of his fingers lined up with the central line, which stretches indefinitely into the distance. In the case of the former, no explanation is given for why De Maria should include this photograph on the poster, but both images can perhaps best be seen – together with the best-known photograph of *Mile Long Drawing* (1968: *Figure 8*) – as an attempt to measure distance in relation to his own body, as well as hinting at the desire to ‘follow the line’ toward the distant horizon.

As we saw in Chapter Four, the concept of travelling along the line of a road as an expression of extending experience in space/time was influentially explored in Tony Smith’s account of his night-time drive on the unfinished New Jersey turnpike during the 1950s. It is surely no coincidence that Smith used the trope of the ‘road trip’ to express his desire for an expanded spatiotemporal framework for art, for this trope has been – and remains – persistent in American culture. Tony Smith was by no means the only visual artist to consider the ‘road trip’ as a metaphor for a new kind of art. Carl Andre – who began to explore America’s deserts in the latter half of the 1960s, at about the same time as De Maria – also invoked the concept of the road, particularly travelling along it, as a form of art. Andre comments:

My idea of sculpture is a road ... A road doesn’t reveal itself at any particular point or from any particular point. Roads appear and disappear ... We don’t have a single point of view for a road at all, except a moving one, moving along it.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lippard, L.R. *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*. New York: The New Press, 1983, p.125. Original source not known.

As a young artist in New York, Andre worked on the railroad, taking long trains of cars that had come in from another city and parking them: 'It was essentially filing cars, a matter of moving largely identical particles from one place to another; then there was the whole terrain-following business which I like very much in my work.'¹⁷ Andre also compiled indexes for a textbook publisher, and he describes this activity as akin to working on the railroad, since both jobs were 'on the line'.

It could, of course, be argued that the journey to reach *The Lightning Field* is of little real consequence; that it is nothing more than a time-consuming necessity. Such a view is perhaps not surprising, given that motorised road travel, especially over large distances, is often regarded as one of the least 'authentic' kinds of travel, and therefore has nothing significant to add in terms of the visitor's encounter with the artwork. Firstly, the very speed of such travel is criticised because it supposedly prohibits any intimate engagement with the places through which one passes, or the people that live there. For example, Jean Baudrillard writes of the senseless repetition endured on a road journey, arguing that 'disaffection finds its pure form in the barrenness of speed', and commenting on the 'marvellously affectless succession of signs, images, faces, and ritual acts on the road.'¹⁸ Secondly, as M. Sheller and John Urry argue, car passengers (unlike travellers on bicycles, on horses, or on foot) are insulated from almost all aspects of the environment except the view through the framing device of the windscreen,¹⁹ which, like television or film scenery, forces the traveller to rely almost entirely on vision, with no opportunity for the other senses to play any part in the experience. Edward Abbey, a fierce champion of wilderness, especially that of the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.123.

¹⁸ Baudrillard, J. (trans. Turner, C.). *America*. London and New York: Verso, 1989, p.5. (First published as *Amérique* by Bernard Grasset, Paris, 1986.)

¹⁹ Sheller, M. and Urry, J. 'The City and the Car', in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol 24, 2000, pp.737-757.

American desert (he worked for a time as a park ranger at Arches National Park in Utah), asserts:

A man on foot, on horseback or on a bicycle will see more, feel more, enjoy more in one mile than the motorized tourist can in a hundred miles. Better to idle through one park in two weeks than try to race through a dozen in the same amount of time.²⁰

However, car travel can be far more meditative and, ultimately, more rewarding, than such criticisms allow. Firstly, the very 'monotony' of long-distance road travel at relative speed – especially through the wide-open expanses of a landscape such as the Midwest desert of the USA – brings with it a sense of an 'endless here and now', as if time has in fact stopped. Indeed, the 'travelling line' – undertaken by artist *and* audience on their way to *The Lightning Field* or to any such remote, outdoor work – extends the Minimalist concept of 'one thing after another', which is principally employed as a way to escape setting up hierarchies or any other kinds of relations between objects and/or events, but which, instead, can engender (whether intentionally or otherwise) a meditative quality. This quality is also encountered in De Maria's Fluxus *Anthology* text, 'Meaningless Work' (*Appendix 5*), which, like almost all of De Maria's contributions to Fluxus, has been neglected in the extant literature on 'Land Art'. 'Meaningless work' focuses on just such a sense of monotonous repetition, which obliges the 'performer' (for where now is the 'audience'?) to think about meaning(s) – and meaninglessness – for him or herself. De Maria writes of such work:

It can make you feel and think about yourself, the outside world, morality, reality, unconsciousness, nature, history, time, philosophy, nothing at all, politics, etc. without the limitations of the old art forms.²¹

²⁰ Abbey, E. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. New York: Touchstone, 1990, p.54. (First published in 1968.)

²¹ De Maria, Walter. 'Meaningless Work', in Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Bronx, New York: La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, 1963.

Repetition without apparent purpose is also 'at work' in Ed Ruscha's photographic series of journeys taken along the roads of America, for example in *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1962) and *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966). And for Carl Andre it even existed in his job on the railroad, 'filing cars'. It also, of course, finds its literary echo in *On the Road*, in Sal Paradise's invocation of Nebraskan place names on his trip to Chicago – 'Ogallala, Gothenburg, Kearney, Grand Island, Columbus'. And, as we shall see later in this chapter, the meditative quality of the 'travelling line' was explored by Robert Morris and La Monte Young in their own contributions to the *Fluxus Anthology*.

Secondly, if we never step out of the car on our journey to *The Lightning Field*, we are certainly forced to rely on what we see rather than on any of our other senses, and we are obliged to focus on the large scale of mountain or canyon rather than the tiny detail of, say, a beetle on a leaf. However, as I discovered on my own journey to *The Lightning Field*, travellers *do* stop and interact with people and places in a relatively intimate way – indeed, the very distance that needs to be travelled forces this upon them. The imperative of forward propulsion is therefore punctuated with places and moments that suspend the journey for something far more meditative and idiosyncratic than can be anticipated, and the experience is far richer and more memorable because of this.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, while De Maria was comparatively busy in the deserts making lines of one kind or another for his audience to find and follow (*Cross*, *Las Vegas Piece*, and *Mile Long Drawing*), the trope of the 'road trip' was being explored through a plethora of what are now seen as iconic countercultural 'biker' and 'car' movies, among them *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) and *Vanishing Point*

(Richard T. Sarafian, 1971), essentially bleak films that both reflected and reinforced the anti-establishment mood of late 1960s America. Both films not only explore the role of the anti-hero, but also uncertainty and danger (which are, as we have seen, close to De Maria's own heart), and ultimately destruction. Like Kerouac's *Sal Paradise* and Dean Moriarty, the films' drug-fuelled anti-heroes attain a sense of an 'endless present' through speeding on fast vehicles on open roads through sparsely populated desert geographies – just as De Maria had done on his own road trips across America in the 1960s. Furthermore, 'stopping-on-the-way' takes up much of the films. In both *Easy Rider* and *Vanishing Point* the protagonists have a specific destination towards which they are aiming (respectively, New Orleans for the Mardi Gras, and San Francisco to deliver a car). However, arrival is continually delayed in favour of detours and encounters along the way, in much the same way as the traveller to *The Lightning Field* stops and starts. In this manner, motion and stasis continually revolve around each other.

A central scene in *Vanishing Point* illustrates the concept of the driven 'travelling line' as a means of extending time and space, of deferring destinations, and of conveying anxiety: all qualities which are experienced by the visitor on the journey to *The Lightning Field*. In the scene, the 'hero' Kowalski gets lost in the desert while trying to avoid detection by the police. As he anxiously drives around trying to get his bearings, his tyre tracks, crossing and re-crossing in the dust, are filmed from the air, in much the same way as De Maria photographed *Cross* and *Las Vegas Piece* from above.²² By this time, Kowalski's journey to San Francisco has gone deeply awry, and the confused tracks signify his own mental confusion, and the dawning realisation that his destination

²² Kowalski's tyre tracks also bring to mind Heizer's *Circular Surface Planar Displacement Drawing* (1970), made at Jean Dry Lake, Nevada, which was constructed by Heizer driving a motorcycle round in a series of circles, cutting up the surface of the dry lake. The work covers an area 900 feet × 500 feet and is best viewed from the air.

will forever be out of reach. Indeed, in contrast to the journey to *The Lightning Field*, whose final destination – the field of poles – is achieved, the protagonists of *Easy Rider* and *Vanishing Point* never get to their destinations. In both films the journeys end dramatically and shockingly: in *Easy Rider*, Wyatt (Peter Fonda) and Billy (Dennis Hopper) are gunned down at random and left dying in the middle of the road; in *Vanishing Point*, Kowalski (Barry Newman) deliberately crashes, at high speed, into two bulldozers set up by the police as a roadblock, producing the fatal fireball that kills him.

3. Pilgrimage

In sharp contrast to Kowalski's dramatic and nihilistic demise at the end of *Vanishing Point*, travellers to *The Lightning Field* often have what can best be described as an uplifting, transformative, perhaps even spiritual experience on their journey to the field of poles, even though – or perhaps because – that journey has been relatively long and hard. In 2004, Todd Gibson, a visitor to *The Lightning Field*, wrote on his weblog:

I've been thinking about times when I've made a special trip to see art and whether I've felt that the trip was worth the effort. Like others who have a passion for the arts, I've done my share of cultural tourism ... But in thinking through all the art that I've seen while away from home, one experience comes to mind as being different than the rest. Over the Fourth of July weekend in 2002 I made the pilgrimage (and I don't use that word lightly) to the New Mexico desert to see Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* ... Pilgrims undertake their journeys for different reasons. For some, religion dictates the behaviour. Others make sacrifices to complete the journey as a sign of personal fidelity and devotion. Some look to experience a personal change through undergoing the journey. Still others travel to be able to claim that they have, to check that item off their list of life accomplishments. All these reasons, to one extent or another, drove my decision to travel to *The Lightning Field*. Any religious pilgrim hopes to come away from the pilgrimage with new insight or having experienced personal change of some type. I can't say I was any different. I was hoping for something by going to the high New Mexico desert to spend a day with De Maria's best-known – but least seen – work.²³

²³ Gibson, T. 'A Pilgrimage to The Lightning Field'. [Online] <http://fromthefloor.blogspot.com/2004/07/pilgrimage-to-lightning-field-part-1.html> [23.06.2006]

Gibson writes of his visit to *The Lightning Field* principally in terms of being a pilgrim, and I have quoted him at some length because he succinctly sums up many of the similarities between travelling to *The Lightning Field* and undertaking a religious or spiritual pilgrimage: the desire for new insight; simply to say that one has ‘been there’; or for some kind of personal transformation.

Certainly Walter De Maria himself sought, and perhaps found, a sense of transformation in his own journey across the American desert in 1967; as we saw in Chapter Three, he made this journey at the time of his marital breakup, and he was also experiencing a growing dissatisfaction with making work in New York. For De Maria, the desert landscape, and especially travelling through it at speed and for a long way, was therefore perhaps helpful both in terms of personal healing and in distancing himself from gallery-based practice. Yet, as is clear from Todd Gibson’s comments, it is not just the artist who can take part in this transformative encounter through travel; visitors to *The Lightning Field* can also experience the potential of the journey to transform and heal.

There is, however, a degree of tension here; for whilst we might travel as secular pilgrims of some kind, we are also undoubtedly tourists. And although ‘cultural tourism’ – travel in pursuit of art and culture – is arguably more educational and therefore more worthy than many other kinds, it is nevertheless largely based on the ‘consumption’ of people and places. Indeed, whilst pilgrimage is often regarded as the most meaningful or authentic journey a person can ever make, enriching not just the pilgrim but also the places and people visited (often even giving them their *raison d’être*), tourism, on the other hand, is often regarded as decidedly superficial. The

geographer Edward Relph, in his ground-breaking book *Place and Placelessness* (1976), describes tourism as an 'inauthentic attitude to place',²⁴ and, as we saw earlier in this chapter, this kind of criticism has been levelled at car travel in particular. Lucy Lippard, in *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* (1999), goes as far as to describe tourism as a whole as a kind of cannibalism,²⁵ and the cultural geographer Dean MacCannell describes it as 'something insidious ... the sucking of difference out of difference, a movement to the still higher ground of the old arrogant Western Ego that wants to see it all, know it all, and take it all in'.²⁶ Indeed, as outlined in Chapter Two, American 'Land Art' in general has sometimes been accused of just such an egotistical, Western – and, for some, specifically male – attitude to place. Yet earlier in this chapter I described how travel – even in a car, at speed – can nevertheless provide a meaningful encounter with the landscape through which the traveller moves: through the meditative quality of speed itself, as well as through the necessity of combining motion with stasis on such a long trip. Furthermore, in their recent publication *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys* (2006), Daniel Olsen and Dallen Timothy propose a blurring of the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism, for they argue that tourists and pilgrims are structurally and spatially the same or forms of one another, with pilgrimage being one type of tourism rather than a completely separate kind of travel.²⁷ After all, not only do many pilgrims seek pleasure, education, relaxation, and so on, as part of their spiritual journey, but also many tourists seek some sense of transformation in a not entirely dissimilar way to the pilgrim. Indeed, despite MacCannell's negative views given above, he also regards tourism as a whole as a modern, secular equivalent of the special ritual experience involved in religious pilgrimage, even as a modern

²⁴ Relph, E. *Place and Placelessness*: London: Pion, 1976, p.83. *Place and Placelessness* is a monograph published out of Relph's PhD studies at the University of Toronto. The book was a major force in the field of humanistic geography amidst the quantitative revolution of that period.

²⁵ Lippard, L.R. *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*. New York: The New Press, 1999, p.5.

²⁶ MacCannell, D. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999, p.xv. (First published in 1976.)

²⁷ Timothy, Dallen J. and Olsen, Daniel H. (eds). *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, pp.6–7.

version of the universal human concern with the sacred: 'The ritual attitude of the tourist originates in the act of travel itself and culminates when he arrives in the presence of the sight'.²⁸ Similarly, Nelson Graburn asserts that the structure of tourism resembles all ritual behaviour, incorporating a beginning, a change, and a return;²⁹ this was certainly true of my own experience of *The Lightning Field*, just as it was for Todd Gibson and for many others who have written of their own, very personal, encounters with the work.

Another significant comparison can be drawn between the experience of the pilgrim and the experience of the traveller to *The Lightning Field*. Prior to departure (and on the journey itself), both pilgrim and tourist are full of anticipation, which is constructed, and sustained, through a variety of practices. With regard to pilgrimages, this is largely through the dissemination of icons of one kind or another, for although the site of special significance is clearly the focus of the journey, the duplication and dissemination of images helps to sustain its power, both before setting off and also while the journey is under way. In *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, David Freedberg emphasises the importance of the making and distribution of copies and souvenirs for European pilgrimage routes:

These images work miracles and record them; they mediate between ourselves and the supernatural; and they fix in our mind the recollection of experience ... The image, whether itself miraculous in origin or not, is placed in a more elevated and appropriate setting; it continues to work miracles; people passionately venerate both it and its copies; they make further copies and take them away with them, or set them up elsewhere.³⁰

²⁸ MacCannell, 1999, p.43.

²⁹ Graburn, Nelson (ed.). *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

³⁰ Freedberg, D. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp.100 and 103.

For works of 'Land Art', the most common method of duplication and dissemination is in the form of photographic reproductions of works. Indeed, because of the remoteness of works such as *The Lightning Field* most people's experience of them is entirely through the medium of the photograph. *The Lightning Field* is unique among works of 'Land Art' on account of the extreme scarcity of available photographs and the ban on visitors taking photographs at the site, which conspire to increase the sense of anticipation felt by the traveller. As we saw in Chapter Three, the most vocal critic of this aspect of the work has been John Beardsley, who regards it as part of an unhealthy degree of control exercised by De Maria and Dia, in order to enhance a sense of mystification for the work. There is certainly no question that both Walter De Maria and the Dia Art Foundation have sought just such a degree of mystification for *The Lightning Field*: indeed, in her recent article, 'Revaluing Minimalism: patronage, aura, and place',³¹ Anna Chave slates the manner in which Heiner Friedrich and Philippa De Menil (co-founders of Dia) deliberately sought and supported works (usually ones of very large scale) that they perceived as embodying some kind of awe-inspiring mystical aesthetic – not only De Maria's *The Lightning Field*, *The Broken Kilometer* (Figure 54), and *Munich Earth Room*, but also the Rothko Chapel in Houston (1971) and James Turrell's *Roden Crater* (1977 and ongoing). The patronage of Friedrich and De Menil has, for Chave, fostered an undesirable focus on quasi-spirituality for the artworks they support, with *The Lightning Field* in particular – monumental in scale, distant, and unique – becoming established as a kind of shrine to which 'pilgrims' need to travel, in order to see it 'in the flesh'. Chave's critique attempts to undermine this work of art – and others like it – precisely because they are 'spiritual' and 'auratic'; for her this is a decidedly unwelcome quality for any work of art. For me, however, one of the many possible purposes of art is precisely to induce awe and wonder – even, as Susan Sontag

³¹ Chave, Anna. 'Revaluing Minimalism: patronage, aura, and place', in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol 90 No 3, September 2008, pp.466–486.

argued in 'Against Interpretation',³² to permit an 'erotics of art'. Here I need to speak from the heart, for although I am not religious in any conventional sense of the word, my own encounter with *The Lightning Field* was certainly sensual, awe-inspiring, reverential, and ultimately 'wonder'-ful. What is more, my 'pilgrimage' to reach it helped to strengthen my sense of anticipation and ultimately pleasure: without the journey, these qualities would have been weakened.

In his influential essay of 1936, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin uses the word 'aura' to describe the sense of reverence and awe that one experiences in the presence of a unique work of art. According to Benjamin, the aura inheres not in the object itself but rather in external attributes such as its known line of ownership, its restricted exhibition, its publicised authenticity, and its cultural value: 'The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition.'³³ Aura is therefore indicative of art's traditional association with primitive, feudal, or bourgeois structures of power and its further association with magic and ritual (both religious and secular). However, as Benjamin argues, once art became mechanically reproducible (firstly in lithography and then in photography), and particularly once forms of art could be produced in which there is no actual original (for instance, film), the experience of art could be freed from place and ritual and brought instead under the gaze and the control of a mass audience, leading to a 'shattering' of the aura, and of the traditions to which it had hitherto been attached. 'For the first time in world history,' wrote Benjamin, 'mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.' He continues:

³² Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1966.

³³ Benjamin, W. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. First published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, New York, 1936. Reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds). *Art in Theory: 1900–2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp.520–527.

That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.³⁴

However, instead of 'shattering' the aura attached to the original work of art, as Benjamin would wish, the six sanctioned images of *The Lightning Field* do precisely the opposite. We have already seen how this is the case for pilgrimage icons, where the replication and dissemination of images enhances the place of special significance at the end of the journey. Such replication and dissemination of images also holds true for tourist sites, and Dean MacCannell has addressed precisely this issue in *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, in which he declares that it is precisely *because* of replication that tourist sites become auratic. Indeed, in terms of tourism as a whole, MacCannell argues that one of the stages of 'sacralisation' of a tourist sight/site is 'mechanical reproduction' of the 'sacred object', with the creation of prints, photographs, postcards, models, or effigies of the object which are themselves valued and displayed. He continues:

It is the mechanical reproduction phase of sacralisation that is most responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey to find the true object. And he is not disappointed. Alongside the copies of it, it has to be The Real Thing.³⁵

Regardless of how many icons or photographs one has viewed or held in one's hands, or the number of retellings of others' experiences one has heard, a pilgrim and an art tourist both want to travel to the site/sight itself, to have an authentic encounter with the place and/or object of special significance. Notwithstanding Anna Chave's scathing critique of the desire for a transformative experience through auratic artworks, this is undoubtedly what most visitors actually seek. Moreover, the actual encounter with *The*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ MacCannell, 1999, p.45.

Lightning Field – both on the journey and once there – must surely demonstrate to almost every visitor just how completely inadequate the photographs are in the face of the ‘Real Thing’; the journey must be taken, in order to demonstrate that the high drama portrayed in most of those visual images is *not* the work, not even a close approximation of it: it is, at best, pornography, as I argued in Chapter Four. A recent visitor to *The Lightning Field*, Ethan Zuckerman, recognises this:

yes, I took pictures. So did the couple visiting the same time I was there. I suspect everyone does. No one searches your bags for cameras, and you’re left unsupervised with the piece for 20 hours – preventing photography is a practical impossibility. But I’ve never posted them [on the Internet], not because of fear of being sued by the Dia Foundation, but because they sucked. While the piece is astounding in person, photographs of it from a conventional camera only capture a small part of the work ... which looks like a couple of aluminium poles standing in a field.³⁶

4. The Fluxus *Anthology* and the ‘travelling line’

Earlier in this chapter I referred to Walter De Maria’s Fluxus *Anthology* text, ‘Meaningless Work’.³⁷ The kinds of actions advocated there provide a number of suggestions for meaningless, repetitive action through time – for example, ‘putting wooden blocks from one box to another, then putting the blocks back to the original box, back and forth, back and forth, etc’ – but they can hardly be described as ‘travel’. However, in several other texts in the *Anthology*, ‘travel’, of one kind or another, was undoubtedly an issue of considerable interest, just as it was for De Maria when, a decade later, he conceived *The Lightning Field* in the remote upland desert of New Mexico. In the final section of this chapter I return to the Fluxus *Anthology*, to explore works – not only by De Maria, but also by Robert Morris and La Monte Young – which, in different

³⁶ Zuckerman, E. ‘Art, copyright and the beauty of inaccessibility’. [Online] www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/?p=487. [23.06.06]

³⁷ De Maria, Walter. ‘Meaningless Work’, in Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Bronx, New York: La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, 1963.

ways, investigate the concept of repetitive action specifically through the motif of the 'travelling line' as a means of extending the spatiotemporal experience of art.

Among the texts that De Maria published in the *Anthology* is 'Beach Crawl' (Appendix 4). Here the 'audience' is instructed to crawl down a beach, moving three stones in a repetitive back-and-forth movement until he or she reaches the ocean. De Maria even included a little sketch of the pattern of movement down the beach. 'Beach Crawl' provides an early example of De Maria's exploration of the 'travelling line' which, like the journey to *The Lightning Field*, does eventually reach its destination but is by no means a straight A-to-B journey, since the 'performer' continually doubles back while moving down the beach. Arrival at the ocean is therefore deferred in favour of both a slower and a less direct journey, in much the same way as the traveller to *The Lightning Field*, or the pilgrim on his or her way to a site of spiritual significance, slows down, and makes detours, in order to encounter events and places along the way. As is so frequently the case with De Maria's work from the 1960s, this work is 'uncomfortable' and 'difficult'. Not only are we expected to crawl on hands and knees while carrying stones, but the journey down the beach – 'no altering of straight ahead course' – has no set timeframe. It might last 'a) until you get tired'; 'b) until you have gone through the cycle 100 times'; or 'c) until you run into the Ocean'. Decision-making is handed over to the 'audience-performer-creator', even while De Maria uses the imperative: 'go to sea shore', 'take three stones', and so on. As we saw in Chapter Four, the presence *and* absence of control was sought by De Maria in his own involvement in debates about art. This kind of tension between the artist's presence and absence is also experienced by visitors to *The Lightning Field*, where the total freedom to do what one likes, while wandering among or around the poles, is set against De Maria's very strict controls over

the visiting arrangements, particularly the length of stay, number of people, and the ban on photography.

Also originally intended for the Fluxus *Anthology* – but subsequently withdrawn³⁸ – was Robert Morris's 'Traveling Sculpture – a means toward a sound record' (*Appendix 6*). As with De Maria's 'Beach Crawl', this work explores the concept of the 'travelling line' – in this instance, a wooden pathway – as a means of extending, and slowing down, experience through time and space. Although a detailed examination of Morris's practice is beyond the remit of this thesis, it is however worth mentioning that, as with De Maria's own contributions to the Fluxus *Anthology*, this work by Morris has been almost entirely ignored in the extant literature, with only Jane McFadden recognising the import of this oversight and the need to redress it. She writes:

That this work has never been cited in hundreds of instances of scholarship on Morris speaks to the inherent problems in the histories of the artist's practice and for the decade of the 1960s as well.³⁹

'Traveling Sculpture' describes the building of the 'pathway' in a remote outdoor location, with 'any number of people' involved, and the size of the pathway 'dependent upon the number of people participating and how much room they feel they need.' The work follows the same back-and-forth kind of motion that was explored by De Maria in 'Beach Crawl', while the subsequent dismantling and reformulation of the 'pathway' through photographic and aural evidence points to the need to question the ontological boundaries of the art 'object', as well as the need to consider what distinctions can be drawn between what we conventionally think of as visual art and theatrical performance. Morris himself called the work an 'event', and it clearly establishes his growing

³⁸ Together with Morris's essay 'Blank Form', 'Traveling Sculpture' was intended for the *Anthology*. However, the collated versions of the book were stored in Morris's loft for a few months after completion, and Morris took his entries out at this time, before distribution in 1963. The Getty Research Institute does, however, own a rare 1962 version that includes Morris's contributions.

³⁹ McFadden, Jane. 'Toward Site', in *Grey Room*, Vol 27, Spring 2007, p.41.

fascination with process and temporality – and for the dynamic relationship between art, place, and beholder – which he later voiced in his four-part ‘Notes on Sculpture’ (see Chapter Four). As with ‘Beach Crawl’ and ‘Traveling Sculpture’, the time-consuming experience of travelling to *The Lightning Field* needs to be positioned within the ‘frame’ of the work. Indeed, this journey resembles the first act of a rather unusual theatrical performance – one in which members of the audience are not just watchers, not even just performers, but also creators of the work.

Both ‘Beach Crawl’ and ‘Traveling Sculpture’ incorporate sound, which, as we shall see later in this thesis, is also of major importance for the visitor’s experience of *The Lightning Field*. In ‘Beach Crawl’ the ‘performer’ is expected to shout out ‘Well that’s new isn’t it?’ There will also be the plopping of the stones into the water, and the sound of the waves on the beach; although De Maria does not mention these, he would have been very much aware of the wider environment of sound at the beach, for he later recorded the sound of the waves for *Ocean Music* (1968). ‘Traveling Sculpture’, meanwhile, incorporates the actual sound of the work being made, since a tape recorder is set up to record the sound of the construction process as the pathway is built, subsequently dismantled, and then set alight. As we saw in Chapter Three, Morris also incorporated this idea in *Box with the sound of its own making* (Figure 13), made the same year, which contained a tape recording of the box being made.

The use of sound as a means of exploring the concept of the ‘travelling line’ is most fully addressed in some of the Fluxus compositions by De Maria’s friend, La Monte Young. Like De Maria and Morris, Young was clearly interested in the concept of the line as a means of expanding spatiotemporal experience. For Young, it was firmly anchored to his engagement with music, especially his interest in sustained notes.

Even as a child, Young was interested in listening to such sounds – man-made as well as natural – and subsequently in creating them himself. The ‘humming’ telephone poles next to his childhood home produced a continuous chord from which, much later, he recalled the four pitches he named the ‘Dream Chord’. As a teenager, jazz dominated Young’s musical activities, just as it had done for De Maria; he became an accomplished saxophone player, and it was on this instrument that he began to practise very long notes. Subsequently, as a student in California, Young, like De Maria, was also deeply influenced by the physicality of the environment of Southern California, with its ‘sense of space, sense of time, sense of reverie, sense that things could take a long time, that there was always time.’⁴⁰

In his own compositions Young first used sustained notes in *Five Small Pieces for String Quartet on remembering a Niad* (1956) and *Octet for Brass* (1957), while the 1958 work *Trio for Strings* consists exclusively of three very quiet notes played and held for unusually long periods, interspersed with long periods of silence. De Maria describes Young’s use of long notes as ‘very static, long long tones without great variations from measure to measure, more like a solid state or a solid feeling.’⁴¹ Young also became interested in the use of long notes in electronic music,⁴² in medieval chant, and in non-Western music, especially North Indian classical music.⁴³

⁴⁰ Swed, Mark. ‘La Monte Young Tunes the Piano His Way’, in *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 1 November 1985, p.36.

⁴¹ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

⁴² Having met Richard Maxfield in 1959, Young became interested in electronic music’s ability to sustain sound indefinitely, and he continued his exploration of duration in his first electronic works. These included *The Second Dream of the High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer* (1962), which developed overtones and microtones, while *Map of 49’s Dream* (1966) examined the effect of continuous, periodic sound waves on an audience for a number of hours. The main purpose of this was to create a totally surrounding environment made of frequency structures in sound and light.

⁴³ The drone of the Indian *tambura* furthered Young’s fascination with sustained sounds, and an interest in microtones developed from these long sustained notes, through which overtones become audible, even though they are not ‘played’. Young was also attracted to Japanese *gagaku* music, having frequently listened to (but not played in) the student *gagaku* orchestra at UCLA’s music department, which was strong in ethnomusicology. *Gagaku* is a type of Japanese ceremonial music for mixed ensembles of largely high-pitched instruments, and it is characterised by smoothness, serenity and precise execution without virtuosic display. *Gagaku*’s combination of precision with serenity later influenced Young’s *Trio*

Young published fourteen works in the *Fluxus Anthology*, of which three provide the most significant ‘hinge’ between Young and De Maria, since they demonstrate the persistence of the trope of ‘the line’ as a means of extending the audience’s experience of time/space. These are *Composition 1960 #7*, *Composition 1960 #9*, and *Composition 1960 #10*.

The score for Young’s *Composition 1960 #7* (Figure 56) is the only work of Young’s in the *Fluxus Anthology* to employ any kind of conventional Western notation: in this instance a specific pitch relationship is designated (B below and F# above middle C – a perfect fifth) and the use of the treble clef gives the pitches a precise reference point. However, there is no indication of dynamics, or tempo or metronome marking, so both volume and duration are utterly equivocal. The two semibreves and the open tie suggest a long duration, but are completely dependent on tempo, which, however, is *not* given. The notation is accompanied by the brief statement ‘to be held for a long time’; its duration is therefore theoretically infinite. According to Simon Shaw-Miller, this ambiguity places the interpretative onus not only on the performer and the act of performing, but also on the listener and the act of listening.⁴⁴ Once it is played, the work moves from the conceptual realm to the realm of minimal music; but as Edward Strickland points out, although the work may be very minimal indeed in terms of technical complexity, this does not by any means suggest that it is ‘minimal’ in terms of content. The work was performed in New York in 1962 by a string trio, and Strickland comments that it projected to the attentive not only a perfect fifth but a whole inner world of fluctuating overtones.⁴⁵ Like travelling to *The Lightning Field*, the particulars

for Strings in particular. See Keith Potter. *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.27–28.

⁴⁴ Shaw-Miller, Simon. *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, pp.228–229.

⁴⁵ Strickland, Edward. *Minimalism: Origins*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p.140.

of this particular ‘journey’ through sound are handed over to the performers: it is up to them to decide about length, intensity, dynamics, and so on. Moreover, when the piece is played, and listened to, the experience of ‘a long time’ takes on new significance, especially in relation to the setting in which the piece is played and heard, for the sound is effectively suspended not only in time but also in space. Here the extended notes create a sense of ‘here and now in a prolonged state’.⁴⁶ This resonates with the description, in Kerouac’s *On the Road*, of Sal Paradise’s experience of driving at speed through Nebraska. Similarly, as one drives through the American Midwest on the way to *The Lightning Field*, over ‘a long time’, there is a parallel sense of suspension, or stasis – a seemingly ‘endless present’ or ‘singular event’ – even whilst one is moving along ‘the line’ of the drive, and this induces a meditative quality.

Composition 1960 #9 also interrogates the line, but this time it is through what can best be described as the medium of the Japanese haiku, rather than what we might conventionally think of as music. According to Keith Potter, most of Young’s contributions to the *Anthology* could be described not merely as musical ‘scores’ but as concise poems:⁴⁷ in fact, this interest in words was, to an extent, shared by De Maria who, as we saw in Chapter Four, wrote a somewhat haiku-esque description of his dealers which he included in Grégoire Müller’s *The New Avant-Garde* (Figure 51).⁴⁸ *Composition 1960 #9* consists of a straight, horizontal line, drawn on a standard 3-inch × 5-inch index card, which is placed inside an envelope affixed to the inside back cover of the *Anthology*. The ‘reader’ has to open the book, then open the envelope and take the card out in order to see it, turn it the right way up, and then decide what to do next. Once again, as with the journey undertaken by the traveller on his or her way to *The*

⁴⁶ McFadden, 2007, pp.46–47.

⁴⁷ Potter, 2000, p.51.

⁴⁸ Müller, Grégoire. *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*. New York and London: Praeger, 1972, p.151.

Lightning Field, the decision-making process is largely in the hands of the active 'reader'. The work also demonstrates a conflation of the visual, material, and textual conditions of the medium, and yet it retains an ability to represent a specific experience, or 'singular event'. Here the form of the line serves as the minimal unit of action, in much the same way as does the chord of *Composition 1960 #7*: it is now contained within the confines of a little envelope, but, once released, it becomes boundless. Similarly, although the journey to *The Lightning Field* has a definite ending point in time and space, one cannot say where it begins, or what kind of 'path' it should take once begun. Like Young's little straight line, its spatiotemporal possibilities are potentially limitless.

Composition 1960 #10 follows *Composition 1960 #9* in its development of the singular form of the line. It is, for me, the most intriguing of Young's works for the *Anthology*, since it conflates music, poetry, and drawing. The work is as follows:

Composition 1960 #10
to Bob Morris

Draw a straight line
and follow it.

In its combination of brevity and complexity this work, like *Composition 1960 #9* and De Maria's 'dedication' to his dealers, is reminiscent of a Japanese haiku. Indeed, Young comments:

what differentiates my event pieces – those 1960 conceptual pieces – from others that were written, such as George Brecht's and Dick Higgins's, is that mine were crystallized down into this haiku-like essence – focusing on one event.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Young, La Monte. Cited in William Duckworth. *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995, pp.233–234.

Jane McFadden sees this work as a particularly important counterpart to Morris's and De Maria's own linear inscriptions in the Fluxus *Anthology* ('down the beach' or 'along a pathway'), since it links temporal process to spatial context. She writes:

[Young's] line is a model for a diversity of experience in a duration of time within a delineated place determined by material form – an appropriate, if minimal, example of practice inscribed in a site.⁵⁰

Like McFadden, Liz Kotz also recognises the wider importance of this work by Young, for she asserts:

When critics of minimalism use the awkward metaphor of 'theatricality' to describe a certain focused perceptual and bodily relation to objects in real time and space, it is Young's 1961 work [the line] that is perhaps the first template.⁵¹

The instruction given in *Composition #10* is brief and it sounds simple – 'Draw a straight line and follow it' – but how is it to be executed? There is no indication of how long the line should be, or where one should draw it, or what with (sound? paintbrush? chalk? one's own footsteps?), or whether it should be permanent or temporary, or for what length of time one should 'follow it'. There have been a number of remarkably diverse interpretations. For example, Young's own realisation of *#10* involved sighting with plumb lines and making a chalk line along the floor, while the British composer Howard Skempton once performed the piece by sustaining a single chord on the accordion for 2½ hours.⁵² Nam June Paik, in *Zen for Head* (1962), dipped his head and hands in ink and dragged them along a length of paper. *Composition #10* therefore demands a considerable degree of decision-making on the part of the 'audience/performer'; once again, this focuses attention on the experience of the individual and the freedom of choice to decide what happens. Indeed, Keith Potter

⁵⁰ McFadden, 2007, pp.42–43.

⁵¹ Kotz, Liz. 'Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the "Event" Score', in *October* Vol 95, Winter 2001, p.80. Cited in McFadden, 2007, pp.42–43.

⁵² Potter, 2000, p.52.

asserts that such minimalist music required new modes of ‘listening’, with the necessity for the viewer or listener to ‘complete the work’.⁵³ The work also incorporates a degree of anxiety about outcomes – qualities amply addressed in many of De Maria’s early works, as we saw in Chapter Three. However, the personal freedom to complete the work is held in tension with what is a quite opposite impulse – that of artistic ‘control’ – since both De Maria and Young focus on the ‘imperative’: Young’s ‘Draw a straight line and follow it’ echoes De Maria’s ‘Go to sea shore ... take three stones’ in ‘Beach Crawl’.

For the traveller to *The Lightning Field*, there is, of course, one major imperative: to get to Quemado by no later than 2.30pm on the day of the visit, as the Dia Art Foundation demands in its instructions.⁵⁴ No matter how engaging and idiosyncratic the journey has been, no matter how many detours one has taken, this particular ‘travelling line’ does – like a pilgrimage – have a very precise endpoint. The ultimate focus for all visitors is to reach the cabin overlooking the poles – to ‘be there’, out of the car, at the site. This forms the focus of the next chapter.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁵⁴ Dia Art Foundation [Online] www.lightningfield.org [07.02.2005]

CHAPTER SEVEN

Aspects of site

1. Introduction

During the latter half of the 1960s, Walter De Maria made an increasing number of trips to the desert to plan and construct works of art. Yet as Jane McFadden recognises, during this period, for every trip that he took to explore that place and what it might mean to be in that place, he also produced works that acknowledged a growing sense of dislocation from place itself.¹ This came about in two ways. Firstly, De Maria seemed to revel in the potential of many of his works to be produced, reproduced, and experienced in multiple forms; this can be seen in his explorations of satellite imagery (*Three Continents Project*, 1969), photography (*Mile Long Drawing*, 1968), film (*Hard Core*, 1969), and television (*Two Lines Three Circles on the Desert*, 1969). Secondly, his preoccupation with duration and process – for example, in ‘Beach Crawl’ (1960), *Move the Ball Slowly Down the Row* (1965), *Las Vegas Piece* (1969), and *Cross* (1965–66) – shifted the focus of attention towards a more ‘nomadic’ encounter with both time and space. Of all De Maria’s works from this period, *Three Continents Project* stands out; as Jane McFadden asserts, ‘conceived between the possibilities of inscription of a site on a monumental scale and the circulation of information within a global arena’,² it reflected his dual exploration of place and its dislocation particularly forcefully.

The Lightning Field is also, in some respects, ‘dislocated’; indeed, we saw two examples of this in the previous chapter. Firstly, the strictly controlled multiplication

¹ McFadden, Jane. ‘Toward Site’, in *Grey Room*, Vol 27, Spring 2007, p.37.

² *Ibid.*

and dissemination of the official photographs partially dislodges the work from its geographical location; this is especially true for those who never go to the site in New Mexico, since their experience of the work is solely through these images. Secondly, for those who do manage to get to New Mexico, the journey itself extends the visitor's experience of the work well beyond what are usually considered to be its temporal and spatial limits. In each case, what we have thought of as 'the work' becomes harder to define: no longer bound to a specific place or time, the photographs and the journey force us to reconsider the spatiotemporal boundaries of *The Lightning Field*, of what might be thought of as *internal* to it, and what *external*. However, it is nevertheless the case that the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field* – or, for that matter, *Spiral Jetty* (1970), *Double Negative* (1969), *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76), or any of these monumental desert works – is ultimately focused on 'being there'. This aspect of experience simply cannot be translated into other media; and although (as we saw in the last chapter) the journey to 'get there' is certainly part of the visitor's extended encounter with the work, this journey – like a spiritual pilgrimage – undoubtedly has an ultimate destination. For a visitor to *The Lightning Field*, it is *this* place – this remote, uninhabited, lightning-prone upland in New Mexico, and this field of stainless-steel poles – upon which their physical and emotional energies have been anchored.

In this chapter I investigate three aspects of site at *The Lightning Field*; the first is moderately familiar territory for a work of 'Land Art', but the other two are positioned beyond the conventional critical boundaries within which this artwork is usually explored. Firstly, I consider the ambivalence of desert geography, and the manner in which the visitor experiences the complex fusion of art and nature at *The Lightning Field*. Secondly, I explore the work's acoustic qualities which, like their visual counterparts, 'take place'; these acoustic qualities have so far been entirely overlooked

in any literature on the work because they do not ‘fit’ the usual discourses on ‘Land Art’, which have focused on visual perception alone. In particular, I interrogate the site of sound at *The Lightning Field* in the light of the work of John Cage and La Monte Young, both of whom were fascinated by the relationship between sounds – especially natural ones – and the spaces in which they were made and experienced. Finally, I consider the role of the wooden cabin where visitors stay; far from being *external* to the work (merely a place to eat, sleep, and shelter), it provides a significant – yet almost totally neglected – dimension to the visitor’s encounter with ‘site’. Most importantly, it provides a place in which to slow down, and I compare this ‘slowing-down process’ to the experience of listening to Steve Reich’s 1970 composition, *Four Organs*.

2. Desert

The Lightning Field was commissioned and is maintained by the Dia Art Foundation, and, as we saw in Chapter Five, part of the Foundation’s remit is ‘to support art projects whose nature and scale exceed the limits normally available within the traditional museum or gallery’.³ This is certainly the case for *The Lightning Field*; no gallery could even begin to contain this work, for not only is the array of poles measured in kilometres and miles, but it is located in an overwhelming expanse of scrubland, stretching horizontally to embrace the distant mountains and perhaps beyond, and vertically to include the overarching sky, whose physical dimensions are, as far as we know, infinite. In his 1980 essay on *The Lightning Field*, De Maria writes that ‘The land is not the setting for the work but a part of the work’,⁴ and the inseparability of artwork and environment – which is often called its ‘site-specificity’ – is commonly regarded as

³ The Dia Art Foundation. [Online] www.diaart.org [08.02.2009]

⁴ De Maria, W. ‘The Lightning Field’, in *Artforum* Vol 18, No 8, 1980, p.58.

one of the defining features of ‘Land Art’ in general, especially American ‘Land Art’.⁵ This is hardly surprising: usually constructed in remote desert locations far from urban galleries, and made (at least in part) out of the material of the earth itself, many such works are felt to be deeply rooted to their geographies. This is the case even where a number of ‘Land Artists’ (including De Maria) also used photographic, textual, or cartographic documentation to enable non-transportable works such as *Mile Long Drawing*, *Double Negative*, and others to be exhibited in galleries. It also holds true for works by those artists – notably Robert Smithson – who explored the dialectic of ‘site’ and ‘non-site’: after all, here questions of ‘site’ are still at the centre of debate. The inseparability of artwork and site is thought to be especially true for those works made on a monumental scale – such as Heizer’s *Double Negative*, Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, Holt’s *Sun Tunnels*, James Turrell’s *Roden Crater* (1979–present), Heizer’s *Complex One/City* (1972–present), Robert Morris’s *Observatory* (1971), and *The Lightning Field*. Of all such works, *The Lightning Field* is seen as the most anchored to its geographical location; physically, it could be regarded as the biggest of all (so far, at least),⁶ and it is also the most immutable – unlike *Spiral Jetty* or *Double Negative*, it is not permitted to slide towards entropy (or, for that matter, as in the case of *Spiral Jetty*, to disappear for years on end),⁷ but is scrupulously maintained in its original condition.

Yet what is meant by ‘site-specificity’? The term has frequently been employed, especially in discussions of recent and contemporary art, but often without any specific definition. As T.J. Demos asks: ‘Is the “site” a geographical area, a representation of that area, its phenomenological experience, an institutional grid, a discursive network, a

⁵ For Ben Tufnell, such works reject the historic fine-art traditions of Europe in favour of forms referencing historic Native American idioms: the lines at Nazca, Mesoamerican temples, Indian burial mounds, and so on. See Ben Tufnell, *Land Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2006, p.46.

⁶ James Turrell’s *Roden Crater* and Michael Heizer’s *Complex One/City* are also massive, although at the time of writing (February 2009) neither work was completed.

⁷ Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) has spent much of its life underwater because of the unforeseen fluctuating water levels of the Great Salt Lake, Utah, into which it was constructed.

community formation?’⁸ Some aspects of the complexities of the term – especially with regard to its emergence from the phenomenological concerns of Minimalism – have been explored by Craig Owens,⁹ James Meyer,¹⁰ and Miwon Kwon.¹¹ Kwon, for example, sees site-specificity as emerging in the late 1960s as a way to resist complicity with market forces that would reduce works of art to mobile commodities; certainly, De Maria’s (and others’) move outdoors and away from urban spaces was in part informed by a desire to sidestep the traditional role of galleries in art’s commodification, as we saw in previous chapters. Kwon focuses principally on artworks made after 1980, and she cites Richard Serra, who, in works of ‘public art’ such as *Tilted Arc* (1981), grounded the sculptural object irrevocably in the geography of its site; art could be as much about ‘environment’ as it was about ‘object’ – a quality already, of course, recognised by ‘Land Artists’ such as De Maria, Heizer, and Smithson nearly two decades prior to this particular work by Serra. Kwon then goes on to argue that the site of an artwork is, however, not just geographically but also socially and institutionally determined, and in so doing she relocates the locus of site-specificity away from geography and towards discursive formations. Yet here Kwon’s argument is in danger of almost entirely ‘unmooring’ artworks from any connection to what is very real physical terrain, whether that be the urban geography of public art, or the abandoned industrial landscape of reclamation artworks, or the remote desert of ‘Land Art’.¹² I am certainly not refuting Kwon’s argument with regard to the importance of social and institutional determinants – and as far as American ‘Land Art’ is concerned, this aspect of site has been well rehearsed, especially by Suzaan Boettger in *Earthworks: Art and*

⁸ Demos, T.J. ‘Rethinking site-specificity’, in *Art Journal*, Vol 62 No 2, Summer 2003, p.98.

⁹ Owens, C. ‘Earthwords’, in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994.

¹⁰ Meyer, James. ‘The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site-Specificity’, in Erika Suderburg (ed.). *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp.23–37.

¹¹ Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The MIT Press, 2002.

¹² Demos, 2003 pp.98–100.

the Landscape of the Sixties (2002),¹³ as we saw in Chapter Two. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is precisely the very real physical place of earth, mountains, sky, mud, and dust to which I want to remain anchored, even though this is a polysemic environment whose spatial and temporal boundaries can never be completely delineated.

