The “Curve over the Crest of the Hill”:
Carl Andre and Richard Long

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It might appear counterintuitive nowadays to pair the American minimalist sculptor Carl Andre with the British land artist Richard Long, since their differing nationalities have meant that they have come to be discussed within significantly distinct contexts and agendas. Yet that was not always the case, and there was a period, at least during the 1970s, when it was possible to envisage both artists as guided by shared interests and common themes. In this essay I want to make the case that there is ground to be gained by revisiting these points of continuity.

The most explicit pairing of Andre and Long is to be found in Lucy R. Lippard’s 1983 publication, *Overlay*, in which she emphasizes that both are artists who remain inspired by the prehistoric landscape of southwest England.¹ The basis of her argument is very much in accordance with the themes of her book. In her introduction Lippard explains that the catalyst for *Overlay* had been a year spent “on an isolated farm in southern England” in which she had lived in proximity to numerous prehistoric sites. These places had provoked her to explore the deep associations between contemporary art and the archaic; as she puts it, it was “an overlay of my concern with new art on my fascination with these very ancient sites.”² A layering of the contemporary with the ancient is further corroborated by the book’s illustrations, which intersperse reproductions of work by current artists with evocative photographs of prehistoric monuments, the majority of which are situated within the British Isles. Thus, by the time readers approach the chapter in which she describes the work of Andre and Long, they are more than sufficiently primed to embrace the predominantly pastoral and agrarian presentation of Andre’s sculpture, and to accede that this is work that is decidedly attuned to qualities of the English countryside. Andre’s major artistic contribution, we learn, was to produce a kind of low-lying, segmented sculpture, often produced directly in a landscape, which provoked viewers to walk along its length, just as they might pass along a road.³ From here, it is only a small step for Lippard to point out that unlike North America’s spaces, the English countryside is eminently conducive to walking, and that it is this quality that defines the ethos of Richard Long’s art. Lippard describes how Long’s “breakthrough” had been to present photographic documentation of a
walk he had undertaken in 1969 across Dartmoor in Devon as a sculpture in its own right. Furthermore, Lippard emphasizes the extent to which Long’s work is attuned to the ancientness of landscape. “A walk is just one layer,” Long is quoted as saying, “laid upon thousands of other layers of human and geographic history on the surface of the land.”

The tangle of cultural and national assumptions that surround the terms walking, ancientness, and landscape, invoked in this context, clearly deserve to be negotiated carefully. Moreover, we may wish to question the degree to which Lippard’s pairing of Andre and Long, elegant and provocative though it is, overemphasizes the premodern orientation of their work at the expense of considering how much their outlook might be shaped by shared, late twentieth-century perspectives. Undoubtedly, both artists do share a fascination with the prehistoric, and Lippard’s reading is a timely reminder of this point. In this case, how might we attend to their shared interests without ignoring the fact that their outlook is also decidedly modern and clearly attuned to the larger preoccupations of the transatlantic art world of the late 1960s and 1970s?

Posing this question will invariably raise issues relating to the ways in which national identity is figured in relation to both artists’ work, but this is not the primary focus of my account here. Instead, I am interested in exploring the ways in which both artists invoke prehistory in order to define their sculpture, and how these references can help cast new light on some of the ambiguities and internal tensions within their respective practices. To examine some of these issues, I shall be contrasting Long’s and Andre’s investment in ancient sites in England with those of an earlier generation of British sculptors.

Andre met Long in 1968; they have remained in contact ever since, and have spoken openly of their mutual respect for one another’s work. Of course, it should be emphasized that their compliments are truly complementary, in that their art has always remained sufficiently different for them to feel that their work does not encroach too fiercely on the other’s territory. Long, for instance, once claimed that he admires Andre’s sculpture yet would hate to work with prefabricated, industrial materials, while Andre has said that he envies Long’s “genius at ordering nooks and crannies of the natural world into works of art,” but also stresses that he prefers to work with materials shaped largely by humans. “You might say,” he adds, “I am the Richard Long of the vacant lot and the scrap heap.”

