



*Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla.  
Under Discussion, 2005.*

# Wake, Vestige, Survival: Sustainability and the Politics of the Trace in Allora and Calzadilla's *Land Mark*\*

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*The authentic artist cannot turn his back on the contradictions that inhabit our landscapes.*

—Robert Smithson

*Will we struggle to ensure that everyone has a right to survival?*

—Vandana Shiva

## 1. *Et in Vieques Ego*

At the beginning of Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla's video *Under Discussion* (2005), a young man wades into the sea toward an upturned rectangular table floating in the water and performs an unlikely act of collage-engineering. He attaches an outboard motor to the table, revs it up, and sets out to re-trace the coastline of a picturesque tropical landscape, the passage of the vehicle leaving an ephemeral trail or wake in the crystal-blue water like a kind of drawing. The solitary tour guide does not speak or even gesture, and he has no apparent destination or purpose other than to train our eyes on the verdant contours of the land; yet gradually the angle of the camera begins to take us away from an imaginary position aboard or alongside the watercraft, and we find ourselves following its trajectory from an aerial perspective.

Inhabiting the elevated gaze of a military strategist or development surveyor, our view begins to alternate between the pathway cut by the table through the water

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and a defoliated terrain pock-marked with craters. We then witness a series of planes, bunkers, and airfields—rusting and overgrown like so many ancient ruins—followed by an elaborate building complex under construction at the edge of the sea and what appears to be a cemetery. After following the vehicle in a vertiginous spiral, we are returned to the horizontal perspective of the helmsman. Passing close to the shore, we see two pieces of apparently incongruous signage. One reads “Welcome to the Vieques Wildlife Refuge,” entreating us to “please help us protect the plants and animals” and specifying the “permitted activities” of “nature observation, hiking, and photography.” The second is marked with a skull and crossbones and reads, “No Trespassing, Authorized Personnel Only: Danger—Explosives.”

In its counterpoint to the landscape’s apparent vitality, the warning comes to us as a distant echo of *Et in Arcadia Ego* (“I too am in Arcadia”)—the address made by the death’s head to the Arcadian shepherds in the Baroque allegory of worldly mortality famously depicted by Guercino and Nicolas Poussin in their questioning of the genre of the pastoral, and its idealized, atemporal harmony between humanity and nature.<sup>1</sup> But in *Under Discussion*, the skull and crossbones do not so much speak to the universal ravages of mundane decay as they mark the extremes of simultaneous duress and negligence to which a specific population and its life-support systems have been exposed for more than half a century.

*Under Discussion* is part of a long-term, multi-phased project concerned with the political and ecological conditions of what Allora and Calzadilla describe as the “transitional geography” of Vieques, an inhabited island off of Puerto Rico used by the U.S. Navy as a weapons-testing range from 1941 to 2003. It is informed by the following questions, as formulated by the artists: “How is land differentiated from other land by the way it is marked? Who decides what is worth preserving and what should be destroyed? What are the strategies for reclaiming marked land? How does one articulate an ethics and politics of land use?”<sup>2</sup> Involving photographs, sculptural installations, collaborative design projects, and videos addressing the conditions of the island during and after its military occupation, the works comprising *Land Mark* have appeared in various

1. Erwin Panofsky, “*Et in Arcadia Ego*: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition” (1938), in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Anchor Books, 1955), pp. 295–320, cited in Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 26. Robert Smithson recodes this axiom as “Et in Utah Ego” in “The Spiral Jetty” (1972), in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 149.

2. Allora and Calzadilla, “Introduction,” in *Allora and Calzadilla: Land Mark* (Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2006), pp. 4–5. As a long-term, multifaceted investigation of the landscapes of U.S. colonial expansion, *Land Mark* bears comparison to Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri’s *Camp Campaign*. See T. J. Demos, “Means without End: Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri’s *Camp Campaign*,” *October* 126 (Fall 2008) pp. 69–90. *Land Mark* and *Camp Campaign* occupy the more politically engaged end of a broad spectrum of contemporary landscape investigations in which the oblique public pedagogy of the Center for Land Use Interpretation plays a crucial mediating role. On these developments, see “Remote Possibilities: A Roundtable Discussion of Land Art’s Changing Terrain,” *Artforum* (Summer 2005), pp. 289–95; Max Andrews, ed., *Land, Art: A Cultural Ecology Handbook* (London: Royal Society for the Arts, 2006); Nato Thompson, ed., *Experimental Geography* (Hoboken: Melville House/ICI, 2008); and Kelly Baum, ed., *Nobody’s Property: Land, Space, Territory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).



Guercino. Et in Arcadia Ego. 1618–1622.

iterations in an array of public venues ranging from the Tate Modern to UNESCO to the *Utopia Station* programming at the 2005 World Social Forum.

*Land Mark* in some ways bears comparison to what has recently been described by the Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA) as “Tactical Cartography”: “Spatial representations that confront power, promote social justice, and are intended to have an operational value . . . ‘tactical cartography’ refers to the creation, use, and distribution of spatial data to intervene in systems of control affecting spatial meaning and practice.”<sup>3</sup> IAA emphasizes the “connotations of instrumentality” that come with the umbrella term “tactical media,” a paradigm they describe as “fundamentally pragmatic, utilizing any and all available technologies, aesthetics, and methods as dictated by the goals of a given action.”

Using a range of media and means in its “confrontation of power” and “promotion of social justice” in relation to Vieques, *Land Mark* shares something of this tactical orientation. Yet Allora and Calzadilla’s project is also distinctively compelling in artistic terms: its spatial investigations are made in terms of what the artists call “the trace.” At once a poetic trope and a set of material operations, the trace links presence and absence, inscription and erasure, preservation and destruction, and appearance and disappearance, and is exemplified by the wake created by the watercraft as it redoubles the shoreline in *Under Discussion*.

Allora and Calzadilla have gone so far as to remark that “we could say that the trace is our medium,” which they characterize as a kind of “marking and

3. Institute for Applied Autonomy, “Tactical Cartography” in *An Atlas of Radical Cartography*, ed. Lize Mogel and Alexis Bhagat (Los Angeles: Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, 2007), pp. 29–30.

effacement . . . that unsettles any linear relation between past, present, and future.”<sup>4</sup> Keeping in mind the etymological link between trace, track, and drawing, we might understand Allora and Calzadilla’s embrace of the term “medium” in the sense of the word developed in recent years by Rosalind Krauss, in her challenge to re-think the conditions of possibility governing artistic practice in the aftermath of modernist medium-specificity.<sup>5</sup> Krauss displaces any essentialist investment in the “material support” with an attention to what she calls the “technical support,” a complex term that encompasses the art-historical, ideological, and technological overdetermination of a specific set of formal procedures and processes of art-making. In a polemical allusion to Marshall McLuhan, Krauss posits that “the medium is the memory”<sup>6</sup>; but her appeal to memory is less a matter of a continuous tradition than of the enigmatic remains of previous practices and techniques that must be “reinvented” in a singular fashion across the oeuvre of a given artist.

Krauss defines the *political* stakes of her project over and against the menace of what she decries, following Frederic Jameson, as “the globalization of the image in the service of capital.” But a more challenging target against which to measure the stakes of what Krauss calls “reinventing the medium” would be the radically politicized counter-globalization discourses of tactical media, the axiom of which was canonized by Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) in the early 2000s: “By Any Media Necessary.”<sup>7</sup> CAE and allies such as IAA unapologetically posit a neo-Situationist end-of-art narrative in which artistic practice is dissolved into an expanded field of activist visual culture to be judged by what IAA would call “instrumental” criteria.

Allora and Calzadilla are in no way opposed to the overall activist impulse of tactical media, but for them art never quite ends. In Hal Foster’s terms, art “survives” or “lives on,” precariously encompassing “formal transformation that is also social engagement,” so as to “restore a mnemonic dimension to contemporary art,” albeit in ways that treat memory not in terms of nostalgic preservation but rather as what Foster calls a condition of “coming-after.”<sup>8</sup>

4. Guillermo Calzadilla, in Jaleh Mansoor and Yates McKee, “The Sediments of History: An Interview With Allora and Calzadilla,” *Parkett* 80 (September 2007), p. 48.