De Maria spent no less than five years searching for a suitable site in which to construct the field of poles for the full-scale version of *The Lightning Field*, and he chose *this* place in preference to all others.¹⁴ He had very specific requirements for the site. It needed to be remote so that a lengthy journey, away from human habitation, would be possible; very large, so that there would be room for the massive array of hundreds of poles; relatively flat, so that the top surface of the array could resemble a giant's bed of nails; sparsely populated, so that neither houses nor roads nor telegraph poles nor any other signs of human activity would be discernible (either visually or aurally) from the field of poles or the cabin; relatively unproductive, so that it would be easily purchasable; and, by no means least, a site of frequent thunderstorms in the summer months, which could only be achieved given the appropriate climatic conditions. All these criteria were met by the location that was finally chosen, in Catron County, New Mexico, about an hour's drive north from the small settlement of Quemado.

Robert Eaton describes the last part of that drive from Quemado:

Since turning off the paved highway, we have been making our way slowly toward the middle of a vast, uninhabited plain ringed by low, serrate mountains. Except for a few scrubby junipers, the plain is devoid of trees. It is a startlingly exposed landscape.¹⁵

¹³ Boettger, S. *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, and London, England: University of California Press, 2002.

¹⁴ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

¹⁵ Eaton, Robert. *The Lightning Field. Travels In and Around New Mexico*. Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Books, 1995, pp.5–6.

As we saw in Chapter Three, De Maria developed an early interest in such ‘exposed’ landscapes: firstly, the Pacific Ocean, which was a lasting and powerful physical presence for him while he was growing up in California; and subsequently the desert, especially those in southwest USA, which he first visited in 1963. There is a remarkable degree of similarity between desert and ocean: monumental in scale, sparsely populated by human beings (if at all), frequently beautiful, and potentially deadly, both the landscape of the desert and the seascape of the ocean are among the most extreme environments on Earth. They helped to shape De Maria’s personal ‘sense of space’, and it is therefore not surprising that spatial context would come to be a persistent theme – and a particularly complex one – throughout his art practice, and that it would greatly affect the audience’s experience of many of his works, notably *The Lightning Field*. In 1972, when asked by Paul Cummings why he chose to go ‘miles and miles away’ to the desert, rather than, say, the New Jersey flatlands or upstate New York, to make large-scale works of art such as *Las Vegas Piece* and *Mile Long Drawing*, De Maria replied:

that was an aesthetic choice, because the desert is the most aesthetic place in the world, outside of the ocean, maybe more than the ocean, and when you’re in the middle of the Sahara desert you know that it’s one of the most beautiful places in the world, that’s all. There’s no question. You don’t have to explain it. It’s just obvious.¹⁶

During the 1960s and early 1970s, many other artists, musicians, and film-makers were also attracted to the deserts, especially those of America’s southwest. Among them were Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Carl Andre, and James Turrell, as well as rock musicians Gram Parsons¹⁷ and Jim Morrison,¹⁸ and a number of film-makers,

¹⁶ De Maria, W. Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972, Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm [07.10.2005].

¹⁷ Gram Parsons (1946–73) was a member of the International Submarine Band, The Byrds and The Flying Burrito Brothers. In the late 1960s, Parsons became fascinated by Joshua Tree National Monument in California. He would disappear in the desert for days, either alone or with friends, searching for UFOs

including Dennis Hopper (*Easy Rider*, 1969), Michelangelo Antonioni (*Zabriskie Point*, 1970), Peter Watkins (*Punishment Park*, 1971), and Richard T. Sarafian (*Vanishing Point*, 1971).¹⁹ For some – notably Gram Parsons – the desert was also a place in which to ‘escape’ from personal turmoil – echoing De Maria’s own turn to the desert at the time of his marital breakup in 1967, although in Parson’s case it was also the location for his untimely demise, at Joshua Tree National Monument. Across the range of ‘art practices’, depictions of the desert were informed by a considerable degree of ambivalence with regard to purpose, destination, narrative, and even morality. ‘The desert’ became established as a nonconformist landscape, set apart from the usual mores of society – a place for the ‘other’, creating a sense of a remote rural ‘there’ in contrast to an urban ‘here’. It was also often treated as a kind of blank canvas or *tabula rasa*;²⁰ indeed, both De Maria (in *Mile Long Drawing* and *Cross*, both 1968) and Heizer (for example, in *Primitive Dye Painting I*, 1969, and *Circular Surface Planar Displacement Drawing*, 1972)²¹ treated its flat expanses, especially those of the white salt flats (El Mirage Dry Lake, Jean Dry Lake, and others), as just such a canvas upon which they

while under the influence of drugs. He died on 19 September 1973 in Joshua Tree National Monument, at the age of 26, from a lethal combination, supposedly of morphine and alcohol.

¹⁸ At age 4, Jim Morrison (1943–71), who later became lead singer and lyricist of The Doors, purportedly witnessed a car accident in the desert, where a family of Native Americans were injured and possibly killed. He subsequently referred to this incident in a spoken word performance on the song ‘Dawn’s Highway’ from the album *An American Prayer*, and again in the songs ‘Peace Frog’ and ‘Ghost Song’.

¹⁹ Tom Holert writes of this period: ‘Around 1970, interest in the desert was booming, though not simply because pictures of the moon’s surface, documenting the existence of yet another desert, had had a sobering effect upon humanity. Rather, even as the moon’s extraterrestrial desert was undergoing colonialization, the Earth’s deserts were being firmly inscribed on the collective imagination of global popular culture.’ Tom Holert. *Political Whirlpools and Deserts: Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Smithson and Michael Snow*. [Online] www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/art-and_cinematography/deserts_of_the_Political/ [17.10.08].

²⁰ Reenie Elliott describes the American desert as ‘a museum of curiosities, an alien landscape of perverted passions, an augmented fiction in search of an author.’ It is home to ghost-town goldmines (Apache Junction, Arizona), aeroplane graveyards (Sonora Desert, near Tucson, Arizona), nuclear waste dumps (Yucca Mountain Repository, Nevada), alien touch-downs (Roswell, New Mexico, still doing a roaring trade in alien memorabilia), mafia corruption (Las Vegas), the ‘burning man’ festival and land speed records (both Black Rock Desert, Nevada), nuclear test sites and secret military operations (‘Area 51’, southern Nevada). Elliott, R., Curtis, J., Silver, P., and Young, L. ‘Desert Fictions’, in *Atelier 3*, 2008/2009.

²¹ *Primitive Dye Painting I* was made on Coyote Dry Lake, Mojave Desert, California, while *Circular Surface Planar Displacement Drawing* was made on Jean Dry Lake in Nevada. Both of these ‘dry lakes’ are absolutely flat and extremely pale in colour.

could make massive 'drawings', as often with bulldozers or motorcycle tyres as with paint or chalk.

Patricia Nelson Limerick describes the desert as an environment of stubborn integrity, refusing to comply with the requirements of American materialism: '...if one had to pick an environment to stand for freedom from control, the desert was the leading candidate.'²² The starting point for its exploration was often Los Angeles, a city that, according to Barney Hoskyns, has always been haunted by the surrounding desert, 'by its emptiness, its inhospitality to life and the way it provides a refuge for freaks, cultists, and murderers.'²³ Tom Holert sees the desert as 'a semantically ambiguous heterotopia' of emptiness, death, temptation, and revelation, as well as unspoiled nature, purity, and reformation.²⁴ And Suzaan Boettger asserts that it is a more physically and psychically demanding terrain than the city, but one that has a redemptive power that the city lacks.²⁵ Indeed, the desert is often described, simultaneously, in both negative and positive terms; it is often laden with images of sterility, death, darkness, and evil, yet, at the same time, as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan argues, we are also able to feel a sense of 'worshipful admiration' for it.²⁶ *The Lightning Field* is undoubtedly seen by many of its visitors as a place that provides a retreat for the spirit, as well as a place in which one

²² Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *Desert Passages: Encounters with the American Deserts*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1985, p.158.

²³ Hoskyns, Barney. *Waiting for the Sun. The Story of the Los Angeles Music Scene*. London: Bloomsbury, 1996, p.177.

²⁴ Holert, Tom. *Political Whirlpools and Deserts: Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Smithson and Michael Snow*. [Online] www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/art_and_cinematography/deserts_of_the_Political/ [17.10.08]

²⁵ Boettger, 2002, pp.110–111.

²⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan has explored some of the possible reasons for this: for instance, in Hebraic-Christian thought, desert wilderness signifies the unsown: 'it is a howling wasteland, a realm of evil spirits beyond God's presence and even somewhat beyond his control. One explanation of the desert waste is that it is a consequence of God's curse: Adam's Fall brought with it the decay of the earth.' (Genesis 3:17). We find the desert threatening and a source of fear – it is certainly a very dangerous place. The Bible juxtaposes a harsh view of the desert with a view of the desert as a place of spiritual uplift and exaltation. In the Old Testament, the Sinai desert stood for death, disorder, and darkness, but also for God's transcendent power and redemptive love. Yi-Fu Tuan. 'Desert and ice: ambivalent aesthetics', in S. Kemal and I. Gaskell (eds). *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp.143–144.

has to face one's innermost demons; and within the Christian tradition, the desert is certainly just such an oxymoronic geography – Jesus was sent into the desert in order to be tempted by the devil but also to be able to pray to his god, while St Jerome saw the extreme isolation of the desert as a kind of paradise.²⁷ Tuan also remarks not merely on the power of the desert's physical emptiness, but also on the impact of its silence: 'God spoke on an empty stage, knowing how easily the sound of rivers diverted human attention.'²⁸ Moreover, visitors to *The Lightning Field* and to other works of 'Land Art' certainly perpetuate what is perhaps a particularly American desire to venture into wilderness, a desire that has been the subject of much American literature: consider Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Aldo Leopold and Edward Abbey, Robinson Jeffers, Gary Snyder, Jack Turner, Jay Griffiths, and many others.²⁹ Among many of these authors' texts, deserts are seen not only as a refuge for untamed animals and geography, but also as a sanctuary for the 'wild' side of people.³⁰

So far, I have discussed 'the desert' in very general terms, as if it were one physical entity: the site upon which hopes, escapes, spirituality, and 'new starts' could be inscribed. However, to speak of 'the desert' is to paint with far too broad a brushstroke. With regard to 'Land Art', each work has its own particular desert, and each is experienced quite differently. It is worth commenting briefly on some encounters with Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969), in order to demonstrate how varied such encounters can be, and to show the importance of

²⁷ For a useful insight into desert spirituality, see C. Belden Lane: *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

²⁸ Tuan, Yi-Fu. 'Attitudes toward Environment: Themes and Approaches', in David Lowenthal (ed.). *Environmental Perception and Behavior*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967, p.11.

²⁹ See also Max Oelschlaeger's *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991.

³⁰ See, for example, Jay Griffiths, *Wild: an Elemental Journey* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2006); Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: Touchstone, 1990. First published in 1968); and Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996).

first-hand experience of these works and their sites. Indeed, with regard to *Spiral Jetty*, Ben Tufnell astutely comments on the distinction between appearance and experience:

It is interesting that most analyses of the jetty tend to focus on meanings derived from the appearance, rather than the experience, of the jetty. This is surely because so few commentators have actually visited the site; the work is known primarily through photographs of it.³¹

Although *Spiral Jetty* has been reconfigured in Smithson's own film and text,³² as well as in Tacita Dean's entirely aural work *Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty* (1997),³³ the experience of 'being there' is specific to its location on the salty edge of the Great Salt Lake. Lawrence Alloway writes:

Walking along the spiral lifts one out into the water into a breathless experience of horizontality. The lake stretches away, until finally there is a ripple of distant mountains and close around one the shore crumbles down into the water, echoing the mountains ... The landscape is openly geologic, evoking past time with placid insistence.³⁴

For Ann Landi, it is especially the sound of water at *Spiral Jetty* that intrigues her:

Part of what makes the experience so memorable is the 'heavy' quality of the Great Salt Lake, whose water has so high a salt concentration that it supports only brine shrimp and algae. There are no birds or fish. All you hear is the lapping of the water when the jetty is partially submerged, and it doesn't sound like water. It almost sounds like molten lead, a slightly thudding sound. The place has an unearthly magic.³⁵

³¹ Tufnell, 2006, pp.43 and 44.

³² Smithson, Robert. 'The Spiral Jetty', in Gyorgy Kepes (ed.). *Arts of the Environment*. New York: G. Braziller, 1972, pp.222–232. Reprinted in Flam, J. (ed.). *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp.143–153.

³³ Tacita Dean comments: 'This sound work documents my journey to try and find Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) following faxed directions I received from Utah Arts Council. I went with someone who had no idea what he was looking for. I never intended making a work from this trip but it was a combination of the extraordinary quality of Rozel Point and the Great Salt Lake, and the fact that I can never be sure that I found the risen or submerged jetty that inspired me to partially construct the documentation of this journey.' [Online] www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/tacitadean/spiral.htm. [24.02.09].

³⁴ Alloway, Lawrence. 'Robert Smithson's Development', in Alan Sonfist, (ed.). *Art in the Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983, pp.138–139.

³⁵ Landi, A. 'Moving Mountains, Walking on Water', in *Art News*, June 2004, p.85.

At *Double Negative* the visitor is confronted by quite a different kind of desert landscape – one that, as Charles Darwent puts it, ‘looks like Egypt after the Seven Plagues.’³⁶ Germano Celant describes the experience of entering the work:

As one begins to descend, the spatial vertigo shifts one’s perception of the self. One is continually displaced and replaced by the immensity of a void. *Double Negative* is an internalised desert, or a desert folded over onto itself. Its presence is absence. It gives form to nothingness without adding anything. Having arrived at the bottom of the descent, one feels oneself immersed in a plain that comes to a sheer end in the valley. On the other side, letting one’s gaze pass over the void that separates the two sides of the mesa, thus including the absence in the work as well, one single intervention reveals a spectacular cut that reflects yet another conquest of emptiness.³⁷

In contrast to the intense aridity of the mesa into which *Double Negative* is cut, or the extreme sterility of the lake into/out of which *Spiral Jetty* spirals, *The Lightning Field* is located in a vast landscape of semi-arid scrubland. On the final approach to the cabin, as the first poles came into view, I was forcefully struck by the ludicrous inadequacy of the official photographs which had so far been my only visual exposure to the work, and which give very little sense of how immense and untamed this environment is. As already discussed, De Maria was fully aware of the ‘gap’ that opens up between the experience of the photographs and the experience of the ‘site’ itself. I also quickly observed that – unlike *Spiral Jetty* or *Double Negative*, both of which are often represented by aerial photographs – an aerial view would be utterly useless here; indeed, De Maria remarks on this in his 1980 essay: ‘Because the sky-ground relationship is central to the work, viewing *The Lightning Field* from the air is of no value.’³⁸ Moreover, no photograph – aerial or otherwise – could convey the visual detail of mud, rabbits, ants, flowers, distant mountains, cabin, and cloud formations. Equally importantly, no photograph can show *The Lightning Field*’s sounds: the moan of the

³⁶ Darwent, Charles. ‘Land Art’, in *Art Review*, No 15, October 2007, pp.122–133.

³⁷ Celant, Germano. *Michael Heizer*. Milan: Fondazione Prada, 1996, pp.xxviii–xxix.

³⁸ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

wind, the twitter of passing finches, the alarm call of prairie dogs (often heard, but never seen – at least, not by me). The overwhelming tendency to explore the monumental spatial aspects of this work has resulted in a complete absence of any exploration of those attributes of the work that are concerned with the small details of site: yet, as we saw in Chapter Three, De Maria was clearly interested in small features – for instance in the engraved *High Energy Bars*, in the faint lines and words of his ‘invisible drawings’, and in precisely engineered works such as *Instrument for La Monte Young*. Many of the small details of site at *The Lightning Field* – frogspawn, beetle, seed head, potsherd – are only noticeable if one physically gets down to the level of the ground, and adopts a microscopic frame of viewing, rather than an expansive one. I return to this in Chapter Nine.

Out of this complex land- and soundscape rise the 400 stainless-steel poles. Yet ‘the work’ is no more ‘in the poles’ than it is ‘in the ants’ or ‘in the wind’, leading one to question, again, where the ontological boundaries of the work are to be found: where now is the ‘art object’? For instance, De Maria himself saw no clear demarcation between the land and the sky at the work: indeed, the poles do the job of breaking through any such strict border – they disappear in certain lights, and one might wonder: do they belong to the land or to the sky? Terrestrial and celestial, tangible and intangible, vertical and horizontal, empty and populated, natural and artificial, this is a place in which the usual terms ‘art’, ‘nature’, ‘geography’, ‘sight’, and ‘sound’ seem to have lost all distinction. Moreover, like so many of De Maria’s works (for example, *Pyramid Chair*, *Ball Drop*, and especially *Bed of Spikes*), the experience of ‘being there’ at *The Lightning Field* is an anxious one. This is based on many very real uncertainties. Is that a rattle snake? What should I do if I encounter a cougar, or even perhaps a bear? Why do I feel ‘lost’ even though I can see for miles in each direction

(or, rather, miles in one direction and kilometres in the other)? The main site of anxiety, however, is located in the sky, for visitors are constantly alert to the atmospheric conditions, especially the cloud formations, and whether the massive clouds on the horizon are coming their way. As Ben Tufnell remarks, 'the idea of lightning' becomes a major part of one's experience of this 'place'.³⁹ Lightning and the 'idea of lightning' deserve a chapter of their own: Chapter Nine.

Among the texts that Walter De Maria published in the *Fluxus Anthology* are two that clearly demonstrate that as early as 1960 (the year in which they were written) the complexities of site, and how it could be fully experienced by the 'audience', were already an emergent concern in his art practice. These are 'On the importance of natural disasters' and 'Art Yard'. In 'On the importance of natural disasters' (*Appendix 3*) De Maria expresses his interest in extremely large-scale, and dramatic, natural locations as sites for what can only be described as extreme experience; indeed, he laments the fact that an artwork can never match the dramatic locations and actions of nature. Although lightning does not feature in this text, *The Lightning Field* comes close to providing the visitor with just such an experience of 'natural disaster' – an experience for which one has to 'be there' rather than looking at a photograph of lightning. In 'Art Yard', meanwhile (*Appendix 2*), De Maria explores the combination of work and action with site and spectacle (both visual *and* acoustic), resulting in a complex and engaged form of participation in which the location – the yard – is not merely incidental but a key component of the work. This work alludes to De Maria's ongoing interest in pushing the experiential potential of art, within which the play between art and its context is a fundamental one. It also reflects some of the experiments associated with the New York 'Happenings', which were taking place concurrently, as well as those by others who,

³⁹ Tufnell, 2006, p.58.

like De Maria, were involved with Fluxus. Choreographers, theatrical performers, poets, and composers (among them John Cage, La Monte Young, Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono, Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, and Merce Cunningham) regarded the spatial context of their work – and the manner in which the audience engages with it – as an increasingly important concern. To give just one brief example from the world of dance, Yvonne Rainer, in discussing her 1961 work *The Bells*, said that dance was at a disadvantage in relation to sculpture in that the spectator could spend as much time as he or she required to examine a sculpture, walk around it, and so forth; but a dance movement – because it happened in time – vanished as soon as it was executed.⁴⁰ In order to overcome this, Rainer repeated the seven movements of the dance, in varied sequence, direction, and parts of the room, over seven minutes, in a sense allowing the spectator to ‘walk around it’.⁴¹ In so doing, the performance was ‘given place’. It is, however, particularly the shared spatial concerns of *The Lightning Field* and music that I now want to address.

3. Sound

I have already given some instances of how *The Lightning Field* is experienced aurally as much as it is experienced visually. Yet, clearly, the work’s sounds cannot be conveyed through any photograph, map, or text, but need to be experienced either at first hand, or, at the very least, through a recording. De Maria had already made recordings of natural sounds (crickets and waves) and combined them with the sound of drums (in *Cricket Music*, 1964, and *Ocean Music*, 1968). In both these works, he draws on the inspiration of those two most expansive, dangerous, and seemingly desolate of environments – desert and ocean – which I identified earlier in this chapter as a major influence in shaping his ‘sense of space’. For the listener, both works evoke a powerful impression of spaciousness even though this is produced entirely through the recording

⁴⁰ Licht, Alan. *Sound Art. Beyond Music, Between Categories*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007, pp.119–120.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

of sounds that have been detached from any original physical 'site'. For example, *Cricket Music* is reminiscent of hot, open desert space (perhaps any desert space), while the ebb and flow of the waves in *Ocean Music* creates a sense of both a place and a time that seem to go on forever, of which the listener has merely caught a fragment. Similarly, the soundscape of *The Lightning Field* continues to reverberate – in its New Mexican location and in memory – even after visitors have returned home. A very similar sense of physical and temporal spaciousness can be found in some of La Monte Young's work: for example, *Dream House* – designed to exist over a period of weeks, months, or even years – articulates Young's interest in what he describes as an 'open-ended-in-time' quality.⁴² A member of the audience, after leaving the performance, is aware of its continuing existence, even in his or her absence.

The sounds of *The Lightning Field* are as site-specific as the ants or the poles that the visitor encounters, and to hear them somewhere else would constitute a different experience. Bela Belazs writes that 'Every sound has a space-bound character of its own. The same sound sounds different in a small room, in a cellar, in a large, empty hall, in a street, in a forest, or on the sea.'⁴³ Explorations of the site of sound are, of course, not new.⁴⁴ Indeed, the interactions of sound and site were of major concern for the architects of Gothic cathedrals, as Bill Viola observes:

When one enters a Gothic sanctuary, it is immediately noticeable that sound commands the space. This is not just a simple echo effect at work,

⁴² Young, La Monte: cited in William Duckworth, *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995, p.215.

⁴³ Belazs, Bela, 'Theory of the Film: Sound', in Elisabeth Weis and John Benton (eds). *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p.124.

⁴⁴ Alan Licht gives some examples. In the 17th century, Orazio Benevoli composed a work for the inauguration of Salzburg Cathedral, for which 53 instruments and 12 choirs were distributed throughout the interior of the cathedral in order to emphasise its acoustic effects. In the 19th century in one section of Mahler's third Symphony, the brass play offstage. In the 19th and early 20th centuries George Ives and Henry Brant composed pieces for multiple bands or orchestras situated in different areas of an outdoor space. Brant went on to compose over 100 pieces in which spatial context was paramount. See Alan Licht, 2007, pp.42–43.

but rather sounds, no matter how near, far, or loud, appear to be originating at the same distant place ... Chartres and other edifices like it have been described as 'music frozen in stone'.⁴⁵

In *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories*, Alan Licht asserts that by the 20th century the landscape of sound grew to be of major significance for many composers.⁴⁶ And in *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage*, Simon Shaw-Miller discusses the work of several twentieth-century composers who have been concerned with the spatial element of their music, among them John Cage and La Monte Young.⁴⁷ Cage and Young are especially pertinent to my discussion of the site of sound at *The Lightning Field*, and in what follows I explore a few examples of their work.

John Cage was particularly instrumental in exploring the relationship between site and sound. In the 1930s he put on a performance in a swimming pool for the UCLA swimming team's annual water ballet. In so doing, he took musicians, instruments, and, of course, listeners outside of the conventional, 'safe' confines of the concert hall into a physical space that could no longer be seen as merely incidental to the performance but was, instead, a major component of experience. Cage's move out of the concert hall anticipated the shift by 'Land Artists', including De Maria, out of the usual gallery spaces and into the vastly different physical arena of the Midwest deserts. In summer 1952, while at Black Mountain College, Cage organised what he called a 'concerted action', combining music, theatre, and visual art, in the main dining hall of the college; here 'site' became the principal point of contact for these various practices. Calvin Tomkins describes this 'spectacle':

⁴⁵ Bill Viola, cited in Licht, 2007, p.41.

⁴⁶ Licht, Alan. *Sound Art. Beyond Music, Between Categories*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007.

⁴⁷ Shaw-Miller, Simon. *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, principally pp.212–234.

There was a score of sorts, arrived at by chance methods, but the performers also had considerable freedom of action during the forty-five minutes that the event lasted. Their actions took place simultaneously, and included Cage reading one of his lectures from the upper rungs of a stepladder; Merce Cunningham dancing, both around and amid the audience, which was seated around four sides of a hollow square so that it faced itself; David Tudor playing the piano; Mary Caroline Richards and Charles Olsen reading their poems, in turn, from another stepladder; Robert Rauschenberg playing scratchy records on an ancient wind-up phonograph with a horn loudspeaker; and two other people projecting movies and still pictures on the walls around the room. Rauschenberg's white paintings were hung from the rafters above the audience.⁴⁸

In his best-known work, *4'33"*, Cage creates a complex interaction between site, sound, audience, and performance. Both in its public performances and its score, the spatial elements of this work are given an unexpected prominence: I shall, however, wait until Chapter Nine to explore this work in more detail. For Cage – as for De Maria – it was particularly the sounds and silences of the natural environment that he found most conducive. Rather than sit in a concert hall, Cage much preferred to take a walk in the woods – especially looking for mushrooms, for he was an extremely knowledgeable mycologist. Cage himself writes:

I have spent many pleasant hours in the woods conducting performances of my silent piece [*4'33"*], transcriptions, that is, for an audience of myself, since they were much longer than the popular length which I have had published. At one performance, I passed the first movement by attempting the identification of a mushroom which remained successfully unidentified. The second movement was extremely dramatic, beginning with the sounds of a buck and a doe leaping up to within ten feet of my rocky podium. The expressivity of this movement was not only dramatic but unusually sad from my point of view, for the animals were frightened simply because I was a human being. However, they left hesitatingly and fittingly within the structure of the work. The third movement was a return to the theme of the first, but with all those profound, so-well-known alterations of world feeling associated by German tradition with the A-B-A.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The 'show' caused a huge sensation and the success of this event led Cage to feel that it was theatre, rather than music on its own, that came closest to being synonymous with life. 'Theatre takes place all the time wherever one is ... and art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case.' Calvin Tomkins. *The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, pp.117–118.

⁴⁹ Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p.276.

For La Monte Young – as for De Maria and Cage – sounds, as well as objects and actions, have a dynamic dialogue with site. Indeed, Young even comments on the isolated geographical location of his childhood home in terms that echo not only De Maria's own youthful – and continued – passion for extended time and space, but also his desire to make art that deploys just such an extended spatiotemporal framework for experience. Indeed, Young's description of looking out of his log-cabin home is remarkably reminiscent of the view from *The Lightning Field's* own log cabin. Young comments:

There were 149 people in the town where I was born. And there was this sense of space and time; being able to sit out there on the porch and look out across that incredible distance and see the clouds and the hills way far off there ... so the log cabin had a very special effect on the most important years of my life – this very simple, spacious, open-ended-in-time type of setting.⁵⁰

In one of his Fluxus scores, *Composition 1960 #5*, Young draws attention to the space of performance through the unpredictable, silent flight of butterflies:

Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area.

When the composition is over, be sure to allow the butterfly to fly away outside.

The composition may be any length but if an unlimited amount of time is available, the doors and windows may be opened before the butterfly is turned loose and the composition may be considered finished when the butterfly flies away.⁵¹

This piece focuses on the muddling of sight and sound within a specific location: indeed, Young commented to his colleague Tony Conrad, 'Isn't it wonderful if someone

⁵⁰ Duckworth, William. *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995, pp.214–215.

⁵¹ MacLow, Jackson and Young, La Monte. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Bronx, New York: La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, 1963.

listens to something he is ordinarily supposed to look at?'⁵² For Simon Shaw-Miller, the silent flight of the butterfly – persistent symbol of beauty – acts as a visual metaphor for the absent melody, or inaudible sound, leading one to question whether audibility is a prerequisite of music⁵³ Shaw-Miller also comments:

This work raises problems of boundaries not just between sound and music, or sight and sound, but also between culture and nature.⁵⁴

If I were a member of the audience at a performance of this work, I could imagine that the size of the butterflies in relation to the space into which they are released – coupled with the sounds, and possibly sights, coming through the open doors and windows – would create an astonishing amalgam of space with time, sound with vision, nature with culture. The work has, however, never been performed:⁵⁵ perhaps it never needs to be, since it can exist perfectly well in the space of one's imagination.

Young continued to investigate the spatial context of his work, and in 1964 he formed the Theater of Eternal Music⁵⁶ in order to realise the project called the 'Dream House', a light-and-sound installation where musicians would live and create music 24 hours a day. Since then, there has been a series of Dream Houses, combining Young's sine waves (of which more in Chapter Nine) with Marian Zazeela's light sculptures to create deeply sensual effects, utilising aspects of the visitor's perception to create an extraordinarily refined sensory overload, within which the listener's position and

⁵² Cited in Edward Strickland. *Minimalism: Origins*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p.140. Original source not known.

⁵³ Shaw-Miller, 2002, p.226.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ By 1964, the group included Marian Zazeela (voice), Tony Conrad (a mathematician), John Cale (strings), and sometimes Terry Riley (voice). The first Dream House was at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Munich in 1969, and consisted of Young and Zazeela performing *Map of 49's Dream*: two voices, with sine wave drones and a light environment. Friedrich's patronage was very important to Young, just as it was for De Maria. Another version of the Dream House was installed at 6 Harrison Street, and supported by Dia (founded by Friedrich) until 1985 – Dia had intended to set up a permanent Dream House – but it was closed due to funding problems.

movement in space will alter the perception of sound. For Young, the architectural space of his performances was as important as its sounds and sights.⁵⁷ He comments: 'I thought that if you had a *piece* that could be continuous, it would be nice to have a *place* where the piece could be performed at a greater frequency.'⁵⁸

Young's 'Dream House' establishes a whole world for experience – a kind of theatrical space in which the audience becomes immersed. At *The Lightning Field*, the audience is similarly immersed in a theatrical or filmic space, and within the literature on 'Land Art' this aspect of the work has occasionally been recognised. For example, Amy Dempsey comments on the manner in which the physical setting of the work heightens its theatrical effect, creating 'an arena or amphitheatre-like space',⁵⁹ while Gilles Tiberghien asserts that 'scenographic concerns' must have influenced De Maria when he chose the site for *The Lightning Field*, for the work is 'surrounded by plateaus that confined his work as if it were the theater set of a future apocalypse.'⁶⁰ Scenographic concerns certainly preoccupied De Maria in his two films, *Hard Core* (1969) and *Two Lines Three Circles on the Desert* (1969), both of which were clearly influenced by spaghetti westerns. However, he also explored a scenographic quality of site in his series of three 'Earth Rooms', each of which could only be viewed from one position, from which only part of the 'earth room' was visible, thereby continually frustrating the viewer in his or her desire to see the site of the work as a whole. Amy Dempsey writes of the *New York Earth Room* (1977): 'You do not experience the work by walking through it; instead you stand staring at it like a painting, as there is a glass barrier that

⁵⁷ Duckworth, 1995, p.253.

⁵⁸ Young and Zazeela even live their lives on an extended sleeping-waking schedule, with 'days' 27 hours long. Since 1966 they have had a sound-producing installation in their house in New York. The system is audible 24 hours a day, and sometimes lasts for weeks or even months. See Wim Mertens (trans. J. Hautekiet). *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. (First published in Belgium in 1980.) London: Kahn & Averill, 1983, pp.30–31.

⁵⁹ Dempsey, Amy. *Destination Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2006, p.107.

⁶⁰ Tiberghien, Gilles. *Land Art*. London: Art Data, 1993, p.50.

holds the earth in and keeps the viewer out.’⁶¹ Upon arrival at *The Lightning Field*, however, in sharp contrast to this deliberately frustrated kind of viewing of site, visitors have a completely uninterrupted prospect over the whole field of poles, as well as the distant mountains beyond and the sky above. Not surprisingly, they might well think that they have been given the ideal viewpoint – the wooden cabin – from which to watch the drama of ‘the work’ unfold in front of them. In what remains of this chapter I investigate the role of this little building in the visitor’s experience of ‘site’.

4. Cabin

Located 200 yards outside the northern edge of the field and centred between the 10th and 11th rows from the east, the cabin clearly serves a practical purpose, not only as a place to eat and sleep (since visitors have to stay overnight), but also as a vital shelter from a thunderstorm, should one occur. This practical role has been moderately well documented in the extant literature on *The Lightning Field*. However, with the brief exceptions of Amy Dempsey and Jane McFadden, who note that the cabin is the location for developing some kind of interaction with the other people in the group (most of whom will be strangers),⁶² the part played by the cabin in extending the visitor’s experience of the spatial context of the work has been entirely ignored. There are several reasons why I am not surprised by this neglect. Firstly, the protective, domestic interior of the cabin does not sit at all comfortably with the image of American ‘Land Art’ as an art practice engaged in by rugged men making rugged gestures in rugged exteriors. Secondly, De Maria himself merely states in his 1980 essay that the cabin ‘has been restored to accommodate visitors’ needs’ and that it ‘serves as a shelter during extreme weather conditions or storms.’⁶³ Thirdly, the six official photographs reinforce the viewer’s impression that the cabin is of no importance beyond the

⁶¹ Dempsey, 2006, p.122.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.107; and McFadden, 2004, pp.133–134.

⁶³ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

practical. The cabin only appears in one of the photographs (*Figure 2*), where it seems to be entirely incidental to the 'real business' of the poles, the desert, and the sky: almost invisible at the far left of the image, it is merely the tiniest of brown smudges, entirely overwhelmed by the land and sky. Photographs showing the cabin are rarely reproduced in any of the principal texts on 'Land Art' (the one exception being Gilles Tiberghien's *Land Art*).⁶⁴ No photographs show a close-up view of the cabin, or its interior; indeed, there is no evidence that any were ever taken by John Cliett, the commissioned photographer. Consequently, those who never make the journey to the site in New Mexico can never know either what the cabin looks like – close up or inside – or what kind of role it might play beyond the purely practical.

Implicit in critiques of *The Lightning Field*, in the reading of De Maria's 1980 essay, and in the viewing of the photographs, is the assumption that the cabin is simply not part of 'the work': that it is firmly outside of the frame. If this is indeed so, then perhaps, upon arrival at the site, we might imagine drawing a line on the ground somewhere between the cabin and the first row of poles, in order to establish that everything beyond the line is part of 'the work' and everything before the line is not. However, we would instantly recognise the absurdity of attempting to create such a boundary, since the possibility of knowing what is internal and what is external to 'the work' has already been significantly disrupted, both spatially and temporally, by the photographs, the journey, and the inclusion of sound, all of which extend the visitor's experience beyond its usual borders. Likewise, what happens in and from the cabin has a dynamic part to play in this experience: rather than being ignored, the cabin quite literally 'takes its place' in this exploration of the complexities of *The Lightning Field*.

⁶⁴ Tiberghien, 1993, p.220.

The cabin was not built for the artwork but is a pre-existing homestead, dating from the early part of the 20th century, that has been renovated, extended, and refurbished, largely with materials – windows, mouldings, doors, walls, and base boards – gleaned from other abandoned log cabins in the area, of which there is now no sign. Upon arrival at the cabin, visitors are shown where everything is, and how things work, and what to do in the event of an emergency; and then the caretaker drives off in a cloud of dust, and they are stranded, with no possibility of escape. It quickly becomes apparent that the interior of the cabin is extremely plain; there are no pictures on the walls, no carpets or rugs on the floors, no television, radio, computer, telephone (except one – strictly for emergencies – hidden away in a dark recess), no curtains at the windows, no bookshelves or books. The overwhelming impression is of functional simplicity contained within a structure of wood upon wood upon wood: indeed, the insistent woodenness of the cabin signals ‘refuge’ on account of its evident non-conductivity. Austerity continues outside, where there is a simple veranda with a bench and a chair to sit on, overlooking the field of poles. This lack of adornment establishes the cabin as a place in which to shed the trappings of everyday 21st-century existence, and its austerity also provides visitors with a place in which to adopt a suitable frame of mind with which to contemplate whatever experience unfolds over the course of the next 24 hours. The necessity of spending the best part of 24 hours at the field of poles has frequently been acknowledged as a crucial element of the visitor’s experience of *The Lightning Field*, since it forces the visitor to take time – indeed, considerably more time than is spent with most works of art. Yet nowhere has the role of the cabin in this extended timeframe been addressed, even though much of this time is spent in and around it, walking from or to it, looking out of its windows and doors, and sitting on its veranda. Most significantly, this extension of duration is coupled with a ritual ‘slowing down’, which simply does not happen at other works of ‘Land Art’ such as *Spiral Jetty*

or *Double Negative*, where, upon arrival, the visitor can, and does, invariably ‘walk straight in’.

Such ‘slowing down’ does, however, occur in some works by Steve Reich. In 1967, Reich wrote the score for a work entitled *Slow Motion Sound*, which read: ‘Very gradually slow down a recorded sound to many times its original length without changing its frequency or spectrum at all.’ This work was influenced by having seen Michael Snow’s film *Wavelength*⁶⁵ – a film which also impressed De Maria⁶⁶ – as well as by the augmentation techniques found in the organum of the 12th-century French composer Perotin.⁶⁷ It was also an extension of the technique of delaying the tape spool that Reich had already used for *It’s Gonna Rain* (1965), a major early work which I discuss further in the next chapter. For *Slow Motion Sound*, Reich planned to make a tape loop, probably of speech, and gradually slow it down to enormous length so that its harmonic and timbral qualities could be given a more detailed appreciation. The work was never realised, but the following year (1968) Reich wrote a text called ‘Music as a Gradual Process’⁶⁸ which iterates the same desire, and which in fact remains the core exposition of his aesthetic ideals as a young composer. Here he argues that, in order to facilitate closely detailed listening, a musical process must happen extremely gradually. He writes:

Performing and listening to a gradual musical process resembles:
pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to
rest:
turning over an hour glass and watching the sand slowly run through to
the bottom;

⁶⁵ Reich, Steve. ‘Wavelength by Michael Snow’. 1968. First published in Jim Sheddon (ed.). *Presence and Absence – Films of Michael Snow*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1995. Reprinted in Steve Reich. *Writings on Music 1965–2000* (edited with an introduction by Paul Hillier). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.36–37.

⁶⁶ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972, Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm [07.10.2005].

⁶⁷ Potter, Keith. *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.200.

⁶⁸ Reich, Steve. ‘Music as a Gradual Process.’ Reprinted in Reich, 2002, pp.34–36.

placing your feet in the sand by the ocean's edge and watching, feeling, and listening to the waves gradually bury them.⁶⁹

The idea of 'pulling a swing back, releasing it, and observing it come to rest' found expression in a work made the same year, called *Pendulum Music* (Figure 16), which, as we saw in Chapter Four, was published in Issue No. 8 of *Aspen* (1970/71). In this work, a number of suspended microphones are released at the same time, and then swing freely, over or in front of loud speakers, until they gradually come to rest. As the microphones swing progressively more slowly, so the feedback pulses become correspondingly longer, until the swinging stops completely and continuous feedback is produced, signalling the end of the piece. The process, once set in motion, is set to run its own course, and, as Michael Nyman asserts, this allows Reich to 'step aside from his material so that the continuity is not decided at each stage by his own subjective decisions.'⁷⁰ Reich comments that such musical processes 'can give one a direct contact with the impersonal and also a kind of complete control, and one doesn't always think of the impersonal and complete control as going together.'⁷¹ This echoes De Maria's own desire to be both present and absent at the same time, as we saw in Chapter Four.

Two years later, in 1970, at exactly the same time as De Maria started to search for a suitable location for *The Lightning Field*, Reich composed a work called *Four Organs*. Here, too, Reich achieves a sense of 'slowing-down'. He saw the work as a pivotal one in his career because 'to put it crudely, I'd been working with short notes and I started working with long notes':⁷² an echo of De Maria's desire for an extended timeframe at *The Lightning Field*. Written for four organs and two pairs of maracas, this deeply

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁷⁰ Nyman, Michael. *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.152. (First published in New York, 1974.)

⁷¹ Reich, Steve. 'Music as a Gradual Process.' Reprinted in Reich, 2002, p.35.

⁷² Duckworth, 1995, p.302.

unsettling, even abrasive, work – it caused a furore at its premier⁷³ – establishes a seemingly endless sense of expectation that is continually frustrated, never resolved: indeed, Michael Nyman even describes it as ‘the big prick tease’.⁷⁴ In the work, a single chord – a dominant 11th – is gradually stretched out, while the maracas player lays down a steady ‘time grid’ of even quavers throughout – ‘a regular reminder of passing time’⁷⁵ – enabling the four organists to synchronise while counting beats. The process of stretching the chord is achieved by the addition of beats, so that the chord gets progressively longer, giving the impression of slowing down.⁷⁶ In so doing, what lasted a single beat in an eleven-beat bar (three + eight) at the beginning of the piece has, by the end, evolved into a chord which is held for an enormous 265 beats.⁷⁷ The structural process (linear as opposed to cyclical, making it unique among Reich’s works from this period) is completely transparent; nothing is hidden, and this quality of transparency is also evident at *The Lightning Field*, where everything is visible (the only exception being the poles’ foundations). Such transparency does not, however, mean that either *Four Organs* or *The Lightning Field* lacks mystery. Reich himself comments on his music:

⁷³ Michael Tilson Thomas writes of the performance at New York’s Carnegie Hall, in which he was involved in playing the piece: ‘In all my years as a performer, I have never seen such a reaction from an audience. After a few minutes into Steve’s piece a restlessness began to sweep through the crowd: rustlings of programs, overly loud coughs, compulsive seat shifting, gradually mixed with groans and hostile exclamations crescendoing into a true cacophony. There were at least three attempts to stop the performance by shouting it down. One woman walked down the aisle and repeatedly banged her head on the front of the stage wailing, “Stop, stop, I confess.” The audience made so much noise that, in spite of the fact that the music was amplified, we were unable to hear one another’s playing. I had to mouth numbers and shout our cues so that we could stay together. Just after the piece came to a close, there was a moment of silence followed by a veritable avalanche of boos. It was deafening. We stood up and took a bow smiling as best we could and walked off the stage. Steve was ashen, looking as lost and unhappy as a lost soul from Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*. I, on the contrary, was exhilarated. I turned to him and said, “Steve, this is fantastic. It’s the kind of thing you read about in history books, like the premier of *Rite of Spring*. Whatever some members of the audience think about your piece, you can bet by tomorrow everyone in the United States will have heard about you and your work and will be hugely intrigued to hear it for themselves.’ Michael Tilson Thomas, in the Sleeve Notes for *Steve Reich: Works 1965–1995*, pp.21–21.

⁷⁴ The South Bank Show: *Steve Reich*. ITV1: 10 December 2006.

⁷⁵ Nyman, 1999, p.157.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ For a detailed description of *Four Organs*, see Potter, 2000, pp.200–203.

The use of hidden structural devices in music never appealed to me. Even when all the cards are on the table and everyone hears what is gradually happening in a musical process, there are still enough mysteries to satisfy all. These mysteries are the impersonal, unintended, psychoacoustic by-products of the intended process. These might include submelodies heard within repeated melodic patterns, stereophonic effects due to listener location, slight irregularities in performance, harmonics, difference tones, and so on.⁷⁸

Likewise at *The Lightning Field*, the enforced slowing down provided by the time spent at the cabin – within a structure that is totally transparent – gives the visitor the opportunity to experience the equivalent of *Four Organs*' 'submelodies' and 'slight irregularities'. Moreover, each visitor will experience different submelodies and irregularities, and consequently will have a very personal encounter with the slowing down of time provided within the spatial context of the cabin. The need to slow down continues as we walk among *The Lightning Field*'s poles, and I consider this in the next chapter. 'Slowing down' is also currently being taken to extremes through an extraordinary work inspired by John Cage. Titled *Organ²/ASLSP* (As SLOW as Possible), the work is adapted from Cage's 1985 work *ASLSP* for solo piano. The performance began in the church of St Burchardi in Halberstadt, Germany, on 5 September 2001 (which would have been Cage's 89th birthday), and is being played on the church's organ. It will continue for a monumental 639 years, and is scheduled to end in the year 2640.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Reich, Steve. 'Music as a Gradual Process.' Reprinted in Reich, 2002, p.35.

⁷⁹ The first modern organ was built here in 1361 (subtract 1361 from the millennial year 2000, and the result is 639). In a 1982 interview, Cage commented that he wanted to make his music so that it doesn't force the performers of it into a particular groove, but 'gives them some space in which they can breathe and do their own work with a degree of originality. I like to make suggestions, and then see what happens, rather than setting down laws and forcing people to follow them.' Several years after Cage's death, Michael Betzle and a group of musicologists and philosophers discussed the possibility of a performance of *ASLSP* that would truly be in the spirit of Cage, and they decided that the duration of the work would be the lifetime of an organ, 639 years, 'for as long as the organ can sound, and make sounds, or even stand upright', according to Hans-Ola Ericsson. The first three notes were played on 5 February 2003. However, the performance actually began on 5 September 2001, with nearly 1½ years of silence. So far, five notes have been played, the most recent being on 5 February 2009. [Online] www.john-cage.halberstadt.de/new/index.php?seite=dasprojekt&l=e [24.03.2009].

It would be tempting to think of the cabin as a closed interior space that exists in sharp contrast to the expansive exterior that surrounds it. However, as we have already gone some way towards repositioning 'the work' in terms of breaking down clear distinctions between what is internal to it, and what external, it is also necessary to reconsider what is meant by 'internal' and 'external' with regard to the cabin and what lies beyond it. Indeed, just as Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, describes the 'inside/outside' dialectic of contemporary philosophy as a 'geometric cancerization',⁸⁰ so too does the dialectic division of inside space and outside space need to be dismantled when we think about the cabin. The interior is not a 'closed' space, but one from which – while slowing down – we are constantly looking out through doors and windows that frame the view beyond as if it might be a painting. Likewise, the veranda that overlooks the field of poles operates as a liminal zone, further destroying any clear demarcation between inside and outside. The 'looking out' – whether through windows, or doors, or from the veranda – is quite different to the blocked view of the *Earth Rooms*, for now everything is visible. However, even though everything can be seen, the scene upon which we look is not one we readily recognise, either as a landscape or, for that matter, as a landscape painting. There are no classical *repoussoirs* of trees, rocks, or lofty towers; no meandering line of path or river to take the eye from the foreground through the middle distance to the background; no alternating planes of light and dark. Even the poles, at the time of arrival, are almost invisible in the flat light of mid-afternoon. Consequently, although the cabin provides a vitally important site for slowing down, it does *not* provide the visitor with the expected privileged viewpoint from which to survey 'the work'. Not only is the view totally unfamiliar – a seemingly barren sea of mud, poles, and scrub – but the visitor understands that 'seeing' is simply not enough:

⁸⁰ Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p.213.

the scopic is dethroned. Instead, he or she must step into the prospect. This forms the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Walking, repetition, and the 'grid'

1. Walking

Unlike *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), *The Lightning Field*'s array of metal is not viewed from a static position behind a barrier. Neither is it merely walked *around*, as with *4-6-8 Series* (1966) or *Bed of Spikes* (1968–69). Instead, it is physically entered and explored, on foot, over the extended timeframe of a visit to the work. The ambulatory encounters undertaken at *The Lightning Field* are, however, by no means straightforward, since no guidelines are provided concerning direction, length, speed, and so on, and experiential evidence points to the sheer diversity of possible ways to 'take a walk' at *The Lightning Field*, together with a myriad emotional responses. Such diversity is all the more intriguing, given that all these walks take place within and around what is usually regarded, within conventional critical discourses, as Minimalism's most immutable and impersonal compositional schema – the grid. Such experiential evidence has important repercussions for understanding the limits of such discourses with regard not only to *The Lightning Field* but to De Maria's oeuvre as a whole, in which repetition of one kind or another – of which the grid is just one example – has been a major preoccupation.