What both Long and Andre might be said to recognize in one another’s work is a shared investment in the principle of sculpture as “placement.” Lippard is right to emphasize that Andre’s major contribution to the development of sculpture in the 1960s was to appreciate that three-dimensional art could be made simply by setting units of similarly shaped materials directly on the floor. This way of working releases the artist from having to be concerned with shaping or cutting, or, for that matter, even with assembling things. Instead, the selected particles simply lie where they are positioned and follow the plane of the ground.

Since Long’s art is much more oriented toward a notion of landscape than is Andre’s, there are of course differences in their art that need to be acknowledged. Long has created considerably more works than has Andre for sites outside museums and exhibition galleries, many of which are ephemeral and emerge, seemingly spontaneously, from his walks. These have largely taken the form of simple marks left on the land, such as a straight line generated by

walking up and down repeatedly until a narrow track forms, or an arrangement of stones that are aligned into a small circle, a row, or a cross. Records of these sculptures only exist as photographs exhibited subsequently in galleries, or as reproductions in specially designed publications. However, he has also made sculptures to be shown exclusively indoors, and, like Andre, he too positions separable units—such as stones or pieces of wood—into elementary configurations directly on the ground.

Both artists have also emphasized how important a notion of “place” is to their art. Long has often spoken, for instance, of the extent to which his art has been generated from specific places and observes that a good work “is the right thing in the right place at the right time.”8 Famously, Andre also asserted that a place “is an area within an environment which has been altered in such a way as to make the general environment more conspicuous.” He understood place to be related “to both the general qualities of the environment and the particular qualities of the work,” such that, to see an artwork from the perspective of place is to recognize how an artist’s intervention and the artwork’s context are mutually determining.9 Phrased in these terms, Andre’s description is highly abstract, as though a place could be literally anywhere. Yet even by the late 1960s he began to explain what he meant by place by invoking very particular locations, which tended to be decidedly premodern. In 1968, for instance, he told his interviewer that he associated his understanding of place with the Indian burial mounds of Ohio, and shortly afterwards he was aligning his sculpture with Japanese rock gardens.10 Place also had a profoundly “neolithic” quality, he explained to Phyllis Tuchman in an interview from 1970, and on this occasion his principal example was Stonehenge.11 In the case of Long, however, it seems fair to infer that place is more a resting point on a longer journey. And while Andre’s notion of place embraces prehistoric sites only in a generic and holistic way, Long’s references to these locations have tended to be considerably more direct, with specific locations being named in titles, and particular features and attributes becoming the focal point for individual works.

Their different approach partly reflects their nationalities and the circumstances in which both artists became familiar with southern England. For Long, born and brought up in Bristol, the neolithic and Bronze Age sites of Wiltshire, Devon, and Dorset were familiar landmarks. He would later tell critics how he would often pass Silbury Hill on the Marlborough Road, while hitchhiking to London.12 Silbury Hill is the largest neolithic site in Europe; it is a man-made mound of blocks of chalk and turf, roughly 120 feet tall and four and a half thousand years old. For Long, places such as these were recognizable objects in a well-known landscape. In fact, Stonehenge itself seems to have felt almost too familiar and well known for him, and he has only referenced it by name in just two works.13

Andre, however, was born in Quincy, outside Boston, and first went to England to visit family relations in 1954, at nineteen. During his stay, his uncle and aunt took him to see a selection of their favorite places in Wales and England, including Salisbury Cathedral and Stonehenge. The scraped-clean Gothic interior of the cathedral made little impact, but Stonehenge left a lasting impression.14 I am not certain whether Andre has ever returned, although even if he has, he has never spoken openly of any subsequent trip. So, while Long could invoke these prehistoric sites in the context of his art with a casualness born of familiarity, Andre has tended to summon the name “Stonehenge”—and
with it all the other prehistoric landscapes of southern England—with a fervor that attests mainly to the vividness of a teenager’s memory.

