MATT COOLIDGE

Wendover, Utah

An Interview by

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IT IS MONDAY MARCH 31ST, 2014. MY NAME IS GREG SMOAK. AND I AM AT THE CLUI BASE IN WENDOVER TO INTERVIEW MATTHEW COOLIDGE, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR LAND USE INTERPRETATION OR CLUI. ALSO WITH ME TODAY IS JARED FARMER, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONYBROOK AND A GREAT BASIN HISTORIAN. AND WE ARE HERE TO CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW FOR THE GREAT SALT LAKE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. THIS IS INTERVIEW NUMBER U-3253.

GS: Thank you for being with us today, Matt.

MC: My pleasure.

GS: All right, what I would like you to do is start with a little bit of biographical background on yourself. Tell us a little bit of how you got into landscape and art. And you can go back to your childhood if you'd like or pick it up with high school or what got you first interested in the work that you do and is so well known today.

MC: Well, like the rest of us, we're born into the landscape, right, at some point? [laughs]

GS: Where were you born into that landscape?

MC: I was born in Montreal, in 1966, the last day of 1966. I came to the States to live during high school in Massachusetts. And I went to Boston University, studied environmental science there mostly, officially, but then did a lot of architecture, art, filmmaking, things like that, as well. But I went west for the first time after high school and ended up going back and forth to the west coast a lot during college.

I guess the first time I moved west was to think about going to art school in California but didn't end up enrolling in it. And I got involved with artists working on projects at CalArts and other institutions in the area. And I started working through the idea of different kinds of archives and collections about places, before the internet existed

as a way of dispersing information, began building kind of a database, using just regular database software, of places.

And it was actually, I was in New York City waiting to work on a Todd Haynes movie as a kind of a techie with some friends who also did that kind of work, and the movie ended up getting postponed and postponed. It was one of those hot summers in New York City. I was sleeping on somebody's couch and it was just getting more and more frustrating. I spent almost all of the day for at least a week, in the New York Public Library, just enjoying that environment. Gosh, the New York Public Library is just such a wonderful communal kind of temple of history and knowledge. And at some point, that's I guess where I started building a database actually. I don't know what I was piecing together but there were ideas about American landscape that were emerging. I think that probably is where I stumbled on things like *Landscape Magazine*, JB Jackson's thing. So at some point I said, "Oh, to heck with this Todd Haynes movie. I'm just gonna drive, go look at some of these places I've been learning about."

GS: But this is after you'd already been to the west before?

MC: Yeah, I'd been a little bit but never really moved out west.

GS: How did the landscape or seeing this landscape impact you on that very first trip? Do you have memories of that?

MC: Yeah, so I had some dots, I guess, that were on the map that I was looking at. And a lot of it had to do with federal projects and the idea of the USA in the federal sense – so the dams; the test sites; the military reservations; the large, industrial sources; the infrastructures. This idea of an American landscape with a big capital A seemed to be… the threads I was trying to put together were trying to sort of map those things and to

describe them in a way on a national scale. There seemed to be a version of America that was eluding people, including myself, that was America as too big a place to get your mind around, so you end up just biting off chunks. But as a result you kind of missed the full view in a way. Maybe it was this sense of, for me, starting off as a personal research project, trying to connect the dots to have them add up to be some kind of more complete portrait of the country, I guess, was sort of the latent or nascent thing that was occurring at that time.

But I went west. And I had like two months and I had a few thousand dollars and then I was gonna have to stop [laughs]. So I had a list of places that I wanted to think about living in too. And I had some connections in some places, but those were kind of romantic ideas of great places to live. Like Portland, Oregon, right? I couldn't actually find any work in Portland; everybody seemed to be making a living… living for free [laughs] as a full-time job [laughs].

Anyhow, so at some point I got more interested in inverting this list, and rather than have high expectations about a place I've never been to, go to the places you have the lowest expectations about, and then you can only really be surprised and find better qualities than you expected. So that idea of going to the places on the bottom of the list, at least in terms of a common perspective, and certainly mine at the time, places that you didn't want to live, that seemed sort of dystopic or sites you didn't think you wanted to look at. So it was a kind of a refreshing sense of coming to places like Los Angeles and being pleasantly surprised rather than disappointed by it.

GS: And so then, to go back, I didn't mean to interrupt that, so you left New York after working on the film, and that's when you permanently came west?

MC: Yeah. Well that's sort of when my sense of being based east coast stopped.

GS: And LA became home.

MC: Yeah, LA after some time in Portland. And it became home, meaning that's where I was living, I guess [laughs]. The idea also of, on a personal level, I always thought it was strange that people had license plates from the states they were from, and why people had to say they were *from* somewhere. Why can't you be from a continent or a nation or a county or whatever? And I guess I still don't really think that I'm from LA, that's just where I'm living at the moment. All of our lives are trajectories moving through places, and a lot of people migrate on a national or international scale. Where you are from at that moment is I guess where you're from, but you're really from all of those places, I think, where you've spent time.

GS: So your undergraduate was environmental studies?

MC: Yeah.

GS: And did you go on to graduate work in art or design? How did you get into art?

MC: Well, I never got an advanced degree after that. I was gonna go to art school but elected not to. I kinda got an education in arts from people who worked in the art world, but also just friends who… Art is a very nebulous realm of research and activities that can be anything almost. And that's what I liked about arts. But I guess I got more interested in this idea of not being involved in any specific disciplinary structure, the idea of not even a multi-disciplinary thing, which would imply borrowing from different types of things, but more of a non-disciplinary kind of activity, where there's no particular model or group of procedures that you're following. It's something that doesn't really belong anywhere. And "the arts" is a catchall for things that don't fit in other categories,

so that ends up being some kind of frame for people who work in this way. But it's not really art in that that's where it comes from, it's just that's where it ends up, in some ways of looking at it. But the idea of creating an institutional frame also was kind of a process of examining methodologies from some arts as well as other kinds of institutions.

There was a, I remember—I didn't read this book until after I had gotten involved in the center and stuff, but it was a nice resonance, some of these ideas in the book: *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees*. It's a Lawrence Weschler book about Bob Irwin, the minimalist sculptor. And at some point in that book—it's mostly just Bob Irwin talking, being transcribed and interviewed by Weschler, so even though Weschler's the author, it's Bob Irwin's view of the world. And at one point Irwin says that as he works through his reduction, through minimalism, the materials of art production, he gets more and more into just light and perspective, and he dematerializes the artwork that he's pursuing as a way of expressing ideas simply about a phenomenology of viewing, of experience. And he's honing down minimalism to the point where it really is just a kind of a state of being really, without any physical thing, like putting scrims over windows to alter the light slightly, or just reducing the materials to the point of pure experience. And at some point he says, "What am I gonna to do now that I've done this? Just take people out to the desert and say, 'Look'?" And he asks that rhetorically. And I kind of went, well, yeah [laughs] that's the next step, exactly.