In the last chapter of *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977)¹, titled 'The Double Negative: a new syntax for sculpture', Rosalind Krauss points to the necessity of physically entering, on foot, large-scale, outdoor sculptural works, citing Michael

¹ Krauss, Rosalind. *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.

Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969) and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) as important examples. Of *Double Negative* she writes:

Because of its enormous size, and its location, the only means of experiencing this work is to be in it – to inhabit it the way we think of ourselves as inhabiting the space of our bodies.²

And of *Spiral Jetty* she writes that one 'can only see the work by moving along it in narrowing arcs toward its terminus.'³ Walking at *The Lightning Field* is, however, quite unlike that at *Spiral Jetty* where the walk is clearly mapped through the spiral arc, or at *Double Negative* where the visitor enters one cut and then the other, but clearly cannot enter the void at the centre. In contrast, at *The Lightning Field*, there is no 'path' to follow, and this gives rise to a powerful sense of unease about *how* and *where* – and even *why* – one should walk. In fact, this unease contrasts not only with the walks undertaken at *Spiral Jetty* and *Double Negative* but also with many of the largely urban 'wanderings' of the Dadaists or the Lettrist International earlier in the century, with Michel De Certeau's theory of walking in the 1970s and 1980s,⁴ or with Guy Debord's theory of the *dérive* from the 1950s. For example, in the latter, which formed part of a larger exploration of psychogeography,⁵

one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and actions, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.⁶

² *Ibid.*, p.280.

³ *Ibid.*, p.281.

⁴ Michel De Certeau devotes a chapter of his *Practice of Everyday Life* to urban walking. For Certeau, walkers are 'practitioners of the city', and the city is made to be walked. A city is a language, and walking is the act of speaking that language, of selecting from its possibilities. Just as language limits what can be said, so architecture limits where one can walk, but the walker invents other ways to go, 'since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements.' Michel De Certeau. *Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, pp.93 and 100.

⁵ Psychogeography was originally developed by the Lettrist International, and it was defined in 1955 by Guy Debord as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.' Guy Debord. 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

Such 'wanderings' were often regarded as acts of subversion of conventional rules and regulations about where one should walk and how one should behave while doing so.⁷ At *The Lightning Field*, however, there are, quite simply, no rules to be subverted, even though its grid plan mimics that of the archetypal American city. Apart from De Maria's brief suggestion in his 1980 essay that visitors walk around the perimeter – 'a simple walk around the perimeter takes approximately two hours'⁸ – no other guidelines are provided. Moreover, there are no literal pathways through or around the grid of poles, either to follow or, for that matter, to ignore. This is far removed from John Beardsley's assertion that De Maria and the Dia Art Foundation wish to control all elements of a visit to *The Lightning Field*, since not only is the visitor actively engaged, but he or she also continually has to make decisions about direction, distance, speed, duration, and so on. Wim Beeren describes the necessity, and uncertainty, of his own walk:

I started walking and tried to get some idea of size and distance. I paced a square bordered by poles and counted my steps; I walked diagonally between poles on opposite corners, simultaneously watching my step on the desert ground, desert plains are tough and hard. The plantation of steel poles stretched out in straight lines. I decided to walk down one side (a kilometre) of the field and then cross it diagonally. Walking makes you sense the work in terms of distance, among other things. It is a visual work, but it occupies space, requiring physical effort to experience it ... You can't see it as an entity, you have to invent its structure by pacing it out.⁹

It seems that, upon arrival at *The Lightning Field*, visitors generally do one of two things: either they walk around the perimeter of the field of poles, or they walk right into it. Todd Gibson recognises the importance of both kinds of walk, for he remarks that 'until you actually walk the 3.2-mile perimeter of the work, and spend even more time wandering through its middle, you have no sense of the immensity of this

⁷ See Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London and New York: Verso, 2001) for an account of the cultural significance of walking: its evolution as a recreational pastime, its meditative and philosophical qualities, its sexual politics, and its future in an increasingly car-oriented world.

⁸ De Maria, Walter. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum* Vol 18 No 8, 1980, p.58.

⁹ Beeren, W. and Schoon, T. *Walter De Maria*. Exhibition Catalogue. Rotterdam: Museum Boymans – van Beuningen, 1984, p.32.

construction.’¹⁰ Walking the perimeter can be regarded as an attempt to acquire some sense of the physical dimensions of the entire grid of poles, its breadth and width being measured in terms of the time taken to complete a circuit on foot: significantly, here duration (‘about two hours’)¹¹ is a more useful measure of experience than distance. In addition, the walker of the perimeter also seems to be attempting to establish some sense of a boundary between what is ‘inside’ the grid of poles and what is ‘outside’, but this is not as straightforward as it might at first appear, and the experience of any such ‘edge’, or ‘frame’, is remarkably elusive. Indeed, on my first walk at *The Lightning Field*, through the poles from one side to the other, I expected to experience a ‘falling out’ of the grid once I got to the far side, but this simply did not happen. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the poles are far enough apart, and so slender, that they do not mimic any kind of wall or fence. Secondly, the ground beneath one’s feet, the sky overhead, and the view of the distant mountains are all exactly the same whether one is ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the grid. This inability to differentiate between that which is within the frame of the grid and that which is outside it also marks a continuation of the ongoing complexities involved in establishing the boundaries of the artwork at all. As we saw in the previous two chapters, neither spatial nor temporal borders can be delineated.

In comparison to walking the perimeter, wandering within the grid of poles is an even more unstructured experience, for there is no sense either of directionality or of climax. In the absence of these conventional markers of experience, one can feel disorientated, even ‘lost’, although the ‘whole view’ is always visible.¹² This feeling of being lost is heightened after dark, and a number of visitors have commented on taking night-time

¹⁰ Gibson, T. ‘A Pilgrimage to The Lightning Field’. [Online]
<http://fromthefloor.blogspot.com/2004/07/pilgrimage-to-lightning-field-part-1.html> [23.06.06]

¹¹ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

¹² For more on ‘getting lost’, see Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Edinburgh, New York and Melbourne: Canongate, 2006. First published by Viking Penguin, USA, in 2005.

walks. For example, Wim Beeren describes how moonlight on the poles transformed them into 'a fantastic electrified field,'¹³ while my own night-time walk, on a moonless night without a torch, gave rise to flights of imagination about alien spaceships and hungry cougars. Bodily engagement also seems significant. For instance, on my own visit, an hour before having to leave, I 'got lost' in a sea of unexpected flowers and lay down among them: a decidedly haptic experience with this particular geography.¹⁴

Robert Eaton describes how one visitor jogged slowly back and forth among the poles, weaving his way silently to the far edge, and touching each pole that he passed. Here both jogger and observer gain pleasure in the rhythm of the piece:

His movement is slow and deliberate and so constant as to be almost mesmerizing. He seems to be jogging to the rhythm of the day. A metronomical calm descends on us as we sit on the porch, waiting for afternoon to attenuate into evening. A light breeze noiselessly stirs the grass.¹⁵

Dana Micucci, describing her own walk, writes:

I felt bounded by the steel grid yet oddly liberated by it, because my senses had been activated and serenely focused. As I continued my exploration through, between and around the poles, I became as much aware of the surrounding landscape as of De Maria's creation, and how it, too, shifted constantly in my perception with the changing light of day ... Gazing upward, I felt that I, too, had begun to merge with the landscape. And I saw myself, like the poles, as a conduit between the earth and the heavens.¹⁶

Many visitors have commented on the sensation that neither the poles nor the surrounding landscape is fixed in position. Gilles Tiberghien writes:

¹³ Beeren and Schoon, 1984, p.32.

¹⁴ See Paul Rodaway's *Sensuous Geographies: Body, sense and place* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) for more on the importance of all the senses in generating an intimate sense of place.

¹⁵ Eaton, Robert. *The Lightning Field. Travels In and Around New Mexico*. Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Books, 1995, p.12.

¹⁶ Micucci, Dana. 'Sublime Beauty', in *Art and Antiques*, Vol 31 No 6, June 2008, pp.98–100.

When the viewer walks through De Maria's *Lightning Field*, he perceives rocky silhouettes at the horizon whose boundaries seem to move with him. The virtual space thus created by the work in daylight produces almost a floating effect.¹⁷

This 'floating effect' enhances the visitor's sense of disorientation, and, as one walks, a somewhat disconcerting impression of oscillation also occurs, which simply cannot be attained by any means other than walking: stand still, and it stops. Cornelia Dean writes:

Once we got into the grid ... everything changed. Depending on where you were, and how fast you were moving, the poles came and went in your line of sight, constantly shifting patterns and rhythms.¹⁸

The best description of this oscillation is provided by Lars Nittve, who is worth quoting at some length because he eloquently captures not only the sense of continuous visual oscillation between order and chaos, but also its impact on his mood:

I was walking in the eternity of the tableland. A mountain range was perceptible on the horizon. I was moving in *The Lightning Field*, and I felt a strong sense of unease; the inability of the vast landscape to offer a framework, to define me, seemed to be reinforced by the apparently disordered presence of the polished steel poles, which seemed to have been placed at random. They seemed to just be there, just like me. The feeling of meaninglessness produced by their – and my – predicament accentuated my persistent unease. I was walking around, looking for a system that would neutralize the ever-changing disorder of the poles in the landscape. Suddenly I found myself in a spot where everything crystallized into a seemingly infinite system of absolutely straight coordinates – into order. My unease was transformed into a dizzying sense of pleasure and self-evidence, the air was easy to breathe, the infinite plain became friendly and familiar. Yet this harmony was as transitory as it appeared eternal: a few more steps and the system was annihilated, however clearly I understood that it was there. A sense of loss was added to my quickly returning uneasiness. And even though I soon came upon another new, liberating order, this too was quickly transformed into disorder, followed by the same palpable, almost physical reaction.¹⁹

¹⁷ Tiberghien, Gilles A. *Land Art*. London: Art Data, 1993, p.98.

¹⁸ Dean, C. 'Drawn to the lightning', in the *New York Times*, 21 September 2003.

¹⁹ Nittve, Lars. (ed.). *Waller De Maria: Two Very Large Presentations*. Exhibition catalogue. Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1989, p.88.

The act of walking also helps to slow the visitor down – a continuation of the ‘slowing down’ process achieved at the cabin, which I discussed in Chapter Seven. Walking is slow, not only on account of the rough terrain and the height above sea level (7,200 feet), which makes breathing more laboured and progress therefore more measured, but also because of the sheer quantity of mud and puddles. In each of these respects, the location’s physical and geographical attributes have a direct impact on the nature of experience. Mud is certainly no trivial matter: on my own visit, it attached itself in great clumps to the soles of my boots, making it remarkably hard to walk, as if I were being held to the ground with enormous suckers. By slowing the walker down, the mud permits a more gradual, and therefore more detailed, awareness of one’s surroundings; in particular, it requires the walker to look down at the earth as much as up to the sky. In addition, the sheer size and quantity of puddles forces the walker continually to meander, and such enforced ‘meandering’ contrasts sharply with the rigid grid of poles themselves. Kenneth Baker, for example, writes:

I have been able to take only a few steps at a time, partly because of my fascination, and partly because of the mud underfoot. Trying to take a direct route to the *Field*’s southeast corner, I find that pools of mud and convenient atolls of vegetation force me to revise my path continually.²⁰

2. The ‘grid’

What unites these multifarious walks is that they all take place within and around the very precisely aligned grid of identical, precision-engineered, highly polished, stainless-steel poles, and one might well have expected such a repetitive, mathematically precise, ‘mechanical’ structure – where each element is identical to all the others – to be totally resistant either to such a variety of experiences or to the kinds of emotional responses that it evokes in many visitors. After all, the grid is usually regarded not only as the

²⁰ Baker, Kenneth. *The Lightning Field* (with a preface by Lynne Cooke). New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008, p.14.

most logically structured, immutable, and non-hierarchical form of repetition, but also as the least conducive to any kind of emotional nuance – arguably a clear-cut case of ‘what you see is what you see’, to repeat Frank Stella’s oft-quoted phrase.²¹ During the 1960s and ’70s, the grid was used as a mode of composition by many painters and sculptors – see, for example, Agnes Martin (*Song*, 1962), Jo Baer (*Primary Light Group: Red, Green, Blue*, 1964), Robert Ryman (*Winsor 34*, 1966), Sol LeWitt (*Modular Piece (Double Cube)*, 1966), Carl Andre (*144 Steel Square*, 1967), Judy Chicago (*Cubes and Cylinders (Rearrangeable)*, 1967), and Eva Hesse (*Schema*, 1967). In response to these came Rosalind Krauss’s critique of the grid, simply called ‘Grids’,²² which was published in *October* in 1979. Krauss describes the grid as a hugely ‘successful’ emblem of 20th-century art. Here ‘success’ refers to three things at once: a purely quantitative success, considering the numbers of painters who have used grids in the 20th century; a qualitative success, since the grid has become the medium for some of the greatest works of modernism; and an ideological success, since it has become emblematic of the Modern.²³ For Krauss, however, the grid announces art’s ‘will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse’.²⁴ Although Krauss acknowledges that the sheer number of careers that have been devoted to the exploration of the grid is ‘impressive’, she asserts that ‘never could exploration have chosen less fertile ground.’²⁵ She goes on to describe the grid as a ‘ghetto’, resisting development even though so many careers have been devoted to its exploration:

²¹ ‘Questions to Stella and Judd’, interview by Bruce Glaser on WBAI-FM, New York, February 1964, published in *ArtNews*, September 1966; reprinted in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp.148–64.

²² Krauss, Rosalind. ‘Grids’, in *October*, No 9, Summer 1979, pp.51–64.

²³ Krauss regards the grid as a specifically 20th-century phenomenon, asserting that it occurs nowhere in the art of the 19th century, and that one has to travel a long way back into the history of art to find previous examples of grids: to the treatises on perspective of the 15th and 16th centuries and the perspective studies of Uccello or Dürer or Leonardo. However, she asserts that such perspective studies are not really early instances of grids at all, since in these instances perspective was ‘the science of the real, not the mode of withdrawal from it.’ Krauss, 1979, pp.51–52.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature. In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface.²⁶

For Krauss, the grid does not map the space of a room or a landscape or a group of figures onto the surface of a painting: if it maps anything, it maps merely the surface of the painting itself. She goes on:

It is a transfer in which nothing changes place. The physical qualities of the surface, we could say, are mapped onto the aesthetic dimensions of the same surface. And those two planes – the physical and the aesthetic – are demonstrated to be the same plane: coextensive, and, through the abscissas and ordinates of the grid, coordinate. Considered in this way, the bottom line of the grid is a naked and determined materialism.²⁷

Although Krauss's essay is largely devoted to a critique of the two-dimensional grid in painting, it seems surprising that, given her earlier awareness of the necessity of physically entering works such as *Double Negative* and *Spiral Jetty* which she discussed in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, she completely fails to take account of the possibility of an 'activated', three-dimensional grid. By the time of Krauss's essay on the grid (1979), *The Lightning Field* was already two years old. Here the three-dimensional grid of steel – modularly perfect, its logical structure easily described in the driest of language – is far from being the 'ghetto' or 'dead end' that Krauss describes. Neither does it turn its back on nature. Rather, it is a structure within which almost everything is in a constant state of flux: a flux largely brought into play by the moving body of the visitor, immersed in the sculptural grid, which is itself immersed in the wider natural world of land and sky. Even the very material existence of the grid is thrown into question under certain light conditions, when the physical solidity of the poles simply evaporates. Robert Eaton writes:

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.52.

I imagine the array just before sunset or just after sunrise, when each of the silvery poles casts a supernaturally long black shadow, and I can't help thinking of the Italian surrealist Giorgio de Chirico and his chiaroscuro paintings of statue-like figures in stark, empty piazzas. This place shares with those paintings a certain mood: otherworldly, premonitory, mute. The difference is that the paintings are fixed, static, incapable of change, whereas the array is in flux, always reflecting or translating what is going on around it. An hour before sunset or an hour after sunrise it looks different. Even on a clear afternoon it changes subtly from minute to minute.²⁸

Later that day, at sunset, he describes the scene:

Sunset is disappointing. Late in the afternoon a wave of slate-colored clouds washes in over the western horizon, and the sun sinks into it without so much as a fizzle. But a peculiar thing happens anyway: the poles dissolve magically in the gray light of dusk. One minute they are there, silhouetted against a pale salmon sky, and the next minute they are gone and we are looking at an empty plain. Again the effect is strangely unsettling. I am tempted to walk out into that murky space to make sure they're still there. This would be a good place for a paranoid to spend a vacation.²⁹

As we have seen throughout this thesis, this particular 'grid' inspires imaginative musings, voiced by Robert Eaton and many others (see, for example, the comments by Cornelia Dean that I cited in Chapter One), demonstrating that the grid has in no way created a barrier 'between the arts of vision and those of language',³⁰ as Krauss might have us believe. My point here is that the theoretical structure that one might conventionally turn to when considering the grid – Krauss's 1979 essay – simply cannot begin to accommodate the true complexities of this activated structure; as with so much of De Maria's work, conventional debate falls short. With this in mind, we can go on to question the appropriateness for De Maria of other theoretical frameworks that have been erected to account for the deployment of repetition more generally.

²⁸ Eaton, 1995, p.13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14

³⁰ Krauss, 1979, p.51.

3. The trope of repetition

The grid is just one type of compositional schema to use repetition, and repetition is often regarded as one of the hallmarks of Minimalist art and music: indeed, during the 1960s and early 1970s repetition of one kind or another was deployed by many visual artists and musicians as a new means of creating structural intelligibility. It was also a significant component of the Fluxus aesthetic, especially with regard to repetition of actions in which the ‘audience’ was often engaged. In what follows, I provide a brief outline of repetition as a persistent trope across the arts. Although this might be regarded as something of a tangent to the main thrust of my argument, it provides a necessary background for De Maria’s own use of repetition in some important works – made both prior to and after the construction of *The Lightning Field* – which help to illuminate the complexities of repetition at *The Lightning Field* itself, where, as we have seen, the grid fails to conform to theoretical expectations. In particular, I explore these works in the light of Frances Colpitt’s three categories of repetition, as outlined in *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (1990).³¹ Rather than settling comfortably within Colpitt’s organisational structure, De Maria’s oeuvre frequently disrupts any such attempts at classification, and this is especially true when we consider – as we surely must – the huge variety of ways in which so many of his works are actually experienced by their audiences.

Robert Rosenblum asserts that, given the dramatic social upheaval of the 1960s, artists’ obsession with repetition, modules, measurement, and mapping was part of a longing for a ‘therapeutic geometry’ – a desire for simplicity and order in the face of social and political complexities and uncertainties.³² This ‘turn to mathematics’, exemplified by the deployment of logical, repetitive, and seemingly impersonal organising principles, is

³¹ Colpitt, Frances. *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990.

³² Rosenblum, Robert. ‘Toward the Tabula Rasa’, in *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, pp. 146–191.

certainly regarded as a reaction against what many young artists at the time saw as 'the autobiographical, gestural excesses'³³ of Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock, for whom painting functioned (in part, at least) as self-discovery.³⁴ Furthermore, for many American artists, 'one thing after another',³⁵ as Donald Judd put it in 1965, was also a means to escape the kind of relational composition that was identified with European art.

In terms of form, 'one thing after another' is clearly evident in much of the work of Agnes Martin, Agnes Denes, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin, and Carl Andre among many others. It is also a feature of Richard Serra's lead *Casting* (1969), which was made by flinging molten lead into the angle between floor and wall, pulling away the hardened shape into the centre of the room, and then repeating the process to create a succession of lead strips 'as sequential and near alike as waves following one another toward shore.'³⁶ Also in 1969, Serra made a three-minute film titled *Hand Catching Lead*, which shows Serra's repeated attempts to catch a sequence of falling strips of metal as they drop through the space of the image, and Rosalind Krauss refers to the film's quality of 'relentless persistence – of doing something over and over again without regarding "success" as any particular kind of climax'.³⁷ Nearly a decade before Serra's film, however, De Maria had explored a similar kind of repetition of action in two of his Fluxus texts – 'Beach Crawl' and 'Meaningless Work' (both 1960) (*Appendices 4 and 5*). Crucially, in these two works it is the 'audience', rather the artist, who performs the action. As with so much of De Maria's work, the 'audience' literally has to take part rather than merely observe. Repetition of action was in fact a relatively

³³ Colpitt, 1990, p.1.

³⁴ John Elderfield remarks, however, that the 'all-over' expansiveness of much minimalist painting owes much to Pollock. Elderfield, John. 'Grids', in *Artforum*, Vol 10, May 1972, pp.52–59.

³⁵ Judd, Donald, 'Specific Objects', in *Arts Yearbook 8* (1965), p.82.

³⁶ Krauss, R. 'The Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture', in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977, p.244.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.243–244.

common feature in the work of many Fluxus artists. For example, La Monte Young's *Piano Piece for David Tudor #2* (1960) contains the following instruction:

Open the keyboard cover without making, from the operation, any sound that is audible to you. Try as many times as you like. The piece is over either when you succeed or when you decide to stop trying.³⁸

Simone Forti used repeated movement as the principal element of one of her 'Dance Constructions', which was also published in the *Fluxus Anthology*:

A group of seven or eight people stand together in a very close huddle. One member of the group climbs up the mass of people and then down again becoming once more a part of the mass. Immediately another is climbing. The movement must be consistent but not hurried. Sometimes it happens that there are two climbing at once. That's all right. The dance construction should be continued 'long enough', perhaps ten minutes.³⁹

Similarly, the dancer, choreographer, and film-maker Yvonne Rainer – although not involved in Fluxus – has said of her own choreography: 'If something is complex, repetition gives people more time to take it in.'⁴⁰

In music, too, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass began seriously to explore repetition, based on various mathematical structures, as a means of scoring music. Although music's association with mathematics goes far back into history⁴¹ – and of course this association is in some respects a fundamental one due to sound's inherent properties of vibration, wave propagation, acoustical resonance, and musical tuning – it

³⁸ Young, La Monte. *Piano Piece for David Tudor #2*. In Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Bronx, New York: La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, 1963. Simon Shaw-Miller makes the important note that the work promotes the visual because all audible sound is suppressed. See Simon Shaw-Miller. *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, pp.225–226.

³⁹ MacLow and Young, 1963.

⁴⁰ Rainer, Yvonne, quoted in Lucy Lippard. *From the Center*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976, p.270.

⁴¹ Brandon LaBelle writes: 'Music history could in fact be traced in terms of a mathematical evolution, from early Greek theories of rhythm as "musical motion", and Pythagorean formulations of musical ratios, to esoteric meditations on the "music of the spheres", which used arithmetical proportions derived from celestial bodies as guides for musical understanding.' Brandon LaBelle. 'Performing Geometry: Music's Affair with Numbers, Systems, and Procedures', in Lynn Zelevansky. *Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s–70s*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The MIT Press, co-published by Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles, 2004, p.129.

is nevertheless true that during the 20th century this interest in mathematical structures was particularly powerfully felt; indeed, Brandon LaBelle goes as far as to argue that an ‘overriding concern with systems and numbers constitutes the secret history of twentieth-century music.’⁴² During the 1960s and early 1970s, Reich, Riley, and Glass consistently applied techniques of repetition in their work; indeed, as with Minimalist art, repetition is frequently regarded as one of the defining features of minimalist music,⁴³ and by combining this with a reduction in variations of tempo, pitch, dynamics, and timbre these composers achieved the same kind of absence of climax or directionality that was sought by many visual artists – and which, as we have already seen, is also felt by the walker at *The Lightning Field*, where, because all the poles are identical, there is no sense of centre or of direction or of conclusion. As well as drawing on the foundations already laid by the Serial composers of the previous decades (among them Arnold Schönberg, Anton Webern, Alban Berg, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, and Olivier Messiaen) for examples of systematic procedures for composition, Riley and Glass were also influenced by the use of repetition in Indian music, while Reich was drawn to the repetitive elements of West African and Balinese music, as well as the cyclical structure of the canon. Among the most well-known works of the mid-decade to use repetition is Terry Riley’s ensemble work *In C* (1964), which uses the pulse of a continuously repeated quaver high C throughout; this maintains the tempo and gives the performers a permanently audible constant to which they can relate.⁴⁴ The work is based on a series of musical progressions, or figures (53 of them), which

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ The use of repetition in music is of course not new. But, according to Wim Mertens, what *is* new is the context in which it is used. The music of the American composers of repetitive music can be described as non-narrative and a-teleological. This is in sharp contrast to the use of repetition in traditional music, where, as Mertens asserts, it is used in ‘a pre-eminently *narrative* and *teleological* frame, so that musical components like rhythm, melody, harmony and so on are used in a causal, pre-figured way’. Through this, a musical perspective emerges that gives the listener ‘a non-ambivalent orientation and that attempts to inform him of *meaningful musical contents*.’ Wim Mertens (trans. J. Hautekiet). *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. (First published in Belgium in 1980.) London: Kahn & Averill, 1983, pp.11–17.

⁴⁴ Nyman, Michael. *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp.146–148. (First published in New York, 1974.)

performers are asked to play in sequence, yet Riley invites individual interpretation by suggesting that performers repeat each figure as many times as they wish before moving on. On the sleeve notes for the 1968 Columbia Records recording, Paul Williams writes of this seminal work:

Playing this record for a small group of people is like watching a web being spun. Playing it for a friend means watching a Pilgrim's Progress of reactions. Playing it for yourself may be like staring at a mirror for forty-five minutes; or it may be more like sitting in a window and watching the carnival of life go on below.⁴⁵

The work's constantly pulsing high C can be played either on a piano or a mallet instrument, and the percussive quality of this repetitive note is paralleled by Steve Reich's piano in *Six Pianos* (1973) and *Piano Phase* (1967) (*Figure 57*), in which the piano keys are hit repetitively and percussively. Like Riley, Reich also sometimes uses the unfaltering rhythm of just one instrument in order to hold the work together; this is most clearly heard with the maracas in *Four Organs* (1970) and *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976). Like Reich, De Maria (as we saw in Chapter Three) was also drawn to the rhythmic quality of the drums, which, of all instruments, can create the most repetitive sound, often 'laying down the beat' for others to follow, and yet he was also able to explore the nuances of this instrument with great subtlety, as we shall see towards the end of this chapter.

Despite working with seemingly impersonal mathematical schema, artists and composers nevertheless developed their own personal styles, and have become – whether they like it or not – most well known for these. For example, among visual artists, Agnes Martin is best known for her grid-like canvases, Donald Judd for his stacked shelves and boxes, Dan Flavin for coloured lighting tubes, Carl Andre for fire

⁴⁵ Williams, Paul. Sleeve notes for Terry Riley, *In C*. Columbia Records, 1968.

bricks and flat metal plates, and Sol LeWitt for wall drawings and modular, open-sided cubes. Among musical composers, Terry Riley is commonly identified with the use of continually evolving repetition, in works such as *In C*, while Steve Reich is associated with his ‘phasing’ technique (at least up to 1972), in works such as *Piano Phase* (1967) and *Drumming* (1970–71). Philip Glass is known for his sudden, unprepared transitions, from *Music of Changing Parts* (1970) onwards, which disorient the listener in what Wim Mertens describes as ‘a treacherous or brutal way’.⁴⁶

If one were to choose a ‘personal style’ for De Maria, it might well be straight metal rods in various repetitive configurations, since these appear in a number of major works, not just in this period, but throughout his entire career. To give just a few examples: *4–6–8 Series* (1966), *High Energy Bars* (1966), *Cage* (1966), *Bed of Spikes* (1968–69), *Eros Iron* (1968), *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977) (Figure 58), *The Broken Kilometer* (1979) (Figure 54), *A computer which will solve every problem in the world: 3–13 Polygon* (1984) (Figure 52), *13–14–15 Meter Rows* (1984) (Figure 59), *Large Rod Series* (1985) (Figure 60), *2000 Sculpture* (1992) (Figure 61), and *Time/Timeless/No Time* (2004) (Figure 62). However, as we saw in Chapter Three, for every sculptural work in which De Maria deployed metal poles in some kind of repetitive sequence, he produced just as many that didn’t, among them *Move the Ball Slowly Down the Row* (1965), *Gothic Shaped Drawing* (1965), *Suicide* (1966), *Candle Piece* (1965), *Death Wall* (1965), *Silver Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1965), the three ‘Earth Rooms’ (1968, 1974, and 1977), *Las Vegas Piece* (1969), *Seen/Unseen, Known/Unknown* (2000), and *One Sun, 34 Moons* (2002) (Figure 63) – to say nothing of his non-sculptural drawings, musical works, and *Anthology* texts. Indeed, the problem with all attempts to define ‘personal style’ is that they neglect those works and practices that do not fit its remit,

⁴⁶ Mertens, 1983, p.15.

and this is true not just for De Maria (for whom many of the works listed above have been entirely overlooked in the literature on 'Land Art') but for many other artists and musicians. Steve Reich, for example, is resigned but not particularly happy with being labelled a 'minimalist', preferring instead to be treated as an individual whose interests have developed in multifarious directions over time. He comments:

My job is composing the next piece and not putting myself in some kind of theoretical box ... I'm sure there are some who wish I'd write *Drumming* or *Music for Eighteen Musicians* for the rest of my life, but I'm just not that kind of composer; I move on.⁴⁷

In the visual arts and in music alike, rapid advancements in technology during the 1960s had a significant part to play in expanding the opportunities for using repetition as a compositional device. Indeed, *The Lightning Field's* precision-engineered stainless-steel poles simply could not have been constructed by De Maria himself, but were produced by machine under the supervision of factory technicians in New York. For many artists, mass-production, together with the creation of totally new, industrially made materials such as Plexiglas, greatly increased the possibilities of using multiple elements, since these could now be produced rapidly and in large numbers in factories. At *The Lightning Field*, these technological advances meant that all signs of the artist's personal touch have been eradicated, throwing into question the concept of De Maria as 'artist genius', since he is now neither skilled craftsman nor a 'deep thinker' in any obvious sense. Coupled with this, the use of machine-tooled elements subverts the notion of the 'preciousness' of the art object. Indeed, William Malpas comments that *The Lightning Field's* arrangement of poles looks less like a work of art and more like 'a scientific or industrial project – like a radio telescope site, say, or a military

⁴⁷ Duckworth, William. *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995, p.293.

communications centre,⁴⁸ while both Robert Eaton⁴⁹ and Kenneth Baker⁵⁰ draw brief comparisons between *The Lightning Field* and the National Radio Astronomy Observatory about 30 miles to the east of *The Lightning Field* on the Plains of San Agustín. Known as the Very Large Array (VLA), this consists of 27 large-dish radio antennas positioned along a Y-shaped system of railroad tracks, each arm of the Y extending 13 miles. Like *The Lightning Field*, its futuristic, sculptural array points skywards: another case of ‘American technological sublime’, perhaps.

The repetitive grid arrangement of *The Lightning Field*’s poles destroys any sense of compositional hierarchy, since each individual pole is no more important than any other, either in its appearance or its position (with the possible exception of the ones on the perimeter and on the four corners – yet even here, the sense of an ‘edge’ is insubstantial, as already mentioned). A similar destruction of conventional harmonic hierarchy is also at work in much of Reich’s early music, and this is partly achieved through a vastly reduced palette of timbre, tempo, and dynamics, so that no single note or phrase stands out. It is also achieved through a massive reduction both in the number of pitches and in the types of instruments used. For example, *Piano Phase* uses just five pitches throughout the entire piece, while in *Six Pianos* and *Four Organs* Reich uses just one type of instrument (piano and organ respectively), rather than the more conventional range of instruments, so that an ‘all-over’ quality of sound is produced. As with *The Lightning Field*’s stainless-steel poles, no one instrument – or, for that matter, performer – is any more important than any other.

⁴⁸ Malpas, William. *Land Art. A Complete Guide to Landscape, Environmental, Earthworks, Nature, Sculpture and Installation Art*. Maidstone: Crescent Moon Publishing, second edition, p.167.

⁴⁹ Eaton, 1995, pp.12–13.

⁵⁰ Baker, 2008, pp.81–84.

4. Frances Colpitt's three categories of repetition

I have given a necessarily brief background to just some of the ways in which repetition was used across a range of artistic practices during the 1960s and early 1970s. Given this variety, it is not surprising that attempts have been made to produce some kind of classification system for repetition, and in the visual arts just such a system is provided by Frances Colpitt in *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective*, published in 1990. Colpitt traces 'the serial impulse'⁵¹ to three major art exhibitions which were held between 1966 and 1968, each of which took a slightly different slant on repetition. These are: Lawrence Alloway's 'Systemic Painting', at the Guggenheim, New York, in 1966; 'Art in Series', at Finch College, New York, in 1967; and 'Serial Imagery', at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1968. In 1967, in his essay 'The Serial Attitude', Mel Bochner attempted to distinguish between different types of repetition,⁵² and Colpitt develops Bochner's definitions in order to delineate three distinct categories: repetition through a set of separate works, seriality within an individual work, and modular composition. In what follows, I explore these in relation to a small but important selection of works made by De Maria both before and after *The Lightning Field*, in order to demonstrate just how difficult it is to categorise his oeuvre within this conventional critical framework.

a) Repetition through a set of separate works

Frances Colpitt regards repetition through a set of separate, but related, works as the most traditional category of repetition. For instance, Monet's series of haystacks and Rouen Cathedral paintings are often regarded as early examples of works in series, and Colpitt argues that the concept can be tracked from Monet through Willem De Kooning, Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein to Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland. Yet although

⁵¹ Colpitt, 1990, p.65.

⁵² Bochner, Mel. 'The Serial Attitude', in *Artforum*, Vol 6 No 4, December 1967, pp.28–33.

Monet's haystacks certainly work well by being exhibited together as a series, one might ask whether, for example, De Kooning's paintings of women are a true series or simply variations on a theme. As far as De Maria's oeuvre is concerned, the concept of repetition through a set of separate works is certainly problematic; we have no specific evidence that De Maria thought of any of his works in this way, and nothing much seems to be gained by doing so. Amy Dempsey asserts that his three 'Earth Rooms' are 'connected' to each other; after all, they share the label, and each was experienced in the same way: seen and smelled, but not entered or touched. However, each work nevertheless would have functioned totally independently of the other two; and, since the first two (in Munich and Darmstadt) no longer exist, *New York Earth Room*⁵³ clearly now does just that. Moreover, knowledge of the 'three' does not improve knowledge of any 'one'.

The definition of a series is even more problematic when we consider two other major works by De Maria: *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977) (Figure 58) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979) (Figure 54). The Dia Art Foundation's own literature describes these as 'companions',⁵⁴ as does Amy Dempsey,⁵⁵ even though there are two years between them and they were made on separate continents (Europe and America respectively). *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* – a kilometre-long brass rod – is buried vertically into the ground in Friedrichsplatz Park, Kassel, in Germany. Although it goes deep into the earth, only the very top of the rod is visible, surrounded by a metal plate one metre square, which can be walked or sat on or prodded or stroked. Situated out of doors, it takes its place in – belongs to – the wider physical environment of the park and city in which it is located. Meanwhile, *The Broken Kilometer* – at Dia's gallery space, 393

⁵³ The *New York Earth Room* was made in 1977 and installed in Heiner Friedrich's SoHo gallery on Wooster Street: although the exhibition closed in 1978, it was subsequently reopened two years later in the same space, as a permanent installation supported by the Dia Art Foundation.

⁵⁴ [Online] www.brokenkilometer.org [15.11.2008].

⁵⁵ Dempsey, Amy. *Destination Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2006, p.123.

West Broadway, Manhattan, New York – uses 500 brass rods (each 2 metres long) of the same diameter, weight, and overall length as the one used for *The Vertical Earth Kilometer*, but this time the ‘kilometre’ is arranged in five neat, parallel columns of 100 rods each. The rods can be viewed, but the space in which they are arranged cannot be entered. It could be argued that these two artworks operate as a pair: not only are they of the same overall size and material, but between them they encompass the physical dimensionality of the world, since the first work explores verticality and the second explores horizontality. However, in terms of the viewer’s experience, the works could not be more different. Since only the very top of *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* is visible, this outdoor work requires a kind of faith that the rest of the rod actually exists at all; yet because visitors can touch it (even walk and sit on it) they have a very tactile relationship with it – at least to its top. The work also brings contradictory thoughts to mind: for Dempsey, it speaks of ‘the vulnerability of the Earth and the damage caused to it by drilling and mining as well as the many archaeological treasures it holds.’⁵⁶ On the other hand, with *The Broken Kilometer* the whole kilometre is literally spread out before the viewer within the confines of a large internal space – a kind of ‘opposite’ to the hidden nature of *Vertical Earth Kilometer*. Yet it cannot be touched or even walked around, even though it is wholly visible. As Anna Chave reports in her recent essay ‘Revaluing Minimalism: patronage, aura, and place’, for some visitors the experience is utterly underwhelming, while others are outraged by the cost involved in assembling the work. Some visitors, however, describe the experience as ‘like meditating at the bottom of a brilliant golden ocean’.⁵⁷ Indeed, Ken Johnson observes,

There is something paradoxical about Walter De Maria’s art: it can be adequately described in the most dryly logical mathematical terms, and yet the actual experience of it is breathtakingly mysterious. No set of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.125.

⁵⁷ These are among observations made by visitors to *The Broken Kilometer* and recorded 23 October to 29 December 1979, ‘internal memorandum’, Dia Art Foundation. Cited in Anna Chave, ‘Revaluing Minimalism: patronage, aura, and place’, in *The Art Bulletin*, September 2008, pp.466–480.

specifications, however perfectly definitive, could convey the haunting, cathedral-like atmosphere of *Broken Kilometer*.⁵⁸

Thomas Kellein writes of his own encounter with *The Broken Kilometer*:

There's a faint hint of incense. The calm that you sense on entering the gallery is only intensified by the creaking of old floorboards. Outside we have left behind us countless boutiques, passers-by and clamorous restaurants ... Our gaze roams to and fro, lingering on columns, a double-window on the left wall, a white rope in front of us at knee-height. Do not enter, just look. A devotional image with no figure of Mary, no Joseph and no Lord God. Just pure brass, illuminated by some other sun for our benefit alone, it seems.⁵⁹

This quasi-religious experience calls to mind De Maria's earlier *Candle Piece* (1965), *Cross* (1965), *Star* (1972), and *Gothic Shaped Drawing* (1965), which – at least in part – share the sense of the divine that, in her essay, Anna Chave has been so keen to disparage.

b) Seriality within an individual work

Frances Colpitt's second category of repetition – seriality within an individual work – is, as Bochner puts it,

premised on the idea that the succession of terms (divisions) within a single work is based on a numerical or otherwise predetermined derivation (progression, permutation, rotation, reversal) from one or more of the preceding terms in that piece.⁶⁰

Sol LeWitt talks of the pleasures and benefits of adopting such logical sequences in his art, and marks the important distinction between rationality and logic:

In a logical thing, each part is dependent on the last. It follows in a certain sequence as part of the logic. But, a rational thing is something you have to make a rational decision on each time ... You have to think

⁵⁸ Johnson, Ken. 'Permutations in Steel', in *Art in America*, September 1989, Vol 77 No 9, p.199.

⁵⁹ Kellein, Thomas. 'Thirty Years of Eternity: Walter De Maria's Broken Kilometer', in *Tate Etc.* Issue 12, Spring 2008, pp.96–99.

⁶⁰ Bochner, Mel. *Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism*: in Gregory Battcock (ed.). *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*. London: Studio Vista, 1969, pp.92–102. (First published by E.P. Dutton, New York, 1968.)

about it. In a logical sequence, you don't think about it. It's a way of not thinking. It's *irrational*.⁶¹

What this means is that, once the (admittedly personal) first choice of pattern or system has been chosen, logical thinking permits no further decision-making, and its deployment is effectively anonymous and self-contained, methodical, and mechanical. There are, of course, many different types of structuring systems for this category of repetition, ranging from the very simple to the extremely complex. Mel Bochner distinguishes between arithmetic progressions (for example, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10...), as used in Flavin's *the nominal three (to William of Ockham)* (1963), and geometric ones (eg. 2, 4, 8, 16, 32...), as used in Paul Mogensen's *Copperopolis* (1966). The Fibonacci series,⁶² Pascal's triangle,⁶³ squares and square roots have all been used as organising schema – indeed, *The Lightning Field* uses the latter, its grid of equidistant poles stretching for 16 (4×4) poles in one direction and 25 (5×5) poles in the other, and, in total, the poles amount to the square of twenty (400). These progressions do not, however, necessarily need to be understood by the viewer: as Barbara Haskell writes, what is important is that viewers intuitively realise that there is some kind of scheme at work, that something other than personal choice is operative.⁶⁴

Many works by De Maria use serial repetition. *4–6–8 Series* (1966) (*Figure 34*) was the first work in which De Maria used numerical sequences, and it consists of four-, six-, and eight-sided rods, positioned in rows of three on individual stainless-steel bases. The

⁶¹ Interview with Sol LeWitt, New York City, 15 November 1980. Cited in Colpitt, 1990, p.58.

⁶² The Fibonacci system is a self-reproducing principle of proportionate growth – a logically progressive sequence – which was discovered (actually rediscovered) in the Middle Ages through the examination of natural forms. One of the key proponents of the Fibonacci spiral has been the Italian artist Mario Merz (for example, in *Fibonacci Tables*, 1974–76), while Robert Smithson used it in *Aerial Map – Proposal for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport* (1967), and Mel Bochner used it in *Three-Way Fibonacci Progression* (1966).

⁶³ For example, Agnes Denes' *Pascal's Triangle* (1973) examines the displacement of a set of points from one format (rectilinear) to another (circular). See Rainer Crone. *Numerals 1924–1977*. Exhibition catalogue. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1978.

⁶⁴ Haskell, Barbara. *Donald Judd*. New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1988, p.49.

series gives all the possible combinations of linear arrangement of the square, the hexagon, and the octagon. *A computer which will solve every problem in the world: 3-12 Polygon* (1984) (Figure 52) comprises 75 stainless-steel polygonal bars, each one metre long, arranged in rows on the floor. Each row differs from the others in the number of sides on its bars, a number that in turn corresponds to the number of bars in the row. For example, the first row contains three three-sided bars, the second contains four four-sided bars, and so on through twelve rows. In addition, although the bars vary in the number of their sides, they are all of equal area and weight. According to Michael Govan of the Dia Art Foundation, the artwork suggests 'an infinitely expandable progression',⁶⁵ and this kind of logical sequence is also at work in De Maria's *The Equal Area Series* (1976–90) (Figure 64), *360° I Ching* (1981) (Figure 65), *13, 14, 15, Open Polygons* (1984) (Figure 66), and *2000 Sculpture* (1992) (Figure 61), among many others. Yet because many of these works can be walked around, they provide a dynamic, and often very personal, point of contact between audience, artwork, and space: something which one might not have expected from such logical structures. For Lars Nittve they also give rise to the same sense of oscillation that he experienced at *The Lightning Field*. He describes 'long, bewildered walks' around *A computer which will solve every problem in the world: 3-12 Polygon* in Rotterdam:

as soon as I begin to move around it, I enter a world not only of order and disorder but of orders – suddenly perceived straight lines, diagonals, elaborations, and progressions – and a constantly changing disorder, changing not least because of the intricate play of the reflections in the shiny steel.⁶⁶

However, of all De Maria's works that use serial repetition, the most pertinent to *The Lightning Field* is *Bed of Spikes* (1968–69). Regarded by De Maria as a precursor to *The Lightning Field*, this work's vertical stainless-steel rods are laid out in increasing

⁶⁵ Govan, M. 'Walter De Maria'. [Online] www.diacenter.org. [11.10.2005]

⁶⁶ Nittve, 1989, p.89.

numbers whose arrangement is based on carefully organised mathematical progression. The experience of walking around *Bed of Spikes* hints at what is to come at *The Lightning Field*. As an 'activated' series, it emphasises the dynamic, variable, and indeed potentially dangerous connections between art object, place, and active viewer, even though its structure is logically precise; and Colpitt's category of 'seriality' simply cannot account for this complexity.

c) Modular composition

The third type of repetition identified by Frances Colpitt is 'modular composition', of which the 'grid' is one example. Here each unit is identical to all the others: examples include Andre's *144 Steel Square* (1967), Judd's *Untitled* (1969), and LeWitt's *Floor Structure, Black* (1965). The unit, which may be anything – Andre's steel squares or bricks or hay bales, Judd's Plexiglas shelves, Flavin's lighting tubes, LeWitt's cubic constructions, even Warhol's soup cans – does not alter its basic form in each work: not only is each unit exactly the same, but each is also theoretically interchangeable with all the other units. However, as with the two other categories of repetition identified by Frances Colpitt, one struggles to accommodate De Maria's work within this category. With his 'series' of *High Energy Bars* (1966) De Maria uses what certainly appears to be modular repetition. But although each bar is identical in size, shape, material, and weight, the certificates that accompany them are sequentially numbered, and both the bars and the certificates are then of course treated differently depending on who owns them and what they do with them. No longer identical, each bar is clearly altered by its individual circumstances: each is effectively completed by its 'owner'. Like the *High Energy Bars*, *The Broken Kilometer* also appears totally modular, yet is in fact serial. This is because the apparently exacting regularity of the work is an optical illusion; the space between the rods in each column actually

increases by five millimetres each time, thereby distorting the illusion of perspective and creating the appearance of regularity where none exists. For Kenneth Baker, this work demonstrates the eye's unreliable sense of measure:

The Broken Kilometer confounds one's bodily estimate of its extension in space. The eye quickly succumbs to the dazzle of the brass finish and the illusion that the rows rise as they recede.⁶⁷

The Lightning Field appears to utilise an entirely modular form of repetition. Its precise grid of poles, equally spaced over such a large rectangular area, can easily be described in purely statistical terms; indeed, as we have seen, in his 1980 essay De Maria does precisely this, and the vast majority of that essay quite strikingly steers well clear of any hint of the work's potential for emotional impact. Even the essay's short, abrupt statements, coming one after the other in quick succession like a relentless salvo of arrows, exhibit a repetitive quality akin to the staccato arrangement of the poles themselves. Much of the extant literature on *The Lightning Field* cannot resist reiterating at least some of the statistical detail given by De Maria (I did so myself in Chapter Five), as if these lengths, heights, elevations, diameters, and weights can somehow 'account for' the work,⁶⁸ which, as De Maria well knew, they can't. Yet as we have seen, there is far more to this grid than can be 'explained' by statistics, and this leads me to the final section of this chapter, in which I offer a far more nuanced account of *The Lightning Field's* deployment of repetition than is possible within the conventional critical framework established by Rosalind Krauss or Frances Colpitt.