What would Andre have seen at Stonehenge in 1954? Certainly in those days the site would have felt markedly more remote than it does today. Passing vehicles were infrequent, and there were no visitors’ facilities. Sightseers were free to meander among the stones and seek out the surrounding ditches, burrows, and burial sites as much as they liked. It is also important to mention that during the mid-1950s Stonehenge was subjected to extensive excavation and restoration, so the stone circle would have been filled with substantial quantities of archaeologists’ paraphernalia. In 1954, the investigation had focused on the inner circle. That year they dug up a number of stones that had become buried beneath the turf, and four years following Andre’s visit, they straightened a number of the larger outer “sarsen” sandstones, and reerected one of the giant trilithons that had collapsed in 1899.

Clearly this was a high-profile undertaking, and it stimulated a renewal of public interest in the monument. Yet it is revealing to contrast the general image of Stonehenge that was generated by these excavations with the memories Andre would later retain from his visit. Consider, for instance, the evocative terms used by R. J. C. Atkinson in his well-known book on the monument from 1956; Atkinson had been one of the principal archaeologists on the project, and his text was widely considered exemplary for the accessibility of its presentation of the archaeology of the site. In his introduction, he writes:

Of the stones themselves no words of mine can properly describe the subtle varieties of texture and colour, or the uncountable effects of shifting light and shade. . . .

At a nearer view, each stone takes on its own individual pattern of colour and texture. Some are almost white . . . and so hard that even thirty-five centuries of weathering has not dimmed the irregular patches of polishing executed so laboriously by the original builders. Others are a dull matt grey, streaked and lined . . . like the grain of some vast stump of a petrified tree; and others again are soft, buff or even pink in colour, and deeply eroded into hollows and overhangs in which a man may crouch, the compact curves of his limbs and the rounded thrust of shoulder and hip matching the time-smoothed protuberances of the stone around him.

What is noteworthy about Atkinson’s somewhat high-flown description is just how naturally his metaphors help to anthropomorphize the stones. His concern is with the give-and-take between physical weathering and human shaping; his focus glides seamlessly between the rocks’ mineralogical texture and their figurative appearance.

It might also be conjectured that Atkinson’s approach to the stones is much more in keeping with the terms in which an earlier generation of modernist sculptors embraced the neolithic past. The preoccupations in this passage are not entirely removed, we might feel, from Henry Moore’s Three Piece Reclining Figure from the late 1960s, in which the human form seems to be petrified into folds of weathered rock (fig. 1). Or consider Moore’s suite of fifteen lithographs of Stonehenge from 1972–73, where his depiction of the imposing twenty-two-foot-high sarsen trilithon is titled Cyclops, while a detail of a lintel hole is called Arm and Body. In a similar vein, we might also be reminded of the sculptures
of Barbara Hepworth, whose works have long been affiliated with standing stones, albeit more with Cornwall than Wiltshire. Take, for instance, her Two Figures, Menhirs (1964) or Rock Form (Porthcurno) (1964), both of which adopt a decidedly anthropomorphized silhouette.  

For Moore and Hepworth, along with other artists of their generation, we might speculate that part of the allure of the weathered forms of these neolithic stones is that they can be approached as shapes that are already abstracted; they are forms void of explicit meanings. They have been shaped by age, yet still can be regarded as suffused with evidence of human intention. Work of this nature plays into the assumption that a stone set into the ground and standing upright is an archetypal form of mark-making. Furthermore, invoking the historicity of ancient, standing stones is also a means of relaying attention from the vicissitudes of making sculpture in contemporary times. A work such as Hepworth’s bronze Figure for Landscape contains its own base, which means that in practical terms there is no reason for it to be site specific (fig. 2). Potentially, it could be set down anywhere—in a gallery, or in a museum’s sculpture garden, or even atop a hill. Yet the form and title of the sculpture encourage viewers to recognize in the proportions the monumentality of a monolith, and thus to conjure into existence the idea of an environing and complementary landscape, and this in spite of its modern-day placelessness. In other words, the sculpture projects an impression of magnitude and location that is essentially metaphorical.