5. See Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999). Though Allora and Calzadilla undoubtedly inhabit the “post-medium condition” in that they do not identify as painters or sculptors, for instance, it should be noted that their account of “the trace” puts their work into close proximity with the vexed quasi-medium of drawing. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, “trace” derives from “Middle English, *track*, from Old French, from *tracier*, to make one’s way, from Vulgar Latin \**tractine*, from Latin *tractus*, a dragging, course, from past participle of *trahere*, to draw.” For an important statement on the resilience of drawing as an expanded and “self-differing” medium quietly informing a wide range of contemporary practices, see Jaleh Mansoor, “Panel I,” in *Drawing Papers 31: Symposium: Drawing (as) Center*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (New York: The Drawing Center, 2002), pp. 9–11. The enigmatic contemporaneity of drawing is the *raison d’être* of the still-unfinished Scorched Earth project (Gareth James, Sam Lewitt, and Cheney Thompson).

6. Rosalind Krauss, *Perpetual Inventory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), p. 19.

7. On tactical media at the intersection of artistic and activist discourses, see *Third Text* 94 (September 2008), a special issue edited by Gregory Sholette and Gene Ray on the topic.

8. Hal Foster, “The Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse,” in *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 130.

If, following Krauss and Foster, we approach art itself as a series of precarious memory-structures, we recognize that much of the most compelling contemporary art is concerned both formally and thematically with the relation between history, memory, and the political. Exemplary in this regard is the self-recursive analogy staged by William Kentridge between the temporality of inscription/erasure in the animated film, on the one hand, and the traumatic histories of South African apartheid, on the other hand. Emily Apter points out that for Kentridge, the aftermath of apartheid is often staged in terms of the degradation of postcolonial landscapes and the life-support systems of subaltern populations, an observation that leads her to interpret his work in terms of an “aesthetics of critical habitat.”

“Grafted from the lexicon of environmentalists, who use it to refer to the minimal conditions necessary to sustain the life of an endangered species,” Apter’s paradigm of critical habitat links questions of environmental sustainability to the “coming-after” of postcolonial globalization.<sup>9</sup> Programmatically defined by the 1987 United Nations’ report *Our Common Future* in terms of “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” sustainability has all too often been taken for granted as a self-evident good in artistic discourses, as exemplified by Rirkrit Tiravanija’s *The Land* (1998–ongoing).<sup>10</sup> Such projects have led many Left-oriented critics to dismiss the term out of hand as so much neoliberal “greenwashing” serving to neutralize properly political analyses and demands in favor of superficially eco-conscious forms of lifestyle, design, and consumer-citizenship.<sup>11</sup> While there is much truth to such jaundiced assessments, sustainability should be recognized as a contested concept with the potential to be re-marked in relation to struggles for what Allora and Calzadilla call, following the work of low-income activists of color in the United States, “environmental justice.”<sup>12</sup> In the artists’ words, *Land Mark* aims to “extend the parameters of the term *sustainability* to include the very survival of the indigenous civilian population of the island, and as a result complicates and broadens mainstream notions of environmentalism and sustainability to include questions of social justice.”<sup>13</sup> Allora and Calzadilla state that their project is concerned with “what and who counts as an

9. Emily Apter, “The Aesthetics of Critical Habitat,” *October* 99 (Winter 2002), pp. 21–22.

10. United Nations Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 1.

11. For a thorough critique of sustainability as an “empty signifier” of socio-ecological responsibility, see Janet Kraynak, “Rirkrit Tiravanija’s *The Land* and the Economics of Sustainability” (paper presented at CAA’s 2009 Annual Conference, Los Angeles). Kraynak’s critique is echoed by design theorist Adrian Paar in *Hijacking Sustainability* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009).

12. See Giovanna De Chiro, “Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996), pp. 298–330. Also see Robert Bullard, et al., *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002). For a deployment of these models in relation to contemporary architecture, see Yates McKee, “Haunted Housing: Eco-Vanguardism, Eviction and the Biopolitics of Sustainability in New Orleans,” *Grey Room* 30 (2008), pp. 84–113.

13. Jennifer Allora in Stephanie Smith, “Interview: Allora & Calzadilla,” in *Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art*, ed. Stephanie Smith (Chicago: Smart Art Museum/ICI, 2005), p. 39.

endangered species—and how this discourse [environmental justice] reconceptualizes the relationships between nonhuman and human nature, and, as a result, fosters new forms of environmentalism.”<sup>14</sup> This resonates with the project of political ecology formulated by Bruno Latour, which aims to undo the “work of purification” that separates properly “social” actors and problems on the one hand from the realm of “natural” phenomena on the other. Latour tracks the ways in which human and nonhuman “actants” become entangled in ecological imbroglios that mix “chemical reactions and political reactions. A single thread links the most esoteric sciences and sordid politics . . . dangers on a global scale and the impending local elections or the next board meeting.”<sup>15</sup> Allora and Calzadilla add to this their insistence that the intersection of ecology and politics is always marked by historically uneven distributions of environmental vulnerability, which is bound up with postcolonial dynamics of race, class, and region. These are dynamics traditionally effaced in the discourse of so-called “eco-art,” the idealism of which is exemplified by Barbara Matilsky’s remark in the exhibition catalogue for *Fragile Ecologies* that “an understanding of ecology—the interrelationship of all forms of life in their diverse environments—is essential to the survival of the planet . . . . An important new art movement has emerged to reestablish a vital link to nature by communicating an experience of its life-generating powers.”<sup>16</sup>

The trace-as-medium is the key principle mobilized by Allora and Calzadilla to undo an ecological idealism in which “survival” is posited as a transcendental moral mandate addressed to a generic humanity, rather than as a matter of what Judith Butler has called the biopolitics of “survivability.” For Butler, survivability concerns access to the “sustained and sustaining conditions of life.” This simultaneously encompasses ecological and economic life-support systems (air, water, food, land, shelter, income) and political struggles concerning “the representability of life,” which is to say, the discursive, legal, and aesthetic frames that enable lives to appear as livable, grievable, and worthy of protection: “in this way media and survival are linked.”<sup>17</sup>

14. Ibid.

15. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 1. For a productive application of Latour to the early ecosystems-related work of Hans Haacke, see Luke Skrebowski, “All Systems Go: Recovering Hans Haacke’s Systems Art,” *Grey Room 30* (Winter 2008), pp. 55–83.

16. Barbara Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists Interpretations and Solutions* (New York: Queens Museum/Rizzoli, 1992), p. 3. While this exhibition deserves credit for identifying environmental degradation as an ongoing matter of concern among U.S. artists in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, the depoliticizing idealism of writers such as Matilsky has proven to have an insidious legacy in subsequent discussions of art and ecology. For recent correctives to this longstanding tendency, see Brian Wallis, “Survey” in Jeffrey Kastner, ed., *Land and Environmental Art* (New York: Phaidon, 1998), pp. 18–43; Yates McKee, “Art and the Ends of Environmentalism,” in *Nongovernmental Politics*, ed. Michel Feher with Gaelle Krikorian and Yates McKee (New York: Zone Books, 2007), pp. 538–83; and T. J. Demos, “The Politics of Sustainability: Contemporary Art and Ecology,” in *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009* (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 2009), pp. 16–30.

17. Judith Butler, “Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect,” in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), p. 51. For an account of “the right to survival” claimed by subaltern groups, see Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* (Boston: South End Press, 2006), p. 62.

2. *Chalk* (Lima)

Allora and Calzadilla's interest in the trace precedes their work on Vieques. The most exemplary instance is *Chalk*, a paradoxically site-specific process-sculpture that has been reiterated in three separate locations over the past decade, albeit in ways that expose the principle of location itself to a certain dissemination or drift: El Museo del Barrio on Fifth Avenue in New York City during the yearly Museum Mile event (2000); the Plaza de Armas in Lima for that city's first biennial exhibition (2002); and again at the Boston Common on July 4th under the rubric of the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art's "Vita Brevis" public art program (2004).

In each iteration, the artists ordered the industrial manufacture of twenty-four identical white cylinders six feet long and one foot in diameter, which were then unceremoniously placed in clusters and rows in the nominally "public" site selected by the artist. Laid out prone, the serialized, monochromatic objects recall the "blank forms" of high-Minimalist sculpture; yet in each case, any impression of physical solidity or formal coherence was belied by the presence of a slight clue as to their particular materiality and potential function: one of the cylinders had been dragged along the ground for several feet, leaving behind a thick white line. In each iteration, passersby picked up on the cue, and began almost immediately to cooperate in breaking the unwieldy cylinders into large fragments of what was gradually revealed as a familiar material—chalk—and using them to inscribe enormous calligraphic marks over the surfaces of the spaces in question. In *Chalk*, Allora and Calzadilla repeated a sculptural formula that could, in principle, be mobilized in "one site after another" across the globe to infinity.<sup>18</sup> But in deconstructive fashion, every repetition of *Chalk* involved a rupture, each contextually precise iteration giving rise to an unforeseeable transformation.