And people who build sculptures or whatever in the desert, like Smithson, are sort of doing the same thing, drawing people out of their context to experience the place, but they still need to construct edifices and objects in order for them to work within the art establishment. But also, really, art is really just a point of view. And that was something

that Duchamp figured out over a hundred years ago, that art is the thing on the wall as seen by the person looking at it; it's not actually the object, it's the perception of the object. So it's a communication through the painting or the photograph or the sculpture or whatever it is conveying the idea, but it doesn't exist until it's formulated in the mind of the viewer. So art really is a perspective that you can frame. And you don't need an object you just need some kind of structure to direct attention and to provide context. So the post-minimalists working through a dematerialization kind of got to that point and then didn't go further. But it seemed like one could.

And that was part of, I think, what suggested this institutional frame, this framing device, of the organization that we finally put together, as a non-material, in a sense, contextual framing device for looking at the world. Not the whole world as art object, but using the tools and the precedents of the arts for a more common viewing experience. Because art tends to be, in many cases, very esoteric and very limiting in its audience because there—there's all kinds of art but some of it's very complicated and requires a lot of knowledge and things and it's very intimidating for people who don't have that education, and that's most people. So there's this alienating effect of a lot of traditional art, which is a tragedy because there's so much interesting things being conveyed and explored through the arts and it just isn't accessible to most people. So we sort of, by dissolving the material of the art, like the post-minimalists, we also dissolved, in a sense, the requirement for all of the art historical linkages in order to understand what it is we were conveying, to try and get to a more common, communal, broad-based experiential thing, which we all deal with every day: the spatial dynamics of the landscape. That's the common ground is the ground we are sharing. That's the most basic material we deal

with at the center, just this shared space of the ground: What's that on the ground? Before I trip over it, what is it? Where'd it come from? What's it connected to? What does it mean? Why do we think it means that? So those are the basic questions that we ask.

GS: So the Center for Land Use Interpretation's going to be twenty years old this year? Is it the twentieth anniversary?

MC: I guess so, yeah.

GS: I came across 1994 as the founding.

MC: Yes

GS: Can I push you towards the material here and have you talk a little bit about the actual founding of the center? How did you pull this together? How did you find support for it? How did you logistically create this center? How did you create a space for it in those early years, or even before 1994? We have an idea of how it came together in your mind theoretically and what you wanted to do with it, but how does someone go about creating a non-profit that's premised on this idea of making people look?

MC: Well, at a certain point you just leap in. For a lot of my life exploring ideas there was, I think with a lot of people too, it's a sort of fear of commitment. But at some point we got fairly organized, myself and the few others that were helping out with this in the early stages. And we decided we were gonna file the paperwork and do this. And that, I guess, is, even though the origin of the organization comes through some legacy of the transition of thoughts as I was describing, the actual founding we considered to be when we filed the paperwork to the IRS [laughs]—you can't take that back, at least not easily. It was a fair amount of work to put together. And the process is a good one because it forces you both to commit to the ideas but also to frame them in a way. The IRS wants to

understand a certain language, and you generate a methodology, a process for revenue production. But it took us a couple of years before we really got any even small grants. It wasn't created as an institution where we raise money first, but there was the idea that once we had the 501C3 status then possibly people could donate, if they liked what we did, and who knows if they would or not. But it was also about creating an institution. Even though it has conceptual origins, it was a very practical thing. It wasn't simply a critique of institutionality that we were creating [laughs]. It was actually to provide a service and to have a reason to exist. It was to be a medium to do a public service as well.

GS: Who were some of those people that were involved with you, the most important people at the beginning? Are many of them still with the organization?

MC: There were three of us, and one was a demolition contractor in San Francisco, and she continued to do that. She's also an organic farmer. And the other was a bike courier in San Francisco, and a motive force in the critical mass bike revolution of the time, and he went on to do that more and more full time. Other people, like the artist Igor Vamos got involved pretty early on, too. And Melinda Stone, who's in San Francisco. She teaches media studies, been doing that for I guess more than twenty years now too probably. So people with different backgrounds. We had Eric Knutzen, who was a music PhD. He was involved early on, and went on to do urban homesteading books and things like that. So people have touched the organization at different times. Rex Ravenal, another artist who was on board early on, helped build our initial database.

GS: How did such a diverse group of people find each other? What kind of circles were most important for people who—a demolitions contractor, a bike courier, an artist.

How did people who were interested in the landscape start talking to each other and find each other?

MC: Friendships develop. People who like to talk and think about similar things I guess. Yeah, I don't know how we found each other. It was just passing through life [laughs].

GS: So at what point did—and I assume that CLUI is your full-time job now.

MC: Yeah.

GS: It doesn't sound like, at first, that it could be. How long did it take before running the center became a full-time job?

MC: Well, we started getting busy with Wendover actually, so '97 probably. But a full-time, meaning I also teach workshops and give talks. And I've worked as a professor periodically. I taught a graduate Curatorial Practice class at California College of the Arts, for example, for seven years in San Francisco, even though I lived in Los Angeles. We would do these field trip programs, where we would go to places like the end of the Mississippi River. The school was encouraging me to think about engaging the students in CLUI productions. So when they offered me that job it was very much to align the methodology and directives of the center in the teaching process, to engage the students in the development of already programmed activities that we were doing, such as Wendover. So we'd come out here with the students and do stuff with them. The idea was to help them expand the curatorial frame to look at landscapes and places, and curating place by selecting representative sites and developing ways of building exhibits and experiences through walking tours, through video documentary projects, things that aren't generally part of the traditional curatorial structures that are more gallery-based.

This was looking at curating time and place as well as content. I do other things to supplement my income still. And that's kind of the way it's always been.

GS: Well, let's talk about where we're sitting right now. We're sitting at the center's base in Wendover. It's situated in a number of buildings at the historic Wendover Airfield, the famous bomber training base during World War II, not too far from the Bonneville Salt Flats and Speedway. And could you tell us about how you acquired access to the property here, how that process took place, and how it has developed over the years?

MC: Well it was probably right around '95, '96, fairly soon after establishing the center. A group of us came, had a list of sites to look at in the southwest to develop some kind of field-based, site-based, interpretive structures. The idea was initially to have a kind of a visitor center or viewing place that had a fixed, visible venue that people could go to and see, kind of like an exhibit of the place in the place, but which look outwards, almost on a western scale at least, if not a national one. We were still based in Oakland at that time, so we came from the west, came over the hill, after going through the Basin and Range, through Nevada, bouncing along the 80. And Wendover was one of the sites we wanted to consider, just from things we had heard about it. And we came over that hill and hit the Salt Flats slope and saw the base, and probably had one of those Brigham Young kind of experiences.