It goes without saying that not all emerging artists in the 1960s were drawn to neolithic sites for the same reasons. For one, the upright form of the human figure ceased to be the defining point of reference for sculptors, on both sides of the Atlantic. As many critics have emphasized, there is in André’s work in particular a clear shift away from the vertical to the horizontal plane. In the case of his metal ground-based sculptures, for instance, the works may indeed possess distinct boundaries, yet because they remain at the level of the viewers’ feet, they never come across as obstacles. The edges of these sculptures function more as thresholds, designed to articulate the movements of the viewer, rather than to act as barriers to confine and restrict.

Figure 1

This shift in orientation is reflected in the way Andre (and Long, for that matter) approached prehistoric locations. For both of them there was a clear concern with the larger topographies, and the extent to which monuments such as Stonehenge form an integral component of a much larger series of interlocking points and vistas that incorporate an entire landscape. A small booklet by Long from 1978 explicitly illustrates this shift in focus; it is titled *A Walk past Standing Stones, Cornwall*. Long photographed the various monoliths he passed en route, but it is the journey between them that is the focus of the work, not the stones themselves. Others of their generation were similarly not interested in the monoliths themselves. In an unpublished essay from 1966 or 1967, Robert Smithson commented, for instance, that when Robert Morris had visited Stonehenge, he had not been drawn to the huge trilithons at the center of the monument, but to “the mound-like fringes.”

At a symposium in the United States in February 1969 Long famously articulated his interest in the wider landscape, explaining that “England is covered in huge mounds and converted hills . . . most of England has had its shape changed—practically the whole place, because it has been ploughed over the centuries—rounded off.” Andre made a similar statement in an interview in December 1968, when he confessed that “one of the great influences on the
The course of my own development was the English countryside... which is one vast earthwork.”

The ramifications of their shared willingness to regard the entire topography of southern England as a single sculpture should not be underestimated. In fact, Andre was nothing but explicit about this: “England in 1954 presented me with a countryside that was in fact a collective sculpture worked on over more than 3000 years.”

This reorientation of sculpture from the vertical to the horizontal, and the concomitant interest in larger topographies that we see in artists emerging in the 1960s, clearly attests to a changed sense of scale. A shape representative of an upright figure registers either as monumental or miniature, depending on the relationship of its proportions to its surroundings, and to the size of the viewer. Yet a sculpture that is horizontally oriented is not necessarily bounded by such categories. In fact, it was partly for this reason that Clement Greenberg found Andre’s work unsatisfactory. He pointed out that because Andre’s sculptures are made up of separable units, he could not see how they had any sense of proportion. Indeed, Andre’s sculptures do certainly have the potential to continue extensively, or to be extremely short, and such decisions are frequently determined by purely practical factors, such as the amount of available material or the size of the space in which he is working. Andre has always been open about this. More to the point, no sculpture of his is intended to project a scale distinct from what it is, however large or small it might be.

The same is also true of many of Long’s pieces. His Walking A Line in Peru, a work from 1972, consists of an almost perfectly straight path formed by the artist across a flat valley floor. From the photograph, which now stands as representative of the sculpture, the trajectory produced by Long’s footprints appears to extend for several miles, and were it not for the elevated perspective and the good visibility, the line could never be depicted within a single frame at all. Yet the visible evidence of Long’s movements cannot be described as either monumental or minute because the line simply has no scale. It is merely a literal dimension, just as the mountains in the distance and shallow streams in the foreground have measurable lengths and specific proportions.

However, one or two of Long’s very early works have a rather more complicated relationship to scale. This is partly to do with the fact that he seemed concerned with the question of how a substantial terrain, such as an entire landscape, might be apprehended and represented within a single sculpture. Interestingly, the issue comes to the fore as soon as he invokes prehistoric sites in relation to his work. This first occurs in 1969 with an outdoor sculpture that he made in conjunction with his exhibition in Manhattan at John Gibson Gallery. Long dug up a small rectangle of turf in Battery Park, scooping out the earth and heaping it up into a slight mound. Later it formed a grassy hump. In terms of its dimensions, it was only a few feet long, but this small intervention was intended to invoke the memory of a site vastly more substantial. The announcement card for the exhibition featured an aerial photograph of the grassy ramparts of the Bronze Age fort of Maiden Castle in Dorset, and it is clear that the young artist wanted visitors to draw an analogy between this site and his own earthwork. But the physical size of the ancient site literally dwarfs the actual dimensions of Long’s small work; with its three tiers of ditches and rings, Maiden Castle is the largest hill fortification in Europe. Here, Long invokes a prehistoric site in quite a different way from an artist such as Hepworth. He establishes his association through synecdoche; he is claiming that the...
material he is using links him to this ancient site. Yet the difference between the extremely large and the disproportionately small is hard to overlook and seems to attest to a certain awkwardness regarding the matter of scale. It is almost as though there is no manageably sized, clear middle ground that Long feels his sculptures can happily occupy.