⁶⁷ Baker, 2008, p.145 footnote 81.

⁶⁸ To give just one example, Ben Tufnell writes: 'The work consists of 400 highly polished, precision-engineered, stainless-steel poles, set in concrete foundations 3 feet deep with pointed tips and arranged in a grid measuring one mile by one kilometre. The poles are set 67 metres apart and are between 458 and 815 centimetres high; installed so that the tips form a level plane' Ben Tufnell. *Land Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2006, p.57.

5. *The Lightning Field*'s 'grid' and Steve Reich's 'phasing process'

The experience of being among *The Lightning Field*'s 'oscillating' grid of poles finds its musical equivalent in the experience of listening to certain pieces of music by Steve Reich, especially those that demonstrate his 'phasing process'.⁶⁹ To date, such an approach to repetition, moving across the usual borders of art and music to provide an interdisciplinary interpretation, has been given virtually no voice in conventional debate.

Earlier in this chapter I described how walking in *The Lightning Field*'s grid immerses the visitor in an uneasy oscillation between order (when the poles align with each other) and disorder (when they fall out of alignment), and this finds its musical analogy in a number of Reich's 'phasing' works from 1965 to 1972, which establish an experience of listening that constantly swings between perceptions of order and perceptions of chaos. Both *The Lightning Field*'s grid of poles and Reich's phasing technique are, however, founded on precise and logical structures within which one might have expected chaos and unease to be totally absent.

Developments in electronic and recorded music were particularly important for a number of composers – including Steve Reich – during the late 1950s and 1960s, opening up many new possibilities such as the use of tape to repeat sound as many times as was desired, to record and manipulate speech and natural noise, and to create new sounds and combinations of sounds. Steve Reich discovered his 'phasing'

⁶⁹ Reich's 'phasing process' was partly a reaction against serial music, in which there is a discrepancy between method and auditory result. In serial music, while the compositional method is highly mathematical, the outward impression is one of randomness, and the listener cannot follow the various permutations of the series. Reich extends this criticism to indeterminate music, as exemplified in much of the work of John Cage; here, too, the listener cannot hear the chance operations which determine the choice and disposition of notes. Reich comments: 'The process of using the I Ching or observing the imperfections in manuscript paper cannot be heard when listening to music composed that way. The compositional process and the sounding music have no audible connection.' Steve Reich, 'Music as a Gradual Process' (1968), in *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, (edited with an introduction by Paul Hillier). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.35.

technique by chance when, having begun experimenting with tape, he recorded a black Pentecostal preacher called Brother Walter talking about Noah and the Flood, in Union Square in San Francisco. Reich made two tape loops out of Brother Walter's voice, and when he later played the two tape loops together, they gradually went out of synchronisation due to a minuscule difference in their speed.⁷⁰ After this serendipitous accident, Reich began deliberately to control this discrepancy by delaying one tape spool with his thumb, but to such an infinitesimal degree that, although the speed was slightly shifted, the pitch was not affected. What appealed to Reich was, firstly, the impersonality of the process – 'you're watching something going on outside your control' – and, secondly, the mathematical precision of the process:

it's not a process left up to chance, in any sense of the word; it couldn't be more determined. It's a very austere and completely pure working out of this process.⁷¹

Out of this experiment with tape came an important early work, *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), in which Brother Walter's voice hovers between speaking and singing, while in the background the low rumble of traffic can be heard. As Reich recorded the preacher, a pigeon took off near the microphone, and Reich repeats this sound of the pigeon in flight to mimic the sound of a beating drum. Reich comments:

As you listen to the result, you seem to hear all kinds of words and sounds that you've heard before, and a lot of psychoacoustic fragments that your brain organizes in different ways, and this will vary from person to person. All music to some degree invites people to bring their own emotional life to it. My early pieces do that in an extreme form, but paradoxically they do so through a very rigid process, and it's precisely

⁷⁰ In his interview with Emily Wasserman, Reich describes what happened: 'I had two tape recorders with two loops of him [the preacher] saying "It's gonna rain." Both loops were exactly the same length, and I ran them on two machines at the same speed. I thought I was going to make a certain relationship between two identities, so I had to line them up. In the process of trying to do that, I noticed that when I didn't touch them the imperfections in the loops and the small differences in the motor speeds caused a slight change of phase to happen. I let them go and they began gradually to separate; when I heard that, I realized that this was a solution to what a composer thinks of as a problem of musical structure: how to begin someplace and go somewhere else...the mathematics of it, so to speak, offered a new system.' Emily Wasserman. 'An Interview with Composer Steve Reich', in *Artforum*, Vol 10 No 9, May 1972, p.44.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.44.

the impersonality of that process that invites this very engaged psychological reaction.⁷²

The second part of *It's Gonna Rain* uses a different sentence spoken by Brother Walter and takes it further and further out of phase until it is reduced to noise. Reich describes this part of the work as far darker than the first, as 'paranoid and depressing ... a heavy trip – bad vibes – but there's substance in there that gets to you.'⁷³ 'The emotional feeling is that you're going through the cataclysm, you're experiencing what it's like to have everything dissolve.'⁷⁴

There are several significant points of comparison between this important early work by Reich, and *The Lightning Field*. Firstly, the rigid compositional process used by Reich finds its visual analogy in the logical structure of the grid at *The Lightning Field*: once the initial organisational system has been determined, its execution is straightforward and impersonal, and the artist's own personality is held in check. Secondly, with the 'phasing process' Reich created a method of composition whose structure – much like the grid of poles at *The Lightning Field* – is totally transparent to the audience. Thirdly, gradual shifts are employed to establish a sense of oscillation: as a listener, this creates a vibrating world of sound, while a walker experiences this as a visual vibration; and in both cases, the experience is of a kind of rhythmic ambiguity, or even moiré effect. Finally, both *The Lightning Field* and *It's Gonna Rain* use logical structures to provide what can be a particularly powerful, and often far from comfortable, experience for their audiences, as voiced so eloquently by Lars Nittve (*see earlier in this chapter*). Indeed, although Ian Macdonald might assert that much minimalist music is passionless, sexless, and emotionally blank – 'an effective soundtrack for the Machine Age'⁷⁵ – the

⁷² Reich, Steve. 'It's Gonna Rain', in *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, 2002, p.21.

⁷³ Duckworth, 1995, p.297.

⁷⁴ Reich, Steve. 'It's Gonna Rain', in *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, 2002, p.21.

⁷⁵ MacDonald, Ian. *The People's Music*. London: Pimlico Publishing, 2003.

experience of listening to Reich's music is as emotionally charged as the experience of walking among the precise grid of metal at *The Lightning Field*.

Reich used 'phase shifting' in several more works, including *Come Out* (1966)⁷⁶ and *Melodica* (1966),⁷⁷ and from 1967 onwards he applied the process to instrumental music rather than taped sounds, composing *Piano Phase* (1967) (Figure 57), which, of all his 'phasing' works, bears close comparison with the experience of walking within *The Lightning Field*. This work uses two pianos, and the listener can very clearly distinguish a dualism of stasis and movement, since the piece consists of a fixed part that repeats the basic pattern throughout, while the second part accelerates to take it out of phase in an ever-changing alignment against the first, 'resulting in the stressing of constantly different notes or groups of notes.'⁷⁸ Eventually, after a certain number of repetitions, the players reach unison again, at which point the pattern is changed and the 'phasing process' begins again.⁷⁹ It is precisely this oscillation between order (when the two players are in unison) and disorder (when they are not) that is found in *The Lightning Field* as one walks among the poles. One could imagine that the 'fixed part' of the music equates to the fixed location of the poles, while the 'moving part' of the music equates to the moving body of the walker. At *The Lightning Field*, the speed of

⁷⁶ *Come Out* also uses recorded speech, in this instance the single phrase 'Come out to show them', recorded on two channels, first in unison, and then with channel two beginning to move ahead. As the phrase begins to shift, a gradually increasing reverberation is heard which slowly passes into a sort of canon or round. Eventually the two voices divide into four and then eight. Gradually, the intelligibility of the voices is destroyed - one hears only a constantly changing polyphony of rhythmic elements.

⁷⁷ *Melodica* uses almost the same rhythmic structure as *Come Out*, and was played on the melodica (a toy instrument), which was taped so that two tape loops could be played against each other. The work was conceived and realised on 22 May, 1966. See Steve Reich, 'Melodica', in *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, 2002, pp.22–23.

⁷⁸ Mertens, 1983, p.49.

⁷⁹ Reich comments on playing this piece: 'To perform the piece, one learns the musical material and puts the score aside, because it is no longer necessary, it would only be a distraction. What you have to do to play the piece is to listen carefully in order to hear if you've moved one beat ahead, or if you've moved two by mistake, or if you've tried to move ahead but instead have drifted back to where you started. Both players listen closely and try to perform the musical process over and over again until they can do it well. Everything is worked out, there is no improvisation whatever, but the psychology of performance, what really happens when you play, is total involvement with the sound: total sensuous-intellectual involvement.' Steve Reich. 'Piano Phase', in *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, 2002, p.24.

oscillation from order to disorder can be controlled by the speed of one's own moving body, whereas with *Piano Phase* the oscillatory effect is fixed by the 'phasing process' itself. However, the listener has to focus with such intense concentration upon the slowly changing sound that this can produce psychological states comparable to drug-induced euphoria or a meditative trance.

Reich expanded and refined the phase-shifting technique used in *Piano Phase* in several subsequent works, including *Violin Phase* (1967),⁸⁰ *Drumming* (1971),⁸¹ and *Clapping Music* (1972).⁸² In each of these works, there is not only an acoustic oscillation, but also an 'all-over' density to the music. Variations of pitch, tempo, dynamics, and timbre are all considerably reduced, resulting in an absence of hierarchy which parallels the same kind of absence of hierarchy which we experience as we wander among *The Lightning Field*'s poles. Moreover, in all these musical works, as with *The Lightning Field*, there is no sense that the 'middle' is any different to anywhere else in the pattern, even though the 'middle' can be defined spatially in the art and temporally in the music.

After *Clapping Music*, Steve Reich discarded the 'phasing process'. As he himself writes, 'By 1972, it was time for something new.'⁸³ 'Something new' did arrive for

⁸⁰ *Violin Phase* is an expansion of *Piano Phase*. Reich writes: 'As one listens to the repetition of the several violins, one may hear first the lower tones forming one or several patterns, then the higher notes are noticed forming another, then the notes in the middle may attach themselves to the lower tones to form still another. All these patterns are really there; they are created by the interlocking of two, three, or four violins all playing the same repeating pattern out of phase with each other. Since it is the attention of the listener that will largely determine which particular resulting pattern he or she will hear at any one moment, these patterns can be understood as psychoacoustic by-products of the repetition and phase-shifting. When I say there is more to my music than what I put there, I primarily mean these resulting patterns.' Steve Reich, 'Violin Phase', in *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, 2002, p.26.

⁸¹ *Drumming* uses just one rhythmic pattern throughout the whole 75-minute piece, but the pattern is shifted by one player at a time increasing his or her tempo ever so slightly, so that the players move out of phase with each other and then back again; again this is like *The Lightning Field*'s poles continually sliding in and out of alignment.

⁸² *Clapping Music* was composed out of a desire to create a piece of music that would need no instruments at all beyond the human body. With this work one performer remains fixed, repeating the same basic pattern throughout, while the second moves abruptly, after a number of repeats, from unison to one beat ahead, and so on, until he or she is back in unison with the first performer.

⁸³ Reich, Steve. 'Clapping Music', in *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, 2002, p.68.

Reich, firstly with the technique of augmentation which he used in *Four Organs* (and in the previous chapter we saw how the ‘slowing down’ of this piece parallels the ‘slowing down’ that happens for visitors during time spent at *The Lightning Field*’s cabin), and secondly with the development of the technique known as ‘rhythmic construction’, which Reich went on to use in a number of works, most notably in *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–76). I end this chapter with an exploration of the visitor’s experience of *The Lightning Field*’s grid in the light of this major work by Reich, focusing particularly on each work’s centrifugal qualities.

Edward Strickland describes Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* as ‘a radiant work which ... remains his masterpiece and the high point of ensemble music of the 1970s’.⁸⁴ Written at almost exactly the same time as De Maria was planning and constructing *The Lightning Field*, it undoubtedly marks a watershed in Reich’s career, since it constitutes an astonishingly ambitious departure, in terms of instrumentation, harmony, rhythm, and structure, from anything he had done before. It is ‘a riot of colour’;⁸⁵ indeed, Reich himself has remarked that this one work contains more harmonic movement in the first five minutes than any other work he had written by that time. He has described this work as ‘a step backwards *into* the Western tradition, *into* harmonic variation, *into* orchestral color’;⁸⁶ but at the same time it was also a big step forward stylistically.

Music for 18 Musicians has no conductor and no solo performers. It lasts almost an hour, and is based around a cycle of eleven chords. Two rather different kinds of meter occur simultaneously throughout the piece: the first is provided by the regular pulse of the pianos and mallet instruments, while the second is established through the human

⁸⁴ Strickland, Edward. *Minimalism: Origins*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p.233.

⁸⁵ Kim, Rebecca. *From New York to Vermont: Conversation with Steve Reich*. [Online] www.steverreich.com [19.07.07].

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

breath in the voices and wind instruments. With regard to the latter, the entire opening and closing sections, plus part of all the sections in between, contain pulses by the voices and winds. Reich comments:

They take a full breath and sing or play pulses of notes for as long as their breath will comfortably sustain them. The breath is the measure of the duration of their pulsing. This combination of one breath after another washing up like waves against the constant rhythm of the pianos and mallet instruments is something I have not heard before and would like to investigate further.⁸⁷

Michael Tilson Thomas remarks that, in its slow development from one section to the next, the work is 'like something hovering in musical space and considering many aspects of itself before it moves on to something else.'⁸⁸ The listener therefore has the powerful experience of being in the midst of the music, as if immersed in a vibrant world of colour, and listening with such intense concentration that all sense of self is lost. This quality of immersion also occurs when one is within *The Lightning Field's* grid; here, one is given time to notice the fine detail of flowers, beetles, grass stems, sighing wind and so on – and each visitor probably notices different details. Both *Music for 18 Musicians* and *The Lightning Field* also exhibit a confrontation of the mechanical and the organic. In the former, the metronomic pulse of the percussion instruments contrasts with the mesmerising, organic sounds played by the vocals and wind instruments.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, at *The Lightning Field*, the geometrically aligned, precision-engineered stainless steel is continually juxtaposed with the individually determined movement of the isolated wanderer within a vast and arid landscape.

Both *The Lightning Field* and *Music for 18 Musicians* are centrifugal works; in each case, the work of art can be imagined as a 'mere fragment', cropped from an infinitely

⁸⁷ Reich, Steve, 'Music for 18 Musicians', in *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, 2002, p.87.

⁸⁸ Tilson Thomas, Michael. The South Bank Show: *Steve Reich*. ITV1: 10 December 2006.

⁸⁹ Strickland, 1993, p.235.

larger fabric, compelling our acknowledgement of a world beyond the usual spatial and temporal frames. The centrifugal qualities of *The Lightning Field*'s grid are recognised by Elizabeth Baker, who remarks that 'one feels oneself in a transparent structure that measures out a certain portion of otherwise indeterminate space; one also feels perceptually stretched.'⁹⁰ Baker's comments point not only to the spatial impact of this centrifugal quality but also to its conceptual power. Firstly, the work's grid of poles seems to stretch beyond its physical boundaries into an infinite geographical expanse – not just horizontally across the earth, but also vertically into the depths of the ground into which the poles are embedded, and up into the sky, from which lightning may or may not come. Secondly, the grid serves as a tool for extending not just our vision but also our thought *beyond* the 400 poles: we are indeed 'perceptually stretched'. A very similar experience of a centrifugal force is at work in Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*, even though it operates temporally rather than spatially. Using a repetitive and logical organisational structure, the work simply 'begins', and 'ends', without employing any of the conventional musical mechanisms for beginning and ending music; it has virtually no crescendos or decrescendos, no climaxes, and no sense of directionality. This gives the listener the feeling that the music itself goes on forever, and that we have just tuned in to a fragmentary moment. These shared centrifugal qualities also give *The Lightning Field* and *Music for 18 Musicians* a powerful emotional presence in memory long after the 'event' – walking, watching, listening – is over: once again, this extends both works beyond what are thought of as their usual 'frames' – whether spatial or temporal – for where/when is memory?

⁹⁰ Baker, E.C. 'Artworks on the Land', in Sonfist, A. (ed.). *Art in the Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983, p.82. Gilles Tiberghien also finds this quality in Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* – situated in the immense flat terrain of the Great Basin Desert in Utah. The work 'gives an initial impression of a landscape that stretches on endlessly since the immensity of the terrain, bordered in the distance by mountain ridges, offers no reference points to orient the observer, nothing upon which to focus the eye.' Gilles Tiberghien. *Land Art*. London: Art Data, 1993, p.200.

For De Maria, the concept of the centrifugal work is not in fact a new one. In both *Ocean Music* and *Cricket Music* – composed during the 1960s – a very similar suggestion of a centrifugal force is at work. Graham Gussin describes the experience of listening to *Ocean Music*:

we first listen to the continuous crashing of waves on a stony beach. We are close to this sound, there on the edge of it, listening to its detail. At some point a drum beat becomes audible. It is introduced so slowly that the listener is left with little sense of when it began. An attempt to find the beginning leads to a place where we are no longer sure whether we are in fact hearing a faint drum beat or whether it is, after all, only our imagination. Slowly the drumming has become more apparent, but we don't know when or where it began. It is too gradual to hear.⁹¹

In *Cricket Music*, we first hear the drums, and gradually through this the sound of crickets emerges. Gussin comments: 'It's a reverse of the ocean piece in a way, but then again neither seems to have a beginning or ending.' Gussin also finds this quality in Reich's music, citing *Eight Lines* (1983), which

begins as suddenly as it ends, leaving us with a definite sense of before and after, the silence which precedes and follows is like a demarcation. The experience of listening becomes like observation, we find ourselves watching as the boundaries between aural and visual become confused.⁹²

In both *Ocean Music* and *Cricket Music*, De Maria has used what is usually regarded as the most insistently repetitive of musical instruments – the drums – to collapse any kind of rigidity. This anticipates the manner in which, at *The Lightning Field*, he deploys the most repetitive and rigid of organisational structures – the grid – to evade any attempt to map or contain experience.

⁹¹ Gussin, Graham. 'Fade Away and Radiate', in *Afterall*, Vol 2, 2000, p.65.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.64.

CHAPTER NINE

Lightning

1. Introduction

It is hardly surprising that lightning is commonly regarded as fundamental to the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field*. Gilles Tiberghien, for instance, asserts that this experience is 'entirely tensed toward the event for which *The Lightning Field* was constructed: the lightning that crashes down and transfigures the work'.¹ The central word in the artwork's title – 'lightning' – clearly establishes expectations of the 'dramatic spectacle'² of a lightning storm, while the most frequently reproduced photographs of the artwork are those of spectacular lightning strikes against a dark night sky (*Figures 1 and 5*). Certainly, some visitors to *The Lightning Field* will experience a lightning storm, and in the first part of this chapter I consider not only what this experience might be like – both visually *and* acoustically – but also how it has been informed by De Maria's long-held interest in 'danger'. I also compare the acoustic aspects of a thunderstorm at *The Lightning Field* with the experience of 'listening' to two works by La Monte Young – *Drift Studies* (1966) and *Map of 49's Dream* (1968) – which explore physical experiences engendered by certain types of sounds.

However, notwithstanding the prominence of the central word in *The Lightning Field*'s title and the usual reproduction of the most dramatic photographs, most visitors' experience of the artwork does *not* involve lightning at all, even though they undoubtedly hope for it prior to their visit – I certainly did – and the stage seems to have

¹ Tiberghien, Gilles A. *Land Art*. London: Art Data, 1993, p.105.

² Boettger, S. *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, and London, England: University of California Press, 2002, p.118.

been set for it. Yet the absence of this large-scale dramatic event does not mean that the artwork is not realised – in fact, quite the opposite is true – and in the next part of this chapter I explore the work’s potential to provide an experience that depends on the slow passage of time rather than on instantaneous spectacle, on an awareness of minutiae rather than on the monumental, on quietude rather than the very loud, an experience that ultimately is perhaps more provocative and powerful than the more obvious drama of a lightning storm: indeed, De Maria himself seems to have thought of the lightning as a ‘false climax’ to the work. I conclude with an investigation of the absence of lightning in the light of John Cage’s seminal *4’33”* (1952): here expectations of a conventional musical performance are disrupted, yet something else occurs, which, as with *The Lightning Field*, requires first and foremost that the ‘audience’ take an engaged role in creating meaning for the work.

2. The presence of lightning

We know from his own 1980 essay on *The Lightning Field* that for this artwork Walter De Maria spent no less than five years seeking a location with ‘high lightning activity,’³ and that he found it here in New Mexico.⁴ A lightning storm is one of the most dramatic, beautiful, uncontrollable, and dangerous of all natural phenomena, combining the visual and the acoustic in the most intimate way.⁵ It is not surprising that in the course of human history – and in many cultures – thunder and lightning have played a

³ De Maria, Walter. ‘The Lightning Field’, in *Artforum* Vol 18 No 8, 1980, p.58.

⁴ The necessity of lightning was, however, just one of the requirements of the location. Central Florida is in fact the ‘lightning capital of the United States’, yet during his search De Maria did not go to Florida at all. This was because he also needed a particularly isolated site, which Florida could not provide.

⁵ At any one time there are more than 1,000 storms around the Earth, producing approximately 6,000 flashes per minute. This continuous discharge occurs because of the build-up of negative charge high in the Earth’s atmosphere and positive charge near the Earth’s surface. During a thunderstorm the negative charges migrate to the bottom of the cloud, while the positive charges go to the top. When the negative charge becomes large enough, it flows to the positively charged ground below, as a bolt of lightning. Thunder is the acoustic shock wave caused by the extreme heat generated by a lightning flash. The temperature of the air near a lightning bolt is about 30,000°C. The air expands rapidly, and when its expansion rate exceeds the speed of sound, a sonic boom – thunder – results. For more on lightning storms, see the Illinois Institute of Technology website at www.iit.edu/~johnsonp/smart00/lesson2.htm.

prominent role in mythology, religion, legend, and folklore. Lightning was the weapon of the Greek god Zeus, while in Norse mythology it was produced by Thor as his hammer struck an anvil. Early statues of Buddha show him carrying a thunderbolt with arrows at each end, while in some Native American cultures lightning was created by the flashing feathers of a mystical bird whose flapping wings produced the sound of thunder. Lightning storms have also provided a seemingly inexhaustible source of creative inspiration, not just for visual artists, but also for writers and composers: among other things, it has been used as a signifier of the Sublime, of male creativity and potency, of eroticism, power, and evil. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this fascinating subject in any depth, but two personal favourites are worth a brief mention. The fourth movement of Beethoven's Symphony No.6 in F Major (opus 68, 'Pastoral': 1808) is titled 'Gewitter, Sturm' (The Tempest), and the approaching storm is announced by the low rumblings of cellos and double basses, while the staccato notes of the violins render the falling raindrops. Timpani and cymbals mimic the rumble and crash of the storm as it reaches a crescendo, and subsequently dies down. The movement depicts not just the storm itself but also the feelings of awe and fear experienced by a witness to the storm; indeed, in a comment attributed to Beethoven, the composer asserted that the symphony was meant to be 'a matter more of feelings than of paintings in sound'.⁶ In the visual arts, the American artist Martin Johnson Heade's *Thunderstorm on Narragansett Bay* (1868) is his most intense treatment of the thunderstorm theme – a theme that he had been exploring for nine years, and which undoubtedly had great meaning for Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction years. According to Sarah Cash, Heade's thunderstorm views could be considered as 'visual metaphors for the crises that precipitated the Civil War; for its unprecedented destruction of life, land, and the national identity; and for the seemingly insurmountable

⁶ This comment, attributed to Beethoven, was originally quoted in the printed programme for which Beethoven conducted the first performance, on 22 December 1808. My thanks to Dr Simon Shaw-Miller for this reference.

challenges of Reconstruction.’⁷ Indeed, natural moments of foreboding, including thunderstorms, twilights, and sunsets, appear in American landscape painting with greater frequency in the 1860s than at any other period, and they can be found in works by Frederic Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, John Frederick Kensett, Sanford Robinson Gifford, George Inness, Fitz Hugh Lane, and others.

However, in the above examples, as in other works of art, film, music, theatre, and literature that draw on lightning storms for inspiration, the ‘audience’ experiences the lightning storm at one remove – at second-hand, as it were – and no physical danger is actually involved. In sharp contrast, at *The Lightning Field* the danger is very real indeed, and the consequences of staying outside during a storm potentially catastrophic. Consequently, while wandering among and around *The Lightning Field*’s array of poles, the constant need to check the sky for signs of gathering storm clouds, and to listen for approaching rumbles of thunder, provides an additional frisson to the combined acts of looking and listening. As Journalist Pamela Petro observes: ‘My mind focused on the busy sky; I realised I was trying to read it, to break its beautiful code’.⁸ Rather than being a passive observer and/or listener, the visitor therefore needs continually to be alert to environmental changes: indeed, I cannot think of any other work of ‘Land Art’ that demands our *continued* attention in this way. This sense of unremitting anxiety in the face of an uncontrollable natural phenomenon is clearly demonstrated in Charles Graeber’s account of his own experience of a storm at *The Lightning Field*:

The storm gallops along the plain until what were electric saplings of distant lightning bolts are now thick trunks striking the desert beyond the poles, *bang, bang-bang*, filling the air with spasms of 50,000-degree air. This is an intimate weather moment, and I’m duly self-conscious. I find

⁷ Cash, Sarah. ‘Martin Johnson Heade’s “Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay” 1868; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas’, in *Magazine Antiques*, March 1994.

⁸ Petro, Pamela. ‘New Mexico’s wondrous sky’, in *Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 2007.

myself thinking about the metal in my watch, about my height, the fillings in my teeth.⁹

Explorations of 'danger' were not, however, at all new for De Maria, as we saw in Chapter Three. De Maria would also have known of the Fluxus artist Dick Higgins's series of 'Danger Music' scores; whilst not always 'dangerous' in terms of physical experience, these scores nonetheless establish scenarios of emotional angst and, indeed, menace. No.28 consists of the instruction 'Not smile for some days', while No.5, actually written by Nam June Paik (a fellow Fluxus 'member'), instructs the performer to crawl up the vagina of a living female whale.¹⁰ The explosive No.17 reads: 'Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream!' In an interview with Jeff Abell, Higgins's daughter Hannah (author of *Fluxus Experience*)¹¹ recounts how, as a very young child, she witnessed her father performing this alarming work:

I remember coming down the stairs when I was about 4, and there was a group of people in our living room. I came around the corner just as my father started the piece, and it was *existential*. It was like watching a parent being sawed [sic] in half.¹²

Danger was also very much on De Maria's mind in 1969, when he exhibited at the Dwan Gallery. In a letter to his friend and collector Robert Scull, De Maria wrote: '[I am] trying to make decisions regarding January show: Thoughts of evil and danger cross my mind.'¹³ The advertisement for the show depicts De Maria spread-eagled, face down, on the desert floor within his *Mile Long Drawing* (1968) (*Figure 8*), and the

⁹ Graeber, Charles. 'Ben Franklin Slept Here', in *Popular Science*. [Online] www.popsci.com. [01.12.08].

¹⁰ Michael Nyman quotes Al Hansen (who attended John Cage's classes at the New School of Social Research): 'I don't think Paik has ever performed this because he is still with us.' Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.86. (First published in New York, 1974.)

¹¹ Higgins, Hannah. *Fluxus Experience*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002.

¹² [Online] <http://mouthtomouthmag.com/higgins.html> [26.12.08].

¹³ Letter from De Maria to Robert Scull, 20 January 1969. Robert Scull papers, Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution.

caption reads 'DE MARIA DANGER DWAN' (*Figure 67*).¹⁴ The exhibition contained *Bed of Spikes* (1968–69), for which the audience had to sign a 'release' before they could enter the gallery space:

I, the undersigned, in consideration of being permitted to enter Dwan Gallery Inc. and view the exhibition of Walter De Maria's spike sculpture, do hereby release for myself, my heirs and my assigns, absolutely and forever, Dwan Gallery Inc., Walter De Maria and their respective agents, employees, affiliates, and assigns from any and all claims arising out of accidental injury which may befall me while I am attending said exhibition. I have been warned that the spikes exhibited contain sharp projections which I may not touch or approach and that guard rails and other devices to separate me from the spikes have not been employed in order to provide no distraction from the presentation of the works. Upon entering the Gallery I am freely and voluntarily assuming all risks of accidental injury and I am releasing Dwan Gallery Inc. and Walter De Maria from any duty to protect me from the spikes incorporated in the sculpture. I am 18 years of age or older.¹⁵

As Jane McFadden asserts, De Maria's choice of danger as a 'theme' seems to have reflected his own psychological state in relation to the New York art world at the time, for *Bed of Spikes* was made at the same time as he increasingly questioned the efficacy of the gallery system in the face of new forms of experience for art, especially those that, by now, were occurring in the deserts of the Midwest.¹⁶ To Samuel Wagstaff he wrote: 'Think of the basic nature of the art world itself and then think if the Spike Beds

¹⁴ The exhibition advertisement was published in *Studio International* Vol 177 No 910, April 1969, p.iii.

¹⁵ In an interview Dwan stated: '...we were quite literally concerned about what could happen; or somebody could come in – it was in the days when people were committing suicide over Vietnam, or whatever too. They could just come in and throw themselves on this bed of spikes and end it all that way. It was conceivable. So Walter, ever thorough, worked out a contract for entering the gallery. You had to sign this thing relieving the artist and the gallery of all responsibility for injury if you came in to see the show, and we constructed walls at the entrance of the gallery, additional walls, to hold people back until they had signed this quittance I guess you could call it, and then they could go through the door and see the work.' Virginia Dwan interviews, in Dwan Gallery Archives 1959–1971, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁶ McFadden, Jane. *Practices of Site: Walter De Maria and Robert Morris, 1960–1977*. PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, May 2004, p.114.

don't summarize that situation.'¹⁷ To another colleague and collector, Giuseppe Panza, he noted: 'Perhaps my show of *Bed of Spikes* was the last gallery show of art.'¹⁸

In elevating a natural phenomenon to the status of art, De Maria in fact puts into practice an idea that he first articulated in 'On the importance of natural disasters' (1960) (*Appendix 3*), eight years before constructing *Bed of Spikes*. In this brief text De Maria relishes the uncontrollable drama of 'flood, forest fire, tornado, earthquake, typhoon, sand storm ... not to mention the sky and the ocean.'¹⁹ It is noteworthy that each of these natural events is experienced acoustically as well as visually, and that for De Maria the sounds they make are as significant as their appearance, for in the same text he writes: 'Think of the breaking of the Ice jams. Crunch.' With regard to *The Lightning Field*, for those visitors who do experience a lightning storm, the crash of thunder makes as big an impression as the visual drama of the lightning, as shown in Charles Graeber's comments which I cited above ('*bang, bang-bang*'), and once again this highlights the necessity of exploring the experience of this artwork in acoustic as well as visual terms. In fact, when lightning strikes the field of poles, the lightning and thunder are perceived simultaneously, since the difference between the speed of light and the speed of sound is not detectable at such close range. Moreover, the thunder is so incredibly loud at such close quarters that it is actually felt as well as heard, making this a very physical experience for the visitor. John Cliett, who took the official photographs of *The Lightning Field*, remarks:

In the middle of the day a storm came over the field and it struck my vehicle. It was like a bomb went off. I got this horrible headache and all of the polarities on the camera were reversed from positive to negative.²⁰

¹⁷ Letter from De Maria to Samuel Wagstaff, 22 August 1969. Samuel Wagstaff papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁸ Letter from De Maria to Giuseppe Panza, 1 December 1969. Walter De Maria file, Giuseppe Panza papers, Getty Research Institute.

¹⁹ De Maria, W. 'On the importance of natural disasters', in Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Bronx, New York: La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, 1963.

²⁰ Kastner, J. 'The God Effect: an interview with John Cliett', in *Cabinet*, Issue 3, Summer 2001. [Online] <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/3/god.php> [23.06.06].

Such an overwhelming – and physical – encounter with sound was also sought in some of the experimental music of La Monte Young, especially in those works that deploy extreme amplification, largely made possible by recent developments in electronic music. For example, in *Map of 49's Dream* (1968), which forms part of the *Tortoise, his Dreams and Journeys*, Young examines the effect of electronically generated, continuous, and extremely loud sound waves on an audience exposed to these sounds for a number of hours. The first public performance of this work was in 1969 at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Munich (which, just a year earlier, had been the site of De Maria's *Munich Earth Room*).²¹ Used as part of a totally surrounding environment, extreme amplification means that sounds are not only heard but are also actually *felt* by the audience, sometimes right to the threshold of pain. Indeed, on hearing *Map of 49's Dream*, John Perreault commented that it was 'like being hit in the face with a blast of hot wind.'²² As at *The Lightning Field*, therefore, the audience has a physical and often somewhat uncomfortable, or anxious, encounter with sound.

In *Drift Studies* (1966), which is also part of the *Tortoise* project, Young explores a different physical encounter with sound: one that is engendered not through distracting decibels but through the sonic phenomenon of sine waves. When played at a continuous frequency in an enclosed environment, these divide the air into high- and low-pressure zones. Both the pitch and the volume of the sound vary according to one's position in the room, so the listener needs to keep moving around the performance space – from zones of high pressure to zones of low pressure, and so on – in order to experience the

²¹ Young's amplification systems are carefully adapted or built to his special requirements, but amplification is not used simply for its own sake: rather, as Michael Nyman points out, it is deployed as a means of emphasising selected characteristics of the sound, especially the bass, but also the upper harmonics so that the acoustic by-products known as 'difference tones' become more audible. Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.141. (First published in New York, 1974.)

²² Perreault, John. 'La Monte Young's Tracery: The Voice of the Tortoise', in *Village Voice*, 22 February 1968, p.27.

variety of sounds.²³ As Simon Shaw-Miller points out, not only does the room in which the performance takes place therefore become the ‘musical instrument’, but the active engagement of the listener is essential: the listener ‘plays’ the room. Young comments that this ‘allows the listener to actually experience sound structures in the natural course of exploring the space,’²⁴ creating a dynamic conflation of sound, site, and movement. It is, however, an intriguing point that, while Young’s *Drift Studies* requires that the listener ‘takes a walk’ in order that the complexities of sound can be revealed, at *The Lightning Field* it is at precisely the moment of maximum volume and maximum ‘charge’ that walking within the space of the artwork actually ceases, since it would simply be too dangerous to do so. At this moment, visitors have to retreat to the wooden cabin, and this represents a reversal of the experience of sound addressed by *Drift Studies*.

While De Maria places stringent restrictions on the photographic images of *The Lightning Field* in order to avoid over-duplication of the work and to emphasise the significance of the first-hand encounter, so La Monte Young avoids the over-duplication of his music: none of his scores is published in any conventional sense and few commercial recordings of his work exist.²⁵ Like De Maria with *The Lightning Field*, he wants his audience to experience ‘The Real Thing’ rather than any copy. In addition, for Young, the first-hand experience of works such as *Drift Studies* and *Map of 49’s Dream*

²³ Shaw-Miller, Simon. *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, pp.232–233.

²⁴ From unpublished material in the composer’s archive. Cited in Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.78.

²⁵ For many years, Young made access to would-be interviewers extremely difficult, and even now all private tapes can be listened to only in his loft, while scores and other archival documentation (of which Young has a great deal) are lent extremely selectively. Between 1979 and 1985 Young and Zazeela were sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation in the ordering, notation, and copying of some of their archives. Keith Potter asserts that, whilst this material is not as thoroughly catalogued as it would be in the hands of a professional librarian, it could form the basis of an extensive biography. Potter, 2000, p.22.

creates what he describes as ‘a world of feelings’²⁶ for his audience that cannot be achieved through more conventional musical means. Similarly, the experience of lightning and thunder at *The Lightning Field* creates a ‘world of feeling’ for visitors that De Maria felt could not be obtained through more conventional artistic media or within the conventional exhibition space of a gallery.

3. The absence of lightning

Not only does De Maria’s deployment of the natural phenomenon of a lightning storm greatly expand the potential for visual and acoustic experience, but such a storm’s rarity, uncontrollability, and unpredictability undoubtedly enhance the sense of awe and enchantment of those who experience it. As De Maria states in ‘On the importance of natural disasters’, ‘it is in the unpredictable disasters that the highest forms are realized. They are rare and we should be thankful for them.’²⁷ Unpredictability, or indeterminacy, plays a major role within the Fluxus aesthetic as a whole, and also within the wider experimental music scene of the 1950s and 1960s. Dice were thrown and coins tossed, the I Ching was consulted, words were selected at random from a text, pianos became dart boards, and the imperfections on a sheet of white paper became the notes for a score.²⁸ A not dissimilar reliance on chance is also clearly present with regard to an experience of lightning at *The Lightning Field*. One could argue that the probability of encountering lightning could be decided by the throwing of a coin, since there are only two possible outcomes: ‘lightning’ or ‘no lightning’. However, this particular coin is heavily loaded in favour of ‘no lightning’. This is quite simply because most people do *not* experience a lightning storm.²⁹ Notwithstanding *The Lightning Field*’s potential for

²⁶ From unpublished material in the composer’s archive. Cited in Potter, 2000, p.66.

²⁷ De Maria, W. ‘On the importance of natural disasters’, in MacLow and Young, 1963.

²⁸ For more on this, especially within Fluxus, see chapter six of Nyman, 1999.

²⁹ De Maria’s own 1980 essay on the work states that ‘there are approximately 60 days per year when thunder and lightning activity can be witnessed from *The Lightning Field*’, which leaves more than 300 days when there is no storm. And even though the visiting period, from May to October, is the period of

dramatic acoustic and visual spectacle, I have in fact found remarkably few first-hand accounts of the experience of lightning at *The Lightning Field*, either in the academic literature or in weblogs or newspaper articles. Faced with this absence of *The Lightning Field*'s supposed *raison d'être*, could it be argued that the work simply fails to deliver what seems to be promised by the central word of its title, or by subsequent art-historical or media publicity? Are 'awe and enchantment' simply not possible here without a thunderstorm? Should most visitors ask for their money back?

The disruption of expectation established at *The Lightning Field* can be illuminated by looking back to some of De Maria's earlier works, in which such a disruption was clearly quite deliberate. For example, with *Ball Drop* (1961) one expects that, having placed the ball at the top of the chute, it will trundle and clunk through a series of invisible channels before eventually reaching the bottom, but what actually happens is that the ball drops straight from top to bottom with a resounding crash. The work therefore sets the scene for one kind of experience, but then completely disrupts it, and in a mildly alarming way. There is without doubt an element of the absurd here, and this quality of absurdity is also present in *Boxes for Meaningless Work* (1961), as well as in the 1960 Fluxus text, 'Meaningless work', in which De Maria writes that such work 'is potentially the most abstract, concrete, individual, foolish, indeterminate, exactly determined, varied, important art-action-experience one can undertake today.'³⁰ De Maria's exploration of 'meaningless work' is both humorous and serious, ridiculous and critical, and in some respects it reflects the ideological implications of absurdity that had been particularly developed in the literary work of Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and others associated with the Theatre of the Absurd, in which the

primary lightning activity, the chances of witnessing a lightning storm are still slim. De Maria, 1980, p.58.

³⁰ De Maria, W. 'Meaningless Work', in MacLow and Young, 1963.

dissonant or ridiculous nature of the absurd is reflected back into larger questions of humanity.³¹

De Maria combined the absurd and the serious in other works, such as *Star* (1972), *Cross* (1965), and *Museum Piece* (1966). Often exhibited together (*Figure 68*), each of these works includes a movable stainless-steel ball that looks very much like the ball in a pinball machine, thereby calling to mind rather frivolous ‘games of chance’. Yet each piece also refers to more deeply rooted questions surrounding the significance of the star, the cross, and the swastika in various cultures. In all these examples it seems that De Maria is playing with his audience, or perhaps even teasing them: indeed, he would of course have been thoroughly familiar with the irreverent and often downright mischievous style of many of the other Fluxus artists, who were considered by some as little more than pranksters, yet who often sought to draw attention, through humour, to the wider questions of humanity. He would also have known that humour and play – underpinned by Zen Buddhism – were powerful forces in the work and, indeed, life of John Cage. In *Silence*,³² a published collection of lectures and writings up to 1961, Cage frequently asks himself the question: What is the purpose of writing music (or engaging in any other artistic activity)? The purpose, he wrote in 1957, is ‘purposeless play’:

This play, however, is an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of it and lets it act of its own accord.³³

It is therefore important to consider the central word of *The Lightning Field*’s title as an extension of De Maria’s own sense of playfulness: to keep in mind the possibility that the word ‘lightning’ is – in part, at least – simply a component of a game, leading the

³¹ McFadden, 2004, p.88.

³² Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.

³³ John Cage, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, p.73.

audience to expect one sort of experience, but almost invariably providing one that is quite different, and ultimately more thought-provoking.

However, the absence of lightning at *The Lightning Field* does far more than merely permit an acknowledgement of De Maria's playfulness (a quality much overlooked in the extant art-historical literature). It also provides an opportunity for an array (and here we could consider the word 'field') of other experiences that, being largely unexpected, are all the more rewarding. Todd Gibson writes of his own visit to *The Lightning Field*:

There was no lightning when I visited, but I did not go away from the experience disappointed ... the work unfolds in time and space ... It's given me a new perspective that informs how I look at art.³⁴

Gibson's comment is typical of many visitors' responses to *The Lightning Field*, including my own. Judging by these comments, the work clearly does *not* require the actual performance of lightning for some kind of meaningful or even transformational encounter to occur. It is in fact a common misconception that De Maria and the Dia Art Foundation promote the artwork's capacity for an experience of lightning above all else. Although the cost of a visit to the work is highest during the months when lightning is most likely to occur (suggesting that demand is highest during these months), Dia's website shows one of the least dramatic photographs of the work, and states that 'A full experience of *The Lightning Field* does not depend upon the occurrence of lightning' and that 'the probability of lightning during your visit cannot be predicted.'³⁵ John Beardsley cynically regards this as a simple ploy to avoid breach of contract,³⁶ but even in De Maria's own 1980 essay on the work there is no suggestion that the visitor's experience should ideally involve lightning, for De Maria simply comments that 'the

³⁴ Gibson, Todd. 'A Pilgrimage to *The Lightning Field*'. [Online] <http://fromthefloor.blogspot.com/2004/07/pilgrimage-to-lightning-field-part-I.html> [23.06.06].

³⁵ Dia Art Foundation. [Online] www.lightningfield.org [07.02.2005]

³⁶ Beardsley, John. 'Art and Authoritarianism: Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field*', in *October*, No 16, Spring 1981, pp.35–38.

primary experience takes place within *The Lightning Field*.³⁷ He is far more concerned to stress the importance of isolation and of taking a walk, as well as the extended – and slow – time frame for experience, and the continually fluctuating quality of light.

As we saw in the previous chapter, many visitors to *The Lightning Field* have commented on the changing light – at sunset the poles become coloured rods of light that would surely make Dan Flavin jealous – and of the ‘disappearance’ of the poles at certain times of day (or, indeed, night). Wim Beeren writes that, upon arrival, in a hazy afternoon light, *The Lightning Field* ‘turned out to be no monument at all’³⁸ since it was barely visible. Similarly, on a visit to *The Lightning Field*’s ‘test site’ in 1976, Lawrence Alloway describes the dematerialisation of the poles as ‘a dismissal of mass’.³⁹ This surely unsettles any accusation of aggressive masculinity that Anna Chave, having written ‘Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power’,⁴⁰ might have levelled at the work, since these particular vertically thrusting metal poles simply disappear. It also throws into question the overriding tendency to focus almost exclusively on the monumentality of American ‘Land Art’, at the expense of any serious exploration, or even acknowledgement, of its more ephemeral and intangible qualities.⁴¹ Indeed, De Maria has not been the only ‘Land Artist’ to explore light as a medium for art: Robert Morris’s *Observatory* (1971), Charles Ross’s *Star Axis* (1971 and ongoing), and Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76) focus principally on the ever-changing light of the sky – sun, moon, and stars – while James Turrell’s *Roden Crater* (1977 and ongoing), once complete, will explore perceptions of sky light, as does his series of ‘Skyspaces’, which

³⁷ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

³⁸ Beeren, W.A.L. and Schoon, T. *Walter De Maria*. Exhibition Catalogue. Rotterdam: Museum Boymans – van Beuningen, 1984, p.32.

³⁹ Alloway, Lawrence. ‘Site Inspection’, in *Artforum*, October 1976, p.54.

⁴⁰ Chave, A.C. ‘Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power’, in *Arts Magazine*, Vol 64 No 5, January 1990, pp.44–63.

⁴¹ There are some exceptions to this. See, for example, Jennifer Roberts’ exploration of Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* in relation to crystallography in *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004.

he began in 1974 and is still making. At *The Lightning Field*, the elusive quality of light and the intermittent disappearance of the grid also calls to mind some of De Maria's 'invisible drawings' of the early 1960s, in which the pencil marks are so faint as to be verging on the invisible; here what matters to De Maria is simply the thought that the marks exist, even though they can barely be seen. De Maria also explored this quality of absence – of what cannot be seen – with *The New York Earthroom* and *Vertical Earth Kilometer* (both 1977): both are largely hidden from view, dethroning the centrality of the scopic and leaving space for the imagination instead.

