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The “Longue durée” in American Art (1960s–1970s). Minimalist Poetry, Avant-Garde Film, and Land Art Through the Lens of History and its Methods

In the 1960s, American society was propelled to the forefront of the international stage while simultaneously shaken by multiple sociopolitical crises that compelled a rethinking of history, its concepts, and its narratives. The long term became a central theme of American art, as the figure of the “artist-researcher” emerged, reinventing the role of art in the production of knowledge. For Minimalist and Postminimalist artists, rejecting the traditional narrative opened new methodological paths that combined creativity with theoretical ambition to explore the deep structures of human experience. A dialogue also unfolded with the human sciences, themselves engaged in related debates. This was reflected in explicit readings, such as the immediate success of George Kubler’s *The Shape of Time* (1962). In parallel, correspondences emerge with the perspectives and imaginaries of Fernand Braudel’s “longue durée”, which remained little known in the United States until the late 1970s. Yet even as it borrowed the language of science, art addressed these questions through its own tools, giving rise to a rigorous, inventive form of research, marked by interpretive openness. This dissertation examines how this artistic mode of thought took shape across diverse media: in Carl Andre’s poems, Hollis Frampton’s *Magellan* film cycle, the Earth Art works resulting from the journey of Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt and Michael Heizer in the American West, and Robert Morris’s essay on the Nazca Lines. These case studies show how the “longue durée” functioned as a critical framework for reflecting on cultural legacies and imperialist dynamics, all grounded in a shared concern: the redefinition of an American artistic and cultural identity in tension with its own history.

Keywords: Longue durée (History); Art – USA – 20th Century; Minimalism (Art); Postminimalism; Land Art; Avant-garde film; Environmental Art; Frampton, Hollis (1936–1984); Morris, Robert (1931–2018); Andre, Carl (1935–2024); Smithson, Robert (1938–1973)