Shifting from a set of static geometrical objects to an unprogrammed, performative-collaborative event of graphematic proliferation with an indeterminate lifespan, *Chalk* represents an extremely dense working-through of art-historical legacies. First, the chalk-objects confound the programmatic distinction drawn by orthodox Minimalism between the purified phenomenological experience of the abstract gestalt, on the one hand, and the (debased) cultural legibility of the Pop icon, on the other hand. However, unlike either Minimalist or Pop artworks, the chalk-objects are fashioned from an organic, perishable material, announcing themselves as such in the title. The chinks are thus "chalk" in two senses: they are morphologically and culturally legible as hypertrophic chalk-sticks, but also, like all chalk-sticks, made of a geological substance, the compressed remains of prehistoric marine organisms. Chalk was utilized in various ways by post-Minimalist sculptors concerned with the dissolution of abstract form at the hands of gravity and entropy. However, the objects lose their form not

18. See Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Locational Identity and Site-Specific Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).



through simple exposure to time or the elements, but by becoming objects of *use* for passersby whose curiosity has been activated by the interruption of their everyday movement through the urban landscape.

The graffito is a vexed problem set inherited by Allora and Calzadilla from post-war artists in Europe and the United States, ranging from the figure of the child drawing in the street celebrated by the proto-Situationist COBRA group to Cy Twombly's recoding of the "expressive" Pollockian trace as the forensic remainder of an "auto-mutilative" event that severs, rather than guarantees, the relation between subject and mark.<sup>19</sup> Thus, as their form comes undone, dispersing into an infinity of ephemeral traces, the chalk-objects of *Chalk* unseal an entire series of art-historical and socio-political memories; a reciprocal re-marking of sculpture and site alike.

The stakes of this re-marking became most dramatically evident in the iteration of the work that took place at Lima's Plaza de Armas, a monumental colonial plaza recently designated by the UN as a World Heritage Site. The Plaza functions as an element in the construction of what David Harvey would call the "monopoly rent" of the city. By this, Harvey means the city's claims to cultural, historical, and architectural uniqueness in a global field of inter-urban competition for highly mobile foreign investment and tourism—a spectacularization of locality in which contemporary art and its promotional infrastructure play no small part.<sup>20</sup> In researching the site, the artists learned that at noon once a week, the government permitted a two-hour demonstration in the plaza by a coalition of unemployed public workers laid off due to neoliberal austerity measures imposed by the post-dictatorship government of Victor Toledo. The artists arranged for the chalk-objects to be placed on the plaza a half hour in advance of the weekly demonstration. As demonstrators began to arrive, a range of political inscriptions began to appear, transforming the monumental plaza into an enormous palimpsest that threatened to overspill the officially designated spatiotemporal boundaries of the art event and the protest alike due to the physical portability and mark-making potential of the chalk-fragments.

Within a half hour, however, the disseminating sculpture-event was put "under arrest": police in riot gear were dispatched to the plaza, where they gathered up the chalk fragments into piles, guarding them until they could be loaded into the backs of sanitation trucks and hauled away. Sanitation workers then set about erasing the marks with water hoses and brooms, obliterating all traces of the short-lived event—with the crucial exception of the photographic documentation made by the artists.

19. On the idealization of "drawing in the street" by COBRA, see Mark Wigley, "Paper, Drawing, Scissors," in *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond*, ed. Catherine de Zegher and Mark Wigley (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press/The Drawing Center, 2001), p. 36. Citing Derrida, Rosalind Krauss suggests the "auto-mutilative" logic of Twombly's work in *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 256–66.

20. David Harvey, "The Art of Rent: Globalization, Monopoly, and the Commodification of Culture," in *Socialist Register 2002: A World of Contradictions*, ed. Leo Pantich and Colin Leys (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), pp. 93–110.



Allora and Calzadilla.  
Chalk (Lima). 2002.

One inscription documented by the artists is especially relevant to the ethicopolitical implications of the problem of the trace: “*Que Vivan Los Derechos* [Long Live Rights].” The inscription simultaneously resists and succumbs to imminent perishability, suggesting that because rights are as vulnerable to violation as an ephemeral chalk-mark is to erasure by a broom, our vigilance in claiming, protecting, and sustaining them must be endless as well.

### 3. Land Mark (Foot Prints)

Best known over the past six years as an emergent tourist destination, Vieques gained a certain visibility in the global media in 1999, when a resident named David Sanes was killed by an errant bomb that fell in the civilian area of the island. Though accidental, this concentrated overflowing of violence into the civilian portion of the island became an occasion for the reactivation of grievances spanning several generations of Viequenses concerning the decades-long degradation of the life-support systems of the island. In the mid 1970s, the military occupation of Vieques had become a locus of popular antagonism in the



*Flotilla of Vieques fishermen confronting the U.S. Navy, 1979. Reproduced in Allora and Calzadilla, Land Mark publication (Palais de Tokyo, 2006).*

form of a fishermen's movement against the contamination and restriction of the island's common fisheries. Fishermen used civil disobedience tactics to interrupt naval operations, including, most dramatically, a flotilla of fishing boats that laid a huge net of buoyed chains in the path of a warship, tangling and incapacitating its propeller. The fishermen also regularly trespassed into the primary bombing range itself, activating the military's security protocol, which each time required a temporary cessation of exercises. This history of resistance informed the response by citizens to David Sanes' death, inaugurating a transnational advocacy campaign, the visual culture of which revolved around repeated acts of trespassing on the part of Viequenses and their supporters.<sup>21</sup>

In 2000, Allora and Calzadilla began a collaboration with Vieques activists to develop a set of protest technologies that would explore the relay between the physical action of the body in space and the semiotic articulation of political claims. The artists invited those engaged in civil disobedience to design their own protest graphics, which were then cast into rubber reliefs that could be attached to the soles of normal shoes. Demonstrators' bodies thus became mobile print-making machines; with each step or stamp in the restricted zone of the beach, these pedestrian prosthetics would leave a mark of pressure—both a physical impression of bodily weight in the receptive surface of the sand and, simultaneously, a metaphorical bearing-down upon the intolerable actions and indeed the very presence of the Navy.

21. For histories of Vieques, see Mario Murillo, *Islands of Resistance: Puerto Rico, Vieques, and U.S. Policy* (New York: Seven Stories, 2001); and Deborah Berman Santana, "Vieques: the Land, the People, the Struggle, the Future," in *Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution: The Quest for Environmental Justice*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) pp. 222–39.



Allora and Calzadilla. *Land Mark (Foot Prints)*. 2001–2002.

*Land Mark (Foot Prints)* bears a certain affinity to other examples of “interventionist” tactics developed in tangency with the post-Seattle counterglobalization movement in the early 2000s. However, unlike the frequent neo-Situationist appeals during that period to the physical immediacy of “direct action” in the space of the street, *Land Mark (Foot Prints)* complicates “presence” in every sense, starting with the fact that it is, among other things, a highly self-reflexive series of photographs in which we witness the traces of absent bodies coming-to-pass in the perishable surface of sand.<sup>22</sup>

In this self-reflexivity, Allora and Calzadilla are in dialogue with Rosalind Krauss’s famous discussion of the indexical sign: “As distinct from symbols,” Krauss writes, “indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are marks or traces of a particular cause . . . . Into the category of the index we would place physical traces (like footprints), shadows, and photographs.” She goes on to suggest that the distinctness of the index “is felt through the absoluteness of physical genesis” as opposed to the representational or compositional conventions of traditional artmaking—a logic she refers to as a

22. See Nato Thompson, “Trespassing Relevance,” in *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere* ed. Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press/North Adams: MASS MoCA, 2004), p. 17. For a sympathetic critique of neo-Situationist rhetorics of immediacy in the early 2000s, see Yates McKee, “Suspicious Packages,” *October* 117 (2006), pp. 99–121.