[all laugh]

MC: Yeah, sure enough, this is the place. And we had a meeting with the guy that was running the old airfield at that time, Chris Melville, who's now the West Wendover city manager, kind of runs West Wendover. He, at the time, he was about my age, so he was

in his twenties when he was getting the old airport up and running in the early ’90s. And we told him what we had in mind and whether he’d be interested in leasing a building to us, ’cause all the buildings are protected and part of the historic Wendover Airfield, even though they are sort of falling down. And he was interested. So we worked out an arrangement. It took about a year or so, but we ultimately leased our first building here and installed an exhibit that looked at the region. And the more time we spent here the more layers revealed themselves, and the more we found that this really was the place for an infinite amount of inquiry into perception and history and phenomenology and contemporary culture. It was just so great. All the reasons why intuitively it seemed like the place where it was really panning out. And the more time we spent the more we thought that other people should come here too, to provide different points of view of this place. And the residence program emerged out of that. We had our first resident in ’96, and one of their first projects was plumbing.

[all laugh]

GS: So you have to be handy around the house in order to be a resident here.

MC: Well you don’t *have* to anymore, but certainly in the old days it helped. But sure you can come live in a trailer, but if you want plumbing you gotta install it [laughs] yourself. The residence program has always been very participatory in that way. It’s not, by any stretch of the imagination, a leisurely experience where all your whims are taken care of; nobody’s leaving breakfast on a tray outside your door in the morning. You become engaged in the process of the residency existing as a resident. You realize that it exists only because the people that use it leave it better than they find it essentially, and help to expand it. And it’s always been about collaboration really with the people who

come through, rather than just providing an infrastructure for their work. It's getting involved and getting them involved in the community of the residence program.

We've had all kinds of people doing exotic projects that could only occur here. And that's part of the idea, is to bring people to this place to explore ideas that are about this place in a broad sense, within a hundred mile or so radius, the whole experience of the Salt Flats and the Great Salt Lake region, in the mountains of Nevada, and the sort of empty spaces, as well as the cultural spaces here. Their projects are supposed to explore issues of this direct place, in a literal or non-literal way, that couldn't take place anywhere else. It's really a place-based residency in that way. And it's about mining the cultural and the historical and the physical resources of this area to tell stories that have local or national or international interest. So we're able to provide, from being here for a while, connections with the airport people and the police and the fire departments or the potash folks, whoever they need to talk to to do their project. We've got kind of a network, that extends beyond just the phys plant, of really generous people in Wendover who've tolerated our peculiar activities here for a long time.

GS: You're the weird artists out at the airport.

MC: Well we get some unusual characters for sure. And hopefully it's entertaining for them as well as compelling or stimulating in some way. And they've been really, really generous. I mean, we pay rent, we always have, but they are very, the airport people especially, are really generous with tolerating the things that are often kind of hard to know what they are until they exist, and even then you're not sure [laughs].

GS: So how many residents do you have in a given year and how long to they generally stay?

MC: It's generally about three weeks, four weeks. Sometimes it's broken into pieces where you might come for two or three weeks and then come back months or even a year later to install the project if it's something you need to take back to a lab or your dark room in the old days. Or if you need more time to process the experience, we realize that's an important component for a lot of people. So it's too rushed to think that in three weeks you're gonna finish everything, install it, and go away. Though that does happen, some people do work like that. But we're totally flexible for how much time you need. Sometimes projects take years to come together. We've had some people think they were gonna be here just for three weeks but then come back over and over and over again – recidivists [laughs]. And if we can work that out, that's terrific too, 'cause every new person that comes has to be oriented and get acclimatized and get their mind around the place, and that takes a while. We orient them all. We spend at least a day going through, with the new residents, making sure that they have a grasp of the place. Depending on what the project is we look at sites that are related to their work, who to contact if you need to get access, permission or whatever. We save them all the time for figuring out where the grocery store is and all the quotidian things as well. And then we leave them on their own. And once that's done, if they want to come back another time, we don't have to do it again, so we're more flexible with the schedule after that initial contact. There are people here from the center throughout the residency season periodically but not continuously, so the residents are mostly on their own. Generally we've got six or so new people or groups every year coming through, as well as a lot of recidivists and others coming back to continue to work on projects.

We operate it from April to kind of mid-November, mostly just because of the weather. It gets cold the rest of the time and it's really windy and bitter here in the winter. And since you're supposed to be out and about in the landscape it just gets harder. We do get requests from people who want to work in the off season, but that's trickier for us because we drain pipes and shut things off because if it's unattended we need to do that.

GS: And that's what you're doing right now at this time of year, is getting things back up and running, right?

MC: Exactly. End of March we come up and we fix all the broken pipes [laughs] from when we didn't get all the water out - it seems like we always have a few every year. And we clean the place and get it ready for its several months of continuous occupation.

GS: How competitive are the residencies now? Has it grown? I imagine it's grown over the years as the center's become more well known. Do you turn a lot of people away?

MC: We're limited by the space, so the more applications we get doesn't mean the more people we can accommodate. It's been at capacity kind of since the beginning, because of the limited space. So yes, it's competitive simply because we only have those six or seven spots a year, and it's not even always that many. So ninety-nine percent [laughing] of the applications seem to not make it. But people do reapply and we try to help them refine their project if we can. But it's mostly a space thing, since we only have one kitchen and bathroom. We used to overlap people a bit more, but it's hit or miss. You're playing a kind of a matchmaker in some ways [laughs]. You try to have compatible personalities. And most of the new people we don't know them at all personally, so we don't know how they're going to really work out if they're sharing

space with stranges. It has worked out really well; it's also not. So we don't tend to overlap residents much.

GS: So do the residents live in the airstream outside? Is that the main housing?

MC: That's an option. The main housing is here. This is what we affectionately call the "Resident Support Unit," which we brought here in 1999 I think. And it was converted by residents, a group from the Midwest called Simparch. This was the first project that they did here. It's kind of funny how they heard about the program. We met them, myself and somebody else from the center that was traveling with me, I think it was Igor Vamos, and we literally met them on the interstate, on I-80. Never heard of them or met them before. They had weird sticks on top of their roof, the Simparch guys, and they were on their way to Weber State to install an exhibit there. We were in a truck that had the logo for the CLUI on it, and we passed each other on the freeway. We were looking at their weird sticks piled on top of this van, and they were looking at our logo going, "Yeah, I think I heard of those guys." So anyways, we pulled over at Delle, the only gas station really between Wendover and Salt Lake, and we said, "Well we run this residence program out here," and they said, "That sounds great! We'd like to apply." And so they did. We told them we were bringing a new manufactured office trailer to the location that we wanted to make livable, and they said, "That sounds like the kind of project we're interested in," since they often work with trailers and prefab architecture. So they did all the interiors, built the walls and installed the kitchen. There's this kind of vehicular aesthetic, like the door there for the bedroom is a mini rollup garage door. And it's mirrored like a casino.

GS: Get a little bit of Nevada in the mix.

MC: Yeah, exactly. The towel rack in the bathroom is a chromed car roof rack. The kitchen floor is a bed liner from a pickup truck. There's other kinds of features that are their signature style. Some of the windows they put in, the small ones, are camper shell windows. They did a great job. But prior to having this space, people stayed in the trailer that's outside there.

GS: So in your latest newsletter there's a tour of construction site trailers. Did this base, this home right here inspire that type of interest? Did that grow into that?