For Ben Tufnell, what matters for the visitor to *The Lightning Field* is not so much an actual storm, but rather 'the *idea* of the coming lightning storm, the potential unleashing of terrifyingly powerful natural forces'.⁴² However, by the morning of the second day, even thoughts of lightning seem to have completely faded away. I certainly experienced this, as did Pamela Petro, who writes that by dawn she had 'forgotten about lightning entirely, having been captivated and calmed by the panorama of light and the immensity of quietude.'⁴³ Indeed, even for those who *do* experience a storm, the likelihood is that this will take place in the afternoon, evening, or night, and that by the following morning the storm will have died down or moved away. Yet without the benefit of a 24-hour stay, the quieter moments of morning at *The Lightning Field* simply could not be experienced: this work needs time. In the flat, grey light of dawn, a walk among the poles brings to light a new world of experience: one in which the small and the quiet can be appreciated. One of the few art historians to recognise the major significance of small details at *The Lightning Field* is William Malpas, who compares this aspect of the artwork to one of the world's most massive and high-tech creations – the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) – which is designed to investigate the smallest and most mysterious

⁴² Tufnell, Ben. *Land Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2006, p.58

⁴³ Petro, Pamela. 'New Mexico's wondrous sky', in *Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 2007.

features in the universe: atoms, quarks, charms, Higgs' bosons, neutrons, and protons. For Malpas, 'the ironic thing is that such massive scientific equipment is being used to explore the tiniest, invisible objects, the most mysterious things in the New Physics.'⁴⁴ Generally, however, it is not in the art-historical literature that references to *The Lightning Field's* small details can be found, but rather in the less formal or academic commentaries on the work, written by people who have actually visited *The Lightning Field* (one suspects that some of the art historians have not). On my own visit I particularly enjoyed the profusion of wild flowers around the poles, which were hardly visible at all until I was among them. This curious juxtaposition of the natural 'wild' of the flowers with the high-tech, machine-made steel of the poles brought to mind a number of very personal reflections and fantasies: as Edward Abbey expresses it, in the solitude of morning I felt that I had 'time enough to let thought and feeling range from here to the end of the world and back'.⁴⁵ I have not been the only visitor to notice the flora and fauna: journalist Cornelia Dean writes of

apricot mallow, purple asters, wild sunflowers and broom – and abundant wildlife in the form of ants that have constructed numerous hills, a few feet in diameter and up to two feet high, all over the site.⁴⁶

Similarly, Robert Eaton observed swarms of tadpoles along the puddle-stained track leading to the cabin,⁴⁷ and he also comments on his discovery of an ancient Tularosa black-on-white potsherd, 'probably made a thousand years ago by Pueblo Indians who inhabited the Rio Grande valley east of here.' He goes on to invent a mini-fantasy around the potsherd, demonstrating (as I had also found) the work's capacity for engendering flights of imagination:

⁴⁴ Malpas, William. *Land Art. A Complete Guide to Landscape, Environmental, Earthworks, Nature, Sculpture and Installation Art*. Maidstone: Crescent Moon Publishing, second edition 2007, p.168..(First published 2004.)

⁴⁵ Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. New York: Touchstone, 1990, p.39. (First published in 1968.)

⁴⁶ Dean, Cornelia. 'Drawn to the lightning', in the *New York Times*, 21 September 2003.

⁴⁷ Eaton, Robert. *The Lightning Field. Travels In and Around New Mexico*. Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Books, 1995, p.15.

Surely none of those Indians lived on the North Plains. I try to imagine why they would have been travelling through here – going where and for what? – and why they would have been carrying a pot. Carrying their water across this arid expanse? Someone dropped this pot, broke it. In surprise? For a minute my sense of time is confused, and I imagine the Indians staring in awe at the array, then perhaps averting their eyes and whispering protective incantations. Not a bad idea. This place does inspire a certain fearful reverence.⁴⁸

As we saw in the previous chapter, many of Steve Reich's works also rely on the perception of small details and gradual changes, for example while listening to *Piano Phase* (1967) or *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976). The experience of Reich's music is in many respects an intensely subjective one for the listener, but at the same time it also provides a sense of something beyond the personal. In *Music as a Gradual Process* (1968), Reich writes:

While performing and listening to gradual musical processes, one can participate in a particular liberating and impersonal kind of ritual. Focusing in on the musical process makes possible that shift of attention away from *he* and *she* and *you* and *me* outward toward *it*.⁴⁹

Reich sought to transcend the personal by focusing on the gradual processes of music, and De Maria does something similar by incorporating the impersonal, non-human sounds, and silence, of the New Mexican desert in the visitor's encounter with *The Lightning Field*. With regard to my own visit to *The Lightning Field*, its subtle acoustics – not shaped or controlled by human beings in any way – made a lasting impression on me, especially the whisper of the wind and the at-times all-pervading hush. Robert Eaton felt this too, and he comments:

A light breeze noiselessly stirs the grass. There is no sound, save for the occasional twitter of a small bird navigating through the spindly steel forest, and those occasional twitters only call attention to the absence of

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁴⁹ Reich, Steve. 'Music as a Gradual Process', in *Writings on Music 1965–2000* (edited with an introduction by Paul Hillier). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.36.

sound. In the middle of the North Plains we come to know the silence of space.⁵⁰

This desert quietude cannot be experienced by looking at a photograph or reading a book; instead, the audience needs to 'be there', preferably alone, and this provides another example of the necessity of direct encounter, which has been such a persistent trope for this artwork, and which De Maria stressed in his 1980 essay, where he wrote: 'Isolation is the essence of Land Art.'⁵¹ The solitary experience of the quiet desert is, however, at once compelling and disconcerting, as Edward Abbey recognises in *Desert Solitaire*. Abbey recounts his time as a park ranger at Arches National Park in Utah; he adores the silence and solitude provided by the desert, but he also acknowledges the uncertainties that it can engender, uncertainties that also confront visitors to *The Lightning Field*:

Alone in the silence, I understand for a moment the dread which many feel in the presence of primeval desert, the unconscious fear which compels them to tame, alter or destroy what they cannot understand, to reduce the wild and prehuman to human dimensions. Anything rather than confront directly the antihuman, that other world which frightens not through danger or hostility but in something far worse – its implacable indifference.⁵²

4. *The Lightning Field*'s 'silence' and John Cage's 4'33"

In what remains of this chapter I investigate the absence of lightning at *The Lightning Field* in the light of John Cage's so-called 'silent piece', 4'33" (1952). De Maria is best known for *The Lightning Field*, and Cage is undoubtedly best known for 4'33", yet both these works are continually misunderstood, the assumption being that one is 'all about lightning' and that the other is 'all about silence'.

⁵⁰ Eaton, 1995, p.12.

⁵¹ De Maria, 1980, p.58.

⁵² Abbey, 1990, p.191.

During the 1930s, much of Cage's work incorporated 'silences' of varying duration. These silences were not simply pauses that lent greater emphasis to the surrounding sounds, but were used in much the same way as sculptors were using 'negative volume', or open space, as an element of composition in its own right.⁵³ Indeed, absence is of course an important presence in many art forms: not only is it to be found in the voids of a sculpture, or in the silences of music, but also in the vacant spaces between the stanzas of poetry. With regard to the latter, Stéphane Mallarmé expressed it thus:

The intellectual armature of the poem conceals itself, is present – and acts – in the blank space which separates the stanzas and in the white of the paper: a pregnant silence no less wonderful to compose than the verse itself.⁵⁴

By the early 1950s, absence was being explored by the artist Robert Rauschenberg in his series of monochromatic 'Black Paintings' (1951) and 'White Paintings' (1951). While at Black Mountain College, John Cage saw Rauschenberg's all-white paintings and described them as 'airports for lights, shadows, and particles',⁵⁵ drawing attention to the way in which, as Keith Potter expresses it, 'they reflected back to the viewer not the singular, and illusory, void of their original conception but the multiple reflections of everyday life.'⁵⁶ Similarly, Douglas Kahn observes that,

on a canvas of nearly nothing, notably absent of the expressive outpourings characteristic of the time, another plenitude replaced the effusiveness in the complex and changing play of light and shadow and the presence of dust.⁵⁷

⁵³ Tomkins, Calvin. *The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, p.87.

⁵⁴ Cited in Shaw-Miller, 2002, p.212. Original source not given.

⁵⁵ John Cage, quoted in Daniel Wheeler, *Art Since Mid-Century: 1945 to the Present*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991, p.129.

⁵⁶ Potter, Keith. *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.5.

⁵⁷ Kahn, Douglas. *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1999, p.168.

These 'empty' paintings by Rauschenberg gave Cage the encouragement he needed to create a musical equivalent – a work of 'silence' – with *4'33"*,⁵⁸ which similarly reflects the world it confronts but over which it has no control.⁵⁹ However, just as Cage had already discovered that a plain white canvas is far from 'empty', so he had also recently become aware that in music no such thing as 'silence' exists. In 1951, in the physics laboratory at Harvard University, he experienced what it was like to be inside an anechoic chamber, an enclosed environment that is created to be as silent as is technologically feasible. While in the chamber, Cage nevertheless heard two unavoidable sounds: one high (the sound of his nervous system), the other low (the sound of his blood circulation). After this experience, he proposed that what we have been in the habit of calling silence should be called what in reality it is: non-intentional sounds. What *4'33"* demonstrated was that it was impractical, if not senseless, to attempt to retain the separation of conventional musical sounds and non-intentional sounds, or to make any claim for true silence.⁶⁰ *4'33"* is therefore not a work of silence at all, but a demonstration of the non-existence of silence, of the permanent presence of sounds, and of the fact that they are worthy of attention.⁶¹

The first performance of *4'33"* was on 29 August 1952 at the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, New York. The work's title refers to the number of minutes and seconds that the piece takes to perform, and this time frame for the work was arrived at aleatorically, for Cage employed a deck of homemade cards on which were written various durations. Cage liked the idea that the title could also refer to feet and inches –

⁵⁸ Tomkins, 1962, p.118.

⁵⁹ Potter, 2000, p.5.

⁶⁰ A similar exploration of the impossibility of silence was made by the composer Christian Wolff. In one performance by Wolff, the sounds of traffic and boat horns coming through the open window were louder than the sound of the piano he was playing. Someone asked him to play again with the windows closed, to which he replied that it wasn't really necessary, since the sounds of the environment were in no sense an interruption of those of the music. See Nyman, 1999, pp.59–60.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.26.

‘a sort of personal space-time continuum’:⁶² the integration of space with time appealed to him enormously, just as it did for De Maria. The work is divided into three movements, indicated on the score by the word TACET – the conventional notation for silence. At the first performance, the pianist David Tudor sat on the piano stool in front of the piano just as in a conventional piano recital, but did not play a single note. Tudor solved the problem of the piece’s division into three movements by silently opening and closing the keyboard lid at the beginning and end of each movement. Apart from this, he did nothing but sit, inert but intent. Most of the audience considered the piece either a joke or an affront: indeed, according to Calvin Tomkins this has been the general reaction of most people who have either heard it, or heard of it, ever since.⁶³ From Cage’s point of view, however, the performance was spectacularly successful. Tomkins writes:

This was because in the hall, which was wide open to the woods at the back, attentive listeners could hear during the first movement the sound of wind in the trees; during the second, there was a patter of raindrops on the roof; during the third, the audience took over and added its own perplexed mutterings to the other ‘sounds not intended’ by the composer.⁶⁴

In *4’33”*, the expectation of a conventional musical performance is disrupted: yet, as at *The Lightning Field*, this very disruption provides the audience with the opportunity to experience something *else* that is ultimately far more thought-provoking. Like *The Lightning Field*, *4’33”* relies on the perception of small details, whose character cannot be predetermined but relies in part on an element of chance.⁶⁵ With regard to sounds, these are not the conventional sounds of ‘music’, played on conventional musical

⁶² Tomkins, 1962, p.118.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.119.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ For Cage, the importance of chance outcomes has been prevalent throughout his work. Unlike Reich, who leaves nothing to chance, much of Cage’s work relies on elements of chance; for example, he uses the I Ching in *Music of Changes* (1951), and imperfections on paper in *Music for Piano* (1952–6). Similarly, La Monte Young used random numbers taken from the telephone directory in *Poem* (1960), while George Brecht shuffled cards for *Card Piece for Voices* (1959), as did Cage in *Theatre Piece* (1960).

instruments (in this instance a piano), but those of the wind, rain, birdsong, a passing car, or perhaps the sound of the 'audience' coughing, sighing, or muttering, or even just listening to their own inhalation and exhalation of breath.

Both *The Lightning Field* and *4'33"* require an engaged audience rather than a passive one; by this I mean people who think for themselves about what they choose to look at and listen to, and who also decide for themselves what kinds of meaning(s) they wish to attach to their experiences. With both works, therefore, the traditional distinctions between composer/artist, performer, and audience are no longer clearly demarcated but are in a constant state of fluidity. For Cage, the creative role of the 'audience' follows from his rejection of the notion of entertainment as 'being done to'. He comments:

Most people think that when they hear a piece of music, they're not doing anything but that something is being done to them. Now this is not true, and we must arrange our music, arrange our art, we must arrange everything, I believe, so that people realize that they themselves are doing it, and not that something is being done to them.⁶⁶

The experience of *4'33"* is unique for each member of the audience, and, as we have already seen, this uniqueness also occurs for each visitor to *The Lightning Field*, even though some sort of spatiotemporal framework has been provided by the artist. The photographer John Cliett has described how, as he set up his cameras, he watched one of the visitors to *The Lightning Field* as she walked alone to the western edge of the field of poles and sat down to watch the sunset. For a brief moment a gap in the clouds opened up in the sky and the whole of *The Lightning Field* lit up. The sky 'looked like a Rothko painting', but what was most significant for Cliett was that the woman had got

⁶⁶ John Cage, cited in Nyman, 1999, p.24; original source unknown.

her own private work of art: 'The idea behind the piece is that you're alone, you're isolated, it's for you only and it is unique for each person.'⁶⁷

The Lightning Field is as much an acoustic work as a visual one, even though it is almost invariably regarded solely as a work of visual art. Similarly, although 4'33" is often thought of solely as a work of music, it is as much a visual work as an acoustic one. Michael Nyman comments on the centrality of the work's visual elements: as the audience's attention 'shifted from listening to something that wasn't really there, to watching something that was (David Tudor's restrained actions), they must have realised that it was equally senseless to try and separate hearing from seeing';⁶⁸ this was essentially a move 'beyond "pure" music into what was unmistakeably theatre.'⁶⁹ Indeed, for Cage, theatre and music always went hand in hand. As Nyman writes:

Cage prefers the sight of the horn player emptying out the spit from his instrument to the sounds the orchestra is making: you may prefer to watch Bernstein with the volume control turned down to zero.⁷⁰

We might think of *The Lightning Field* as being loosely held together, in time and space, by the necessity of the 24-hour stay and the physical frame of the grid of poles. Similarly, 4'33" might be thought of as contained within its allocated time span of 4 minutes and 33 seconds, together with the demarcation of the three movements on the written score, and the physical space in which the performance takes place. However, the expected focus for each work – lightning and 'music' respectively – is absent. With regard to *The Lightning Field*, it is the very absence of lightning, or even, by morning, thoughts of lightning, that provides an opportunity for what Wim Beeren describes as 'moments of relationship' with the work: moments that provoke an array of reflections

⁶⁷ Kastner, J. 'The God Effect: an interview with John Cleet', in *Cabinet*, Issue 3, Summer 2001. [Online] <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/3/god.php> [23.06.06].

⁶⁸ Nyman, 1999, p. 72.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

concerning the work's isolation, the necessity of walking in and around it, and, most importantly, the impossibility of finding a final, decisive conclusion about it.⁷¹ These 'moments of relationship' are very personal, even idiosyncratic, and the absence of lightning allows them to occur, where its presence alone could not. Similarly, *4'33"* establishes an expectation of a conventional musical performance that is not fulfilled: instead, members of the audience are given the opportunity to take part in a piece of 'theatre' that is far more nuanced and ultimately rewarding: and, as with *The Lightning Field*, what they make of it is largely up to them. For both *The Lightning Field* and *4'33"*, it is their very emptiness that makes them so full of possibilities.

⁷¹ Beeren and Schoon, 1984, p.23.

CHAPTER TEN

After The Lightning Field

1. Introduction

To conclude this thesis without considering any of the artworks conceived or constructed by Walter De Maria since the completion of *The Lightning Field* in 1977 would be to replicate one of the shortcomings of the literature on American 'Land Art', which has been to treat De Maria as something of a one-trick pony. In that literature – and especially in the survey texts – he is known almost exclusively for *The Lightning Field*, with very little consideration of what came either beforehand or afterwards.¹ Yet throughout this thesis I have already demonstrated the major significance of De Maria's early career – in Minimalism and 'Happenings', in proto-Fluxus and as a musician – for our understanding of *The Lightning Field*. Now that the thesis is nearing its end, the same kind of approach is needed for De Maria's more recent practice. Whilst *The Lightning Field* is undoubtedly his best-known work, he has continued to have a very successful career as an artist during the last three decades, and an investigation of some of the works from this more recent period facilitates a more rounded picture of his oeuvre as a whole, with *The Lightning Field* at its centre. Such an investigation also shows that De Maria's aesthetic has been remarkably consistent throughout his entire career, despite the variety of means used to express it.

¹ Just three works made by Walter De Maria after the completion of *The Lightning Field* are regularly mentioned in the survey texts on 'Land Art'. These are: *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977), *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), and *The New York Earth Room* (1977).

2. *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field*

Six years after the completion of *The Lightning Field*, Walter De Maria made a 'proposal for an earth sculpture' known as *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field* (Figure 69). To be built in 'a yet to be selected area'² – and subsequently, in 1988, proposed for the Northern Territory of Australia as part of the Australia Bicentennial celebrations – the work would consist of a permanent ring, 4km in diameter, of 2,000 pointed stainless-steel poles. Each pole would be 7 metres tall and 5 centimetres in diameter, similar in dimension to those used for *The Lightning Field*, with the poles' foundations sunk 2 metres into the ground. However, *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field* never left the drawing board,³ and is not mentioned in any of the survey texts on 'Land Art',⁴ so I can therefore only speculate about what the experience would have been like for the visitor. The work would certainly have been monumental in scale, inseparable from its geography, remote and difficult to reach – and in the event of a lightning storm the experience would be even more sublime than at *The Lightning Field*. But I suspect that, like *The Lightning Field*, it would also have drawn audience and site together into a particularly nuanced and idiosyncratic range of experiences. Whether driving to the site, walking among or around the poles, slowing down for puddles or ants, watching the sky for cumulonimbus, or inventing fantasies about past, present, or future, the dimensions of those experiences would be equally impossible to map or photograph, or to contain in any valid way.

² Beeren, W. and Schoon, T. *Walter De Maria*. Exhibition Catalogue. Rotterdam: Museum Boymans – van Beuningen, 1984.

³ The cost may have been prohibitive: *The Lightning Field*'s 400 poles cost US\$500,000 in 1977, so one would imagine that 2000 poles in a far more remote location in 1983 would cost at least US\$3 million.

⁴ I have found only two references to this work – not in the literature on 'Land Art', but in two exhibition catalogues: Beeren and Schoon, 1984; and Franz Meyer. *Walter De Maria*. Exhibition Catalogue. Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991. In each of these the entry includes the following sentence: 'The monument is a celebration of the life in this century and that of the next.' It is not clear whether these are De Maria's words, but one suspects that they are, since both catalogues use exactly the same phrase.

Even the work's title – like *The Lightning Field's* – is not as unequivocal as it might at first appear. In Chapter Nine I referred to John Cage's observation that the title of *4'33"* (1952) could refer to distance as well as to time. A similar duplication of meaning can be seen with the title of *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field*, which relates not only to the measurement of number – 2,000 poles – but also to the measurement of time: the year 2000 and the arrival of the new millennium. Moreover, had the work been constructed in Australia's Northern Territory for that country's Bicentennial celebrations, as planned, it would also, via its connection to those celebrations, have looked back in time through 200 years of controversial colonial history. And here one should also recall De Maria's deliberate muddling of metric and imperial measurements at *The Lightning Field*, through which he draws attention to the historical parcelling up and selling off of Native American soil in square-mile sections.

In his proposal for *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field*, De Maria writes that 'the poles could be perceived as either 20 concentric circles of 100 elements each or 100 centrally radiating rows of 20 poles each.'⁵ As at *The Lightning Field*, one's perception of the poles is not fixed, despite the fact that each individual pole is rooted to the spot through its foundations. But whereas *The Lightning Field* consists of a rectangular configuration, *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field* deploys a circular one. The rectangle and the circle – and their juxtaposition – fascinated De Maria, as can be seen in *Equal Area Series* (1976–90) (*Figure 64*), which, like many of De Maria's large-scale works, is in the collection of the Dia Art Foundation. *Equal Area Series* comprises 25 pairs of circles and squares, installed flat on the floor. Each pair differs slightly in size from each of the others, and, as the work's title suggests, each circle in a pair defines an area

⁵ De Maria, Walter. 'Proposal for an Earth Sculpture': Australia Bicentennial, 1988.

of the same size as its corresponding square. The circle and the square are in conversation with each other. As Michael Govan writes:

De Maria poses the opposition of the circle and the square – the perfect curve versus the perfect rectangle – perhaps the most essential of geometric contrasts. The pairing of the circle and the square suggests a binary opposition – like male and female, 0 and 1, black and white, or yin and yang – that underlies the essence of our world – procreation, counting and computing, light and visibility, and so on.⁶

The pairing of opposites is certainly explored at *The Lightning Field*: precision-engineered steel with the untameable and unpredictable forces of nature; the very large and the very loud with the very small and the very quiet; order with chaos; the visible with the invisible. It also seems highly likely that De Maria considered *The Lightning Field* and *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field* as complementary works – with the square and the circle being opposite sides of the same coin – even though they would have been two individual works on two very different continents.

After his proposal for *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field*, De Maria returned indoors. He had of course already investigated the site-specificity of interior space with two permanent (and still extant) installations from the 1970s and still in the Dia Art Foundation's collection: *The New York Earth Room* (1977) (Figure 42) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979) (Figure 54). But whereas those two works could only be viewed from a relatively static position behind a barrier, focusing attention on visual perception, now De Maria increasingly made works which – recalling the much earlier *4–6–8 Series* (1966) (Figure 34) and *Bed of Spikes* (1968–69) (Figure 38) – were laid flat on the gallery floor so that the audience had to walk around them. The floor of the gallery became the indoor equivalent of *The Lightning Field*'s flat expanse of desert: not as large, certainly not remote, but nevertheless demanding a physically active audience.

⁶ Govan, M. 'Walter de Maria'. [Online] www.diacenter.org. [11.10.2005]

We can clearly see this with *360° I Ching* (1981) (Figure 65), *A computer which will solve every problem in the world* (1984) (Figure 52), *13–14–15 Meter Rows* (1984) (Figure 59), *13, 14, 15, Open Polygons* (1984) (Figure 66), *Large Rod Series* (1985) (Figure 60), *Apollo's Ecstasy* (1990) (Figure 70), and *The 2000 Sculpture* (1992) (Figure 61). It was not, however, just the floor that interested De Maria, but the whole of the interior space in which his works were exhibited and through which his audience moved. Indeed, in his interview with Paul Cummings in 1972, De Maria commented on the importance of the temporal and spatial dimension of walking in terms that relate specifically to architectural space:

The most beautiful thing is to experience a work of art over a period of time. For instance, architecture we know has always thought about this. You go into the palace, you go into the house, you experience the different floors, you sit in certain rooms for certain amounts of time and when, after an hour or half hour or four or five you walk out again, you've experienced all of the proportion and relationships; you've experienced something over a period of time.⁷

3. 'Two Very Large Presentations'

Walking through architectural space was very much on De Maria's mind when, in 1989, he had a solo exhibition, titled 'Two Very Large Presentations', at the Moderne Museet in Stockholm. De Maria's choice of the word 'presentation' reinforces the inherent theatrical quality that he wanted to create for the visitor – a quality which, as we have seen throughout this thesis, preoccupied him in numerous works. The first 'presentation' was a display of some of De Maria's works from 1965 to 1988⁸ arranged in a gallery together with El Greco's *The Apostles Peter and Paul* (c.1605–08) on one of the end walls. On the wall opposite it was a large letter 'V'. If, and only if, the visitor

⁷ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972, Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. [Online] www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/demari72.htm [07.10.2005].

⁸ The works included *Cross* (1965), *Museum Piece* ((1966), *Star* (1972), part of the *Large Rod Series* (1985), and pair number 19 of *Equal Area Series* (1976–90).

walked closer to the 'V' could they see that it was the first letter of a text that continued, in much smaller print, 'enus Cyteria. Jan Massys (1561), Kabinett 311, Nationalmuseum.' The need to move close in order to read very small writing was previously explored by De Maria in his series of 'invisible drawings', as well as in *Suicide* (1967) (Figure 24) and *The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth* (1968) (Figure 10). To complete the experience at the Moderne Museet, however, visitors had to visit the city's Nationalmuseum, and locate Room 311, and there they would indeed find Massys' *Venus Cyteria*. Not only did this 'presentation' require that the audience walk around a gallery space, but it also demanded that they travel across town to reach the museum and see Massys' painting: a mini-expedition that mirrors the journey undertaken to *The Lightning Field*, albeit on a much smaller spatiotemporal scale and in an urban setting rather than a rural one, but one which nevertheless can engender any number of (often unpredictable) events and responses along the way. And, as with *The Lightning Field*, meaning is obscure, making room for conjecture rather than certainty. Lars Nittve, for example, writes:

You were rewarded with a marvellous painting, and perhaps a hint as to how De Maria perceives his own work: a combination of the lusty materialism of Massys and the unsentimental spirituality of El Greco.⁹

The second 'presentation' in the exhibition at the Moderne Museet in Stockholm was De Maria's *360° I Ching* (1981) (Figure 65). This was equally theatrical, but in a rather different way. In his 1960 text 'Art Yard' (Appendix 2), De Maria stipulated that his audience would need to 'come to the making of the yard dressed in Tuxedos and clothes which would make them aware of the significance of the event they would see.'¹⁰ With *360° I Ching* he puts a very similar (actually even more bizarre) idea into

⁹ Nittve, L. 'All Fives, Sevens, and Nines', in *Artforum International*, Vol 30 No 2, Summer 1992, pp.72–73.

¹⁰ De Maria, W. 'Art Yard', in Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Bronx, New York: La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, 1963.

practice. Before viewing the work, visitors came to a long mahogany counter behind which hung hundreds of white-cotton smocks, even including children's sizes. Only after putting on the smocks were visitors allowed to walk around the sides of the room, and, all dressed in white, their movements became part of the composition. Ingele Lind describes this as an 'enigmatic dance'.¹¹ Similarly, Lars Nittve asserts that the white clothing worn by the visitors – 'lab coats? Painters' smocks? "Exhibition smocks"?¹² – added to the feeling that this was a choreographed performance.¹³ As with *The Lightning Field*, there is certainly a degree of control by De Maria here, yet, having donned the coats, the actual nature of the walk is not stipulated. Visitors are free to change direction, stay for as long or as short a time as they wish, walk as slowly as they want, sit on the floor, or stand still. The title of the work refers to the I Ching, which has inspired many artists and musicians, including John Cage who used it as a means of composing, for example in *Music of Changes* (1951) for solo piano. As for De Maria, his own deployment of the I Ching can be regarded as part of an ongoing interest in games. As we saw with many earlier works such as *Ball Drop* (1961) (*Figure 18*), *Boxes for Meaningless Work* (1961) (*Figure 17*), *Pyramid Chair* (1966) (*Figure 33*), and *Bed of Spikes* (1968–69) (*Figure 38*), De Maria clearly relishes such 'play'. His interest in the I Ching also demonstrates a continued awareness of the Far East. In particular, however, that interest focused on Japan, and I return to this shortly.

For Ingele Lind, there is a particularly musical quality to De Maria's arrangement of 576 white painted poles in 64 hexagrams in *360° I Ching*. She writes:

Like a fugue that seems capable of endless variations, *360° I Ching* creates the impression of rhythmic interaction between chance and order,

¹¹ Lind, Ingele. 'Walter De Maria' (review of exhibition at Moderne Museet, Stockholm), in *ArtNews*, Vol 88 No 6, Summer 1989, p.188.

¹² Nittve, 1992, pp.72–73.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.72.

movement and rest, complication and simplification, contradiction and unity.¹⁴

This musical analogy recalls the sense of oscillation between apparent opposites that visitors to *The Lightning Field* encounter while walking among and around its poles, and which we would also no doubt have experienced at *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field*. The necessity of rhythmic movement also demonstrates, above all, that the experience of this art is of an 'event' in time, rather than solely of an 'object' in space.

4. *The 2000 Sculpture*

As the new millennium approached, De Maria thought again about how time is measured, and he returned to the number 2000. *The 2000 Sculpture* (1992: in preparation 1985–91) (*Figure 61*) is a 'field' or 'array' of 2,000 five-, seven-, and nine-sided polygonal white-plaster rods each 50 centimetres long. The total size of the field is 50 metres long by 10 metres wide. The rods are arranged in pairs, in a herringbone pattern. Like De Maria's earlier proposal for *The 2000 Ring Lightning Field*, the work's title refers not only to the number of elements in the work, but also to our way of reckoning time, especially to the psychologically charged turning of the millennium. The experience of time was also a key element of De Maria's construction of the work, which took no less than six years (1985 to 1991). The time taken by De Maria to plan and prepare for *The 2000 Sculpture* demonstrates his utter fastidiousness. Indeed, for many of his works he undertakes endless series of experiments with materials, often producing mock-ups before going into final production. In the case of *The Lightning Field*, he made a 'test site' first (*see Chapter Five*), and he spent no less than five years looking for a suitable site for the final work. As we saw in Chapter Four, De Maria's fastidious attention to detail also extends to the presentation of himself, through text and

¹⁴ Lind, 1989, p.188.

photography, through interviews and, indeed, through remaining silent. Such carefulness also extends to De Maria's selection of exhibition spaces, which often have to be altered to accommodate his works. For example, when *The 2000 Sculpture* was exhibited at the Kunsthaus in Zurich, the skylights above the work, usually painted over, were made transparent again for the first time since the late 1950s, and large sections of the light-diffusing plastic grid next to the ceiling were removed. De Maria's concern for, and pleasure in, good lighting conditions, especially the use of natural light, can be traced back not only to *The Lightning Field's* total reliance on natural light (sunlight, moonlight, lightning light) but also to his exhibition in 1966 at the Cordier-Ekstrom Gallery in the penthouse of the Parke-Bernet building in New York. In interview with Paul Cummings in 1972, he commented that 'there were so many windows in the penthouse foyer that the light streamed into that place and it was really beautiful, really like Corbusier.'¹⁵

As with *360° I Ching*, the interaction of time and space was also a vital component for the visitor's experience of *The 2000 Sculpture*. In Chapter Eight I quoted Lars Nittve's account of his experience of walking among *The Lightning Field's* grid, where he noted the oscillation between order and chaos. Nittve also describes the experience of walking around *The 2000 Sculpture*, although here the walk is one that involves other people, in a kind of dance, as opposed to the solitary walk experienced at *The Lightning Field*:

At first it seems that everyone's moving in unison – a slow, hesitating, clockwise ballet around the sun-filled gallery. After a hesitation of my own, I become part of this movement, and variations in the seemingly regular pattern begin to emerge. Someone stops, squatting down for a diagonal view across the space. Another slows in his walk, as though held by an invisible force. At the end of the room a couple are seated, so still as to be almost unseen. As one woman leaves the flow, another couple join it, then suddenly stop, as if surprised, then slowly continue, hand in hand. Clockwise, around and around. Rarely have I perceived myself, or my

¹⁵ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972.

fellow visitors, as so much a part of a work of art. And rarely have I experienced time so acutely, again as something inseparable from the work. As we move along the sides of this spacious gallery ... the duration of the time through which our bodies move becomes quite tangible.¹⁶

5. *Seen/Unseen, Known/Unknown and Time/Timeless/No Time*

At the start of the new millennium Walter De Maria went to Japan, where he made two works: *Seen/Unseen, Known/Unknown* (2000) (Figure 53) and *Time/Timeless/No Time* (2004) (Figure 62). Both are permanent works, and they are located on Naoshima, a remote, rocky island in Japan's Inland Sea, 400 miles southwest of Tokyo. De Maria's 'artistic relocation' to Japan is not surprising. In his interview with Paul Cummings in 1972, he expressed a desire to look towards the Far East rather than back over his shoulder to New York: 'the idea of jumping on a boat and going to Japan was always there.'¹⁷ He was knowledgeable about others' interest in Eastern philosophies, including John Cage's involvement with Zen Buddhism, and he also knew of La Monte Young's interest in Japanese gagaku music. As already discussed in this chapter, he had himself drawn on Chinese philosophy, in the shape of the I Ching, for inspiration.

Gail Gelburd has speculated on the possible philosophical influences of the Far East on works of 'Land Art', including those by De Maria. According to Gelburd, De Maria's *Las Vegas Piece* (1969) (Figure 12), like Zen art, 'embodies and conveys the impression of disciplined restraint ... It's marked by understatement and does not yield all its secrets in the first viewing.'¹⁸ With regard to *The Lightning Field*, there is no evidence that De Maria wanted to create a work specifically influenced by Eastern philosophy. However, Gelburd suggests that it

¹⁶ Nittve, 1992, p.70.

¹⁷ Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972, Oct. 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁸ Gelburd, G.E. *Far eastern Philosophical Influences on Environmental Art, 1967–1987*. PhD thesis. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1988, p.115.

consists of a series of moments, ever changing ... Like Zen, De Maria seeks to put us in touch with that portion of ourselves we avoid – our non-rational, non-verbal side. This Zen-inspired art forces our mind to move beyond the shape of the poles.¹⁹

It seems entirely plausible that, at the start of the new millennium, De Maria found in Japan the deeply ingrained cultural respect for nature that perhaps he had not found in his home country. In Japan, such respect goes hand in hand with cutting-edge technology and precision, both of which De Maria had espoused in *The Lightning Field* and, indeed, in so much of his work. Moreover, in Japan nature is not seen as separate from daily life (even modern daily life), but is interwoven into the fabric of society – in the country's architecture and gardens, in its art, and in its religion. And, in the best circumstances of all, nature and society cannot be separated but are one and the same – a similar uniting of apparent opposites that De Maria expressed in *Equal Area Series*' combination of the square and the circle, as well as in *The Lightning Field*'s own juxtapositions of the natural and the man-made, the visible and the invisible, the very large and the very small, the very loud and the very quiet.

Walter De Maria visited Naoshima a number of times prior to the construction of his works there, and, although – not surprisingly – no interviews or statements from the artist are available, it seems likely that the location also appealed to him because of its remoteness. Like *The Lightning Field*, Naoshima is not an easy place to get to. As Christine Temin comments:

Be forewarned about getting to Naoshima. It's a challenge involving careful coordination of train and ferry schedules; even Japanese people who can read them have been known literally to miss the boat. The middle of the Inland Sea feels like the middle of nowhere ... Benesse Art Site Naoshima is *deliberately* hard to get to – designed to be that way. But the difficulty makes arrival all the sweeter.²⁰

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.117–119.

²⁰ Temin, Christine. 'Naoshima, Japan: An Island on Exhibit', in *The Washington Post*, 12 February 2006.

This is reminiscent of the pilgrimage required to reach *The Lightning Field* which I discussed in Chapter Six. Furthermore, as with *The Lightning Field*, visitor numbers are relatively limited,²¹ adding to the visitor's feeling that it is a privilege to be here, and that the visit – the 'event' – is all the more special.

Time/Timeless/No Time (Figure 62) is located in the Chichu Art Museum on Naoshima (Figure 71). The museum was designed by Tadao Ando and opened in 2004 on the south side of the island. It is virtually buried under the ground ('chichu' means 'buried' in Japanese), and, in order to enter it, visitors go down and through an oblique angular entrance. The design of the building facilitates the exclusive use of natural light to illuminate the exhibits, which therefore change their appearance according to the time of day and the quality of light, just as the poles at *The Lightning Field* alter dramatically in appearance depending on the light. In addition, the museum building itself becomes part of the exhibit, as the light passes across its walls and floors. Buried beneath the earth, the Chichu Art Museum also calls to mind De Maria's earlier fascination with the very substance of earth in his series of three 'Earth Rooms' – in Munich, Darmstadt, and New York – as well as in *The Vertical Earth Kilometer*, which penetrates 1,000 metres of vertical earth. One might also recall the well-known photograph of *Mile Long Drawing* (Figure 8), showing De Maria spread-eagled on the desert floor as if he wanted to sink into it, to be part of it.²²

²¹ There are 10 rooms in Benesse House, 6 in an Annexe called Benesse House Oval, 41 in Benesse House Park, and 8 in Benesse House Beach. There are also day visitors to the island, but they leave before the evening.

²² Other artists have completely entered the earth. See, for example, Keith Arnatt's *Self Burial* (1969), Graham Metson's *Rebirth* (1969), and numerous works by Ana Mendieta (e.g. *Untitled: Grass on Woman*, 1972).

Part of the Chichu Art Museum's remit is to 'rethink the relationship between nature and people',²³ and the interior spaces of the museum were specifically designed by Tadao Ando for permanent installations by just three artists, each of whom certainly explored just such a relationship: James Turrell (*Afrum, Pale Blue* (1968), *Open Field* (2000), and *Open Sky* (2004)), Claude Monet (four large oil paintings of water lilies, including *Water-Lily Pond* (c.1915–26)), and De Maria's *Time/Timeless/No Time* (2004). To reach De Maria's work, a grand staircase leads up to a huge, highly polished sphere of basalt, an orb of black that reflects both the ceiling skylight and the series of gold bars that line the space. The room has the feel of a new-age Shinto shrine: indeed, Christine Temin describes it as 'part cathedral, part sci-fi movie set', and she writes that 'the result is intimidating, as if the orb wanted to roll down and crush you'.²⁴ Like many of De Maria's earlier works commissioned by the Dia Art Foundation, here the scale and setting enhance the work's auratic and theatrical qualities.

Time/Timeless/No Time: the work's title, like the title of *The Lightning Field*, which I discussed in Chapter Four, is ambiguous – even apparently contradictory – echoing De Maria's usual refusal to be the arbiter of meaning(s). This refusal to locate clear meaning in the title is also true of the other work made by De Maria on Naoshima: *Seen/Unseen, Known/Unknown* (2000) (*Figure 53*), which is located at the Seaside Gallery, directly overlooking the sea. Two large black granite spheres and two wooden sculptures covered in gold leaf are placed symmetrically. Because of the configuration of the narrow space that extends far beyond the entrance on both sides, it is impossible to see the entire work at once. Viewers walk inside and outside of the space, see the spheres from the outside, look back from behind and see the work together with the ocean, as well as reflections (sometimes of themselves) which shift with the visitor.

²³ The Chichu Art Museum [Online] www.chichu.jp/e/works/ [15.05.2009]

²⁴ Temin, 2006.

They can only comprehend the full work by combining what they see in the present moment with what they saw in previous moments: there is no gestalt. In this way, the work calls attention to the building up of awareness while moving through time and space, recalling the appreciation of slow time and slow walks among and around *The Lightning Field's* grid, which I discussed in Chapter Eight.

Just as a traditional Japanese house has sliding screens which can be opened up to bring the outside in and vice versa, *Seen/Unseen, Known/Unknown* is both inside and outside (or perhaps neither), effectively destroying any distinction between these two apparent opposites. As with *The Lightning Field*, it also unites highly polished and expertly crafted objects with the expanse of the natural landscape beyond. The work incorporates a sense of unspoken and timeless mystery – called *yugen* in Japanese – which, generally through the sparsest of means, values the power to evoke as opposed to the ability to state directly. *Yugen* can also be found in the haiku form of poetry, and in Japanese painting, where just a few words or the minimum of brushstrokes can suggest what has not been said or shown. As discussed in Chapter Four, both De Maria and La Monte Young achieved this quality in various ‘texts’: De Maria in his written entry for Grégoire Müller’s *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies* (Figure 51);²⁵ and Young in a number of his compositions for the *Fluxus Anthology*, especially *Piano Piece for David Tudor #3*, which consists of just seven words: ‘most of them were very old grasshoppers’,²⁶ and *Composition 1960 #15 to Richard Huelsenbeck*, which is as follows:

This piece is little whirlpools
out in the middle of the ocean.²⁷

²⁵ Müller, Grégoire. *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*. New York and London: Praeger, 1972.

²⁶ Young, La Monte. *Piano Piece for David Tudor #3*, in MacLow and Young, 1963.

²⁷ Young, La Monte. *Composition 1960 #15 to Richard Huelsenbeck*, in MacLow and Young, 1963.

6. Conclusion

There has not been space in this chapter to do much more than provide a very brief overview of just a few of Walter De Maria's artworks since *The Lightning Field*. Yet I hope that, however concise, it has drawn attention to an important possibility for future research, for no in-depth exploration of this period of De Maria's career – or of its relevance for an understanding of earlier work – has yet been undertaken, and it is therefore very much overdue. My intention in this chapter has also been to reinforce the point that, throughout Walter De Maria's entire career – and especially with regard to the visitor's experience of *The Lightning Field* – his central preoccupation has been with the total integration of the art object, the 'audience', and the space-time in which they unite – and that 'context', as opposed to 'text', lies at the heart of his work. This view of art was clearly expressed by John Cage in 1967:

Art, instead of being an object made by one person, is a process set in motion by a group of people ... It isn't someone saying something, but people doing things, giving everyone (including those involved) the opportunity to have experiences they would not otherwise have had.²⁸

One of the aims of Fluxus, expressed in George Maciunas's 'Manifesto' of 1963, was as follows:

Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.²⁹

If anything is located at the heart of *The Lightning Field*'s 'field', it is the experience not so much of the professional, dilettante, or critic, but rather of the public: a true democratisation of the experience of art. The visit to *The Lightning Field* demands immensely personal engagement, with each pilgrim, or player – and here I think back to

²⁸ Cage, John, cited in Udo Kultermann. *Art-Events and Happenings* (trans. J.W. Gabriel). London: Mathews Miller Dunbar, 1971, p.8.

²⁹ Maciunas, George *Fluxus Manifesto*, 1963. [Online] www.artnotart.com/fluxus/gmaciunas-manifesto.html [15.05.2009]

the element of ‘play’ in so many of De Maria’s works, as well as the ‘play’ of theatre – creating the work anew for themselves. However, the experience of its metallic minimalist grid – together with the journey required to get there at all – demands that the visitor embrace a continual tension between freedom and control, which we find in so much of De Maria’s work. Although *The Lightning Field* provides no apparent narrative, and has no central focus, the physical and emotional ‘blank’ that it presents is nevertheless one that has been precisely engineered by the artist.