“trauma of signification.”<sup>23</sup> Allora and Calzadilla stage Krauss’s structural parallel between photograph and footprint, but put the “absoluteness of physical genesis” into question by the fact that the spatio-temporal instant simultaneously interrupted and preserved by Allora and Calzadilla’s camera was itself already marked by a range of other pre-organized matrices.<sup>24</sup>

Allora and Calzadilla have said that the *Land Mark* photographs should be understood in relation to perhaps the most monumental footprints in history: those impressed into the surface of the moon by the astronauts of the Voyager spacecraft in 1969. There, the figure of the footprint was wedded to a humanist mythology in which the agent of the moon-marking was imagined as an *unmarked* representative of humanity-in-general conquering the lunar landscape for science, progress, and eventual inhabitation by the human species—photographic evidence of “one small step for man” and a “great leap for mankind.” The Voyager photographs had already received a critical, if oblique, artistic response within a year of their publicization by Robert Smithson in a contribution to *Aspen* magazine.<sup>25</sup> *Strata: a Geophotographic Fiction* (1970) is a layering of linguistic and photographic fragments derived primarily from paleontology textbooks, displacing the monumental march of “mankind” with the fossilized tracks of extinct prehistorical creatures. Smithson recognized a future-oriented potentiality in these “obscure traces of life,” as when he remarked a year earlier at the Cornell “Earth” symposium that

... if you think about tracks of any kind you’ll discover that you could use tracks as a medium. Like it is possible to rent a Buffalo herd and then just follow the traces. This is a sign language in a sense. It’s a situational thing; you can record these traces as signs . . . . These tracks around a puddle that I photographed, in a sense explain my whole way of—going through trails and developing a network and then building this network into a set of limits.<sup>26</sup>

Smithson’s situating of what he calls the “sign language” of “tracks,” “traces,” or “trails” within a play between the expansive logic of the *network* and the framing or demarcation of *limits* suggests a link between Krauss’s account of the indexical sign and the works she grouped as “marked sites” in “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.”<sup>27</sup>

23. Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index, Part 1” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 203.

24. A further complication is the fact that Allora and Calzadilla’s photographs are digital, and thus are not ‘literally’ physical traces of light bouncing off the sand onto film. For a grappling with the ambivalent status of the index in a digital era, see Mary Ann Doane, “Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction,” *Differences* (Spring 2007), pp. 128–52.

25. Anne Reynolds discusses the Voyager photographs in relation to the “time travel” operative in Smithson’s *Yucatan Mirror Displacements 1–9* (1969). See Anne Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 167–69, 181–83.

26. Robert Smithson, “Earth: A Symposium,” in *Robert Smithson*, p. 181.

27. “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” (1979), in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, p. 279. For a re-reading of this canonical text in light of different modalities of the photograph in contemporary art, see George Baker, “Photography’s Expanded Field,” *October* 114 (Fall 2005), pp. 120–40.

While often associated with the “classical” definition of site-specific art as inextricably bound to the physical actuality of site, Krauss notes that many works by artists such as Smithson and Richard Long were constitutively bound up with what she called “the photographic experience of marking.” For such artists, the photographic recording of ephemeral interventions in remote sites was central to the work itself. In other words, it was only when the mark-making process was cleaved from its actual instantiation that it was able to survive within artistic discourse, addressing a future public as witnesses to an event that had otherwise come to pass without a trace. As more recent scholarship has argued, site-specificity, and more specifically, Land Art, was in many cases conceived from the beginning as a matter of deterritorialized media-events.<sup>28</sup>

Of obvious relevance to *Land Mark (Foot Prints)* is the work of Long, which involved the photographic recording of the trails left behind by the artist as he undertook repetitive walks governed by predetermined routes or distances over particular terrestrial expanses. Long’s body became a kind of drawing-machine, the products of which were photographically displayed in the gallery as a kind of memorial to the absent site and its otherwise short-lived marking by the artist. Throughout his career, Long has treated landscape as a politically neutral surface for the projection of a universal phenomenological exploration of time, space, and embodiment, pretending to provide an antidote to a tragic alienation between humanity and the being of the earth. Long has often presented his work as the antithesis of the purportedly domineering approach to the landscape of U.S. Land Art, treading lightly upon the earth at the intimate scale of the walker rather than cutting, moving, or manipulating it via large-scale equipment in the manner of Michael Heizer. However, Long shares an affinity with Heizer in that both treat “nature” and “humanity” as *unmarked* terms, in the process effacing the violent postcolonial histories inscribed into the landscapes within which their artistic interventions were made (such as the U.S. Southwestern desert or the Himalayan mountains).<sup>29</sup>

A more complex approach to the problem of “marked sites” in general and the problem of the track or trail in particular is to be found in the work of Dennis Oppenheim. Along with Smithson, Oppenheim was among the only artists of his generation to acknowledge the irreducible mediation of any land whatsoever in terms of its technical and administrative inscription *qua* territory. In *Time Line* (1968), for instance, Oppenheim used a snowmobile to draw an ephemeral linear cut through the middle of the frozen St. Johns River, marking the invisible latitudinal boundary between the United States and Canada, on the one hand, while also intersecting the vertically-oriented international line demarcating Eastern and Central time zones, on the other hand. The ephemeral

28. See David Joselit, “Navigating the New Territory: Art, Avatars, and the Contemporary Mediascape,” *Artforum* (Summer 2005), pp. 276–79; Jane McFadden, “Toward Site,” *Grey Room* 27 (Spring 2007), pp. 36–57; and Yates McKee, “Land Art in Parallax: Media, Violence, Political Ecology,” in *Nobody’s Property*, pp. 45–63.

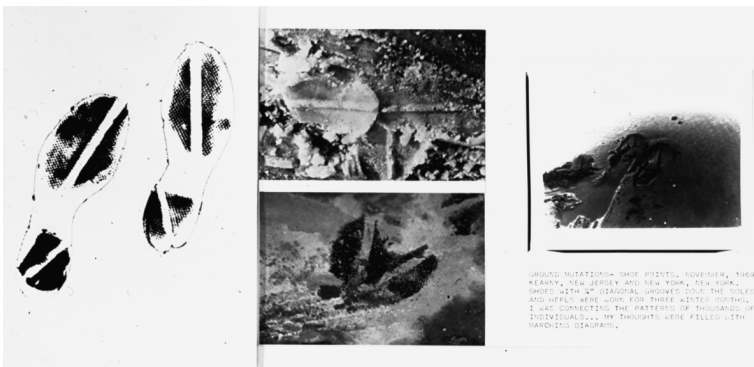
29. On the secret complicity of Long and Heizer in their neocolonial approach to landscape, see McKee, “Land Art in Parallax,” in *Nobody’s Property*, pp. 48–52.

cut was preserved as a photographic document, and presented alongside both a cartographic representation of the site and a photograph of the actual administrative boundary-marker.

In the same year, Oppenheim realized *Ground Mutations* (1969), an exemplary “marked site” project suspended between sculpture, performance, drawing, and photography: as stated in the informational caption appearing alongside the photographic documentation of the project, “shoes with 1/4 diagonal grooves down the soles and heels were worn for three months. I was connecting the patterns of thousands of individuals . . . my thoughts were filled with marching diagrams.” Though not overtly concerned with any specific political or territorial conflict, Oppenheim’s work acknowledges the social overdetermination of the trope of the footprint in several ways. First, contrary to the generic “pathways” charted by Long, and the passage of the human body as such, Oppenheim counters a shoe-print embossed with a mechanically readymade and anonymous matrix. Second, Oppenheim associates this mechanical matrix with the ordering of social if not political behavior—“marching diagrams.” However, rather than simply highlight such a disciplinary “pattern” as an unalterable and predetermined horizon of bodily activity—as is the case in Warhol’s Dance Diagram paintings—Oppenheim’s photo-recording of his pedestrian circulation suggests both the enactment and the violation of such orderings in everyday life, in the manner described by Michel de Certeau in his account of the pedestrian *derive*.<sup>30</sup> The linear groove of the shoe creates both a graphic “figure” against the terrestrial ground into which it is impressed as well as a material “mutation” of the ground itself, transforming the latter into a miniature dialectical topography of elevations and depressions spanning Oppenheim’s three-month pedestrian trajectory.

In *Land Mark (Foot Prints)*, Allora and Calzadilla connect Oppenheim’s concern

30. On the regimentation of bodily activity in Warhol’s Dance Diagrams, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art,” in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 13–14. For Michel de Certeau’s post-Situationist account of the possibilities of pedestrian ambulation vis-à-vis the prescribed routines of urban circulation, see his “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 91–110.



Dennis  
Oppenheim.  
Ground  
Mutations.  
1969.



*Oppenheim.*  
Time Line. 1968.

with the simultaneous overdetermination and indeterminacy of the track with a “marching diagram” that speaks less to a generic form of social control than to the site-specific bodily and visual tactics of civil disobedience in Vieques. Rather than document such activities according to the standard protocols of activist photojournalism, why do Allora and Calzadilla insist on the photographic doubling of the track or trace?