Simon Dell has pointed out recently just how many artists were openly exploring uncertainties of scale toward the end of the 1960s. Robert Smithson is perhaps exemplary in this regard, and Dell notes that Smithson was never one to accede to the pre-given dimensions of an object. For him, scale was a means of undoing preconceptions about the actualities of perception, a theme he explored to great effect in his “Non-Sites” from 1968. Dell reads Smithson’s preoccupation with scale in relation to Jack Burnham’s extensive discussion of the subject in his 1968 publication, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*. Burnham’s argument was that formalist approaches to works of art had come under such pressure in recent years because artists were increasingly responding to new advances in science. As a result of technical innovations in new media, communication and perception often took place below the threshold of the visible, such that visual comprehension could no longer be said to operate always in self-evident or transparent ways. Burnham also felt that “continued technological exploitation of materials,” both organic and inorganic, meant that ultimately “no scale is within range.” In his mind, the “present fluctuations between miniaturation and giantism” exemplified by much contemporary sculpture “seems to reflect that apprehension.” This may well be little more than provocative speculation on Burnham’s part, yet it strikes me that the subject is far from irrelevant when it comes to evaluating some of the early works by Richard Long.

My point is that when artists such as Long and Andre invoke the prehistoric in relation to their art, we need to remain vigilant to the ways in which their perspective might also be informed by other contemporary agendas. In fact, we might suggest that what remains so distinctive about their practices is the degree to which a thoroughly modernist idiom rubs up against prehistoric and premodern references. Neither Andre nor Long draws attention to the potential divergences this may cause, yet arguably both their practices are premised on conflicting orientations.

There are a number of ways in which we might theorize this disjunction, yet I want to do so here by invoking a short prose essay by the British modernist poet J. H. Prynne. I do not want to infer that there was any particular connection between his writings and the 1960s British art world; however, Prynne’s 1968 essay “A Note on Metal” could be considered a particularly helpful resource for speculating about how neolithic sites come to signify in the ways they do for both Long and Andre.

Let me provide a swift, abbreviated account of Prynne’s argument. In four pages, plus notes, he provides a sketch of what is at stake when a prehistoric society moves from an investment in stone to one that values and esteems metal. A culture invested in stone, Prynne suggests, attests primarily to an economy of physical power. The bluestones in the inner circle at Stonehenge, which were quarried from the Prescelli Mountains in Wales 125 miles away, along with the sarsen sandstones from the Marlborough planes twenty miles distant, had to be dragged to this spot using immeasurable quantities of physical exertion. This is why the stones invoke importance and status. Their significance is synonymous with their physical weight, and their embeddedness at this particular site.
Yet with the advent of metal, Prynne explains, weight and substance are displaced by other qualities that are more portable, such as brightness, hardness, or the sharpness of a cutting edge. Indeed, it is thanks to the discovery of metals that notions of abstract and hierarchical values can be developed. Gradually, significance becomes extractable from weight, and can be carried about in metonymic units; metallurgy, in other words, enables a notion to be advanced that value is “essential.” Slowly, Prynne notes, this leads to the emergence for the first time of a metal currency. Eventually even metallic substance can be displaced entirely by the principle of mere numerical quanta, as it is in subsequent societies.

However, this is only half of the argument, because Prynne is equally insistent that this trajectory does not simply proceed uniformly. It is the seeming insubstantiality of modern, numerical economies that makes the reassuring solidity and weight of stone appear as an alternative source of value, enabling it to affirm, for instance, distinct memorializing responsibilities.