MC: Well we've been actually using these kinds of buildings in different ways for a while, and have several of them now in different places. They're kind of an overlooked modernist dream made real. All the great modern architects, Le Corbusier,Buckminster Fuller, Moshe Safdie, and everybody were imagining a prefab, factory built modularity that would take advantage of the economies of scale and production to create modular units that were inexpensive and widely available and functional and practical and modernist, and these are *that*. I mean, these office trailers are made in an assembly line, and are inexpensive, and ubiquitous. They're mobile, that's another advantage. They are made with sixteen-on-center studs just like a regular house. It's a very flexible and simple way to get interior space and they come with AC and heat built into them. So they're really kind of great, practical things that we use as display centers and work spaces all over the country.

GS: Could you talk a little bit about the other, I think there's at least three other buildings that you lease that you use: some of the old barracks across the way here, there's another one down here, and then there's an older office building – I can't remember what its original purpose was. But could you talk about how you rehabilitated

those or made those into exhibit halls and maybe even mention the process, the permitting process? You said that these are protected buildings. How do you go about identifying them and then turning them into exhibit space?

MC: I almost don't know how many buildings we have here now that we officially lease. It's probably six or so. When we got here, the first building we got was one of these barracks. It was kind of falling apart: the windows were all broken so the rain would come in and the roof had holes and the floor was going.

GS: Did you pick one that was better than the rest? [laughs]

MC: Yeah, slightly, but also, we wanted one with, as they say, good bones and that was gonna hold up. And we didn't really have any money to spend; it was all sweat equity. So part of our agreement with the airfield was we'd make it better than it was, as well as pay rent. And we've sort of done that now in several buildings where we've spent the sweat equity to fix them up, and minimal alterations. Some of them have already been severely altered for other uses, and we aren't restoring them back to their original condition. But we do keep to the original floorplan and palate of colors that the airport requests. Any modifications we make we make sure that those are post-historic modifications that were done when it was leased to some storage company or whatever. Most of these buildings have had other uses after World War II. So our modifications we work out with them, and keep them within historic directives as they have them.

So it's about our use and our use also being compatible with the historical directives of the airport. And that is where we overlap. I mean, we don't want to have this stuff go away either. It's a pretty fantastic remnant. We don't mind the rough edges of Wendover though. If it becomes too much of a museum, like if someone were to drop a

hundred million dollars out here and the place would get all fixed up, it would be a lot less interesting to us, because it's the aliveness of its history, its flexibility, its ragged edges, its multiple uses after being an airfield, that make it interesting. Like one building's a laundromat and one's a gym, one's a Jehovah's Witness meeting hall. All these reuses are alive. The place is alive and integrated into its community. And those are things that ought to be able to occur. We don't want the historical stasis to completely cover these buildings and fortunately that's quite unlikely [laughs].

GS: So we should start to talk about the Great Salt Lake at some point, but I want to ask you just briefly before we do that – you have a couple of other bases. You have one in the Mojave Desert, you have one in New York State, as I understand. What goes on at those bases and how did you select them?

MC: Well, our New York site, we got a building there, in Troy, New York, to support projects in that area, which included a Hudson River project. So it's used as a base for things related to the northeastern United States. Why Troy? There was a mix of practical and conceptual criteria to selecting the place. It represents kind of typical industrial town of the nineteenth century that took advantage of the falling water to capture the energy to make, in that case, iron. It was the center of the iron industry, and early steel industry in the United States. And as a kind of a typical industrial northeastern, brick, industrial city that had reached its peak during the last century's boom of early industrialization and was now in a sort of a transition to whatever these places become, half-abandoned shells but within some kind of reprogramming of exploring the possibility of industrial history as a cultural resource. So it was both typical but also unique in its resources. We had some connections with RPI, the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, which is based in town. And

it was on the Hudson at the dam, the first dam on the Hudson River as you go up from New York City, so it's at that fulcrum, the transition point on the river. Where the river turns into the Erie Canal. The Hudson is, in terms of American art history, a really critical place, so it was conceptually really a perfect spot in that way as well.

As for our site in Houston, we wanted to do something about petrochemical and oil industries for years and this opportunity came up with the University of Houston. So we installed a trailer at a former junkyard on the edge of town, and started doing programs about the big industry of that region, a visitors exhibit and gallery there as well as an office space. We even did a series of outdoor movie events there: oil movies at the Junk Yard Drive-In.

So as projects come up we're able to put in semi-permanent, temporary, or in some cases permanent, structures that enable the regional programs to occur. We're not trying to do this everywhere. We're covering different aspects of the whole American experience in a regional way. We've got, in the middle of Kansas, an exhibit hall that's right in the middle of the USA, that's about middle of the USA issues. And that one, in a way, is the balance point for the whole nation in some sense. This one here in Wendover is about the Great Basin and the history and the landscape of this region. We've got others that we're working on different phases of execution. But again, we're not interested in developing permanent or long-term additions to the landscape everywhere. But if that ends up occurring, fine. But we don't always have the resources to manage all these physical plants so it depends on partnerships that develop in these places.

GS: Well let's move directly to our landscape here now, directly to Great Salt Lake, and the lake and its surroundings have been described as surreal and severe, and some

people find great beauty in them, other people it can be terrifying. And it seems to me that that's the core of the way it's inspired artists. And so, if you maybe talk a little bit about how that landscape has impacted the work that's done here. And then I do want to then get into some of the specific projects that you and the center have done around the lake, including the more recent landscan.

MC: One of the big reasons we're here is because of the "emptiness," which is, in a sense, at its apogee in the Bonneville Flats, that white, solid piece of ground, which has nothing on it. Somebody once talked about the idea of an urban way of viewing and a desert way of viewing. In an urban environment you reduce your experience in order to focus on crossing the street or whatever it is that you're doing; there's too much noise around you to perceive everything going on around you, so it's a reductive experience; you cut things out in order to see. Conversely, if you're in a more empty environment, at least according to what you're accustomed to experiencing, you are looking for things to add to your experiential realm, to draw things in; it's a searching; it's additive. And that reaches its highest form in the Bonneville Salt Flats, where the ground itself is static and just a single sheet of white space. And so you stand there and everything that you can see you draw into your experiential frame to try and get balanced and oriented, and to construct some kind of perceptual stability. So it's at the other end of the spectrum from the reductive, urban experience. It's an additive, constructive, anti-urban way of seeing. The things that you see have more value, and you also see them better because other things don't get in the way. Part of the byproduct of this is that the things that go on the Bonneville Salt Flats look really good [laughs].

GS: As all the advertising agencies in America exploit.

MC: Yeah. And it's very much the same sort of phenomenology as a museum experience in a way, where you've got a white wall and you put very selective things on there and they get all the attention because there's less around it, so all of your attention and interest and the valuation of the object that is at hand, that's visible, is enhanced. You can put a car on Bonneville Salt Flats and it looks really good. Or plumbing fixtures. Whatever. We've experimented with ugly things out there and they all look good.