The answer lies in the figure of the *vestige*, which, as Jean-Luc Nancy informs us, derives from the Latin term *vestigium*, “the sole of a shoe or the sole of a foot, a trace, a footprint: ‘a vestige shows that someone has passed but not who it is.’”<sup>31</sup> The vestige marks an irrecoverable passage, as in the smoke of a fire that burns itself out. Confronting the legacy of Hegel’s end-of-art narrative, Nancy suggests that *art itself* is a kind of vestige, surviving its alleged sublation into the ideality of world-historical consciousness—but only barely, as the traces or tracks of something that has come to pass: “the vestige bears witness to a step, a walk, a dance, or a leap . . . it is just a touch right at the ground. The vestige is the remains of a step, a *pas*. It is not its image, for the step consists of nothing other than its own vestige.”<sup>32</sup> Nancy looks to the paradoxical temporality of both art-as-vestige and the vestige-as-art—a series of marks that are simultaneously punctual and anachronistic—to resist idealizations of history and community alike that would claim to ground themselves in the unity of a figurative image. The displacement of the image by the vestige gives rise for Nancy to a politics of what he calls the “passerby”—a term that signals not an indifferent nomadism of one-place-after-another but rather a common condition of shared non-identity in which “community” can only ever emerge as a provisional, temporary negotiation.<sup>33</sup>

31. Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Vestige of Art,” in *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 94.

32. Nancy, “The Vestige of Art,” p. 96.

33. Nancy’s linking of the “passerby” to an unsettling of the “common” dovetails with his notion of “inoperative community,” which was productively used by Miwon Kwon in her critique of so-called “community-based art” of the 1990s. See Kwon, *One Place After Another*, pp. 153–55. Nancy’s work has recently been extended in Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, eds., *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).



Regardless of any artistic intervention, Vieques has always already been marked by an uncertainty about the status of community, and the aims, ends, or goals such a community would set for itself. Keeping in mind their own status as two among the many “passersby”—the crowds of activists, journalists, and politicians—converging on Vieques during the disobedience campaign, Allora and Calzadilla set out to make this condition of uncertainty explicit, and to suggest something of the precarious temporality of the transnational attention given to the island—a prescient concern in light of the reconfiguration of the political conditions of Vieques that would occur in 2003 when the Navy finally vacated the island. *Fuera a la Marina*—Navy Out—was the explicit, unconditional demand shared by the Vieques protesters. While this phrase was incorporated into the design of many of the individual shoe-soles, the latter did not add up to express a homogenous political will. Among the most striking shoeprints is one featuring a cartographic outline of Vieques in which the bombing ranges on the two extremes of the island have each been marked over with an “X.” Often deployed in historical Land Art as a kind of forensic marker simultaneously indicating and cancelling human presence in “remote” landscapes,<sup>34</sup> the X in Allora and Calzadilla’s photograph speaks to the uncertain future of the island itself as a “target” of conflicting aims and representations.<sup>35</sup>

In late 2003, the Navy officially vacated Vieques due to a combination of civil disobedience, critical media coverage, and legislative pressure. With this undoubtedly salutary victory achieved, transnational attention to the island by both media outlets and activist groups began to dissipate; yet for local activists and residents, this victory was precarious, and a new struggle was beginning to take shape with respect to the status of the land.

Along with the political and operational inconvenience caused by the protest movement, an important factor in the Navy’s ultimate decision to vacate the island was the fact that new Geographical Information Systems (GIS) had to some extent rendered the physical terrain of Vieques obsolete: war games could now be conducted in the open ocean using a precise spectrometric simulation of the island’s topography. Using funds provided by the Tate Modern for the exhibition *Common Wealth*, Allora and Calzadilla were able to purchase this data from the private GIS company contracted by the military. In the hands of the Navy, these spectralized traces of Vieques were being made to function in ballistic experiments ultimately intended for material targets in Iraq and elsewhere.

34. On the relation between forensics and site, see Anthony Vidler, “X Marks the Spot” in *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000). In her remarkable but flawed book *Overlay* (New York: New Press, 1983), Lucy Lippard makes the important observation that the “X” regularly appeared as a structural design in earthworks by artists such as Long, Oppenheim, De Maria, and Morris; however, she assimilates this to an essentialist ecofeminist account of the “masculine” negation of the “feminine” fertility of the earth.

35. For an intensive close reading of all of the activist sole-designs used by the artists in *Land Mark (Foot Prints)* that reflects upon the inherent difficulty of doing so in light of physical and symbolic cross-cancelling of the mini-landscapes created in the sand by each mutually overlapping shoeprint, see Kelly Baum, “Reading *Land Mark (Foot Prints)*” in *Nobody’s Property*, pp. 84–87.

Detouring this data-set, Allora and Calzadilla translated it into what they described as an “alternative testing range” installed at the Tate: working from the precise measurements provided by the military contractor’s infrared satellite, they inscribed the entire floor of the massive gallery space with a mathematicized topographical grid that reproduced to scale the crater-marked surface of a portion of the Vieques bombing-range. While composed of two-dimensional white lines overlaid on a black ground and forming a latticework of rectangular sectors, the latter were stretched, torqued, and folded in various ways so as to generate the same virtualized illusion of a three-dimensional topography as that used by Navy pilots in their target-practice. Yet whereas for the pilots the topographic data of the island would appear as a miniaturized simulation inside a pair of electronic training goggles, for spectators at the Tate the data was transformed into a phenomenologically ambivalent experience of vision, scale, and site in which the ambulatory body could take its measure against a decidedly abstract landscape whose volumes and elevations were still palpably evoked in their very absence—positive landforms themselves defined differentially by crater-depressions.

Allora and Calzadilla’s displacement of the “site” of Vieques into the “non-site” of the Tate Gallery complicated any appeal to the sheer materiality of the location in question, as in the classic formulation of site-specificity as something “grounded,” in which the artwork “gave itself up to environmental context, being formally determined or directed by it.”<sup>36</sup> Allora and Calzadilla’s intervention suggested instead that the ruined environment of Vieques is inseparable from its inscription in and as media, demonstrating what Emily Apter calls, in her discussion of “critical habitat,” “the extent to which media and environment are increasingly difficult to disentangle as a semiotic system.”

In this respect, Allora and Calzadilla radicalized a series of insights developed by Robert Smithson concerning site and media during his work on the (unrealized) Dallas/Fort Worth Airport project between 1967 and 1969, which constitutes a highly generative moment in the emergence of what were called for the first time “earthworks.”<sup>37</sup> Smithson was acutely interested in the various spatial techniques and displacements involved in the airport as a construction site, leading him to the realization that “all air and land is locked into a vast crystalline lattice” of computationally-based aerosurveying devices, electronic media networks, and cartographic positioning systems.<sup>38</sup> Smithson was especially interested in the possibility that artworks might be designed at a scale to address an audience traveling at thousands of feet above the surface of the earth, and invited Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, and Carl Andre to contribute proposals for

36. This is Kwon’s rehearsal of the “classical” model of site-specificity in *One Place After Another*, p. 12.

37. See Suzaan Boettger’s contextualization of the airport project in *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

38. Smithson, “Toward the Development of an Air Terminal Site” (1967), in *Robert Smithson*, pp. 52–60.

the airport site. While the others each proposed a project that, however heterodox, would in principle be plausible, Andre adopted a more sardonic tone:

A crater formed by a one-ton bomb dropped from 10,000 feet  
or  
An acre of blue-bonnets (state flower of Texas).<sup>39</sup>

Whereas Smithson was primarily concerned with the “aesthetic potential” of the fact that “aerial photography and air transportation bring into view the surface features of this shifting world of perspectives,” Andre’s proposal linked these technologically-enabled perceptual shifts to a dialectics of extremity shadowed by military violence.<sup>40</sup> “Aerial photography and air transportation” is here associated not only with the perceptual experience of the airline passenger to whom the emergent genre of earthworks might be addressed, but the airborne bombardier testing nuclear weapons in the Southwestern desert or flying sorties over Vietnamese villages. The other hyperbolic extreme proposed by Andre evokes the encoding of the landscape with iconographies linking geographical territory, biological life, and supposed regional character in the interests of cultural identification and tourism-promotion.