We need to appreciate, of course, that Prynne’s essay is no more intended as archaeological history than “Totem and Taboo” is meant to be a piece of academically researched anthropology. Literary professionals have tended to regard Prynne’s essay as a philological note on terms that remain central to political or moral critique, a text that is secreted—typically for Prynne—in an exacting and very particular diction.

However, Prynne’s account is particularly productive for approaching the kind of mixed economy of stone and metal invoked in the work of Carl Andre, for instance. It keeps us alert to the competing terms in which his sculptures generate significance. From around 1967 onward, Andre became increasingly preoccupied with metals, yet he uses this material in a fashion that runs counter to the value it typically assumes within the larger economy. For his exhibition at the Dwan Gallery in December 1967, for example, Andre laid out over the floor of the gallery three sculptures, each made up from 144 plates of metal, a quarter of an inch thick and a foot square (fig. 3). In their
dimensions they were identical, but they were each made from one of three different metals—aluminum, steel, and zinc. The arrangement invariably encouraged viewers to compare the metals’ qualities—to recognize the difference between the white sheen of the zinc and the soft, silvery qualities of the aluminum, and so on.

Yet Andre was also keen to emphasize that the distinctions between the three sculptures extended far beyond the merely perceptual. The announcement poster for the exhibition consisted of a periodic table of the elements, drawn up in the artist’s neat hand, with the three metals highlighted in slightly thicker pen (fig. 4). We might suggest that the visual differences in appearance between the works are further consolidated and rendered absolute by this chart of atomic differences. As such, these metals become samples; they are ambassadors for pure, abstracted qualities that are best represented in the guise of a grid of compartmentalized numerical values. Essentially, that is why Andre was able to deploy steel plates in place of the element iron, as he does in *Steel Square*. By the 1960s, iron had long since become obsolete as a manufacturing material and was barely available as a commodity. It had been replaced by the alloy steel. In that sense, steel serves as a stand-in for iron, just as the silver alloy used for the minting of twenty-five cent coins in the United States was replaced in 1964 with the much cheaper metal, cupronickel.

In claiming that Andre’s metals act as samples of elements, we might be encouraged to assume that one set of, say, zinc plates is as good as any other, just as two ten-cent coins are of precisely equal worth. Or, we might be led to believe...
that the sculpture would still remain the sculpture were the metal units to be arranged in a completely different order, or merely heaped in the corner. Yet that is not the case. For Andre, sculpture is never merely conceptual; it has to be arranged in the designated formation, and the materials are not replaceable. Everything about his work may well imply that the units might be exchanged, or that the sculptures might be replicated effortlessly, but Andre has never embraced such working practices. Indeed, we might suggest that one of the means by which he has emphasized the fixedness of his selected arrangements is by invoking a notion of “place,” and of sculpture as “place-generating.”

In 1968, Andre compared his work very provocatively to that of the artist Michael Heizer, who at the time was positioning multi-ton boulders in crisply cut rectangular trenches in desert locations in the southwest. Andre believed that what Heizer was doing was essentially extending a modernist sensibility into a non-modernist context; he, in his words, was taking a “non-modernist sensibility, the archaic, earth-working sensibility and [bringing] it into the modernist context.” Such a claim might appear to make little sense; after all, his squares of symmetrically cut metal, laid out on the gallery floor, are hard to envisage as having anything to do with an earth-working, archaic sensibility. Yet his statement does help reorient a viewer’s attention away from the otherwise eminently modern, gridlike, and rectilinear format of the presentation. It allows us to attend instead to a phenomenology of placement, and to the way the work is attuned to its surroundings. We might suggest that placing industrially sourced metal sheets flat down on the floor is partly a means of naturalizing them, of invoking a sense that they always have been there, just as Stonehenge has stood on the Wiltshire planes for as long as there has been historical memory.

Very little attention has been given to the ways in which Andre successfully mobilizes his interest in metals, metallurgy, and the periodic table, with what we might call a more archaic, stone-age affinity for placement, such that many of his sculptures appear to equivocate between an orientation toward the present and a leaning into the far distant past. In 1975, for instance, Andre laid a sheet of aluminum on a stream bed beneath a bridge, allowing the rippling water to cake it in moss and turn its shiny surface to a furry, milk-white oxide. Even better known is a work Andre made in 1969 consisting of a square arrangement of six different metals, which is intended to lie open to the elements and corrode gracefully. It is titled Weathering Piece.