[all laugh]

MC: Like a half-eaten burrito on the Salt Flats. It's all about that reduction of static. This perceived emptiness extends beyond the Flats and into the region. The Great Salt Lake is another kind of empty shell in the sense that there aren't a lot of people around the shores of the Great Salt Lake. It's a hard place to be -the shore comes and goes; it's a very gradual slope; and in many cases it's remote, hard to get to. And so that's another resource for visitors, creative types, adventurers, and phenomenologists to explore. We've got a few projects we're working on now more directly related to the lake itself, but the whole region of the Great Salt Lake desert has been part of our arena for a while. This geomorphological void-y-ness has attracted industries and the activities that like "emptiness," the things such as nuclear waste storage and burning chemical waste and testing rockets and what have you, or just driving as fast as you can in no particular direction, the things that we seem to need as a society but often don't want to acknowledge that we need, and certainly don't want to have in the backyards of our cities. The company Clean Harbors that's working out here, that owns all the waste sites, comes from Boston, got its name because it cleaned up Boston Harbor, but it's now the nation's largest hazardous waste company and operates on a national scale, bringing

those urban byproducts to the desert, to this away space. And there's a lot of things working on a national scale, migrating towards this particular Great Salt Lake desert area. Even though it's not quite accurate to call the Great Salt Lake a puddle in the bottom of the Great Basin, it sort of is in a way. And this Great Basin has been, as you well know, historically, a place – because it doesn't drain to the rest of the country, it's become a basin that you can dump things in, kind of a waste basin for some things. That's not its primary use but that's one effect of its remoteness and its at least perceived lack of population or whatever the politics are that enable this to occur. Those things are important to consider in order for us, collectively, to understand and evaluate the true cost/benefits of our various lifestyles. We need to look at these away spaces and to spend time in them. That's really a major part of why we're here too.**GS:** Could you talk a little bit about the creation of the Great Salt Lake Landscan, which is on display currently at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts? Maybe begin by defining what is a landscan and what is the process of creating one. And then specifically talk about that one, which areas you chose to look at and how that process played out, and then the final product took shape.

MC: A landscan was a kind of photography that we settled on working with because, well, it hadn't really been done before but also it took advantage of technologies that hadn't existed before, the stable view over long periods from above, using a helicopter and gyro systems to provide a smooth, linear portrait of a place, a place that extends over a great distance. A place you can't really take a normal picture of it because it's too big, so you need a time-based picture; you need something that can move through it. But we didn't want the medium, meaning the camera, to be the focal point. We rarely do. We like photography because it reveals the subject in a fairly clear way without too much

baggage of the medium getting involved. If a photograph is too good and too good artistically, it ends up being more about the artist than the thing depicted. If a photograph is too bad then it's also about the artist and the photographer as well [laughs]. We are especially interested in mediums where the frame kind of disappears a bit and you're really transported into the content. That's always been our objective with still photography and fixed video. We do a fair amount of fixed video work where we just set up a video camera looking at a landscape and allowing a time component to come in and enhance the photograph, like in the "real world". But in this case we're trying to cover more area, so we're moving the camera while maintaining a fixed perspective. The gyro enables the shake to go away so you're not so conscious of the helicopter, or other mechanisms. You can kind of forget in a way about how this image is coming to you. You are just sort of soaring over the ground, watching the transition from the beginning to the end.

We've applied this technique in different places where we've selected these linear views. We're trying to use this, when we can, to encompass and embrace areas that are too big to do by other means. The first one we did was the petrochemical corridor of Houston, which is the nation's largest industrial and petrochemical zone. That landscan is a fourteen minute shot from end to end of the ship channel area. It shows you the scale of it and also ties these places together - even people who live there don't get a sense of the totality of the place, normally. It's hard to see a big region in a single glance. But the landscan does that.

We've been wanting to do one here at the Great Salt Lake for years and years, to look primarily at the salt pond phenomenon, and the Utah Museum of Fine Art was able

to make it happen by raising money and providing a venue for it. It requires a technology that's still quite expensive, and generally out of our reach. What we wanted to show with the Great Salt Lake Landscan was the transition between liquid and solid. It's about desiccation but it's also about inundation. It's about the balance between geologic time and human time; between insolation, meaning the sunlight coming in, and the inundation of water and drainage, and those two disparate things representing different ends of a phenomenological spectrum coming together and creating something else. The salt ponds, made by MagCorp principally, that collect the water, just the straight water from the Great Salt Lake, provide a place for the evaporation, changing the chemistry of the water, concentrating it as it passes through the more than forty thousand acres of ponds 'til it gets to its most concentrated form near the plant, for the Magnesium Corporation, where they finally treat it in the factory to create magnesium metal. Adding a lot of electricity to the mix, they generate this almost greasy metal that's used in industries of all kinds all across the world. A significant amount of the magnesium metal produced in America, and even the world, comes out of that facility, creating something of great value, by concentrating the dissolved remnants of mountains around us. The mountains melt into this soup in this part of the Great Basin, where things don't drain away – the stuff that spills into the Great Basin stays in the basin. So all the minerals in all the mountains melt into the ground and create, in the case of the Great Salt Lake, a kind of a soup of probably every element on the periodic table is in there in some form. And if you apply the process of extraction by evaporation, as the Magnesium Corporation does, and as Cargill and Morton and others do too, you can select what you're after from this full spectrum of possibilities.

The landscan is also about human endeavor, harnessing these forces of nature on a geologic scale to create a product that has an economic and industrial value to our very complicated and advanced civilization. Magnesium is used to make alloys of steel that are super hard, and are used to make other metal things, like aircraft engines. It's a very high-tech material, representing a very advanced form of industry. Getting that out of this ancient landscape of the Great Basin, by dissolving mountains in soup, and then boiling it away, that's what that landscan's about.

GS: So the landscan's about nineteen minutes. It basically parallels I-80, then turns north and goes over MagCorp at the end. But as I understand you also filmed other portions of the lake. Was it always the intention that that would be the final product, or were you considering other parts of that film? And what will the footage that was not used—will it be used, and what will you do with that in the future?

MC: Well, once we rigged the helicopter for a day of shooting and got the guys in to do that, we wanted to shoot as much as we can. Our main objective was to shoot the ponds of MagCorp, and it took several takes to get one that we liked. We had flown the site with a regular airplane beforehand to plan the route, and so we knew the route specifically we were going to do. And it wasn't necessarily following I-80. I-80 happened to be there, on the side, but since we wanted to start at pure liquid, from the water of the Great Salt Lake, we started near the shore, where a drainage ditch from one of the salt companies fans out into a delta. We wanted to go up a drain to the first set of ponds, and then we turned and get into the more heavy MagCorp ponds further north past Stansbury Island. We wanted to follow the ponds so you get a sense of the scale of them, but also following them upstream in a sense. The drainage comes out, the concentration goes in. It's a kind

of linear path, in a conceptual sense at least. So we wanted to get the higher and higher concentration from water to solid. So that's what determined that route, ending with the plant itself as the most concentrated form. And once we got that we could've gone home [laughs].