A similar complicity of apparent opposites has emerged in Vieques since the 2003 victory of the demilitarization movement, for the land in question was transferred not to the municipality of Vieques, where its future might be democratically debated, but rather to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), where it was redefined as a wildlife refuge. Ironically, in claiming to restore the land to its natural balance the DOI was enacting its own form of destruction and obliteration. Marking the site as purely “natural” required marking over the history of subaltern claims made upon the territory. In a further irony, the new status of the land as a “preserve” provided an alibi for not addressing the continuing contamination of the air, water, and soil of the entire island, even as Vieques was becoming a site of potentially lucrative private tourist investment centering around its remarkable ecological features, such as a rare breed of pelican and a bioluminescent bay. Vieques activists have thus been faced with a more insidious governmental apparatus than the U.S. Navy, which had lent itself quite well to a David and Goliath narrative during the period of civil disobedience. In place of a symbolically potent war machine bent on death and destruction, the question became how to engage tactically a new regime of biopower whose *raison d’être* is the optimal management of the interrelation between living beings and their ecosystems.<sup>41</sup>

39. Robert Smithson, “Aerial Art” (1969), in *Robert Smithson*, p. 117.

40. These citations come from Smithson’s first published text pertaining to the airport project, “Toward the Development of an Air Terminal Site,” pp. 52–62.

41. For the original theorization of biopower as a set of techniques for governing the relations between populations, resources, and environments, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 140–44.

Allora and Calzadilla set out to explore these questions in their Tate installation, staging the future-oriented potentiality of Apter's "critical habitat," an entwinement of environment and media that she associates not with the tragic loss of a grounded sense of place but rather with the emergence of new political groupings "whose interests are panglobal and whose community of feeling spans the parameters of the earth itself."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, according to the artists, the irreducibility of Vieques to its own material territory is what might enable the island to be de-isolated from itself and to share its physical and psychic wounds with other times and places; they set into motion a small-scale articulation of such a "community of feeling" by using the mediatically displaced topography of Vieques in London as the location for a conference involving artists, students, planners, and activists concerned with the politics of ecological remediation in sites throughout the world.

In using their artwork as a pedagogical platform concerning the life-support systems of the "earth itself," Allora and Calzadilla were conjuring, among other things, the fraught legacy of Joseph Beuys. This point of art-historical reference was all the more evident in a crucial sculptural dimension of the Tate installation.



*Allora and Calzadilla.*  
Land Mark (Felt). 2003.

While the floor of the gallery was marked by the abstract traces of the absent non-site of Vieques, the installation provoked its own mode of sensory embodiment through the placement of the latticework, which was overlaid on the floor as a kind of carpet made of felt panels that could be peeled up and rearranged by viewers, gradually dispersing the simulated, displaced topography over time. Felt was frequently employed by post-Minimalist sculptors in the United States, who valorized the physical and behavioral properties of the industrial material. By contrast, Beuys insisted on the metaphorical, poetic, and indeed mythic determination of particular materials. For Beuys, felt was associated with bodily warmth, psychic insulation, organic survival, and shamanistic healing, a self-mythologizing

42. Apter, "Aesthetics of Critical Habitat," p. 23.

elevation of a base industrial material for which the artist was famously lambasted by Benjamin Buchloh.<sup>43</sup> While Allora and Calzadilla have stated their basic agreement with Buchloh's critique, they have also expressed their intention to revisit and revise Beuys' approach to materiality. "Rather than a one-to-one correspondence with some transcendental meaning or spiritual substance, we are interested in the unstable and polysemic quality of materials." Among these materials is felt,

a compressed material with a certain familiar texture, as well as the verb "to feel"; both in the sense of an active process of handling a specific object or material as well as the passive sense of being affected by a force that comes from outside oneself—in the way one might feel the death of a loved one, or, in the case of Vieques the blast of a carpet-bombing raid.

*"Detail of the Greensward Plan  
# 5. Photograph of area of park  
before construction, 1858."  
Reproduced by Robert Smithson in  
"Frederick Law Olmsted and the  
Dialectical Landscape,"  
Artforum (February 1973).*



Thus, through a conceptually dense re-marking of this sculptural material Allora and Calzadilla draw a remarkable link between aesthetic practice and the affective conditions for what Apter calls a "community of feeling" around transnational ecological crisis-conditions. Apter frames the "aesthetics of critical habitat" in terms of a resistance to what she calls, drawing on Gayatri Spivak, "a green globalism that would consign a politics of class to the shadows." Such a concern with the uneven allocation of ecological vulnerability across the globe is crucial to Allora and Calzadilla's *Land Mark* in general and to their relation to Beuys in particular. For while the artists are avowedly interested in a tentative *rapprochement* with certain dimensions of Beuys' legacy, they deliberately distance themselves from the artist's self-presentation as a "shamanic healer" of the rift between "man" and "nature."

43. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Joseph Beuys: Twilight of an Idol" (1980), in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 41–64. For Allora and Calzadilla's discussion of Beuys, see Mansoor and McKee, "The Sediments of History," pp. 47–48.

Beuys has routinely been held up in catalogues and anthologies devoted to “ecological art” as an ideal embodiment of social and environmental responsibility. Taking for granted the self-evident benevolence of ecology, many curators and critics have failed to question the organicist model of community professed by Beuys in his visionary quest to provide an “Energy Plan for Western Man” that would transcend the interested realm of politics in favor of a universal concern with the life of the human species itself. Many curators and critics have—amazingly—collapsed the projects of Beuys and Smithson in their desire to establish a thematic foundation for more recent iterations of ecologically engaged art. All too often, such attempts at synthesis have resulted in a depoliticization of ecology, and an idealization of the role of art in addressing ecological crises.

Disentangling this micro-canon of so-called eco-art is an important task to initiate if we are to comprehend the full stakes of Allora and Calzadilla’s *Land Mark*, and it warrants a detour into the rigorous critique of the relation between art and ecology presciently developed by Smithson himself, who used the term “the dialectical landscape” to recode the aesthetic legacy of the picturesque, with special reference to Frederick Law Olmsted’s Central Park. If the picturesque is traditionally understood as a dynamic but comfortable synthesis of the harmonizing pleasure of the beautiful and the painful force of the sublime, for Smithson it had to be recognized in its “contradictory” status as a matter of “chance and change in the material order of nature” that gives us a “physical sense of the temporal landscape.” “Dialectics of this type,” Smithson writes, “are a way of seeing things in their manifold relations, not as isolated objects. Nature is indifferent to any formal ideal . . . [But] this does not mean one is helpless before nature, but rather that nature’s conditions are unexpected.”<sup>44</sup> Among the generative “contradictions” identified by Smithson in the work of Olmsted was the relation over time between the site on which Central Park was built—a “man-made desert”—and the proliferating non-sites (maps, photographs, surveys, plans) that fed back into the reconstruction of that site as a picturesque landscape caught dialectically between the natural and the artificial. Noting the centrality of media technologies to constructing—rather than simply representing—the landscape in question, Smithson makes a remarkably counterintuitive comparison between Olmsted’s documentary folios of the construction-process and the cinema of Dziga Vertov, especially in terms of the dialectic of stillness and motion at work in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).

The implications of Smithson’s own montaging together of Vertov and Olmsted are profound for the subsequent development of his argument concerning ecology. Smithson calls upon what Peter Bürger would call Vertov’s “non-organic” cinematic procedures of cutting and fragmentation not only to reorient our understanding of Olmsted, but also to critique neo-Romantic approaches to landscape that would call for the artist to become, in the words of the artist Alan Gussow, a “spiritual caretaker . . . [of] Mother Earth” who would “make these places visible,

44. Smithson, “Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape,” *Artforum* (February 1973), repr. in *Robert Smithson*, p. 160.

communicate their spirit—not like the earthwork artists who cut and gouge the land like Army engineers. What’s needed are lyric poets to celebrate it.” According to Smithson, positions such as that of Gussow involve a “spiritualism [that] widens the split between man and nature,” by presuming that social, economic, and technological alterations of the physical landscape constitute a violation of a pristine original nature that might otherwise be restored, rather than “a concrete dialectic between nature and people. Such an artist,” he says, “surrounds himself with self-righteousness and pretends to be saving the landscape; this is not being an ecologist of the real, but rather, a spiritual snob.”<sup>45</sup>