Figure 1



Walter De Maria

The Lightning Field (number one in a series of six photographs)

1977

400 stainless-steel poles in a grid 1 mile by 1006 metres

Average height of poles: 20 feet 7.5 inches. Diameter: 2 inches

Catron County, New Mexico

Photograph by John Cliett

Figure 2



Walter De Maria

The Lightning Field (number two in a series of six photographs)

1977

400 stainless-steel poles in a grid 1 mile by 1006 metres

Average height of poles: 20 feet 7.5 inches. Diameter: 2 inches

Catron County, New Mexico

Photograph by John Cliett

Figure 3



Walter De Maria

The Lightning Field (number three in a series of six photographs)

1977

400 stainless-steel poles in a grid 1 mile by 1006 metres

Average height of poles: 20 feet 7.5 inches. Diameter: 2 inches

Catron County, New Mexico

Photograph by John Cliett

Figure 4



Walter De Maria

The Lightning Field (number four in a series of six photographs)

1977

400 stainless-steel poles in a grid 1 mile by 1006 metres

Average height of poles: 20 feet 7.5 inches. Diameter: 2 inches

Catron County, New Mexico

Photograph by John Cliett

Figure 5



Walter De Maria

The Lightning Field (number five in a series of six photographs)

1977

400 stainless-steel poles in a grid 1 mile by 1006 metres

Average height of poles: 20 feet 7.5 inches. Diameter: 2 inches

Catron County, New Mexico

Photograph by John Cliett

Figure 6



Walter De Maria

The Lightning Field (number six in a series of six photographs)

1977

400 stainless-steel poles in a grid 1 mile by 1006 metres

Average height of poles: 20 feet 7.5 inches. Diameter: 2 inches

Catron County, New Mexico

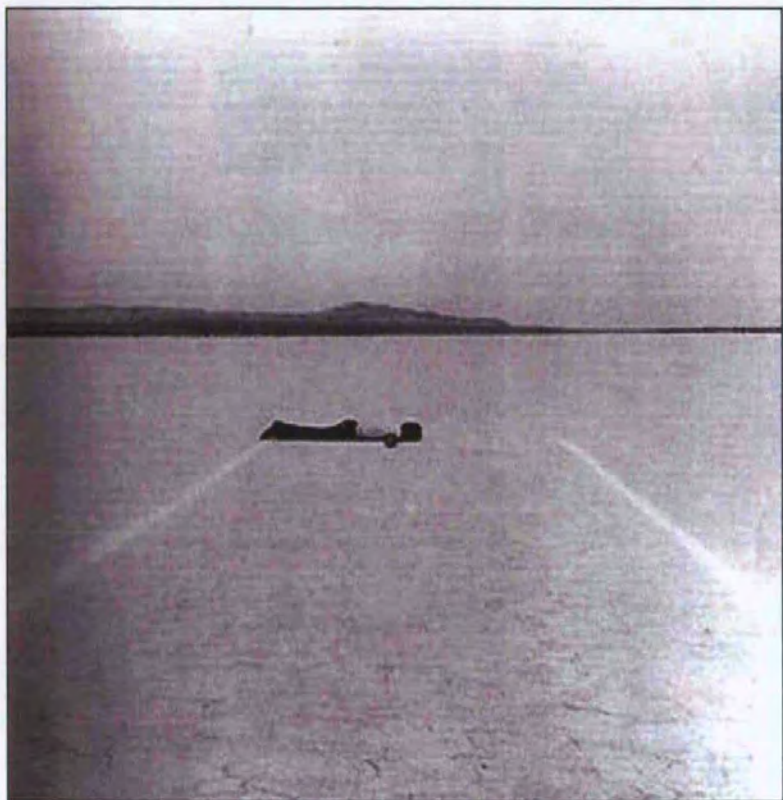
Photograph by John Cliett

Figure 7



Walter De Maria
Three frames from the film *Two Lines Three Circles on the Desert*
1969
Mojave Desert, California
4 minutes 46 seconds

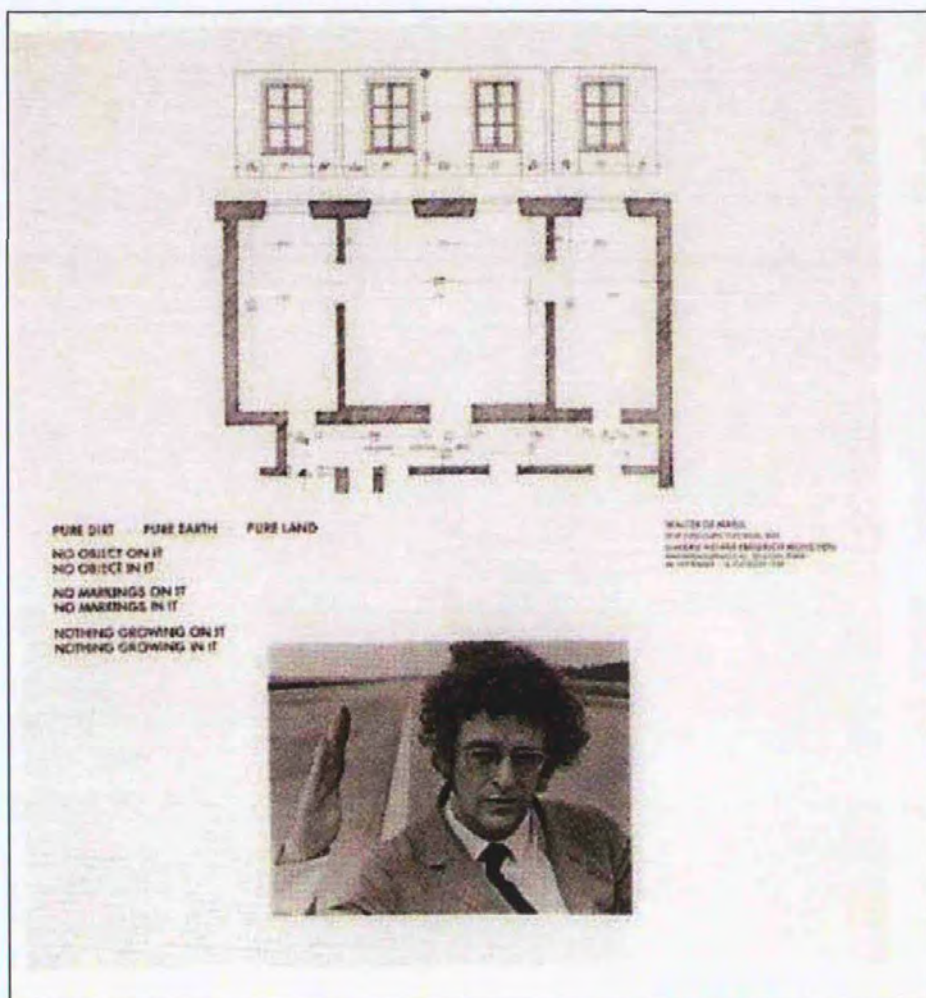
Figure 8



Walter De Maria
Mile Long Drawing
1968

Two parallel chalk lines 4 inches wide and 1 mile long, 12 feet apart from one another.
Mojave Desert, California

Figure 9



Poster for Walter De Maria's *Munich Earth Room*
Galerie Heiner Friedrich
Munich, 1968

Figure 10



Walter De Maria

The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth

1968

Oil on canvas

7 feet × 20 feet

Menil Collection, Houston, Texas, USA

Figure 11



Walter De Maria

Cross

1968

Two lines in white chalk 3 inches wide, forming a cross 500 feet wide and 1,000 feet long

El Mirage Dry Lake, Nevada

Photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni, Sygma

Figure 12



Walter De Maria

Las Vegas Piece

1969

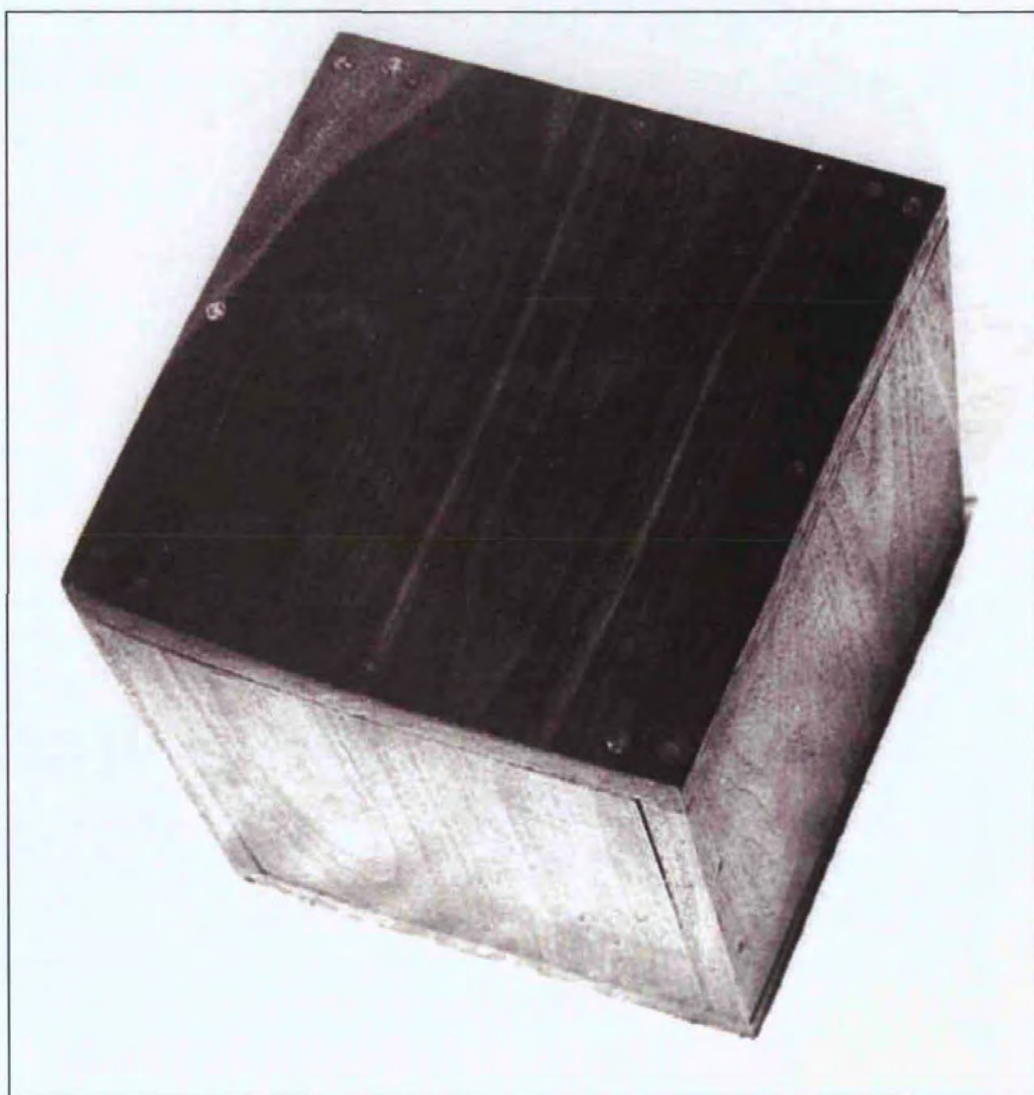
Trenches 8 feet wide, forming right angles over an area of 1 mile \times 1½ mile.

All the cuts are oriented north-south or east-west.

White Pine County, Desert Valley, Nevada

Condition uncertain

Figure 13



Robert Morris

Box with the sound of its own making

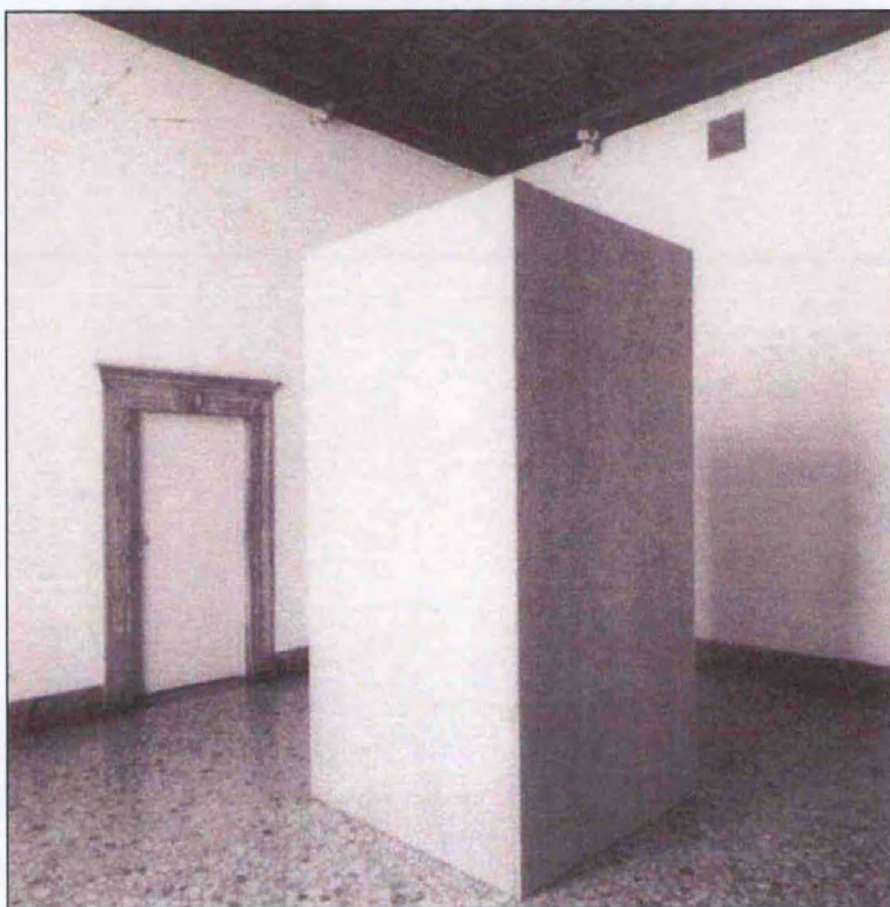
1961

Walnut box, speaker, and 3½-hour recorded tape

9 × 9 × 9 inches

Collection of the artist

Figure 14



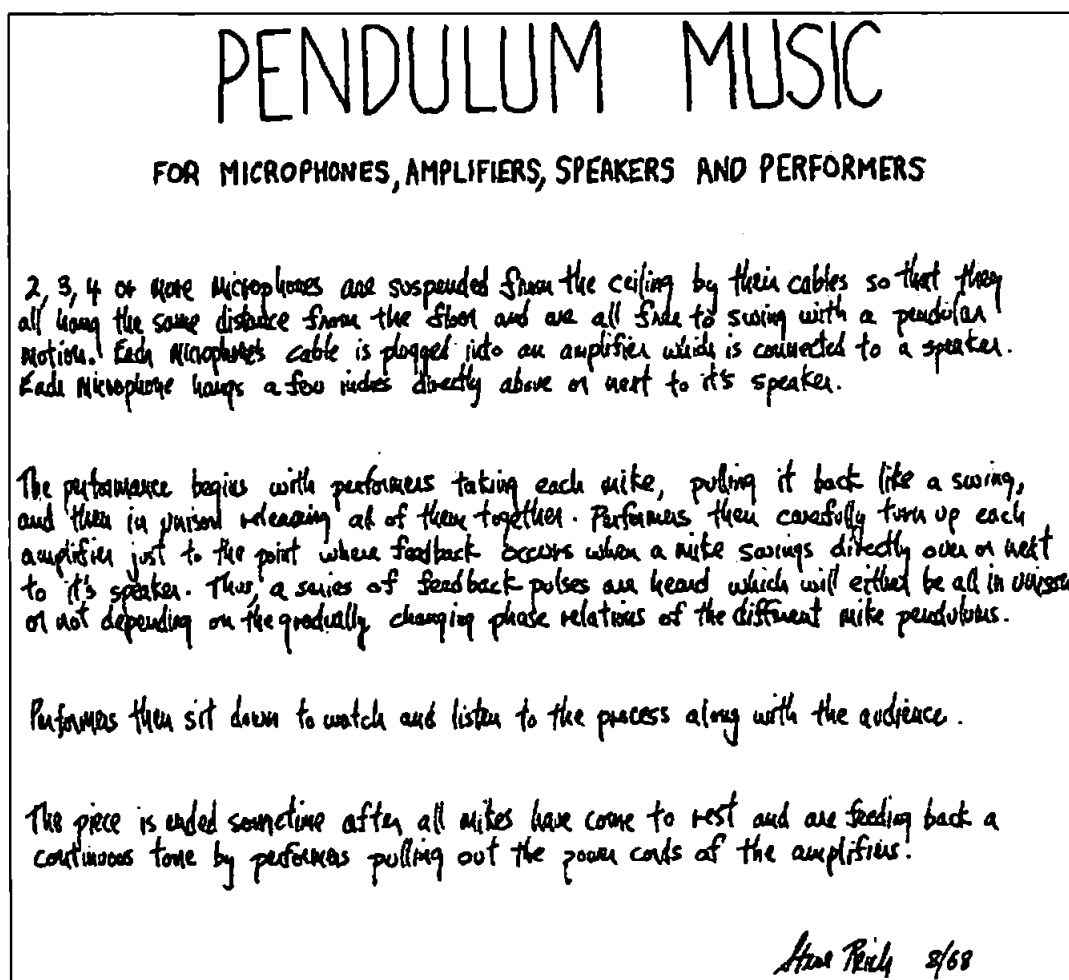
Walter De Maria
Untitled (4' × 8' Box)
1961
Plywood
96 × 48 × 48 inches
Reconstructed 1974, 1979, and 1984.
Collection Dia Art Foundation, New York

Figure 15



Walter De Maria (centre in top photo, and right of centre in bottom photo, in white shirt and wearing glasses) performing in Robert Whitman's *Flower*
March 1963, Great Jones Street, New York

Figure 16



Steve Reich

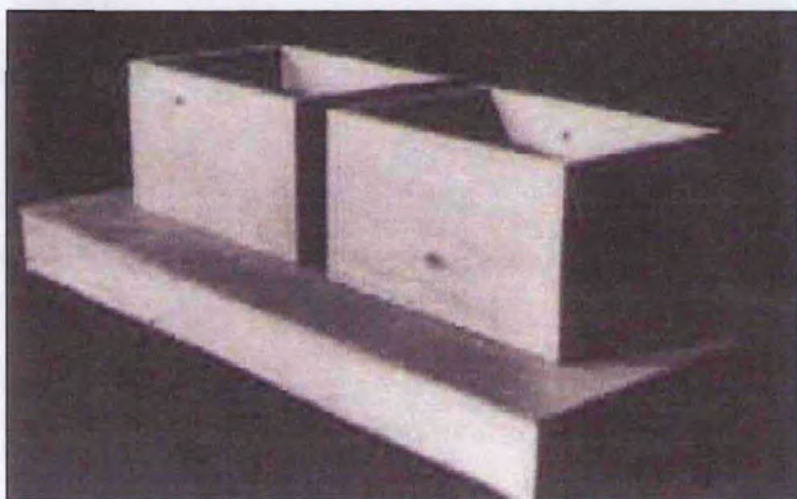
Pendulum Music

1968

First published in *Aspen*, Issue No. 8 (Fall/Winter 1970–71), titled

'Art/Information/Science', edited by Dan Graham and designed by George Maciunas.

Figure 17



Walter De Maria

Boxes for Meaningless Work

1961

Wood

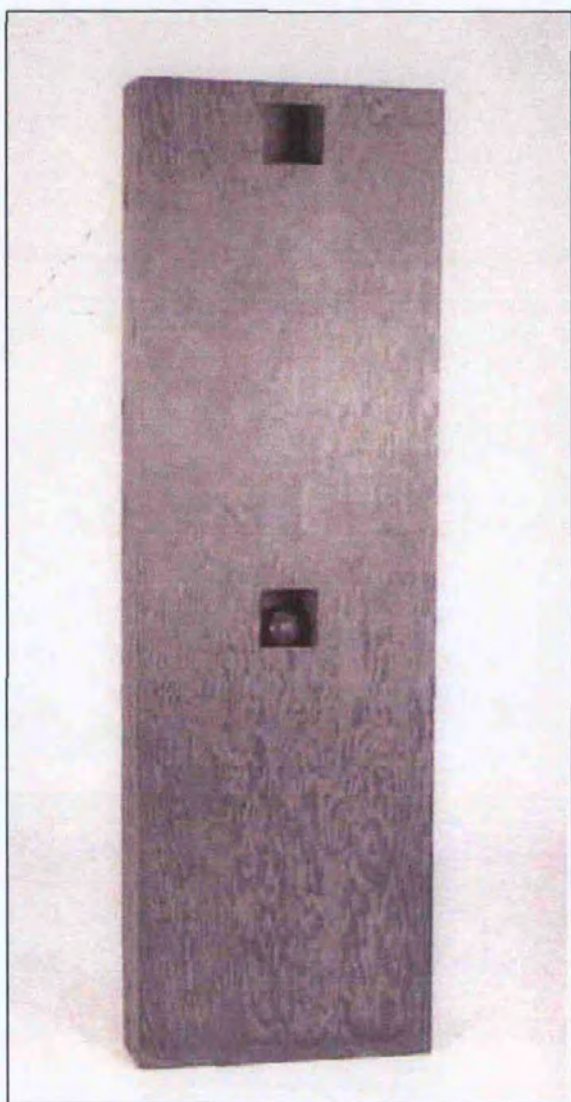
Boxes: 24.5 × 33.5 × 46 cm

Base: 10.5 × 10.2 × 61 cm

Inscribed in pencil on base: "BOXES FOR MEANINGLESS WORK. TRANSFER THINGS FROM ONE BOX TO THE NEXT BOX BACK AND FORTH, BACK AND FORTH, ETC. BE AWARE THAT WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS MEANINGLESS."

Collection of the artist.

Figure 18



Walter De Maria

Ball Drop

1961

Wood and wood ball

76 × 24 × 6.2 inches

Figure 19

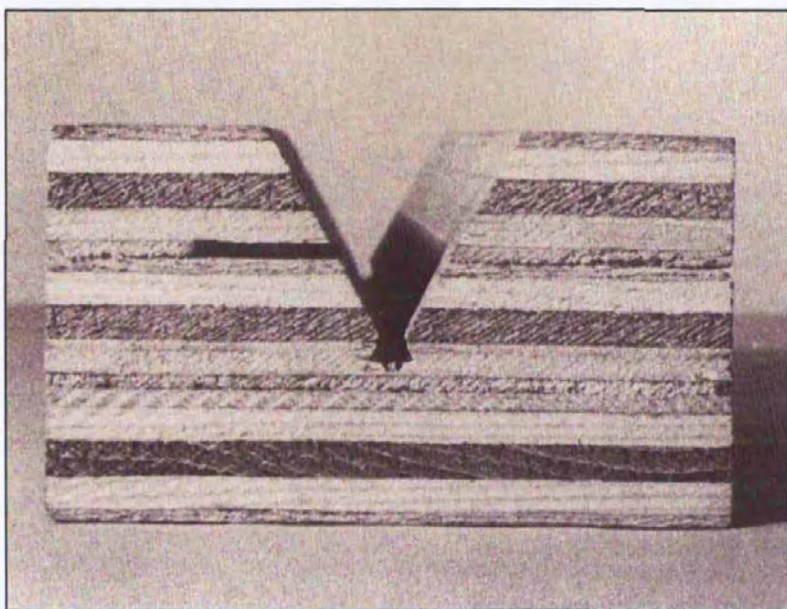


Walter De Maria
Silver Portrait of Dorian Gray (front and back views)
1965

Metal and velvet cloth. Stamped with signature, titled and dated November 5, 1965 on a plaque on the reverse. Silver unit mounted on velvet covered wood with velvet cornice and curtain overall: 104.5 × 79.1 × 10.8 cm. The engraved inscription on the plaque on the reverse reads as follows: 'The silver plate turns color as the air touches it. The process may be photographed. When the owner judges that enough time has passed, this plaque may be removed to free and clean the silver plate. The process can then begin anew...Date: November 5, 1965. For: Robert Scull.'

Private collection

Figure 20



Walter De Maria

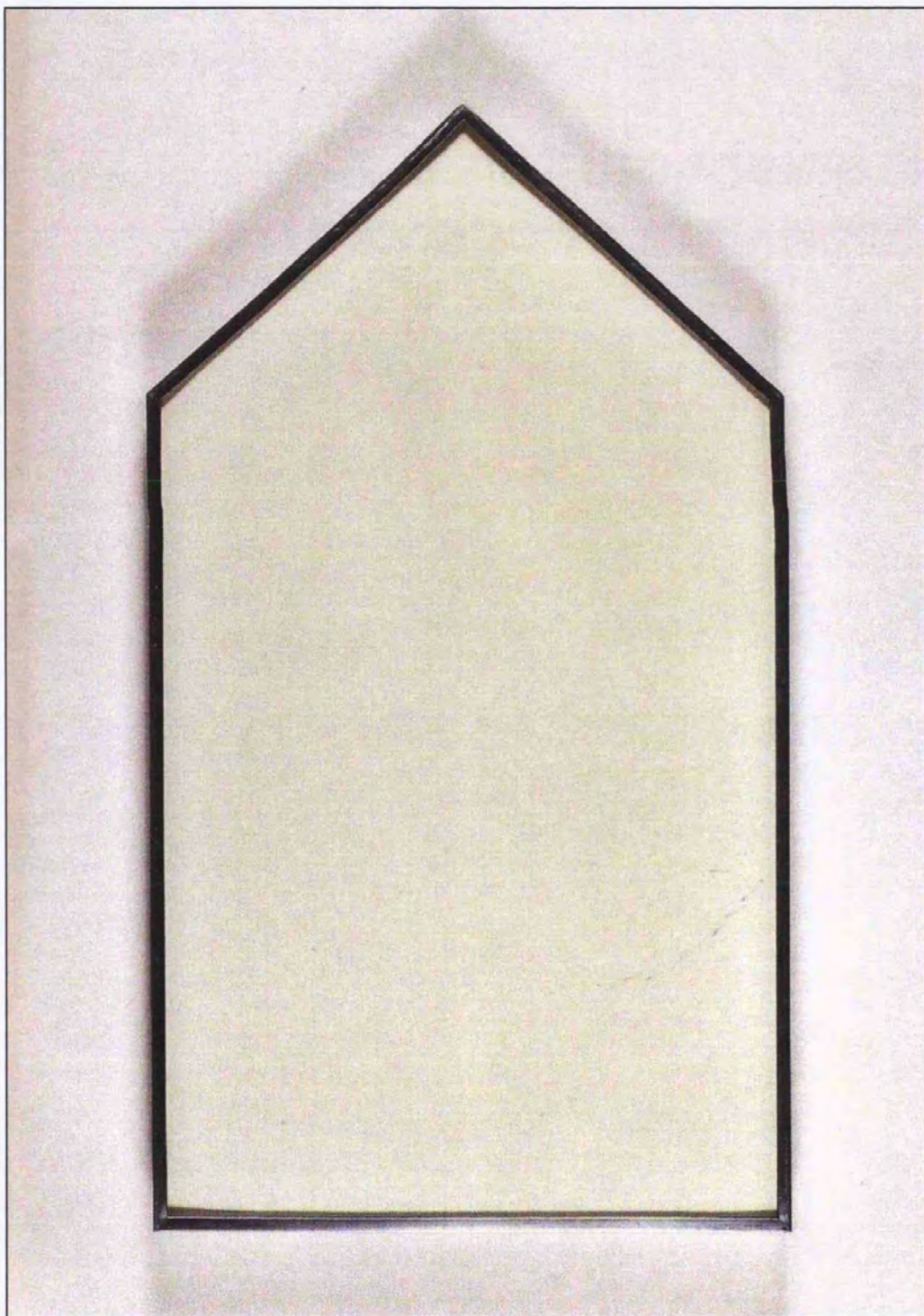
Land Piece

1966

Wood

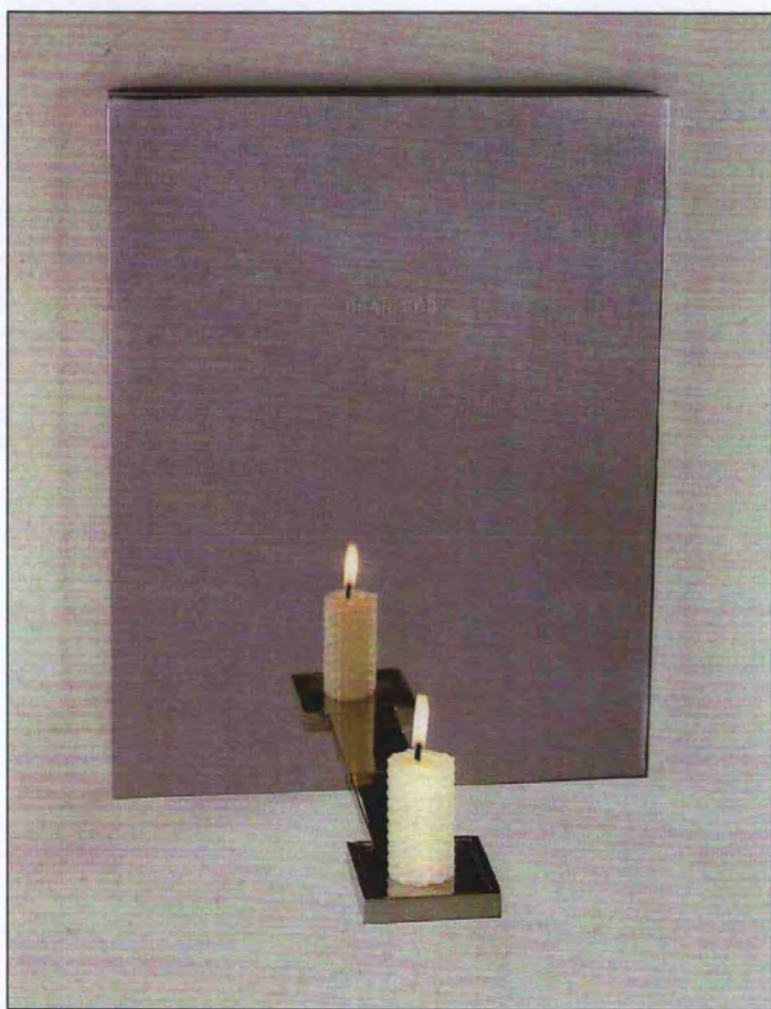
10 × 6.5 × 32.5 cm

Figure 21



Walter De Maria
Gothic Shaped Drawing
1965
Paper with metal frame
62 × 35 cm
Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Figure 22



Walter De Maria

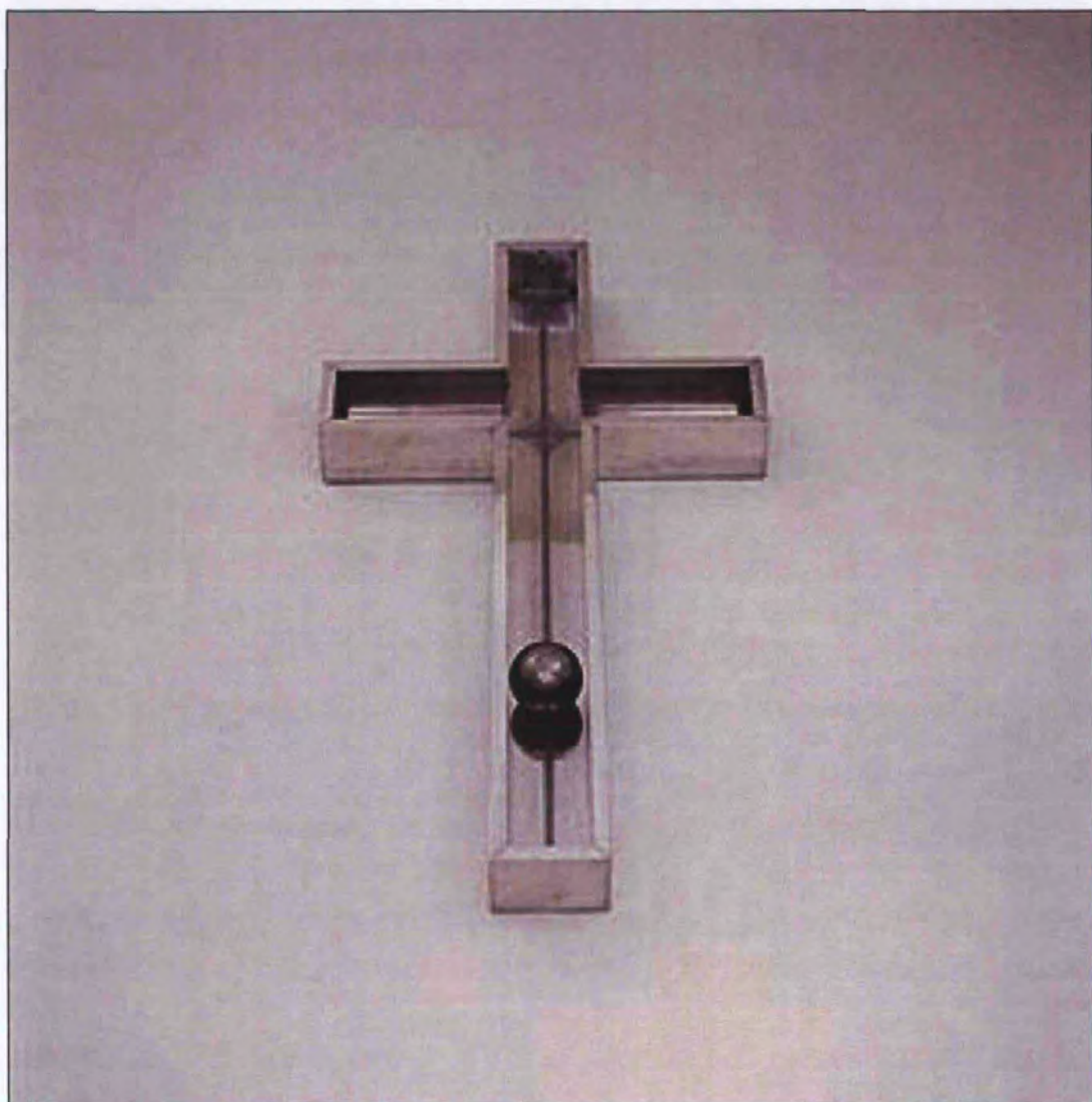
Candle Piece

1965

Stainless steel (engraved 'DEAR GOD') and beeswax candle

36 × 28 × 18 cm

Figure 23



Walter De Maria

Cross

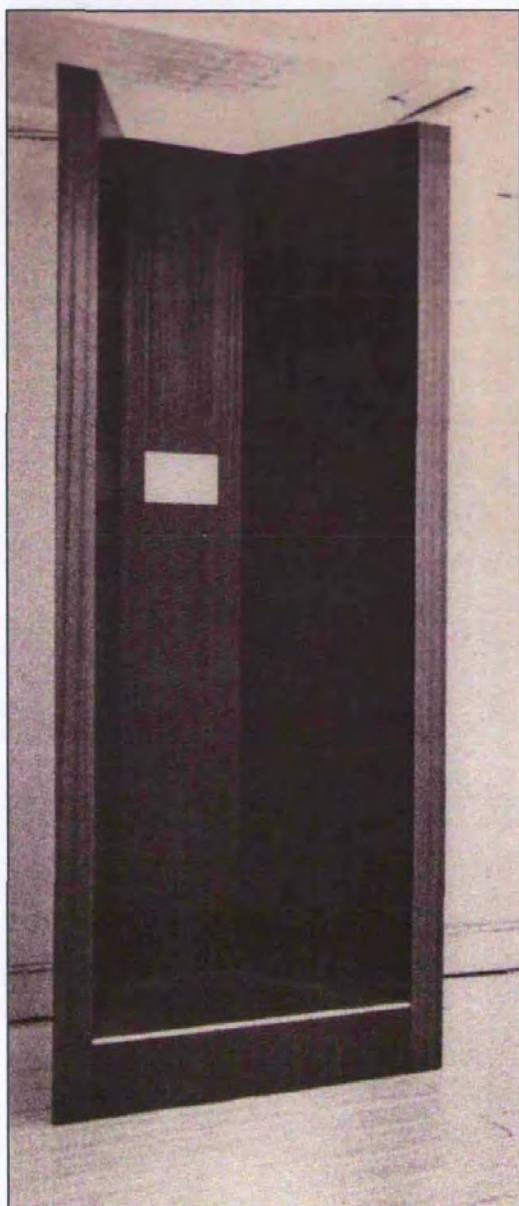
1965–66

Aluminium

4 × 42 × 22 inches

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Figure 24



Walter De Maria

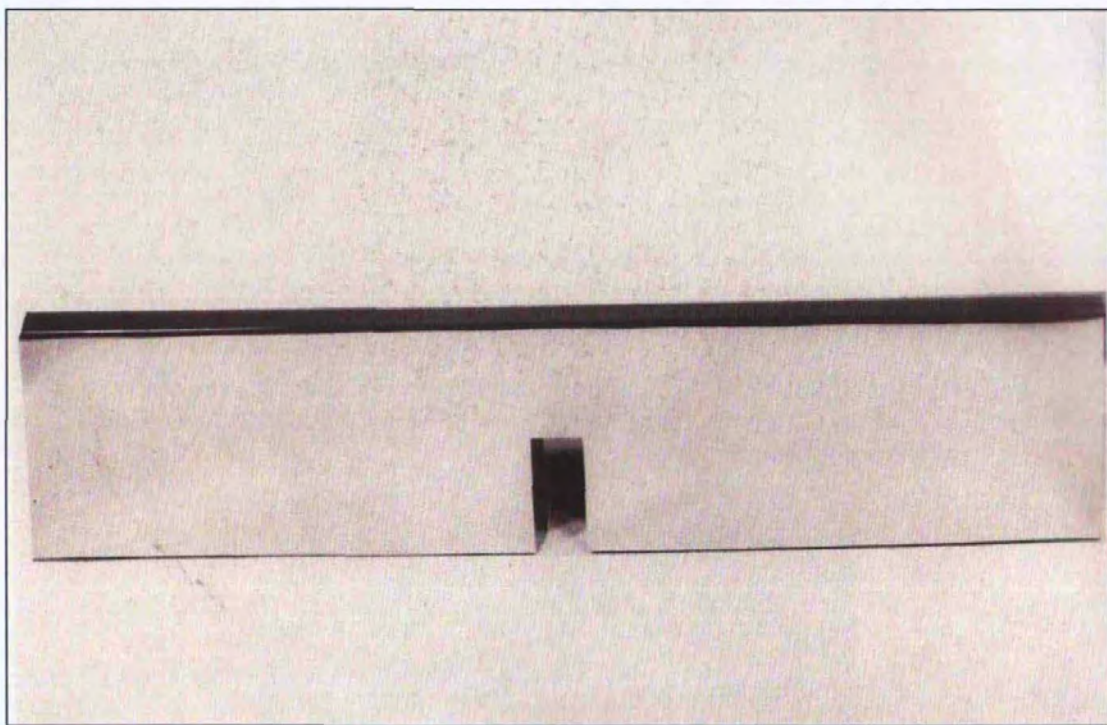
Suicide

1967

Wood and stainless-steel plate engraved with the title

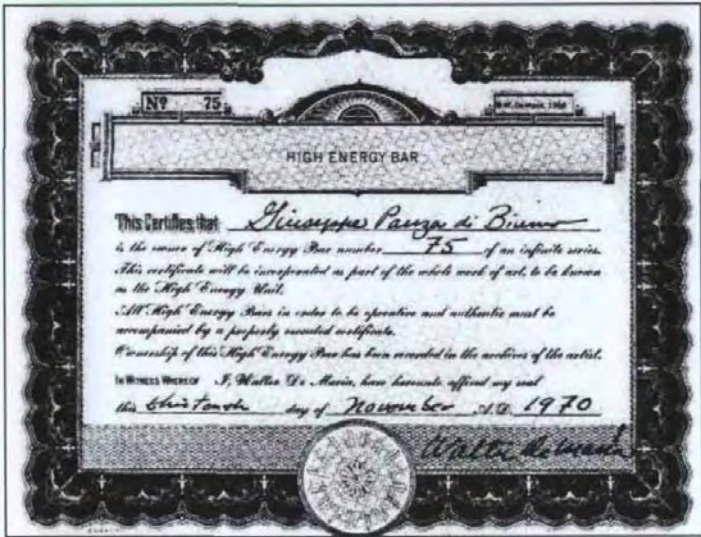
285 × 39 × 90 cm

Figure 25



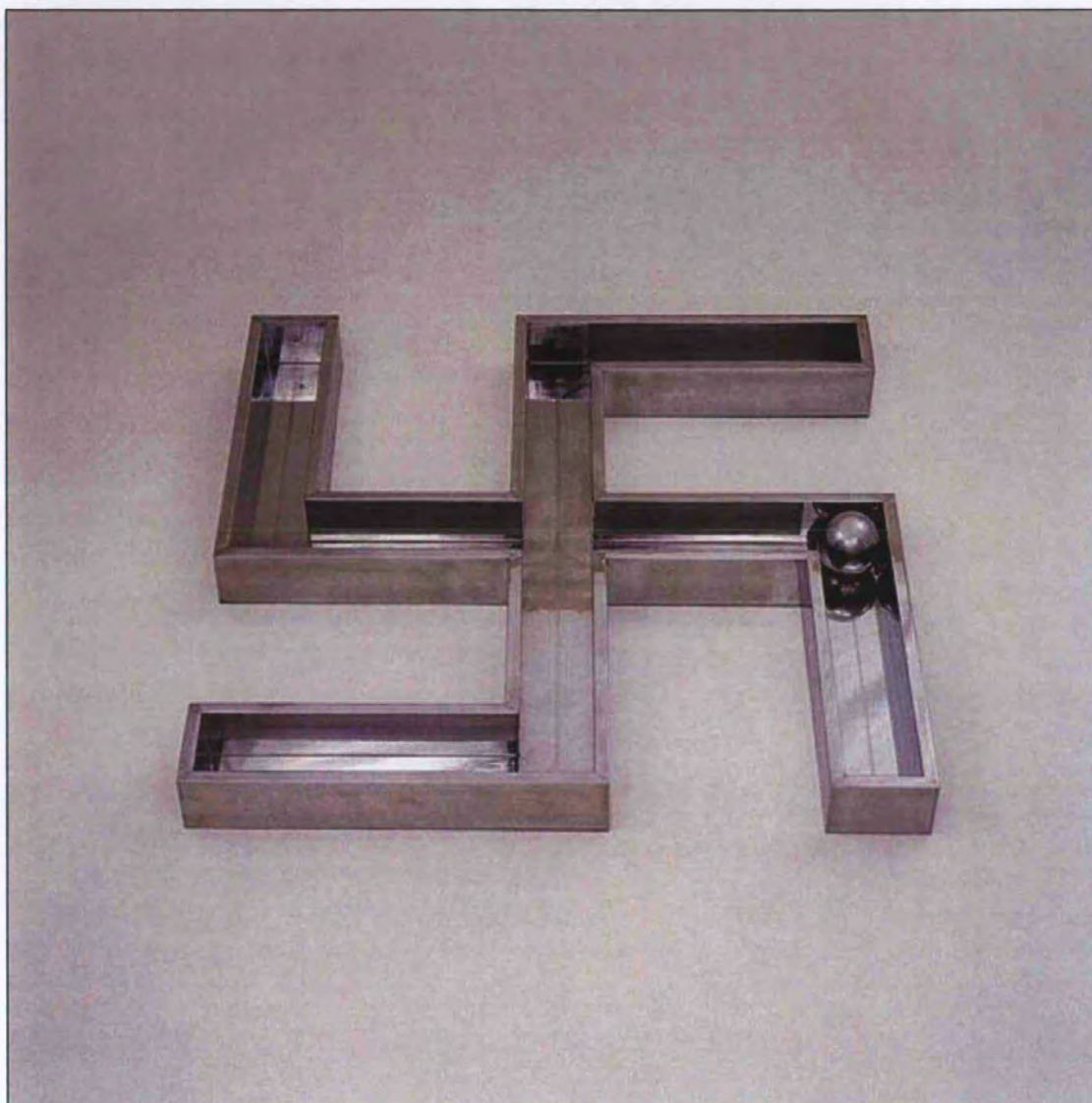
Walter De Maria
Death Wall
1965
Stainless steel
12.5 × 50 × 2.5 cm

Figure 26



Walter De Maria
High Energy Bar (plus signed certificate)
1966
Polished stainless steel
 $3.9 \times 35.6 \times 3.9$ cm
Engraved: HIGH ENERGY BAR © WALTER DE MARIA 1966.
Unlimited edition

Figure 27



Walter De Maria

Museum Piece

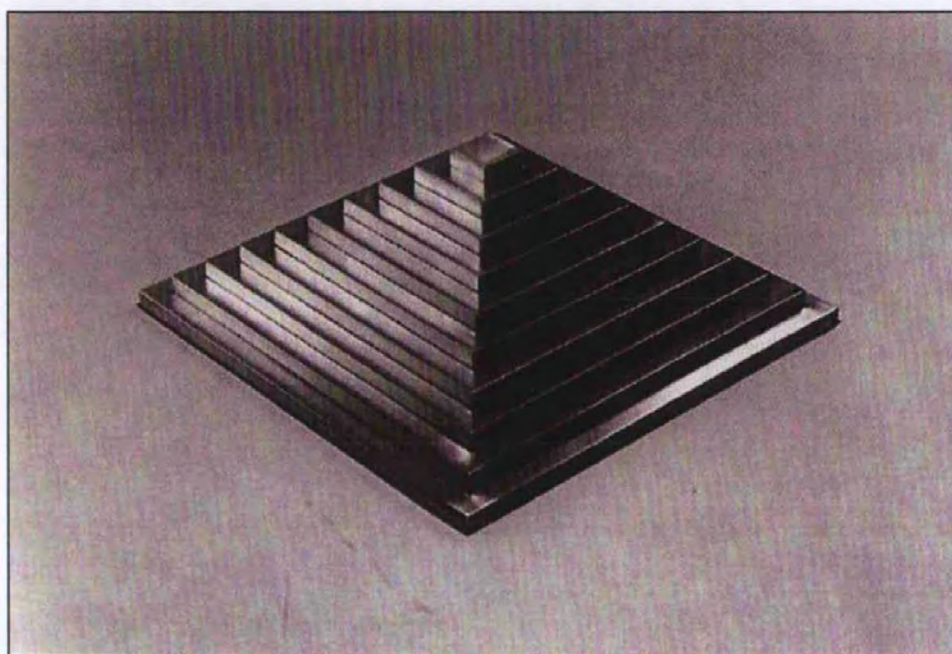
1966

Aluminium

4 × 36 × 36 inches

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Figure 28



Walter De Maria

Zinc Pyramid

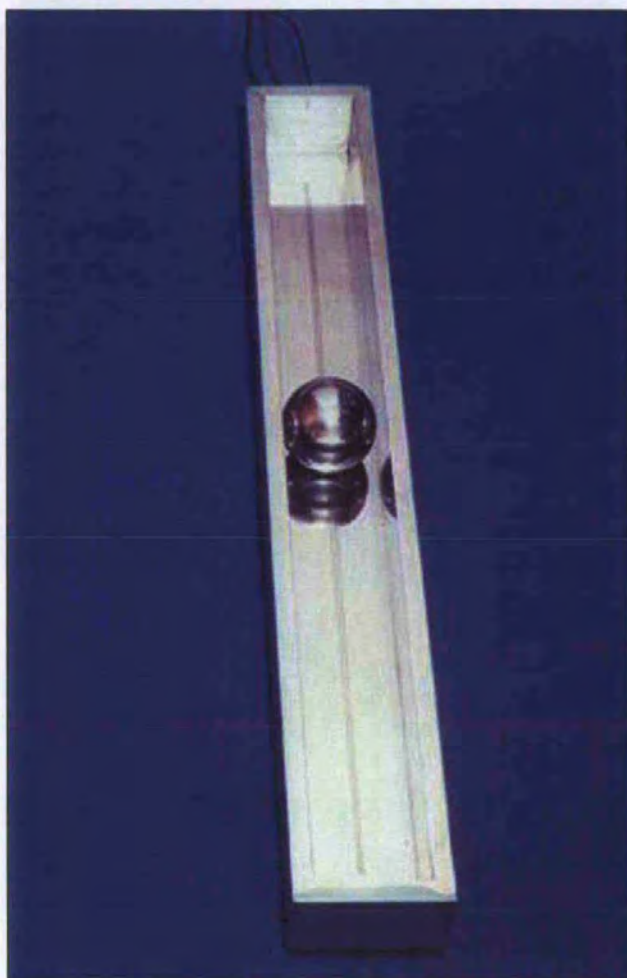
1965

Zinc

$7\frac{1}{4} \times 19 \times 19$ inches

The top point of the sculpture is moveable and contains a small compartment.