GS: But you already spent the money for the helicopter and you're up there.

MC: Right. Any kind of fees and things that we would get out of it we spent by spending a couple more hours shooting other things. We couldn't help ourselves. So we maxed our budget for sure on this and actually did go into pocket a bit out of our operating expenses. But the result is that we do have other things that we shot that we're still putting together but feel like they could be really interesting things to show. And we'll keep you posted.

GS: The Lucin Cutoff is one of those, right?

MC: Correct, yeah. We did, we shot the Cutoff. And I think it'll work together as a good video, for sure. And we did some other things too. But the Cutoff from west end to east end, yeah, it's great. It's an amazing looking thing. And we were able to get all of it.

GS: So are there are other projects that the center's been involved in that involve the lake explicitly that we should know about?

MC: Yeah, for sure. Right now we're working with Simparch on a Salt Lake boat, of sorts. After they did their first project with us, converting this Unit, they worked on another project we were developing, what we call South Base. South Base is a mile and a half south of where we are and is a restricted area with some really interesting components. And it's right on the edge of the Salt Flats, mud flats really, right on the edge of this old munitions storage for the airport. We've rented spaces out there over the

years but we wanted to convert one of them into a place to expand the Residence Program, to enable people to spend more time out there. Simparch developed this project over the years; it's a self-sufficient living environment that's off the grid that provides a base for spending time in that part of the airfield. It's behind a restricted fence, so the public isn't able to go out there because it's a part of the military and a security zone, so you're isolated out there. The only people who come out to that region are people working at the airport or the police, who are doing training operations in some of the abandoned buildings. And the military goes out there to do operations periodically. So when we have people out there they have to interact with those kinds of conditions. We've had some really interesting interactions, and favorable ones, where artists have been able to work with the military folks. We've had law enforcement work with residents showing them how to shoot guns and breech doors when they do their training ops for warrant serving and other things. They have a whole collection of doors that they get from the casinos and they install them in these buildings and break them down. [all laugh]

MC: Anyways, so Simparch is now working with us on a third project, and with an architect from Lubbock, Chris Taylor, who is also a land arts of the American west professor. It's some kind of platform that's built specifically for the north arm of the Great Salt Lake, something you can pack in, that can be set up to float and even propel itself, and provide an exploratory structure, a platform for bringing people into that realm to experience it. The north arm of the Great Salt Lake is one of the least—

GS: It is the most remote. It's the most saline.

MC: Yeah. And it's a unique resource in America. And it's one of the most extreme and unvisited, unknown *terra incognitas* almost. We don't want to mess with it but we do want to bring some people to experience it, and this is a platform that will help make that happen.

GS: And, maybe before we take a little tour around here in a bit, but what I want to do is ask you maybe to close up this part of the interview to talk about some of the other artists who've been inspired by the Great Salt Lake. So obviously, most famously, Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, but also his widow, who just passed away, Nancy Holt, who I know that you have interactions with and worked with over the years. And talk a little bit about how the Great Salt Lake has inspired these pieces of land art, I think it's what, artistically, it's probably most famous for.

MC: Yeah, well certainly the Spiral Jetty is probably the most famous piece of land art, let alone *thing* in this area. Smithson and Holt were drawn to this region for its emptiness I think, and its visual characteristics, its geological characteristics, things about erasure of what you can see. They probably spent a lot of time on the shore looking out across the lake where the horizon line disappears. If you're looking out into it, the sky can be so perfectly reflected in the water that you can't discern the two. There's all kinds of amazing phenomenological things that happen out there. And I think that was definitely a part of what drew them and other people to experience the place, the constantly changing views and appearances of the place dramatically shifting. Even its size - over a decade the lake can almost double or halve in size. It's so dynamic and unfamiliar, certainly to most people. It feels more planetary in a way than any other part of the planet [laughs]. It's almost cosmological. And those, I think, are some of the things that initially drew

Smithson and Holt, and that they expressed through their artwork: Holt building essentially an observatory to tie the area to the cosmos. And Smithson's piece, much more terrestrial, deals with the material of the ground rather than the heavens.

But I always think of the Jetty really as an expressionistic gesture. It is part of the triad of pieces that were all assembled together to be the final artwork: the film, the writing, and the sculpture. But the Jetty in itself is a dead end in a way. I like the idea of using it as a promontory to step off of, into the region. The Jetty is an excuse to go to this amazing part of the lake that you wouldn't otherwise really have access to, if not for—well, the oil jetty next to the Spiral Jestty is I think what actually created the road system out there [laughs]. But anyhow, in terms of drawing people who aren't interested in oil history [laughs] to the shore of the lake, the draw of land art ends up being something that enables people to experience the lake at that location. So it's really a doorway not a dead end. You step off the Jetty and you're dealing with the lake itself and all the different textures and the fragments of the salt formation and the wave action. And then the oil jetty itself I find to be amazing vestiges of the way—you have the deep black tar seeps mixing with white salt formations, substances oozing and cracking creating really dramatic forms, things that you can't really make up, and that you don't see in other places. Yellowstone has similar palette of amazing kinds of fractal prehistoric galactic forms and things like bacterial mats, but it's a National Park. Here, at the lake, if not for things like the Spiral Jetty to draw people, few would ever see these wonders. At least a lot fewer people from places like New York and Germany.

The draw of the land art can provide a window, or a doorway really, to walk through to experience the landscape. It provides a context of cultural significance as well.

For people who need to have a monument to get them there, great, it brings 'em. Most people who are coming just to see the Jetty end up having a much more rich experience once they realize what an amazing place it is.

GS: Well, I know that Nancy Holt, who just passed away, who I'd hoped to interview for this project—did she have much interaction with you with the center? Was it more just working in the same area and knowing each other and knowing what you were doing?

MC: Yeah, I was trying to remember the first time we communicated. But it was probably related to… I guess she heard about the center somehow, through somebody, and we ended up talking on the phone at some point. And I remember talking with her about Sun Tunnels and Lucin, and one of the things we're lacking here, because this is all land that's owned by the county and is controlled and fenced and there's limitations on what we can do on pieces of ground on a larger scale immediately around Wendover because we don't own the land and there are restrictions. So we wanted a site somewhere where we could operate terrestrially with more options for leaving things and doing things and having things go on that were going to stay there and not be in anybody's way. So I talked to her about that. And she said, "Well, I own some other pieces of land out there, maybe we should go look at them and maybe you can use one of those." So we met up.