Smithson himself was not able to enact the proposals for ecological remediation of sites such as exhausted strip-mines that he began to work on between 1971 and 1973, though numerous artists were to pursue such projects in the following decade, including Robert Morris. In a 1979 statement entitled “Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation” that pertains to his own transformation of an abandoned gravel quarry into a phenomenologically dynamic “amphitheater” in southern Seattle, Morris ruminates on the possibility that art concerned with ecological remediation could become an aestheticizing alibi for the very forces it would claim to oppose, performing a kind of clean-up operation for environmentally destructive corporations and government agencies. Morris cites Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s 1974 *New Left Review* article “A Critique of Political Ecology”: “the notorious ‘pollution of the earth’ . . . is misleading insofar as it presupposes a ‘clean’ world. This has naturally never existed and is moreover ecologically neither conceivable nor desirable.”<sup>46</sup> Enzensberger’s axiom calls for a displacement of the moralistic polarity of pollution and purification with a *political* analysis that would link ecological crises to capitalist resource-extraction, military-industrial activity, and social inequalities, rather than a generic conflict between “man” and “nature” to be resolved through a shift in so-called cultural values instigated by the visionary artist. Whereas mainstream discourses of ecological remediation called for artists to assist in the neutralization of the marks of environmental destruction left behind by corporations and governments, Morris suggested that a critical art of land reclamation would need to highlight the violent historicity of the landscapes in question rather than smoothing them over in favor of a spuriously “original” topography.<sup>47</sup>

### 6. *Protesting with Proposals*

Allora and Calzadilla’s *Land Mark* extends the projects outlined by Smithson and later by Morris, displacing an aesthetics of purification with a critical attention to the violent historicity of landscape. But *Land Mark* reorients the question

45. Smithson, “Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape,” p. 164.

46. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “A Critique of Political Ecology,” *New Left Review* 84 (March–April 1974), quoted in Robert Morris, “Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation,” *October* 12 (Spring 1980), p. 94.

47. Morris, “Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation,” p. 99.



Robert Morris.  
Untitled. 1979.

of “art as/and land reclamation” from an agonized concern with how artists might engage with *governmental* agencies—the U.S. Department of Mines, or the Environmental Protection Agency, for instance—than with *nongovernmental* activist organizations concerned with making dissensual claims on those governmental agencies that are, in principle, responsible for the economic and ecological well-being of citizens.<sup>48</sup> Exemplary in this regard is the work of the Coalition for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV), the local NGO that formed in the aftermath of the civil disobedience campaign. Along with demanding that the land be properly decontaminated by the federal government and returned to the municipality, CRDV has had to grapple with the risks and possibilities of ecotourism as an engine for the re-development of the island.

Of particular resonance with the concerns of CRDV is a series of experimental proposals for the former bombing ranges created by art and architecture students in a workshop held by Allora and Calzadilla at the University of Puerto Rico in 2004. These projects evidence a critical working-through of the inheritance of experimental architecture of the 1960s and ’70s, exposing the “visionary” impulse of that period to questions of post-traumatic stress and environmental justice. Neftali Carreira’s *Memorial Watching Tower*, for instance, projects a network of pathways and observation nodes suspended above a desolate pock-marked landscape, calling to mind the ambiguous post-catastrophic bleakness of Constant’s “experimental utopias” such as New Babylon (1959–1974).<sup>49</sup> Carreira writes that “the Live Impact Zone is an area so polluted that it will most likely never be able to be used for civil purposes. There are, per square meter, more craters in this area than on the moon.” Echoing Allora and Calzadilla’s own evocation of the moon-landing footprints, Carreira inserts an image of an astronaut into her design-collage, transforming the space suit into a form of

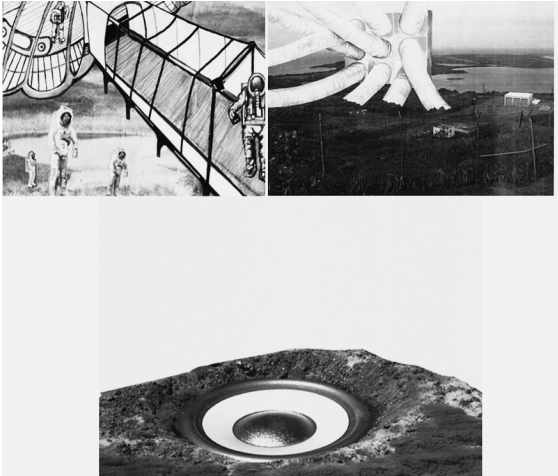
48. See Michel Feher, “The Governed in Politics” in *Nongovernmental Politics* (New York: Zone Press, 2007).

49. See Tom McDonough, “Metastructure: Experimental Utopia and Traumatic Memory in Constant’s New Babylon,” *Grey Room* 33 (Fall 2008), pp. 84–95.



biopolitical bearing-witness to what she calls the “physical and psychological wounds” of the area. This survival gear, she writes, “will enable the visiting public to walk in this extreme geography as aliens in their own estranged earthly environment.”

Another student project is Miguel Velez’s *Re-Direction*, a monumental ventilation and hydrological system whose output of effluents could be “re-routed directly to those governmental agencies which deny the continuing existence of deadly pollutants on the island.” The residues of such governmental negligence are to be found in the trace-amounts of heavy metals that mark the life-support systems of the island—soil, water, air—and thus the bloodstreams and organic tissues of island residents themselves. Against ideologies of environmental design that would aim for the optimal adjustment of natural ecosystems and human communities conceived in a depoliticized vacuum, Velez insists instead on what Jacques Derrida would call a “disadjustment” between past, present, and future as the condition of environmental justice.<sup>50</sup>



*Student projects, Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Puerto Rico (left to right): Neftali Carreira, Memorial Watching Tower; Miguel Velez, Re-Direction; Julio Morales, Loud Speaker. All 2004.*

In a third student project by Julio Morales, one of the craters on the bombing range has been transformed into a massive loudspeaker, “transforming this wound into a speaking device, a site from which a series of testimonies can emerge.” Morales foregrounds the outer membrane of the hypertrophic speaker, which would indexically pulsate in a visually dramatic fashion with the force of the voices issuing from it—a simultaneous reminder and displacement of the barrage of explosions that could be heard echoing across the island for half a century.

Morales’ project can be seen as relating to what

50. The student project-descriptions cited here appear in the “Protesting With Proposals” section of Allora and Calzadilla, *Land Mark* (London: Tate Modern Gallery, 2003), np. For Derrida’s account of the endless “disadjustment” between calls for justice and legal norms, see Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). Since its conception in 2004, Velez’s hypothetical project has taken on increasing urgency; grievances voiced by local advocacy groups concerning the toxic aftermath of the Navy’s occupation have recently begun to receive a response from federal authorities. In November 2009, the Agency for Toxic Substances

Hannah Feldman has identified in Allora and Calzadilla's recent work as "an auditory turn" concerned with "the unique perceptual status of the sonic trace" and its sociopolitical overdetermination.<sup>51</sup> A key example for Feldman of Allora and Calzadilla's spatio-temporal investigation of how "sound etches itself . . . on the surface of reality, as trace, as memory" is a video pertaining to *Land Mark* entitled *Re-Turning a Sound* (2004). Here, a young man takes a moped that has had its muffler replaced with a trumpet around the newly-opened roadways of the formerly restricted areas of the island. As the driver accelerates, slows down, or hits a bump, the acoustic output of the bike/trumpet changes, generating through indexical means a kind of noise-composition that amplifies rather than muffles its own dissonance. Allora and Calzadilla conceive of this clamorous "sound track" as an anthem for post-occupation Vieques, which at once celebrates the victory of 2003 and sounds an alarm with respect to the ongoing emergency conditions of the island.

*Re-turning a Sound* is thus a companion-piece to *Under Discussion*, the video with which we began. The quasi-surrealist vehicular assemblage featured in *Under Discussion* "turns the tables," as it were, on rationalist planning paradigms of conflict-management, resisting the reduction of island residents to one set of supposedly equal stakeholders sitting around a table whose rules of engagement are assumed to be shared in advance. This resistance is articulated not only by the helmsman's *detournement* of the figure of the conference table, but also by the locally recognizable identity of the helmsman himself: Diego de la Cruz, a Vieques activist and son of the leader of the fishermen's movement from the 1970s. Indeed, the vehicle might be thought of as a transgenerational homage to the fishermen's re-purposing of their own equipment during their confrontations with the Navy (little-known archival photographs of which were used as one of the graphic templates for the shoe-soles in *Land Mark* (*Foot Prints*) and were also reproduced by the artists in the *Land Mark* publication). In conjuring the historical memory of the fishermen's movement, *Under Discussion* suggests that certain patterns of domination and exclusion can only be addressed by exceptional, even "absurd," means, ones capable of putting into question given configurations of politics and ecology—such as those that would privilege



Allora and Calzadilla.  
*Re-Turning a Sound*. 2004.