Figure 29



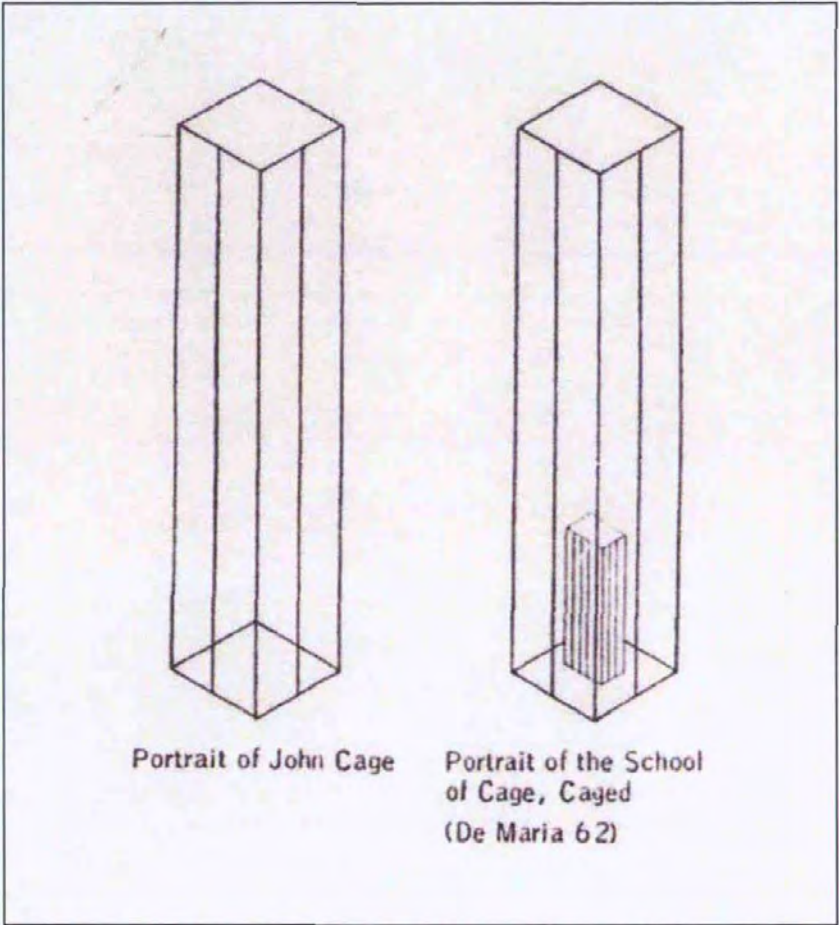
Walter De Maria
Instrument for La Monte Young
1966
Aluminium and mixed media
3.5 × 36.1 × 1.5 inches
Private collection

Figure 30



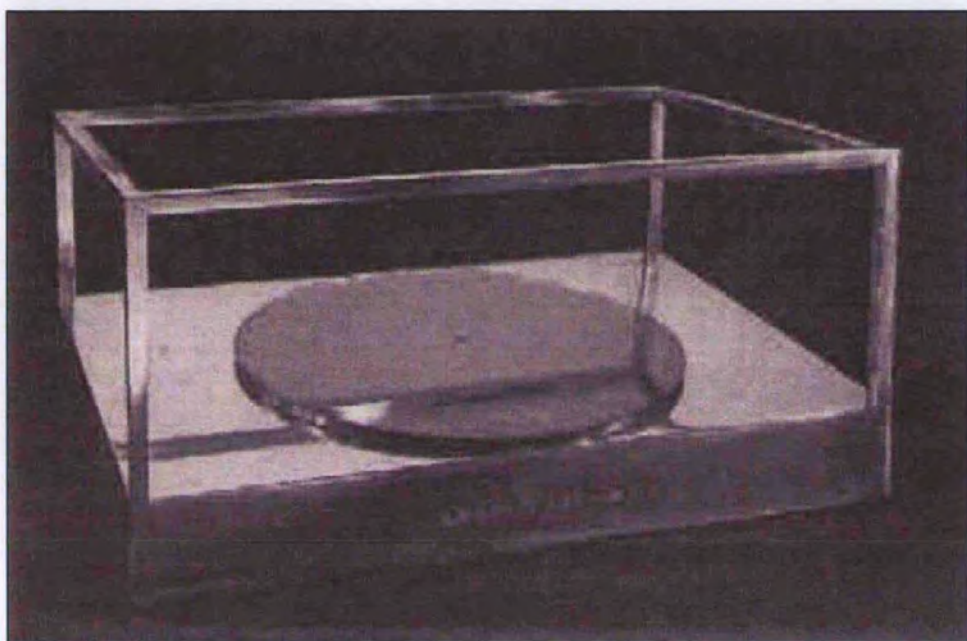
Walter De Maria
Cage II (two views)
1965
Stainless steel
216.5 × 36.2 × 36.2 cm
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Figure 31



Walter De Maria
Drawings for *Portrait of John Cage* and *Portrait of the School of Cage, Caged*
1962
Illustrated in *Fluxus CC V TRE*, February 1964

Figure 32



Walter De Maria

Blue Glass for Joseph Cornell

1966

Stainless steel and blue glass

15 $\frac{3}{4}$ \times 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ \times 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Figure 33



Walter De Maria

Pyramid Chair

1966

2 parts:

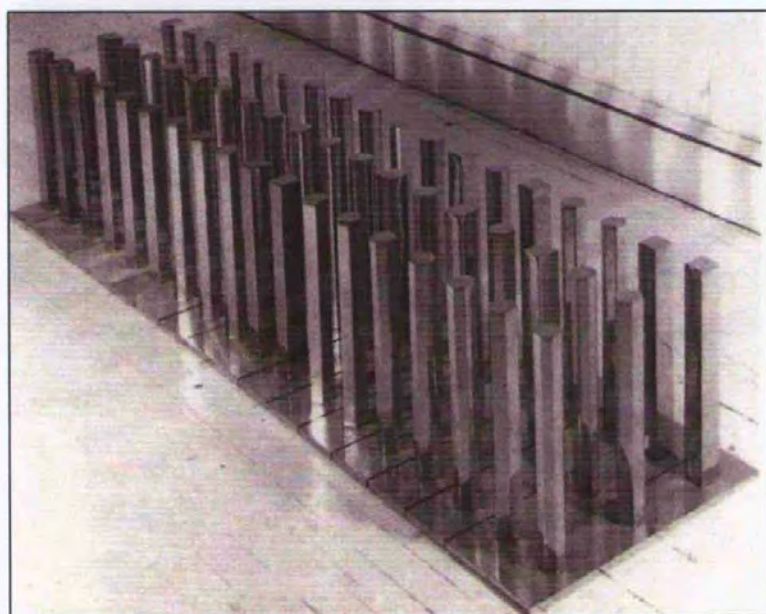
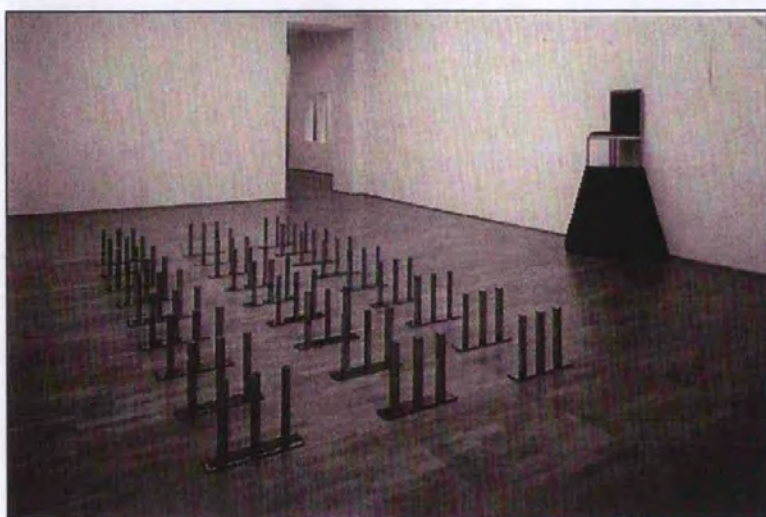
Part 1, chair: chromium-plated V-steel, patent leather

Part 2, base: aluminium, synthetic resin varnish

Together: 218.7 × 127.7 × 87.6 cm

Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Figure 34



Walter De Maria

4-6-8 Series (shown in two different configurations)

1966-1991

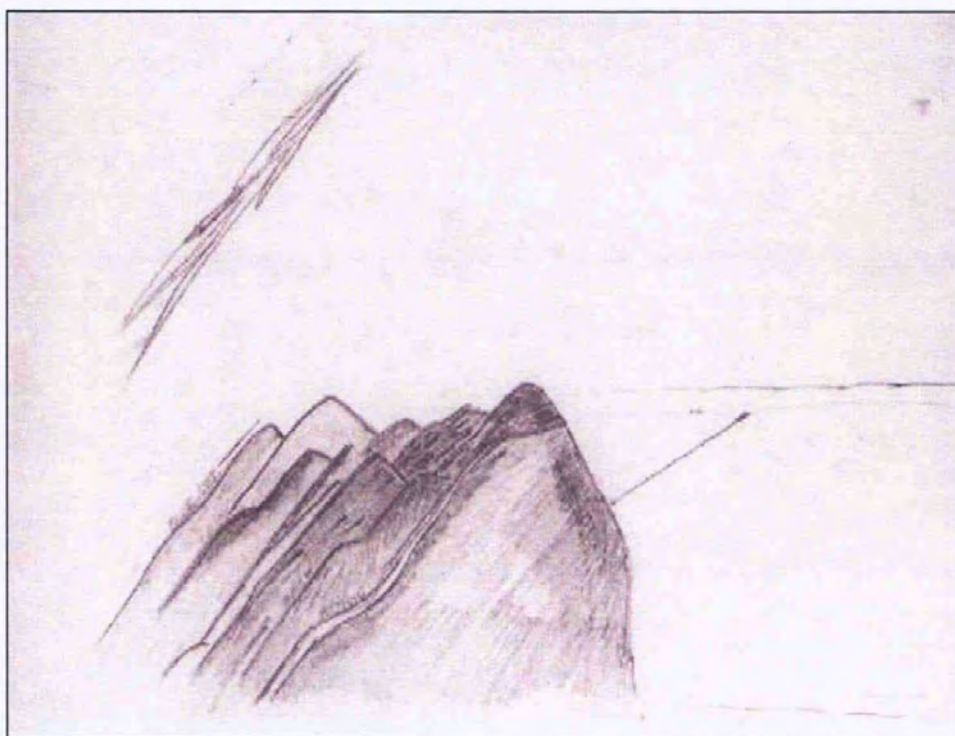
18 parts, chromium plated solid stainless steel.

Each part: $41 \times 50.8 \times 11.15$ cm

Assembled as a unified group (bottom photograph): $41 \times 50.8 \times 200.7$ cm

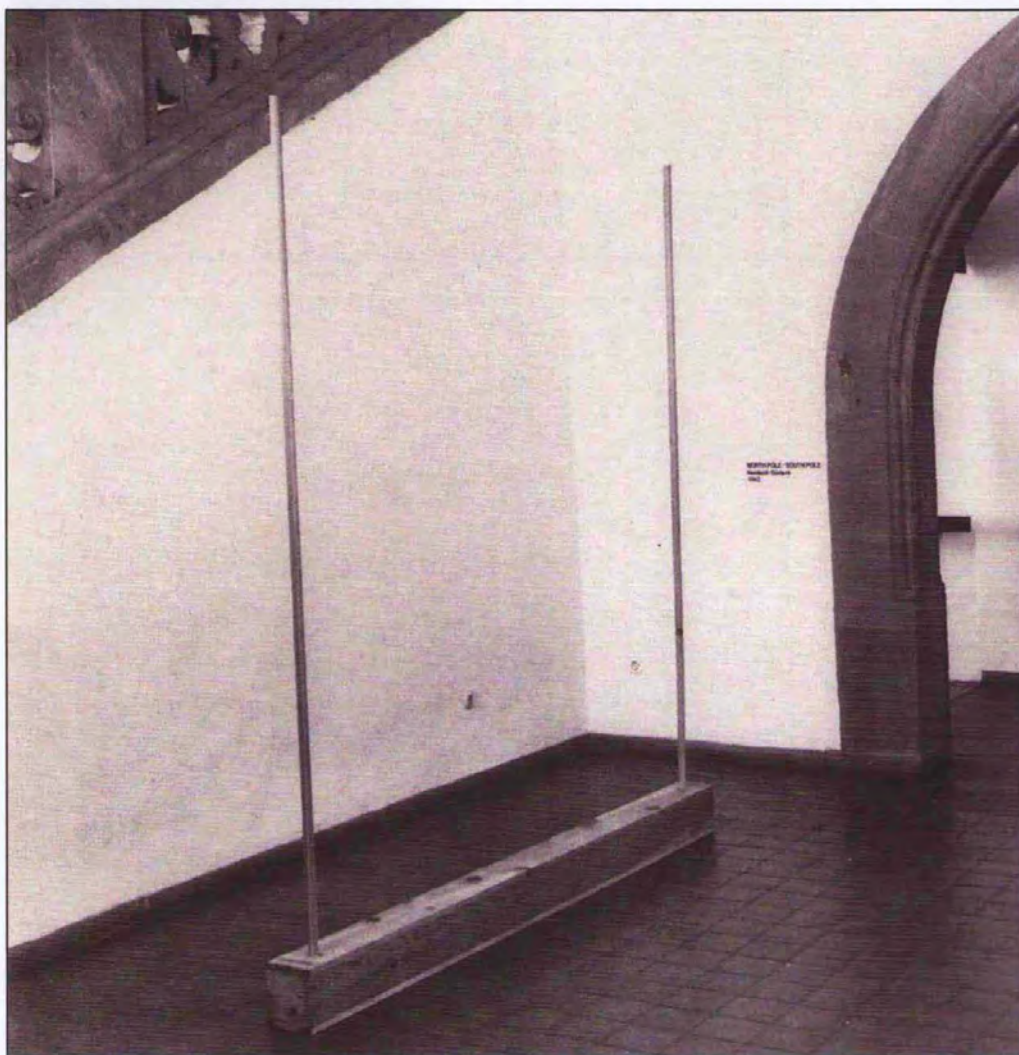
City of Frankfurt, Karl Ströher Collection

Figure 35



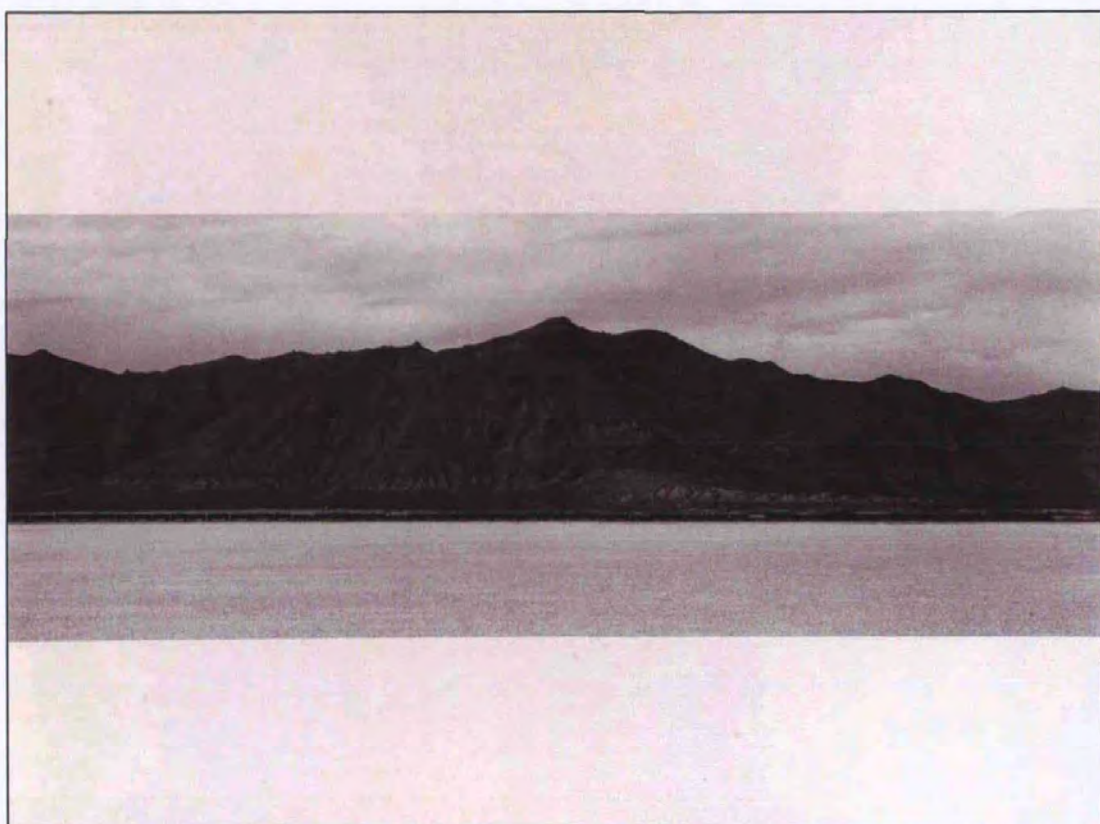
Walter De Maria
Gray Mountains with Jet Plane
Pencil on paper
1962

Figure 36



Walter De Maria
North Pole - South Pole
1962
Wood
240 × 240 × 20 cm

Figure 37



Walter De Maria

***Untitled* (film still from *Hard Core*, 1969)**

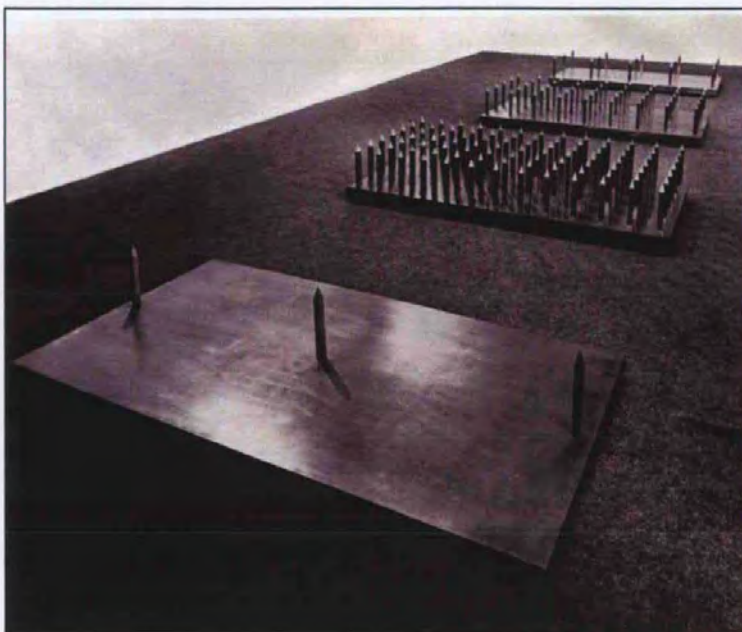
1973

Gelatin silver print on paper

11.7 × 30.3 cm

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC

Figure 38



Walter De Maria

Bed of Spikes (two views)

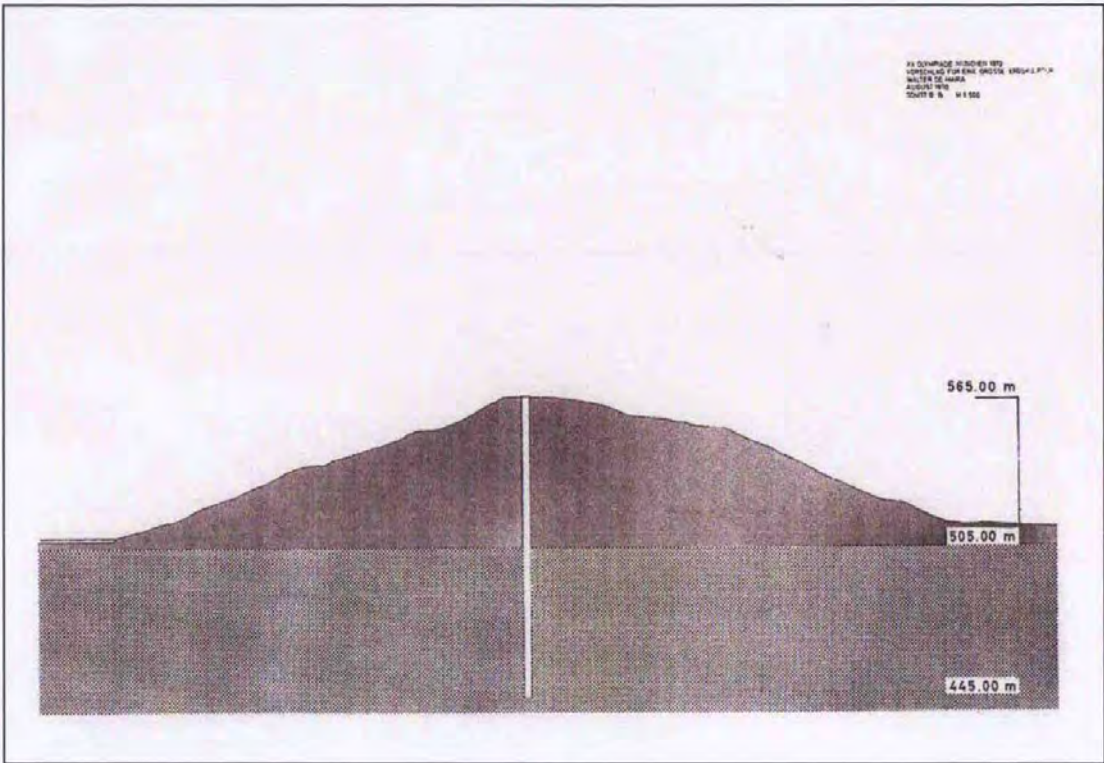
1968–69

Stainless Steel

Five plates $78.5 \times 41.57 \times 2.5$ inches. Each spike $10.5 \times .9 \times .9$ inches (plate one, with just one spike, is not shown in the top photograph)

Kunstmuseum, Basel

Figure 39



Walter De Maria

Olympic Mountain Project

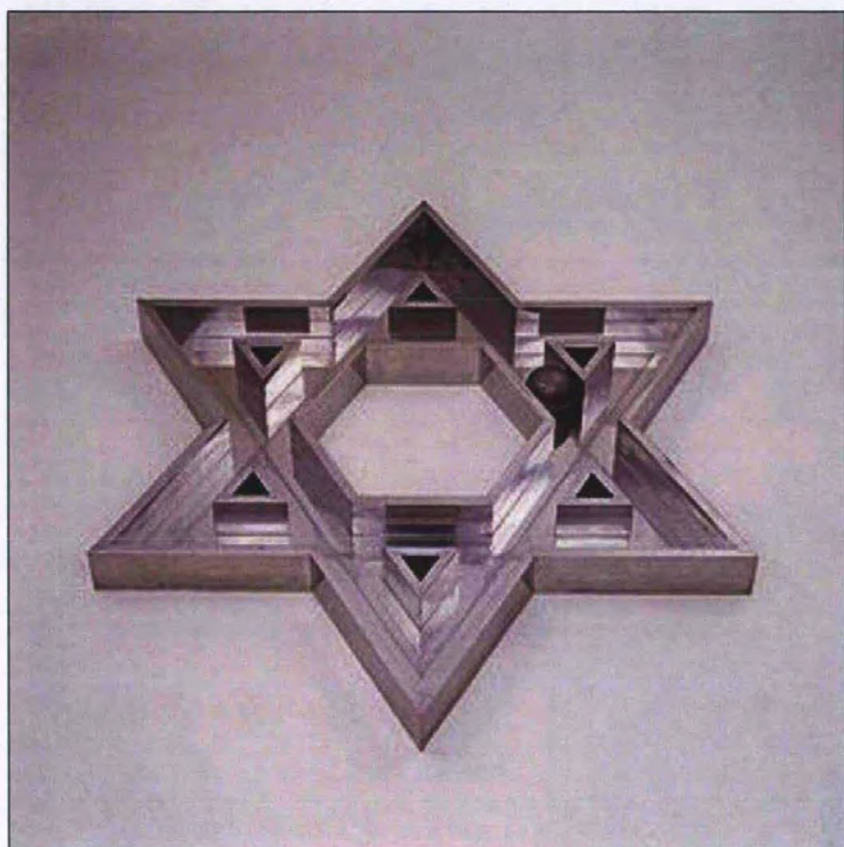
1970

Shaft 400 feet deep and 3 feet in diameter, bored into a pile of rubble in the form of a volcano and covered with earth and grass. The shaft was to be covered in a metal disc 12 feet in diameter.

Project for the Olympic Games in Munich, in 1972.

Never constructed.

Figure 40



Walter De Maria

Star

1972

Aluminium

4 × 44 × 50 inches

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Figure 41



Walter De Maria
Darmstadt Earth Room
1974
Fine gravel
c. 85 m³; 50 cm deep
Dismantled

Figure 42



Walter De Maria

The New York Earth Room

1977

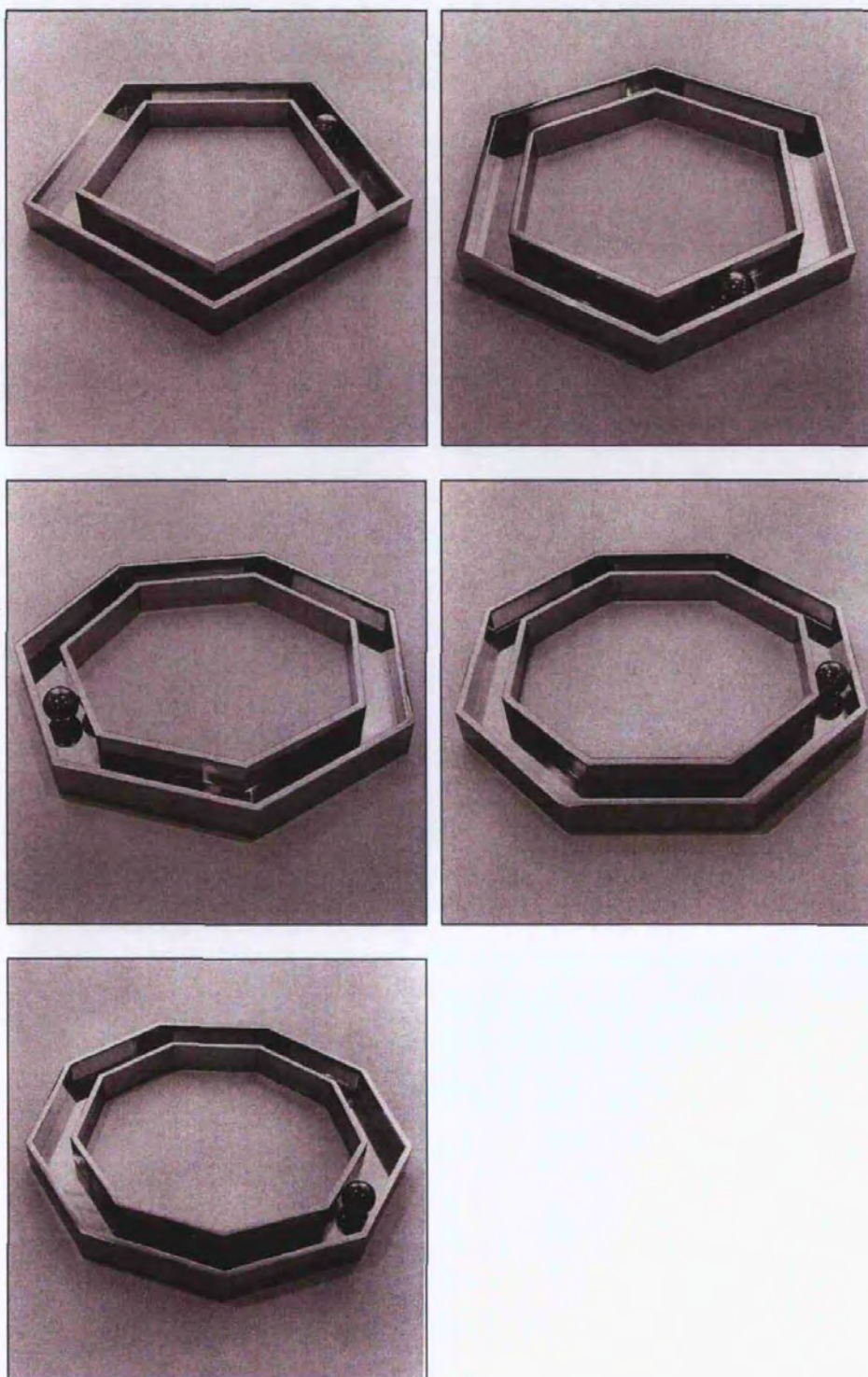
250 cubic yards of earth

3,600 square feet of floor space; 22 inch depth of material

Total weight of sculpture: 280,000 lbs

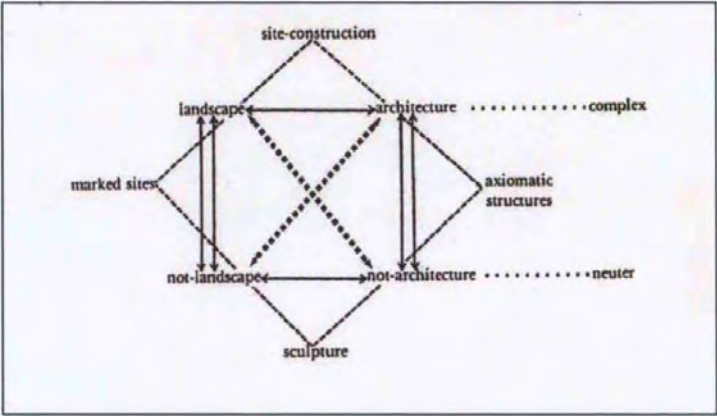
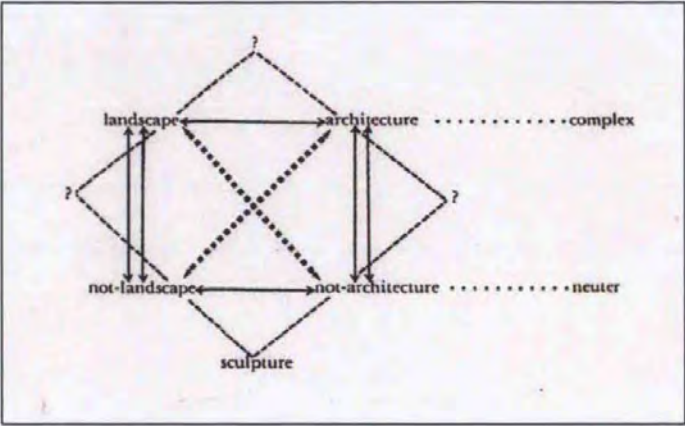
Dia Art Foundation. Permanently installed at 141 Wooster Street, New York

Figure 43



Walter De Maria
5-9 Series
1973-74
Aluminium
121.92 × 10.6 cm
Collection Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Figure 44



Rosalind Krauss' expansion of the Klein Group
From 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', in
The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, 1987, pp.283–284.



Figure 45

1 + 1 for
One Player and Amplified Table-Top


Any table-top is amplified by means of a contact
Mike, amplifier and speaker.


The player performs 1+1 by tapping the table-top
with his fingers or knuckles.


The following two rhythmic units are the building
blocks of 1+1 :

a.)  and b.) 

1+1 is realized by combining the above two
units in continuous, regular arithmetic progressions.
Examples of some simple combinations are :

1.)  etc.

2.)  etc.

3.)  etc.

The tempo is fast.
The length is determined by the player

NYC 11/68
Philip Glass

Philip Glass

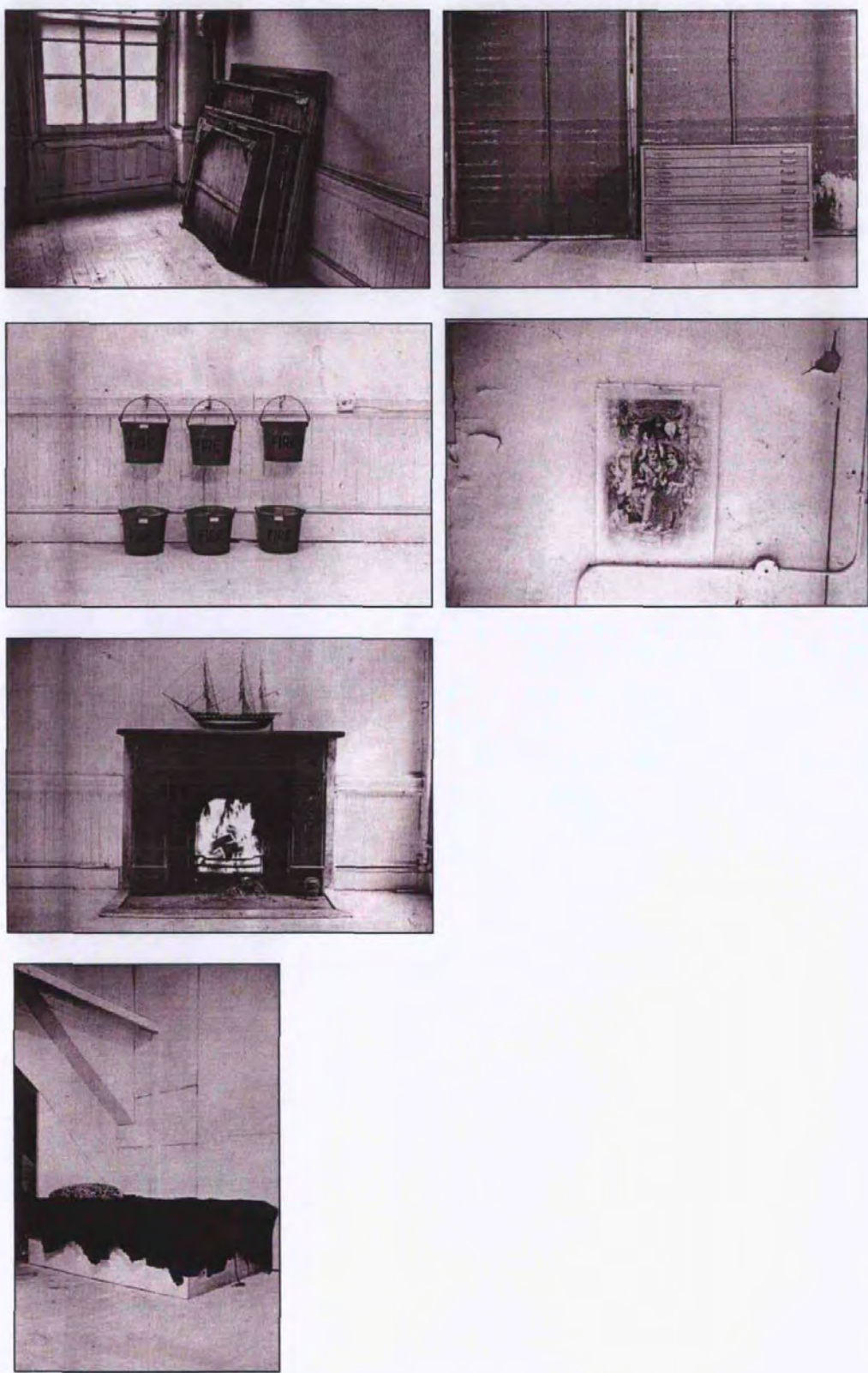
1 + 1 for One Player and Amplified Table-Top

1968

First published in *Aspen*, Issue No. 8 (Fall/Winter 1970-71), titled

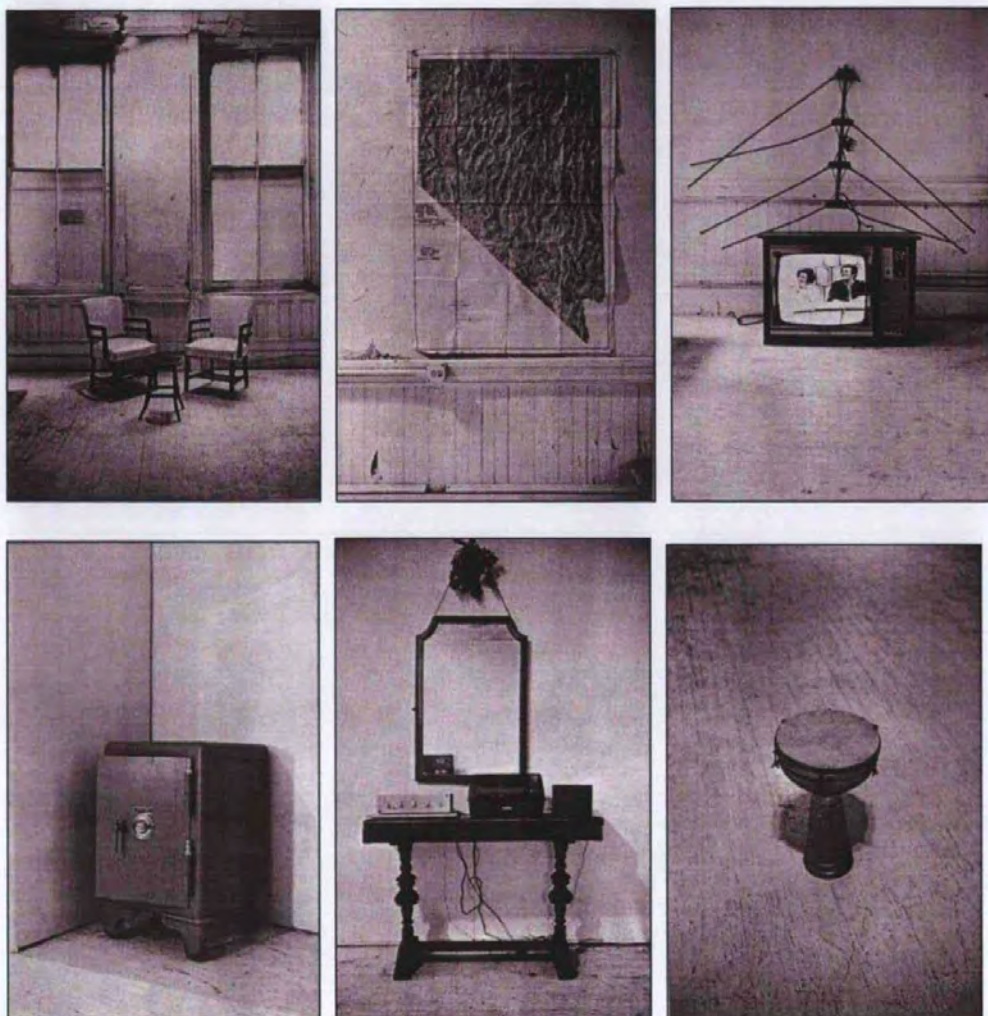
'Art/Information/Science', edited by Dan Graham and designed by George Maciunas.

Figure 46



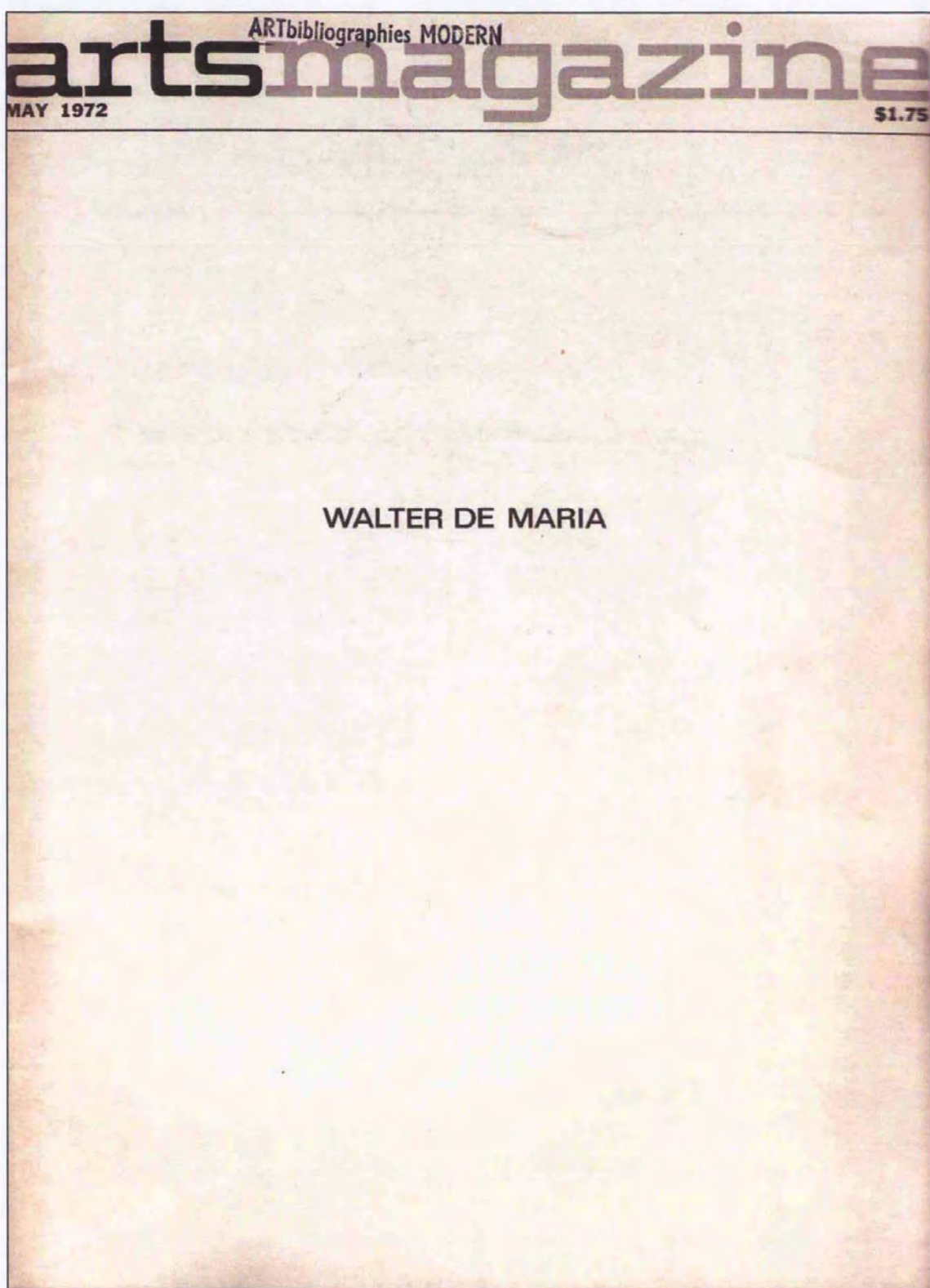
Walter De Maria
Photographs one to six from a series of twelve.
Avalanche, Vol 4, Spring 1972, pp.52-63

Figure 47



Walter De Maria
Photographs seven to twelve in a series of twelve.
Avalanche, Vol 4, Spring 1972, pp.52–63

Figure 48



Arts Magazine, Vol 46 No 7, May 1972
Cover

Figure 49



Arts Magazine, Vol 46 No 7, pp.39, 40–41, and 42 (page 43 is entirely blank).
Three photographs of Walter De Maria (photographer: Bob Benson).

Figure 50



Photographs of Walter De Maria's six dealers:

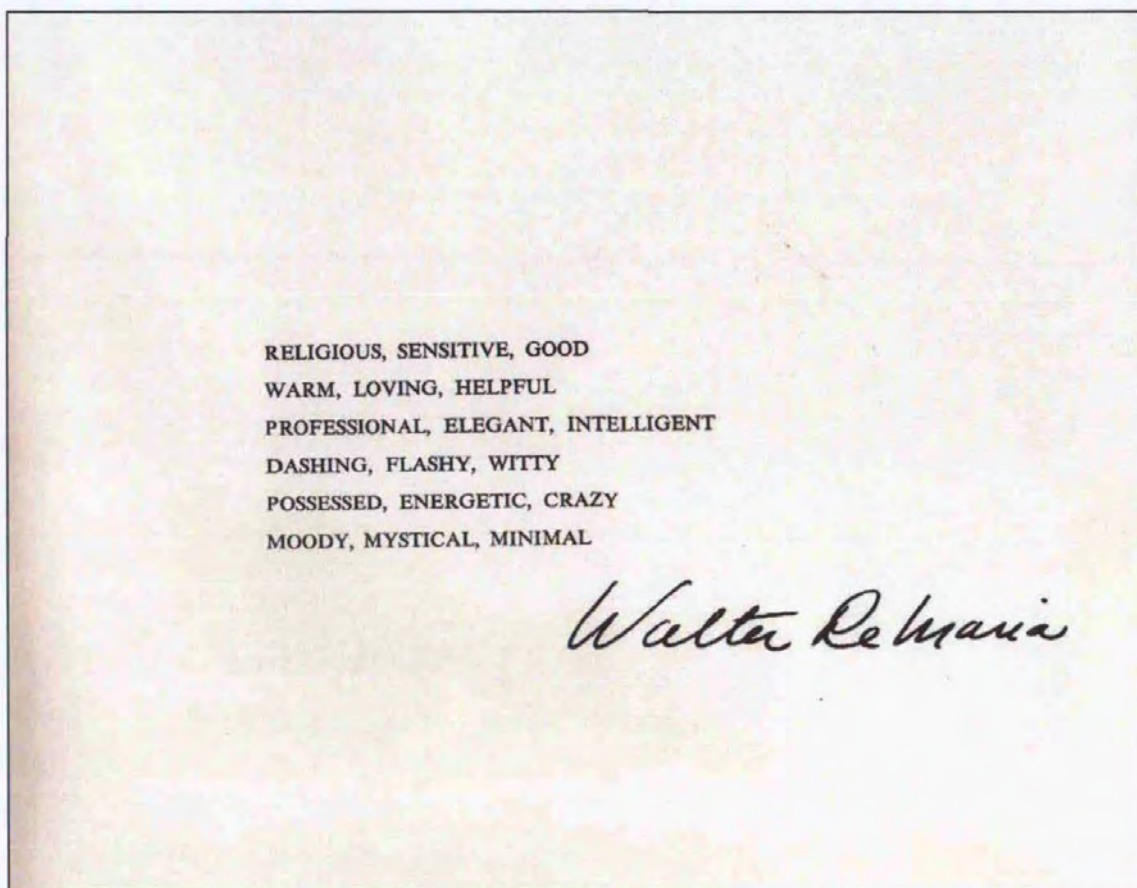
Top row: Richard Bellamy, Paula Cooper, Arne Ekstrom

Bottom row: Nicholas Wilder, Heiner Friedrich, Virginia Dwan

In Grégoire Müller, *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*, 1972, pp.152–157.