There was one in particular that she was interested in us looking at. She owns four pieces of land out there, near Lucin, an hour north of here. Three of them are kind of related in a way. One is where Sun Tunnels is. One is a few miles to the east, that's a kind of gravel pit, where actually some of the gravel for building the roads to Sun

Tunnels came from, as well as the gravel for the oil roads—just like Spiral Jetty, access has its origins in oil. The road that goes by Sun Tunnels keeps going east and terminates at an oil well, and that's why that road existed. In the other direction, the piece of land she has is on a hill a few miles west of Sun Tunnels. So Sun Tunnels is kind of the fulcrum between the digging into the ground and looking down from the higher elevation. Which makes sense, because Sun Tunnels is a ground-based observatory. She had actually wanted to do sculptures at those other sites herself, and just never really got it together to do that. I think she ended up spending a lot of her creative time dealing with Smithson's estate, which she had control over I think a lot of her personal artwork she wasn't able to pursue because of the demands of that, though she was a very productive artist. Especially in the '80s she was doing all kinds of things that were really interesting, in the '70s and '80s, and some of the '90s. She's a very overlooked artist I think overall.

But the fourth piece of land was not part of that triad, it was another site. She had actually bought that land before the Sun Tunnels project was conceived, with Smithson, I think it was like '72 or '71, so after the Jetty but before he died. And they had thoughts about doing projects on that land that never materialized. It's a dramatic site. It incorporates part of a dry lake. It's about an hour north of here on Lemay Island. It has escarpments, and a kind of flat area. A forty acre box, draped over a hillside. She loaned us that site to do projects on, and we've had it for fifteen years or so. Several projects have been done and removed, but there are a couple things out there now that you can go see. It's a very isolated spot, but it is a productive site that enables us to do things that are more remote and can stay out there. It's one of those spots that's a really dramatic, inspiring location, more about the primal landscape than a transformed one.

GS: Well, we'll close here for now. What we'll do is walk around to a couple of the other buildings. We'll continue the interview there. And thank you so much.

MC: Yeah, it's a great pleasure.

[break in recording]

[Conversation continues outside the CLUI residency building]

GS: Go ahead because this is actually a question I was going to ask about the relationship of the center to the environmental movement, because a lot of people could read documenting industrial sites and landscape use as a critique.

JF: And I wanna say engineering geeks, this is awesome because there's a real appreciation of the beauty and the science that goes into building a lot of these structures. And I'm wondering how conscious you were about creating something that – I don't know if apolitical's the right word – but something that could be read in multiple ways. Is it partly a documentary project?

MC: Well people are used to, in land use debates, things being very politicized. And most factions end up representing a particular objective and point view, where there's jobs and economy versus environmental issues, that's usually one of the traditional ways that breaks down. There are other ways of looking at it, and there are other ways of approaching these debates to help resolve them, that don't necessarily have such a clearly defined strategy. I wouldn't even call what we do a strategy; it's really just kind of a reflex, to try to understand the landscape we live in better. Then perhaps with a better understanding, we make better decisions, whatever the decisions are. With a more complete awareness of the current conditions of the landscape of the country and how they got to be that way, and how resources are all connected, and how there's a yin and a

yang for everything. You don't always know that there's a big pit where your copper wiring came from [noise of a truck driving by] – as this truck drives by hauling ore to China.

JF: But do you think of it in terms of consciousness raising, having people more aware of how all these land uses are connected and even if they live in there little detached suburban house that they're part of these big processes that include things like MagCorp?

MC: Yeah, well I think an awareness of things is where change starts. I'm sometimes really just amazed by the landscape and what we've done as a society, and that awe is really compelling, and even parts of it are aesthetic. You go to Bingham Pit and you see this thing and you have a new appreciation for what humans have done.

JF: It's like a technological sublime.

MC: Yeah, and there's a sort of resonance that can occur there that can change people's lives I think, and kind of did mine and I think a lot of others.

JF: Well I'm gonna say there can become this kind of actually radical politics in, as you were talking about, going from the bottom of the list, or starting at the low, 'cause so much of our history, in terms of environmentalism or land use protection is about starting at the top of the list, which isn't always actually the most ecologically important, also it's not often where we live and work.

MC: I remember going to the Nevada Test Site. That was one of our early projects as a center: we published a guidebook to that place in 1996, which, after a couple years of going out there and working with the DOE to open the place up. We'd submit a list of sites we wanted to see and photograph, and they would scratch out ones and say okay to

this one, no to that one. And we kept doing that until we felt like we finally saw enough of the place that we could begin to describe it in a more sort of holistic way. Initially I don't think they were all that comfortable with the information we had in there. But they ended up embracing the publication and distributing to the Bechtel employees as part of their familiarization of the site. So we were able to kind of ratchet it open with more information, more awareness of what went on there over the years. With an increase in the awareness of the history of the place, people come at it from all sides, do what they could with it, but the information genie was a little further out of the bottle there. And that feels like progress [laughs] in terms of a better understanding of things. And better understanding means better decisions.

But, yeah, everything is political as they say. But I guess our politics might be a little more disorienting for people maybe a bit. But I think when you're disoriented you're also searching for your bearings, and you're engaged with the situation at hand. And I think that sometimes a little bit of confusion is a good thing because it gets you searching for answers rather than sticking within the answers you've already had all along. When you're disoriented and confused, when you don't know the political vectors of a display, you look for them, you try and figure it out, rather than go, "Oh, well that was put up by the lobbying group that's trying to build that wildlife area" or whatever.

JF: I think your landscan is, for me, nicely disorienting. I was there again at the museum and some people were complaining, "Where's the lake? I don't know what I'm looking at." [laughs] To me though, that's often the value of what you do. I mean, there's a book I'm sure you know, published by Norton, I think it's *Infrastructure: A Field Guide to Industrial Landscape*.

MC: Oh yeah, that's a great book.

JF: Which is a great book. But that's very much from an engineering geek point of view. Whereas your work is much more aestheticized, I think disorienting, where his is like: "That thing that you see, the little box on that pole that you see every day, I'm gonna tell you what it is. Here's a picture of it," which could be any picture. Whereas your work often has both the element of beauty but also disorientation. But it shares that kind of observational and educational point of view as well.

MC: That's a great book because it is what it says: a field guide to infrastructure. So there's the nuts and bolts, and that is raw material that people use to experience their space in a more enhanced way. While we provide some nuts and bolts sometimes, we also interpret those nuts and bolts to some degree and put together the public experiences that are curations and summations of some of the ideas represented by the nuts and bolts. So, yeah, we're interested in nuts and bolts as a building block, but that doesn't stop there. We use these nuts and bolts to build narratives

[noise of truck passing]

GS: This is going to be one of the most disorienting oral history interviews because we've lost complete control of the sound quality. But that's all right, I think it fits into what we're talking about.

MC: I'm glad we could draw you guys into the field.

[break in recording]

[Conversation continues inside the CLUI orientation building]

MC: This is our orientation building. So this is where we recommend most people who are visiting Wendover, if they're following the CLUI trail, to begin. It tells you about

where the other buildings are, some things to look at, as well as some regional information. One of my favorite features in here is this wall sized map, because it shows the land ownership between the federal government, the state and private hands. You can see the extent of the military operations, three million or so acres, the pink zones; the yellow of course, BLM; the white, private; the blue, state. You see the checkerboard. And when we bring classes and groups here, as we do quite often, most kids, even if they're from the middle of this checkerboard, don't really have their mind around the importance of the square mile grid. I think this is one of the fundamental things to understand about the western landscape.