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and Diseases Registry reversed a Bush-administration pronouncement that remaining residues of military activity on the island did not constitute a public health risk. In announcing this reversal, the government has committed itself to an intensification of clean-up activities, and in principle, financial compensation to local residents. See Mireya Navarro, "Reversal Haunts Federal Agency," *New York Times*, November 29, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/science/earth/30agency.html> (accessed June 15, 2010).

51. Hannah Feldman, "Sound Tracks: The Art of Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla," *Artforum* (March 2007), pp. 336–41, 396; and Feldman, "Orchestral Maneuvers in the Light," in *Allora and Calzadilla*, ed. Hamza Walker (Chicago: Renaissance Society, 2010), pp. 29–39.

the putative value of a bomb-scarred “wilderness” over the long-term amelioration of the precarious living conditions of indigenous populations.

Circulating around the former fishing routes now made unusable by the residues of military waste on the ocean floor, de la Cruz takes us on a kind of subaltern “detour” of Vieques, moving us between picturesque scenery, remainders of military violence, and signs of the island’s incipient large-scale redevelopment, a triangulation that speaks to the aporia of ecotourism. For good reason, critical art writing has tended to treat tourism in all its guises as a subspecies of the culture industry—as bound up with the spectacularization of place and the exploitation of site-specific environmental, cultural, and economic differences.<sup>52</sup> *Under Discussion* takes such a critique to heart, but radicalizes it by suggesting the following questions: Can the legacy of the picturesque, linked from its inception to the political economy of tourism and its penchant for “images of decay,” be mobilized along the lines of Smithson’s anti-idealist ecology rather than simply as a commodification of place?<sup>53</sup> If a certain “commodification” is not only unavoidable but in some cases desirable for marginalized locations and economies, on whose terms will this “monopoly rent” be extracted? And how will it be combined with other forms of economic life-support less dependent on the aesthetic whims and seasonal patterns of Northern consumers? Can the ruined landscape be strategically “preserved” as a resource without marking it as *unmarked* nature and thus obliterating the memories of dispossession and ongoing claims for justice encrypted in it? How to avoid superficial forms of “tragic tourism” that would acknowledge violent histories only to repackage them as a matter of local “flavor,” if not outright entertainment, as in the case of an abandoned military bunker in Vieques recently reconverted into a night club?<sup>54</sup> Can ecotourism be organized in a way that is sustainable not only for nonhuman ecosystems, but for redistributive democracy as well?<sup>55</sup>

52. For a classic statement, see Dean McCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976). See also Joan Ockman and Salomon Frausto, eds., *Architourism: Authentic, Escapist, Exotic, Spectacular* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2005). For a highly nuanced account of the relation between art and tourism in its multiple scales, registers, and contradictions, see Lucy Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place* (New York: New Press, 1999).

53. See Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989). For a critical account of the enduring hegemony of the picturesque as an “aestheticization” of ruin, decay, and dereliction produced by uneven capitalist development, see Wolfgang Kemp, “Images of Decay: Photography in the Picturesque Tradition,” *October* 54 (Fall 1990), pp. 102–33.

54. On modes of “tragic tourism” ranging from Holocaust memorials to nuclear test-sites in the Southwestern desert, see Lippard, *On the Beaten Track*, pp. 118–134. On the bunker-nightclub, see Hugh Ryan, “36 Hours in Vieques,” *New York Times* (February 21, 2010).

55. As Lippard writes, “Ecotourism only deserves the name when it includes humans in its ecosystems; otherwise it’s likely to be ‘ecolonialism’ . . . Grass-roots control of so-called alternative tourism has to be a prime consideration, and no community is so homogenous that it will immediately agree on what is both economically and ecologically best for its own turf,” p. 146. Lippard makes important mention of the paradigm of so-called “reality tours” developed by the NGO called Global Exchange, which aims to bring together public pedagogy, political advocacy, and small-scale income-generation projects in sites of political conflict and/or experimentation in the Global South. See Global Exchange, “Be a Socially Conscious Traveler,” available at <http://www.globalexchange.org/tours/SociallyConsciousTraveler.pdf>.

*Under Discussion* stages these questions via the formal logic of the trace that we have encountered in various guises across the oeuvre of Allora and Calzadilla, including the graffito, the index, and the vestige. In each case, the artists set into motion a series of structural couples—inscription and erasure, presence and absence, appearance and disappearance—that link processes of mark-making with counter-memorial claims for rights and justice vis-à-vis specific sites. In *Under Discussion*, this logic is exemplified by the re-tracing of the coastline by the vehicle, which we witness both from the airborne camera and from an imaginary position aboard the tour-boat itself. This operation of re-tracing returns us once again to the legacy of the picturesque, an aesthetic modality concerned with viewing landscapes “with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing.”<sup>56</sup> With the important exception of Smithson’s heterodox recoding of the term, the picturesque had often been dismissed in modernist discourses as a series of readymade formulae depriving us of the capacity to experience sites in their original immediacy. Yet it is precisely for this reason that the picturesque, in its emphasis on mediation, repetition, and artificiality, becomes a potentially critical resource. However, rather than adjust the site to a stereotypical touristic formula, the tour-guide’s re-tracing of the island in *Under Discussion* cleaves the land from itself, displacing it into a kind of endless spiral of

56. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, quoted in Rosalind Krauss, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, p. 162.



*Allora and Calzadilla. Under Discussion. 2005.*

environmental remediation in which any appeal to the actuality of place or the self-evidence of “nature” is short-circuited in advance.<sup>57</sup> It is here that we might identify a certain politics of fictionality in *Under Discussion*: rather than simply expose the “dark side” underlying the illusory appearance of landscape as constructed by the mainstream tourism industry,<sup>58</sup> Allora and Calzadilla, with the mobilization of their absurd vehicle, stage a fictional counter-appearance, “the introduction of a visible field of experience, which then modifies the regime of the visible. It is not opposed to reality. It splits reality and reconfigures it as its double.”<sup>59</sup> As a video, *Under Discussion* enables us to witness this “poetic doubling . . . of the future of this area” in time as the simultaneous creation and dissipation of the vehicle’s trail as it moves through the water.<sup>60</sup> At once echoing and supplementing the rhythmic cresting and breaking of waves against the shoreline, the vehicle and its wake constitute a kind of fictive counter-memorial informed by what Butler would call a biopolitics of “survivability” concerning equitable access to life-support systems and spaces of political appearance alike.

In conclusion, given Allora and Calzadilla’s interest in polysemic wordplay, perhaps we should consider Barbara Johnson’s reading of “wake” as simultaneously “a service held for the not-yet buried dead . . . the expanding wedge of ruffled water that results from the passage of a ship, and also . . . a state of nonsleep.”<sup>61</sup> Johnson’s reading of this term nicely compresses both the aesthetic and ethico-political concerns of the *Land Mark* project as a whole. Appearing as they disappear, reminding as they slip into oblivion, the wakes and vestiges of Allora and Calzadilla’s *Land Mark* impart themselves as an uncertain inheritance from the past and an incalculable promise to future generations: sustainability without guarantees.

57. Jeffery Kastner notes the important echo of “the spiraling trajectory” in *Under Discussion* with Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* in “There, Now: From Robert Smithson to Guantanamo,” in *Land, Art*, p. 31. On the endless re-tracing at work in *Spiral Jetty* as a kind of diagram “vectorized” between site, sculpture, text, and occasionally airborne film-camera, see George Baker, “The Cinema Model,” in *Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities*, ed. Lynne Cook (New York: Dia, 2005), pp. 96–98.

58. Here I allude to the foundational Marxist art-historical critique of landscape in its pastoral and picturesque modes: John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

59. Jacques Ranciere, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 99, quoted in Vered Maimon, “The Third Citizen: On Models of Criticality in Cotemporary Artistic Practices,” *October* 129 (Summer 2009), p. 96. On the politics of fiction, also see Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility,” *October* 129, pp. 51–84, and Felicity D. Scott, “Involuntary Prisoners of Architecture,” *October* 106 (Fall 2003), pp. 75–101.

60. George Baker uses the phrase “poetic doubling” in his consideration of the “cultural displacement of what could be called natural” in the site-specific sound-recordings undertaken by Lothar Baumgarten at the riverfront of Beacon, New York, prior to the construction of the Dia Center for the Arts and its attendant art-driven tourist economy. See Baker, “Lothar Baumgarten,” in *Watershed: The Hudson Valley Art Project*, ed. Miwon Kwon (New York: Minetta Brook, 2002), pp. 73–74.

61. Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction* (London: Blackwell, 1994), p. 17.