Photographs by Gianfranco Gorgoni

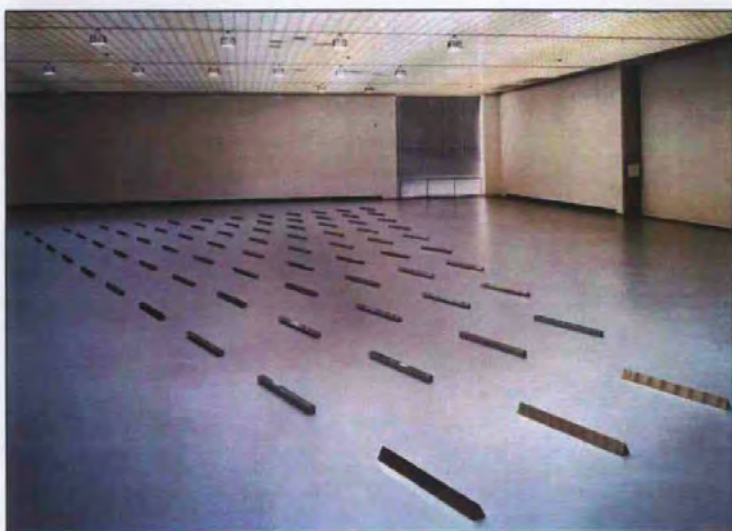
Figure 51



Walter De Maria

Entry on page 151 of Grégoire Müller, *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*, 1972

Figure 52



Walter De Maria

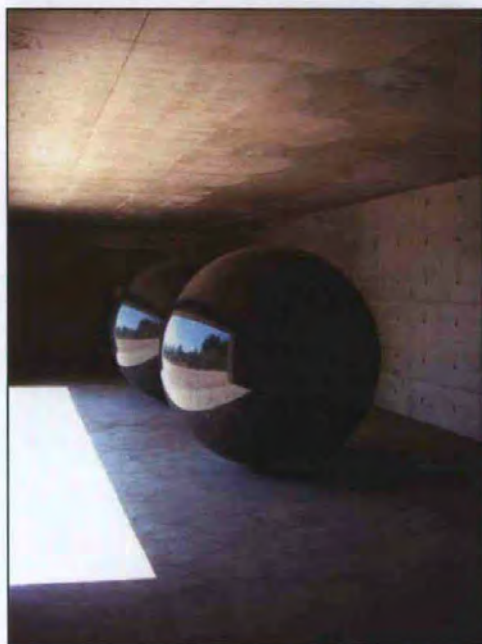
A computer which will solve every problem in the world: 3-12 Polygon (two views)
1984

Stainless steel

75 rods. Each rod 1 metre long. The rods in the row of three have three sides, the rods in the row of four have four sides, and so on up to the twelfth row, in which the rods have twelve sides. The rows are spaced 1 metre apart. All rods have equal length, area, and weight. Each rod weighs 70 lbs.

Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam

Figure 53



Walter De Maria

Seen/Unseen, Known/Unknown (three views)

2000

Two spheres: each 185 cm diameter and weighing 9 tons

Indian green granite

Seaside Gallery, Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum, Japan

Figure 54



Walter De Maria

The Broken Kilometer

1979

500 brass rods, each 200 cm × 5 cm

Overall dimensions: 5 cm × 38.1 m × 13.7 m

Total weight: 17 tons

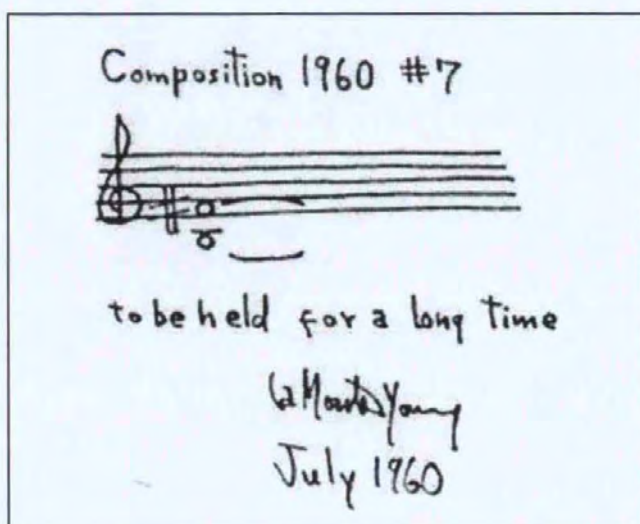
Dia Art Foundation. Permanently installed at 393 West Broadway, New York City

Figure 55



Walter De Maria on the road
Unknown location and photographer
c.1968

Figure 56



La Monte Young
Composition 1960 #7
1960

Figure 57

1 $\text{♩} = 66-84$

Piano I

Piano II

2 3 4 5 6

The first pianist starts at 1 and the second joins him in unison at 2. The second pianist increases his tempo very slightly and begins to move ahead of the first until, (say in 20 to 60 seconds) he is one sixteenth ahead, as shown at 3. The dotted lines indicate this gradual movement of the second pianist and the consequent shift of phase relation between himself and the first pianist. This process is continued with the second pianist gradually becoming an eighth (4), a dotted eighth (5), a quarter (6), etc. ahead of the first until he finally passes through all twelve relations and comes back into unison at 14 again.

Steve Reich

Piano Phase, bars 1-6

1967

Figure 58



Walter De Maria

The Vertical Earth Kilometer

1977

Solid brass rod and sandstone plate

Rod: 1 km length \times 5 cm diameter. Sandstone plate: 2 \times 2 m

Friedrichsplatz, Kassel, Germany

Dia Art Foundation, New York, commissioned for *Documenta VI* and the City of Kassel

Figure 59



Walter De Maria

13, 14, 15 Meter Rows

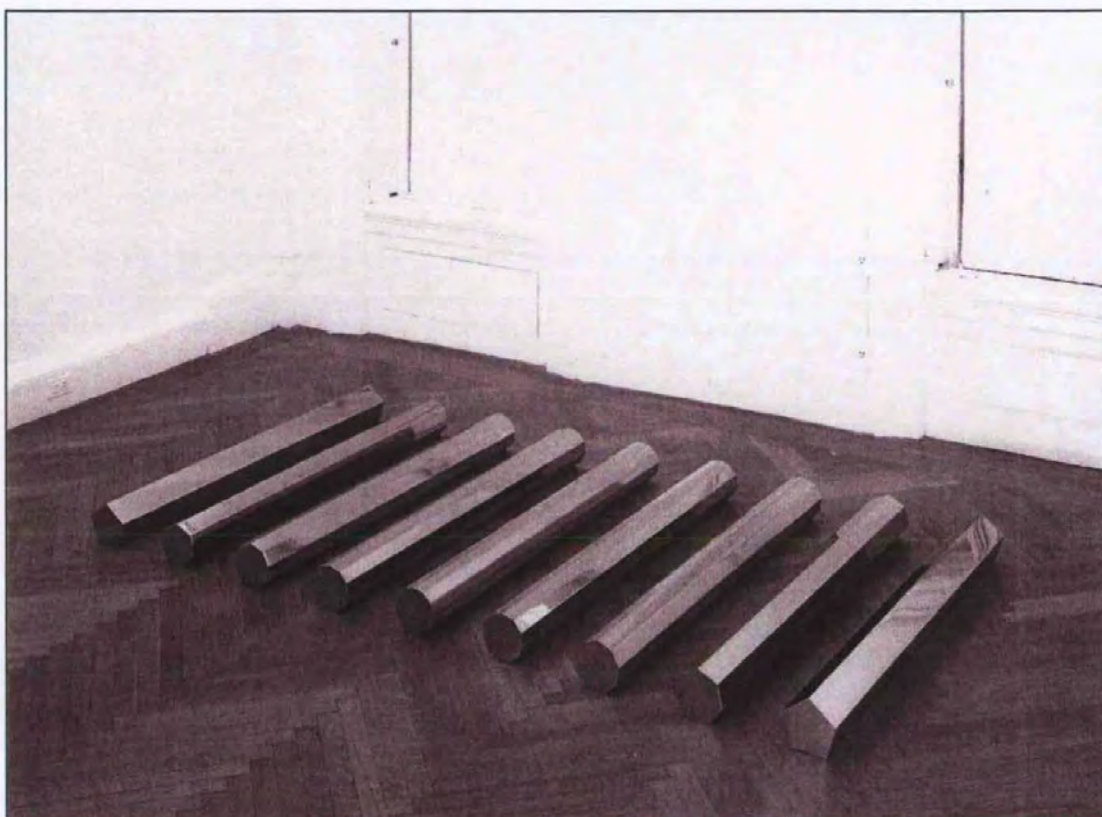
1984

42 solid stainless steel polygonal rods

Each rod: 8.9 cm diameter, 1 metre long

Gagosian Gallery, New York

Figure 60



Walter De Maria

Large Rod Series: Rectangle 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 11, 9, 7, 5

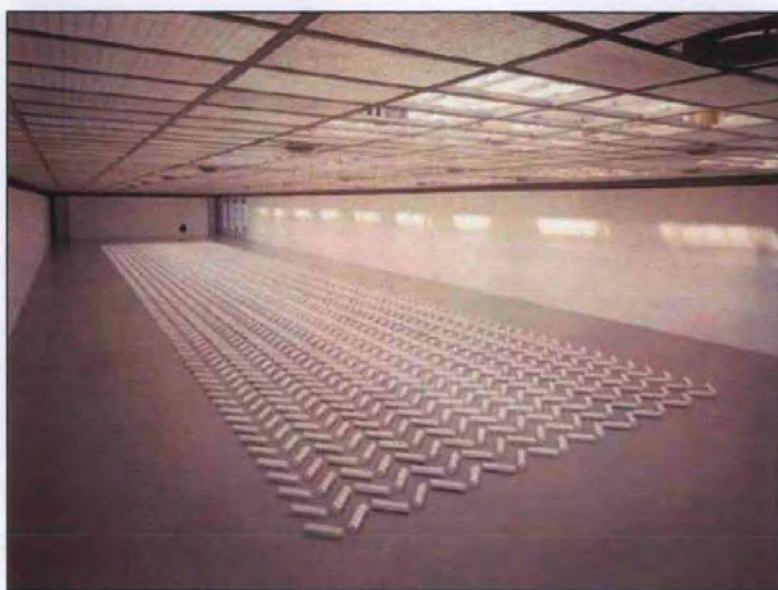
1985

Nine polygonal rods in stainless steel

Total length: 372 cm

Collection Thomas Ammann, Zurich

Figure 61



Walter De Maria

The 2000 Sculpture

1992

Plaster of Paris

800 five-sided polygonal elements: 12cm diameter, 50cm long

800 seven-sided polygonal elements: 11.9cm diameter, 50cm long

400 nine-sided polygonal elements: 11.8cm diameter, 50cm long

Figure 62



top



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Walter De Maria

Time/Timeless/No Time (selection of views, including construction and location)
2004

Granite, mahogany, gold leaf, and concrete
Chichu Art Museum, Naoshima Island, Japan

Figure 63



Walter De Maria

One Sun, 34 Moons

2002

Gilt bronze, stainless steel, reflecting pool, neon illuminated skylights

Each "moon" or skylight diameter 36 inches. Sun: 17 inches x 40 feet 6 inches x 33 feet 9 inches. Pool: 134 x 161 feet.

Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri

Figure 64



Walter De Maria

Equal Area Series

1976–90

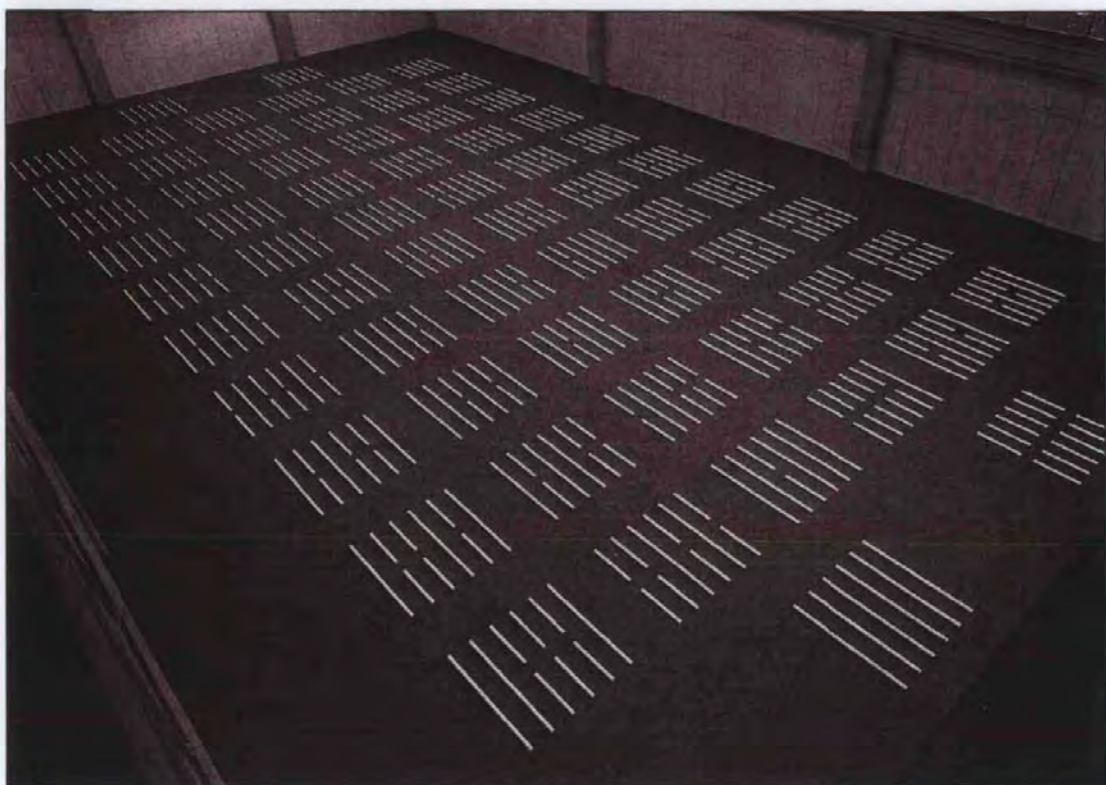
Stainless-steel plate

Twenty-five pairs of circles and squares, 5 inches wide by $\frac{7}{8}$ of an inch thick.

The square and the circle in each pair have the same area. Each pair differs slightly in size from each of the others.

Collection of the Dia Art Foundation

Figure 65



Walter De Maria

360° I Ching

1981

576 rods of lacquered wood

192 six-sided rods, each 2m long, 5.9cm diameter

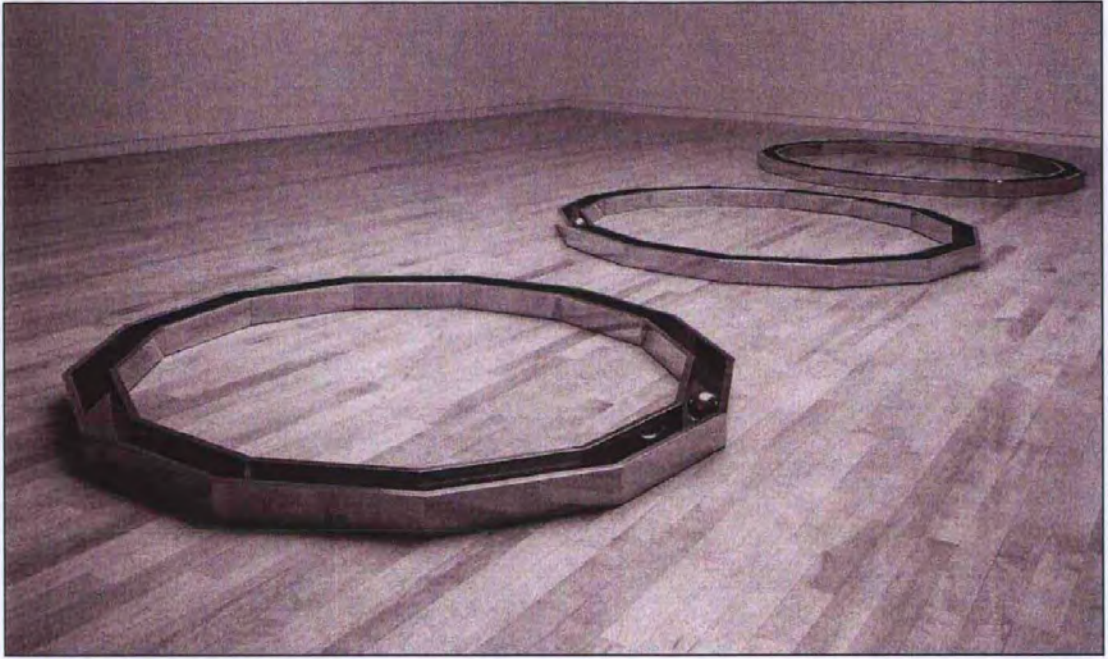
384 six-sided rods, each 88.9 cm long, 5cm diameter

64 hexagrams, each 4 sq metres

Shown installed at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1981 and 1982)

Collection of the Dia Art Foundation

Figure 66



Walter De Maria

13, 14, 15, Open Polygons

1984

Stainless steel

13-sided polygon: 10.16 × 210.82cm

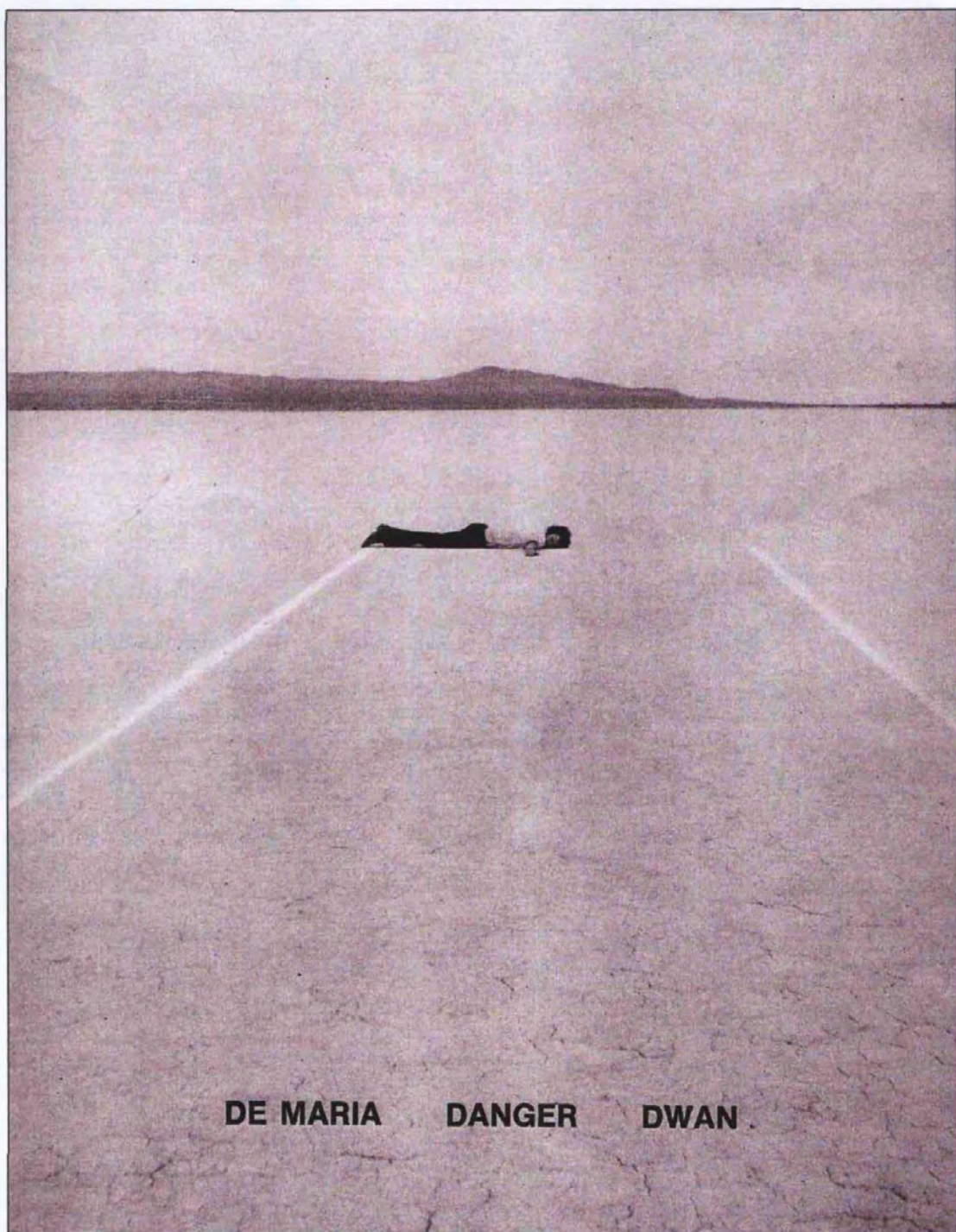
14-sided polygon: 10.16 × 226.06cm

15-sided polygon: 10.16 × 243.84cm

Balls: 9.52cm diameter

Collection Gagosian Gallery, New York

Figure 67



Exhibition advertisement for Walter De Maria's one-man exhibition at the Dwan Gallery, New York, in April 1969.
Studio International Vol 177 No 910, April 1969, p.iii.

Figure 68

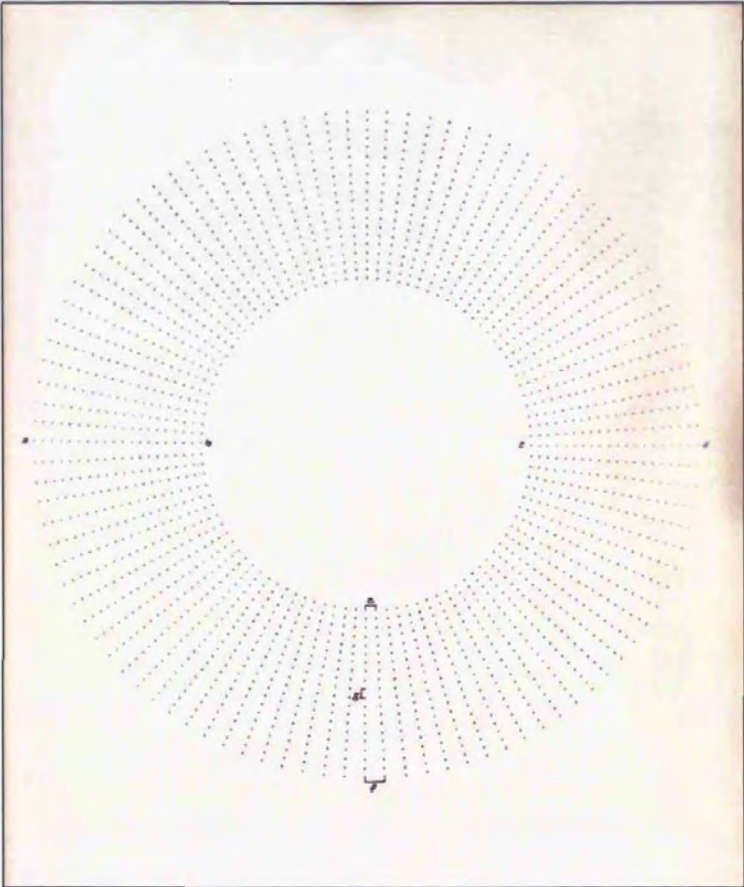
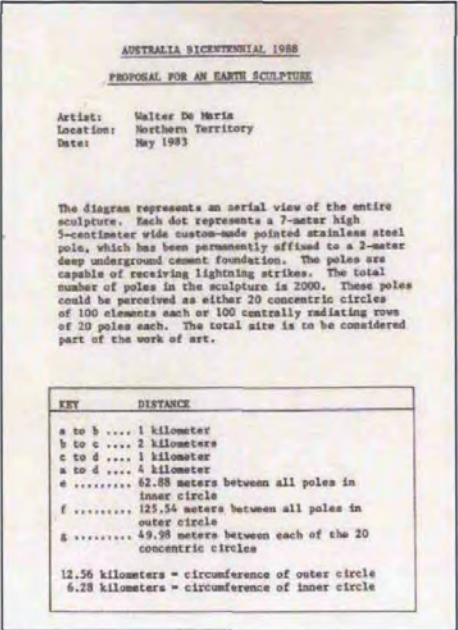


Walter De Maria

Star (1972), *Cross* (1965), and *Museum Piece* (1966)

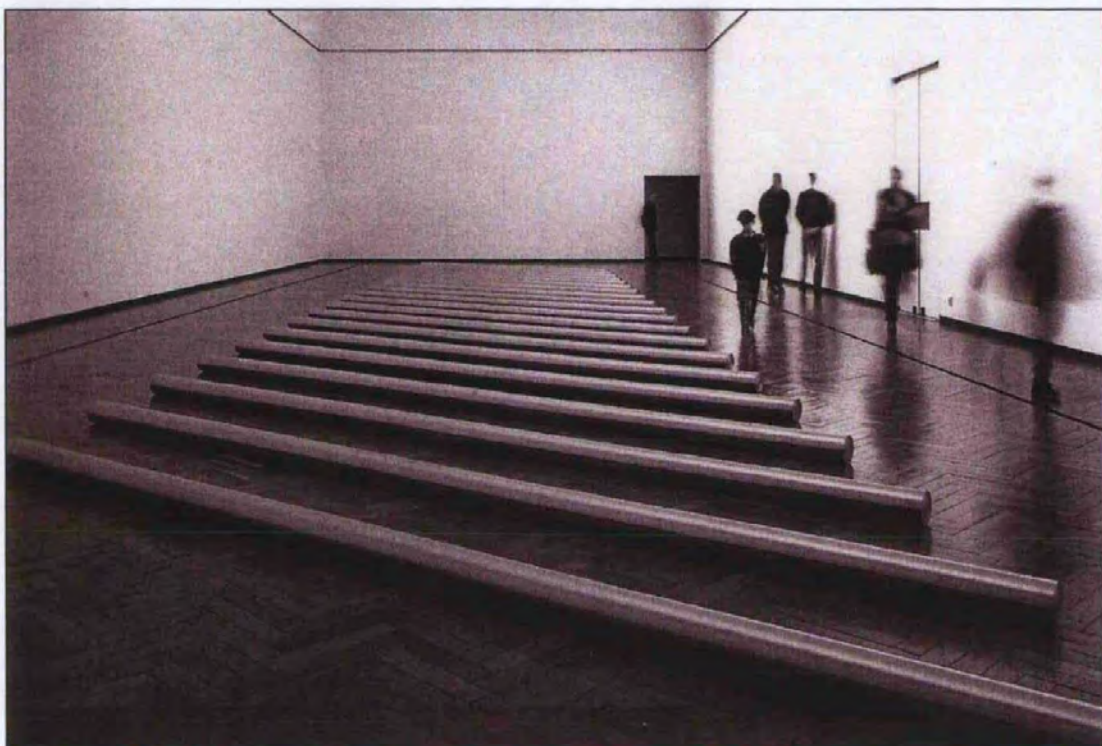
Exhibited as a 'series' in 'Singular Forms (Sometimes Repeated): Art from 1951 to the Present', at the Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2004.

Figure 69



Walter De Maria
Proposal for an Earth Sculpture (*The 2000 Ring Lightning Field*)
1983

Figure 70



Walter De Maria

Apollo's Ecstasy

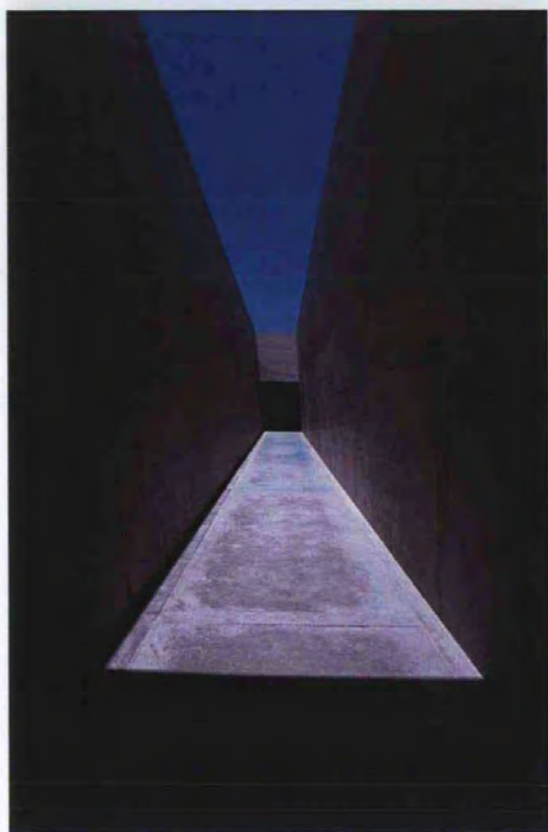
1990

Bronze

20 round rods: each 13.25cm diameter, 5m long

Collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Figure 71



Chichu Art Museum, Naoshima Island, Japan (external view and entrance)
Location of Walter De Maria's *Time/Timeless/No Time* (2004)

Appendix 1

Walter De Maria. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum*, Vol 18 No 8, 1980, pp.52–53.



Walter De Maria. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum*, Vol 18 No 8, 1980, pp.54–55.



Appendix 1 (cont.)

Walter De Maria. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum*, Vol 18 No 8, 1980, pp.56–57.



Walter De Maria. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum*, Vol 18 No 8, 1980, p.59.



Appendix 1 (cont.)

Walter De Maria. 'The Lightning Field', in *Artforum*, Vol 18 No 8, 1980, p.58.

Some Facts, Notes, Data, Information, Statistics and Statements:

The Lightning Field is a permanent work.

The land is not the setting for the work but a part of the work.

The work is located in West Central New Mexico. The states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and Texas were searched by truck over a five-year period before the location in New Mexico was selected. Desirable qualities of the location included flatness, high lightning activity and isolation.

The region is located 7,200 feet above sea level.

The Lightning Field is 1 1/2 miles east of the Continental Divide.

The earliest manifestation of land art was represented in the drawings and plans for the *Mile-Long Parallel Walls in the Desert*, 1961-1963.

The Lightning Field began in the form of a note, following the completion of *The Bed of Spikes* in 1969.

The sculpture was completed in its physical form on November 1, 1977.

The work was commissioned and is maintained by the Dia Art Foundation, New York.

In July, 1974, a small *Lightning Field* was constructed. This served as the prototype for the 1977 *Lightning Field*. It had 35 stainless steel poles with pointed tips, each 18 feet tall and 200 feet apart, arranged in a five-row by seven-row grid. It was located in Northern Arizona. The land was loaned by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine. The work now is in the collection of Virginia Dwan. It remained in place from 1974 through 1976 and is presently dismantled, prior to an installation in a new location.

The sum of the facts does not constitute the work or determine its esthetics.

The Lightning Field measures one mile by one kilometer and six meters (5,280 feet by 3,300 feet).

There are 400 highly polished stainless steel poles with solid, pointed tips.

The poles are arranged in a rectangular grid array (16 to the width, 25 to the length) and are spaced 220 feet apart.

A simple walk around the perimeter of the poles takes approximately two hours.

The primary experience takes place within *The Lightning Field*.

Each mile-long row contains 25 poles and runs east-west.

Each kilometer-long row contains 16 poles and runs north-south.

Because the sky-ground relationship is central to the

work, viewing *The Lightning Field* from the air is of no value.

Part of the essential content of the work is the ratio of people to the space: a small number of people to a large amount of space.

Installation was carried out from June through October, 1977.

The principal associates in construction, Robert Fosdick and Helen Winkler, have worked with the sculpture continuously for the last three years.

An aerial survey, combined with computer analysis, determined the positioning of the rectangular grid and the elevation of the terrain.

A land survey determined four elevation points surrounding each pole position to insure the perfect placement and exact height of each element.

It took five months to complete both the aerial and the land surveys.

Each measurement relevant to foundation position, installation procedure and pole alignment was triple-checked for accuracy.

The poles' concrete foundations, set one foot below the surface of the land, are three feet deep and one foot in diameter.

Engineering studies indicated that these foundations will hold poles to a vertical position in winds of up to 110 miles per hour.

Heavy carbon steel pipes extend from the foundation cement and rise through the lightning poles to give extra strength.

The poles were constructed of type 304 stainless steel tubing with an outside diameter of two inches.

Each pole was cut, within an accuracy of 1/100 of an inch, to its own individual length.

The average pole height is 20 feet 7 1/2 inches.

The shortest pole height is 15 feet.

The tallest pole height is 26 feet 9 inches.

The solid, stainless steel tips were turned to match an arc having a radius of six feet.

The tips were welded to the poles, then ground and polished, creating a continuous unit.

The total weight of the steel used is approximately 38,000 pounds.

All poles are parallel, and the spaces between them are accurate to within 1/8 of an inch.

Diagonal distance between any two contiguous poles is 311 feet.

If laid end to end the poles would stretch over one and one-half miles (8,240 feet).

The plane of the tips would evenly support an imaginary sheet of glass.

During the mid-portion of the day 70 to 90 percent of the poles become virtually invisible due to the high angle of the sun.

It is intended that the work be viewed alone, or in the company of a very small number of people, over at

least a 24-hour period.

The original log cabin located 200 yards beyond the mid-point of the northern most row has been restored to accommodate visitors' needs.

A permanent caretaker and administrator will reside near the location for continuous maintenance, protection and assistance.

A visit may be reserved only through written correspondence.

The cabin serves as a shelter during extreme weather conditions or storms.

The climate is semiarid; eleven inches of rain is the yearly average.

Sometimes in winter, *The Lightning Field* is seen in light snow.

Occasionally in spring, 30- to 50-mile-an-hour winds blow steadily for days.

The light is as important as the lightning.

The period of primary lightning activity is from late May through early September.

There are approximately 60 days per year when thunder and lightning activity can be witnessed from *The Lightning Field*.

The invisible is real.

The observed ratio of lightning storms which pass over the sculpture has been approximately 3 per 30 days during the lightning season.

Only after a lightning strike has advanced to an area of about 200 feet above *The Lightning Field* can it sense the poles.

Several distinct thunderstorms can be observed at one time from *The Lightning Field*.

Traditional grounding cable and grounding rod protect the foundations by diverting lightning current into the earth.

Lightning strikes have not been observed to jump or arc from pole to pole.

Lightning strikes have done no perceptible damage to the poles.

On very rare occasions when there is a strong electrical current in the air, a glow known as "St. Elmo's Fire" may be emitted from the tips of the poles.

Photography of lightning in the daytime was made possible by the use of camera triggering devices newly developed by Dr. Richard Orville, Dr. Bernard Vonnegut and Robert Zeh, of the State University of New York at Albany.

Photography of *The Lightning Field* required the use of medium- and large-format cameras.

No photograph, group of photographs or other recorded images can completely represent *The Lightning Field*.

Isolation is the essence of Land Art.

Appendix 2

ART YARD

I have been thinking about an art yard I would like to build. It would be sort of a big hole in the ground. Actually it wouldn't be a hole to begin with. That would have to be dug. The digging of the hole would be part of the art. Luxurious stands would be made for the art lovers and spectators to sit in.

They would come to the making of the yard dressed in Tuxedos and clothes which would make them aware of the significance of the event they would see. Then in front of the stand of people a wonderful parade of steamshovels and bulldozers will pass. Pretty soon the steam shovels would start to dig. And small explosions would go off. What wonderful art will be produced. Inexperienced people like La Monte Young will run the steamshovels. From here on out what goes on can't easily be said. (It is hard to explain art). As the yard gets deeper and its significance grows, people will run into the yard, grab shovels, do their part, dodge explosions. This might be considered the first meaningful dance. People will yell "Get that bulldozer away from my child". Bulldozers will be making wonderful pushes of dirt all around the yard. Sounds, words, music, poetry. (Am I too specific? optimistic?)

The whole action might last any amount of time. Maybe the machines will run out of gas. Or the people take over the machines. Or the holes might cave in. In any case I am sure there will be enough range of possibilities in the art to permit individual variation, and in time, style and acceptance.

"(The town of Pittsburgh's recent Art Yard was interesting but followed a usual romantic machine crashing interpretation. Yet even with this interpretation not enough was done with the explosions and collisions to merit special notice, and obvious references to NEW YORK'S recent two acre festival did not go unnoticed.)" Alas,

I have just been thinking about this wonderful art already it is being killed in my mind. Is nothing safe? Perhaps you haven't thought me serious? Actually I am. And if this paper should fall into the hands of someone who owns a construction company and who is interested in promoting art and my ideas, please get in touch with me immediately. Also if some one owns an acre or so of land (preferably in some large city ... for art ... thrives there) do not hesitate.

May, 1960

Walter De Maria

'Art Yard'

Published in the *Fluxus Anthology*, 1963

Appendix 3

PIECE FOR TERRY RILEY

PROLOGUE

Terry Riley has played semi-professional baseball.
At that time he did not realize how great he was.

PIECE

Come on the performance area dressed in a baseball catcher's uniform. Stand there for a minute to let the people see what they will hear. Smile, and say pleasantly - "I'd like you to see and hear my catcher's equipment." Then explain the functions of all of the parts of the equipment and make sounds with them. Show everything. Mask, glove, chest protector, shin guards, straps etc. Hum babe.

5/60

SURPRISE BOX

The surprise box has a top with a hole in it large enough to put your hand through it. One person puts something into the box. Anything. A second person comes when the box has been left alone, and reaches into the box to find what has been left inside. He may feel around fast or slow, depending on how much suspense he wants to feel. Pretty soon he will find what's in the box. He can then do whatever he likes with what he found. He then can put something else in the box for the next person to find.

June, 1960

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL DISASTERS

I think natural disasters have been looked upon in the wrong way.
Newspapers always say they are bad, a shame.
I like natural disasters and I think that they may be the highest form of art possible to experience.
For one thing they are impersonal.
I don't think art can stand up to nature.
Put the best object you know next to the grand canyon, niagra falls, the red woods.
The big things always win.
Now just think of a flood, forest fire, tornado, earthquake, Typhoon, sand storm.
Think of the breaking of the ice jams. Crunch.
If all of the people who go to museums could just feel an earthquake.
Not to mention the sky and the ocean.
But it is in the unpredictable disasters that the highest forms are realized.
They are rare and we should be thankful for them.

Walter De Maria, May 1960

Walter De Maria

'Piece for Terry Riley', 'Surprise Box', and 'On the Importance of Natural Disasters'.

Published in the Fluxus *Anthology*, 1963

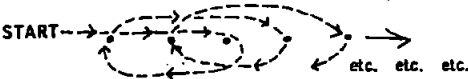
Appendix 4

BEACH CRAWL

Go to sea shore (Beach)
Take three stones, large or small
Place yourself on your hands and knees
Put one stone down.
Crawl forward a few feet, and place second stone down.
Crawl forward a few feet more, place third stone down.
Then crawl back to the first stone, pick it up.
Then turn around and crawl back past second and third stones,
and place first stone a few feet in front of the third stone.
Then turn around and crawl back to the second stone,
(which has now become the last stone) pick it up, turn around
go back up the line of stones, and place that stone a bit in front
of the lead stone.
In this manner you can travel down the beach. . .
a) until you get tired
b) until you have gone through the cycle 100 times
c) until you run into the Ocean
At that time you gather the three stones and place them into
a little triangle pattern.
Then shout as loud as you can "Well that's new isn't it?"
Then throw the three stones into the Ocean. end
As is plain from the description of the event, it must be done with
solemnity.
no stopping to bark at dogs
no altering of straight ahead course for horses or fishermen.

DIAGRAM

July, 1960



PROJECT FOR BOXES

BOXES for MEANINGLESS WORK

I will have built two small boxes.
I put small things in the boxes,
Assign explains the boxes to any-
one who should approach them.
It says "Meaningless work boxes."
Throw all of the things into one
box, then throw all of the things
into the other. Back and forth,
back and forth. Do this for as long
as you like. What do you feel?
Yourself? The Box? The Things?
Remember this doesn't mean any-
thing.
March, 1960

COLUMN with a BALL on TOP

I have built a box eight feet
high. On top place a small gold
ball. Of course no one will
be able to see the ball sit-
ting way up there on the box.
I will just know it is there.
Feb. 1961

Walter De Maria
'Beach Crawl', 'Boxes for Meaningless Work', and 'Column with a Ball on Top'.
Published in the Fluxus *Anthology*, 1963

MEANINGLESS WORK

Meaningless work is obviously the most important and significant art form today. The aesthetic feeling given by meaningless work can not be described exactly because it varies with each individual doing the work. Meaningless work is honest. Meaningless work will be enjoyed and hated by intellectuals - though they should understand it. Meaningless work can not be sold in art galleries or win prizes in museums - though old fashion records of meaningless work (most all paintings) do partake in these indignities. Like ordinary work, meaningless work can make you sweat if you do it long enough. By meaningless work I simply mean work which does not make you money or accomplish a conventional purpose. For instance, putting wooden blocks from one box to another, then putting the blocks back to the original box, back and forth, back and forth etc., is a fine example of meaningless work. Or digging a hole, then covering it is another example. Filing letters in a filing cabinet could be considered meaningless work, only if one were not a secretary, and if one scattered the file on the floor periodically so that one didn't get any feeling of accomplishment. Digging in the garden is not meaningless work. Weight lifting, though monotonous, is not meaningless work in its aesthetic sense because it will give you muscles and you know it. Caution should be taken that the work chosen should not be too pleasurable, lest pleasure becomes the purpose of the work. Hence sex, though rhythmic, can not strictly be called meaningless - though I'm sure many people consider it so.

Meaningless work is potentially the most abstract, concrete, individual, foolish, indeterminate, exactly determined, varied, important art-action-experience one can undertake today. This concept is not a joke. Try some meaningless work in the privacy of your own room. In fact, to be fully understood, meaningless work should be done alone or else it becomes entertainment for others and the reaction or lack of reaction of the art lover to the meaningless work can not honestly be felt.

Meaningless work can contain all of the best qualities of old art forms such as painting, writing etc. It can make you feel and think about yourself, the outside world, morality, reality, unconsciousness, nature, history, time, philosophy, nothing at all, politics, etc. without the limitations of the old art forms.

Meaningless work is individual in nature and it can be done in any form and over any span of time - from one second up to the limits of exhaustion. It can be done fast or slow or both. Rhythmically or not. It can be done anywhere in any weather conditions. Clothing if any, is left to the individual. Whether the meaningless work, as an art form, is meaningless, in the ordinary sense of that term, is of course up to the individual. Meaningless work is the new way to tell who is square.

Grunt

Get to work

March, 1960

Walter De Maria

'Meaningless Work'

Published in the *Fluxus Anthology*, 1963

Appendix 6

Robert Morris

'TRAVELING SCULPTURE – a means toward a sound record', in Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young, *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Bronx, New York: La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, 1962. (Omitted from the 1963 edition.)

Materials: A varied assortment of lumber, at least several pieces for each person involved; carpentry tools; nails; still camera; tape recorder; clock; possibly water.

This event will take place outdoors, preferably in a remote field far from houses, factories, streets, etc. Any number of people may participate as builders' those who act as photographer, sound recorder, and time keeper may also participate as builders.

A pathway is first selected, e.g., 8 feet wide and 15 yards long – its size will be dependent upon the number of people participating and how much room they feel they need. The pathway is then marked out with stakes. The lumber and tools should be closed at hand.

The tape recorder is turned on and a construction begun at one end ("a") of the pathway within the parallel boundaries. All the lumber available should be put into the construction. This completed, a photograph is taken (photographs should be taken at each successive stage – stages being those points decided upon by the photographer either during the construction process or beforehand. The time of each photograph and the position of each photographed "stage" relative to one of the ends of the pathways should be recorded). When all the lumber has been used the builders should go to the extreme "a" side of the construction and begin dismantling that side and carrying the lumber around to the "b" side and so extend their construction on and on until the "b" end of the pathway is reached. Construction should continue from "a" to "b" without stopping, except for individual or collective rests for the builders. At the extreme "b" point some or all of the construction should be consumed by setting fire to it. The tape recorder is then turned off. All but one should then leave, taking with them their permanent record of the sound of the event.

The next day, or as soon as possible, the one who remains behind should return to the site with the photographs (enlarged as big as possible) with the times that they were taken noted on them. These are to be put up on stakes long the outside edge of the pathway at approximately the points where they were taken.

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This bibliography is divided into seven sections, as follows:

1. Archival material
2. Walter De Maria's publications
3. Other publications, prior to the completion of *The Lightning Field* (1977)
4. Other publications, after the completion of *The Lightning Field* (1978 to present)
5. Exhibition catalogues
6. Additional websites
7. Discography

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7. DISCOGRAPHY

What follows is a selection of the music to which I have referred in this thesis. A number of works (especially those by La Monte Young) have never been (or, indeed, cannot be) recorded. For those interested in finding out more, a useful discography is provided by Keith Potter in *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.360–364.

Walter De Maria

Cricket Music 1964 (24:34) and *Ocean Music* 1968 (20:29). Self-released, under the title *Drums and Nature*.

Walter De Maria can also be heard playing the drums on **Henry Flynt and the Insurrections**. *I don't wanna*. Locust Music (1966).

Steve Reich

There are a number of recordings available, but the following are all contained in the 10-CD boxed set titled *Steve Reich: Works 1965–1995*. New York: Nonesuch (7559-79451-2), 1997. The sleeve notes for this sixtieth-birthday compilation also contain an interview with the composer by Jonathan Cott, and useful essays by John Adams, Michael Tilson Thomas, and Robert Hurwitz:

It's Gonna Rain (1965)

Come Out (1966)

Piano Phase (1967)

Four Organs (1970)

Drumming (1970–71)

Clapping Music (1972)

Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ (1973)

Music for 18 Musicians (1976)

Six Marimbas (1973–86)

For *Music for 18 Musicians*, I particularly like the following recording (and its cover, which shows a drawing, 'Weaver's Notation', by Beryl Korot, which resembles a moiré pattern):

Steve Reich: *Music for 18 Musicians*: Munich: ECM (New Series 1129), (CD, 1978).

See also:

Six Pianos (1973) On 'Piano Circus'. Decca, Argo (430 380-2) (CD, 1990).

Violin Phase (1967) (with *Music for a Large Ensemble, Octet*) ECM Records, ECM (1168) (CD, 1989).

Terry Riley

In C (1964). Columbia Records (494983-2) (CD, 1968).

A Rainbow in Curved Air, Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band (1969). CBS (MK 7315) (CD, 1988).

La Monte Young

Excerpt from *Drift Study 31 I 69 12:17:33–12:49:58 PM*, in Aspen No 8, 1969.

Excerpt from *Drift Study '31/01/69, c. 12:17:33–12:24:33 PM NYC'* from *Map of 49's Dream The Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals* (1969). On *OHM+ The early Gurus of Electronic Music: 1948–1980*. 3-CDs plus DVD. Ellipsis Arts, 2005. This boxed set also contains recordings of the following (among others):

John Cage: *Williams Mix* (1952)

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Steve Reich: *Pendulum Music* (1968).

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