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- 1 It is while working on Robert Smithson for her doctoral thesis that Ann Reynolds (born in 1957) -who has since become a professor in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin, developed the methodological tools that she still uses today. Her guiding principle at the time was to try and adhere as closely as possible to the artist's own working method. The dissertation, submitted in 1993 and published in 2003 under the title *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*,¹ was supervised by Rosalind Krauss. Yet it bears little trace of what in the United States is known as "theory". Rejecting pre-established conceptual grids in favor of a return to primary sources, Reynolds immersed herself in the vast labyrinth of Robert Smithson's archives and library, identifying in the artist's process a *modus operandi* based on morphological analogies. Bolstered by the example of Carlo Ginzburg, Reynolds made this comparative morphology the cornerstone of her own endeavor, using it as a way of linking disciplines (history, literature, sciences, philosophy etc.) as well as objects of study, and uncovering the connecting networks between her topics and their original context.
- 2 Since then, Reynolds has added to this approach other sources of inspiration, in particular Raymond Williams's cultural analysis. Without explicitly identifying with 'cultural studies', the historian in her more recent work thus gives a central place to the concept of structure of feelings.² Her current project is a good example of this: a forthcoming book dealing with the relations between the different generations of communities of New York artists from the 1940s to the early 1970s, which Reynolds addresses from the point of view of their shared cinematographic experiences. This research, which is also the basis for an upcoming exhibition about the magazine *View* centered around the figure of its co-editor, the art and film critic Parker Tyler,³ takes a new look at the legacy of Surrealism in American art of the 1960s, examining aspects long sidelined by the dominant historiography, such as the place of cinema and the role of homosexuality.⁴ Reynolds, of course, is not the only historian currently engaged in the important task of rewriting the historiography of a period that has become canonical for the study of contemporary art. But she can quite rightly be said to have been one of the

pioneers in this field and probably one of those most dedicated to recreating the experience of that period.⁵ Not that she is driven by a quest for “authenticity”. On the contrary –and in this she remains faithful to the teaching of Robert Smithson about the truth value of fiction–, Reynolds claims for the historian the heuristic virtues of imagination.

Ann Reynolds © Lily Brooks, 2015

- 3 The essay by Ann Reynolds that most obviously refers to Raymond Williams is “A Structure of Creativity”, in *Ruth Vollmer 1961-1978: Thinking the Line*, Ostfilden-Ruit:Hatje Cantz, 2006, p. 48-57.

NOTES

1. Published in 2003 by The MIT Press (Cambridge, Mass.), the book is now available in French: *Robert Smithson, du New Jersey au Yucatan, leçons d'ailleurs*, Brussels: (SIC), 2014 (translated by Anaël Lejeune and Olivier Mignon).
2. Cf. Williams, Raymond. “Structure of Feelings” in *id.*, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 128-135; *id.*, *The Country and the City*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, *passim*.
3. The traveling exhibition will open in 2018 at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, before going to the Yale University Art Museum and a venue still to be confirmed in California.

4. For an overview of this research, see “A History of Failure”, in Marc Siegel (ed.), special issue about Jack Smith, *Criticism*, vol. 56, n° 2, spring 2014, p. 187-209.
5. In addition to the publications mentioned, see, for example, “Minimalism’s Situation”, in Paul Wood (ed.), *Varieties of Modernism: Art of the Twentieth Century*. vol. 3, New Haven/London: Yale University Press in association with The Open University, 2004, p. 214-239 ; “Dwelling as a World”, in John Beardsley (ed.), *Landscape Body Dwelling: Charles Simonds at Dumbarton Oaks*, Washington: D.C., Dumbarton Oaks, 2011, p. 35-47 ; “Circa 1970: Towards a Feminist Public”, in Rhea Anastas and Michael Brenson (eds.), *Witness to her Art*, Annandale-on-Hudson: Bard Center for Curatorial Studies/D.A.P. Press, 2006, p. 27-33.