Long’s early works could also be said to generate meaning in potentially conflicting ways. To indicate how, I want to return to the issue of the strange, very distinctive dimensions he adopts in his works. Take, for instance, his exhibition at the Dwan Gallery in 1970. The elongated invitation card for the exhibition featured two black-and-white photographs set adjacent to one another. On the right-hand side there is a close-up of what appears to be the gentle grassy undulations of a ditch that might easily be read as some form of archaeological remain: a trace of prehistory in a modern-day field. Certainly, this would tie in with the image on the left, which is a snapshot of Silbury Hill. Beneath this picture is a short text—a piece of local folklore, or a mythological explanation as to why the hill ended up just here, and nowhere else.

The townsfolk of Marlborough and Devizes were always at loggerheads. Marlborough sought revenge by using the services of the devil,
who offered to wipe out Devizes by dropping a hill on the town. This threat was heard by St. John who in due course warned Devizes, the townsfolk of which sent the biggest liar . . . to put the devil off. With a sack filled with old clothes and shoes he met the devil near Beckhampton, and there asked him the time. Old Nick was tired of carrying the hill, and asked . . . how far to Devizes. The old man said that he would never get there that night . . . as he had left Devizes as a young man and had indeed worn out the clothes and boots he was carrying. Old Nick was incredulous, but the old man stuck to his story, and fooled the devil into believing it. Flinging the hill down from his shoulders the devil departed in a flash of lightning. Devizes is still there, the hill at Silbury is for all to see, so the tale must be true.

Long may have included this little tale for a variety of reasons, not least for the piquant local color it provides. However, we might also regard this as an account of place, distance, and scale becoming truly confounded. Moreover, this is also a narrative that contends with the seemingly superhuman exertions that brought Silbury Hill into being. The devil truly is in the details, for this ancient hill has significance for us in our present times largely because of its uniqueness. Its substantiality and placement are synonymous with what it is. Yet this is precisely what Long undoes; he brings the dimensions of Silbury Hill with him to New York’s West Fifty-Seventh Street and paces out in muddy footprints over the brown carpet a work he calls A Line the Length of a Straight Walk from the Bottom to the Top of Silbury Hill (fig. 5). Weight and scale are not represented in the sculpture itself; in fact, there is little that is graspable and tangible here, other than the precise distance, present through the indexical trace of Long’s footprints, stamping out their course, round and round in a windowless New York gallery. With the course curled up in this way, it becomes

Figure 5
increasingly difficult for a viewer to evaluate the proportions. The sculpture provokes viewers to envisage the artist, traipsing up the steep banks of an artificial hill on a different continent, counting off his steps. We might think of this work, then, as an attempt by Long to retain a hold on the nonsymbolic signifying power of materiality and place, yet he is only able to accomplish this through their displacement.

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My aim has been to highlight some of the contradictory ways in which meaning is conveyed in the work of Long and Andre, as a way of indicating how the modern and prehistoric investments in both artists do not necessarily complement one another as might be assumed from reading Lippard’s account in Overlay. That said, we might approach Lippard’s own book as a publication in which the effort to draw ancient sites into present life only ultimately accentuates the disconnected, displaced nature of contemporary living. As mentioned earlier, the catalyst for Overlay had been a year spent on a farm in rural Devon, but as she explains on the opening page, the impetus for her thinking had been more precise than that. It had occurred one day when she was out walking the dog on the moors near the farm. She had been near the upper reaches of the River Plym, on Dartmoor, when she stumbled over the edge of a set of prehistoric stones known locally as the Trowlsworthy Group. New to the site, she had looked back, she writes, and had seen these ancient markers disappearing in “a curve over the crest of the hill.”

For her, there was something in the trajectory of the line that had reminded her of a contemporary sculpture she had seen and reviewed just months earlier in Upstate New York. The work, we learn later in the book, was Carl Andre’s Secant from 1977, which had been installed in the grounds of Nassau County Art Museum.

Invariably, if we compare illustrations of Secant and the Trowlsworthy Group, then the differences look rather more substantial than their similarities. Yet Lippard, along with Andre, and arguably Long as well, partook of a mindset in which it was possible to conflate a concatenation of machine-cut lumber hugging the incline of a grassy slope with an avenue of prehistoric stones on Dartmoor. Geographic specificity melts and blurs. What replaces it, however, is not similitude, but a distinctively particular and generic sensibility—which we might describe as a “neolithic” sensitivity toward place. We might speculate that part of the allure of Andre’s sculpture was that it appears to summon a sense of a distinct location, and in so doing provides a certain touchstone for a viewer. The sculpture, we might infer, renders the small grassy dell in which it was installed rather more precious and necessary than it otherwise might have seemed. Construed in these terms, “place” may well be a decidedly modern phenomenon, yet, as with all good myths, its allure largely stems from the conviction that it is as old as the hills.

Notes

2 Ibid., p. 1.
3 Ibid., p. 125. Lippard quotes Andre from his interview with Phyllis Tuchman in 1970: “My idea of a piece of sculpture is a road,” he explains. “That is, 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.” See Phyllis Tuchman, “An Interview with Carl Andre,” *Artforum* 8, no. 10 (June 1970), p. 57.

4 Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 126. Lippard is possibly referring here to the series of photographs and documents which had been included in the catalogue, *Fernsehausstellung Land Art*, eds. Gerry Schum and Ursula Schum-Wevers (Hanover: Fernsehgalerie, 1969). Initially, however, Long had conceived the documentation for the walk, which was titled *Walking a Straight 10 Mile Line Forward and Back Shooting Every Half Mile, Dartmoor England*, Jan 1969 as a short television film, commissioned by Gerry Schum (16mm film, 6:03 min). For an account of this work, see Ready to Shoot: Fernsehgalerie Gerry Schum, eds. Ulirike Groos, Barbara Hess, Ursula Wevers, exh. cat. (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 2004), pp. 74–77 and 140–41.

5 Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 129.


13 Long began walks that started at Stonehenge in 1972 and 1999. The first he described in a short text: “On a Midsummer’s Day / A Westward Walk / From Stonehenge at Sunrise / To Glastonbury by Sunset / Forty Five Miles Following the Day.” The second he described thus: “Walking to a Solar Eclipse / Starting from Stonehenge / A Walk of 235 Miles / Ending on a Cornish Hilltop / At a Total Eclipse of the Sun.”


17 For a discussion of Hepworth’s interest in prehistoric sites, see Andrew Causey, “Barbara Hepworth, Prehistory and the Cornish Landscape,” *Sculpture Journal* 17, no. 2 (2008), pp. 9–22.


20 Andre added that, in contrast, “in America there has been a lot of slash and burn, slash and cut, there have been a lot of scars but very little cultivation.” See Sharp, “Carl Andre,” *Avalanche*, no. 1 (Fall 1970), p. 20.


23 Long’s exhibition at the John Gibson Gallery ran from February 22 to March 14, 1969.


25 Ibid., pp. 28 and 48.


27 Dell, “Dialectics of Place,” p. 41.


32 The work, called B-Void, was temporarily retitled Water-Void, and was shown at the group exhibition Projects in Nature, at the Merriewold West Farm, Far Hills, New Jersey. The exhibition ran from September to October 1975. For an account of this work, see Jonathan Crary’s review, “Projects in Nature,” Arts Magazine 50, no. 4 (December 1975), p. 52.
33 This particular thirty-six-unit sculpture is made up of plates of aluminium, copper, steel, magnesium, lead, and zinc, and is now housed in the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.
34 Lippard, Overlay, p. 1.
35 Ibid., p. 125. Andre’s Secant was part of a group exhibition called Wood, which ran at the Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts from May to July 1977. Lippard’s review of this work, “Wood at the Nassau County Museum,” is in Art in America 65, no. 6 (November–December 1977), pp. 136–37.