GS: And looking just to your left on this map of Nevada you can see the checkerboard snaking its way along the original route of the Central Pacific.

MC: Yeah. And the whole idea of this Cartesian grid being draped over the nation from the capitol, being able to capture the land before anybody had been out to survey it, it's a net, it's a legal net that was thrown over the various territories as we acquired them. And we all deal with this legacy to this day. And on this map it is laid out on a local scale, all the way from Salt Lake to Wendover and beyond…

GS: Well and with this grid up here I think one of the striking things is that you do have these areas, these areas where no one can go because they're reserved by the federal government for military purposes, so they're fenced off; but then there are so many areas that are open for private ownership, which of course is what Nancy Holt was able to do, was to purchase land out here. And that's not what you can do in lots of areas. But that grid allows people to have private ownership in those areas. But you're so close to these areas which are so restricted and off limits.

MC: Yeah, well Nevada's about eighty-five percent federal land, most of it BLM. So it's the most open state in the entire union. And I guess Utah has about forty-four percent BLM land, somewhere in there, which is number two in the nation. But the idea of almost half a state being essentially public property, is like it's a public park already. On BLM land, if there's a fence it's likely just there to keep the cattle from gettin' on the highway, you just close the gate and go out and camp for fourteen days. And maybe you know the answer to this, Greg, I've never found out, how far do you have to move after those fourteen days for another fourteen days to begin?

[all laugh]

GS: That's a good question. I'm not sure. I've encountered some folks who I don't think move very far.

MC: Yes, exactly. And how long before you can go back to the original? But in a way it's the most free and open state in the union, Nevada, followed by Utah. And yet the two states also have some of the most tightly controlled restricted areas for national security and defense history. Dugway being perhaps the most dramatic military site in Utah and one of the great dramatic sites in the nation, and then Nevada with the Nellis Range and Area 51 and the Nevada Test Site. So you've got these intense, protected, restricted areas where they're modeling different versions of the world to control, to train personnel and to develop technologies. In the case of Dugway, you've got these biolabs that have inverse pressures to keep things from getting out if there's a leak in the lab, so they're intensely pressured inwards, and yet their context in this landscape is all about openness and dispersal and free access. It's a really dramatic contrast.

GS: It is. And to get out of Dugway, I understand if you go in some places in Dugway they have to do a blood draw on you before they allow you to leave the base. So that's a strange… You can't get out. So the restriction can work both ways.

MC: And there's still all kinds of interesting things going on. I love also the idea of the Dugway dispersal grids, which are all about that. That's a mining claim in the middle of Dugway. And you find that. And these are also incursions of private land.

JF: Antelope Island is not state property?

GS: This map probably goes back before it became state property, and the only portion was this section up here. This was still privately owned and grazed. It's probably pre-'74, '75, something like that.

MC: Yeah, that's right. It's amazing how much private land in remote areas there is around Great Salt Lake.

GS: Promontory's all ranch land. It's all privately owned. Pretty much all, there's a couple of sections that are state.

MC: Yeah, I don't know why Lakeside ended up being state land. I got all kinds of questions for you. I should be interviewing you here.

GS: I need to investigate that and find out why that is. That's a good question. Obviously the privately owned land right around Lakeside is the core that's owned by the railroad. But why that is all state and when that came about is a very good question.

JF: So who owns the lake bed?

GS: The state.

MC: It's a navigable waterway. So same with Owens Lake in California, which has not a drop of navigable water on it, though we're about to test that—

GS: It's starting, it's supposed to be refilled. I drove past there this last summer and I purposely drove all the way out of the way to go up there to get to Death Valley just so I could see if there was any water in the lake, and there didn't seem to be any at that point yet.

MC: Well they shallow flood quite a bit of it, but it's not intended to bring recreational use back to the lake. That's all just dust mitigation. So it's kind of a funny situation where there's a lake now with water on it, but no access whatsoever, and that is not the function of the water. It's just to keep the dust from blowing, and to provide some habitat for wildlife too. But for the most part that water is not a public resource, even though it's state land that it's on top of.

JF: So if the state decided they wanted to fill in Farmington Bay to make more suburbs could they do that and sell it off to developers?

GS: Well whether they could or not that's a deeply political question that would be fought over.

JF: I suppose there'd be federal environmental regulations that would—

GS: Well, judging by the huge controversy and the fight over the Legacy Parkway and new plans for another highway that go into those wetlands near Farmington Bay, I think that that would be a very hard sell.

MC: But this [Stansbury Bay] essentially was filled in by MagCorp. And it looks like water on this map but of course it's not: It's all a dyked pond system. It's in that weird kind of: Is it land? I don't know. It's in transition. And not all the ponds are indicated on

here either. Isn't much of this filled in too?

GS: Yes it is. And now the exterior dyke of Bear River really is—this map makes it look like a checkered line but that's pretty much enclosed.

MC: Yeah. This is an interesting feature I'll show you over here. These are 3D glasses – and maybe you've seen this [3D map of the Bingham Canyon Mine].

JF: Oh, is this by the person who made the book of the Wasatch Canyons?

MC: This was put out by Kennecott, as far as I know. And if you put 'em on wrong, it turns the pit into a pile [laughs].

GS: Oh yeah, you're right, it does.

MC: So you can reverse the process, but it depends on your perspective.

JF: Create a mountain or a pit.

GS: That's pretty cool. What Jared was talking about is there is a 3D atlas of the Wasatch that's available. They sell it at REI and you have little glasses like this and you look at the same thing.

We're standing by a map of the Great Salt Lake which actually is hanging in my office right now. This landsat photograph, which was taken when the lake was at very high water, because certainly all Bear River's inundated here. And now much of Farmington Bay today is mud flats right now. So it's definitely going towards a low water phase right now.

[break in recording]

MC: This photo ortho effect on some of their quads, when the topographic features, if they were just lines it would be so minimal [discussion of three USGS 7.5-minute topographic maps of the area immediately east of Wendover].

JF: I've never seen this.

MC: So there are certain parts—I mean, this is the standard quad, if you order it from the USGS. This is not a specialty product; it's the basic standard quad for this section. And they did the photo ortho to show, I guess, differentiation of features that are otherwise just not visible 'cause it's flat. They've done this in other locations as well, but what I love about this is the coloration.

GS: The ponds, yeah.

MC: The tinting is gorgeous. And it's sort of photographic, it's sort of cartographic. It's a hybrid and ends up looking almost like stained glass. The subtleties and the textures are just really, really great.

GS: Yeah, they are. They hang like artwork.

MC: And then in case you were wondering [CLUI's replica "Golden Spike"]…

GS: We saw. Actually, I think when we were here once before… Where did you get the golden spike? And did anyone know it's missing?

MC: It's been here all along.

GS: Okay.

[break in recording]

[Conversation concludes outside]

JF: I want to say for some Wendover teenager, some really sensitive, intelligent person, you're gonna save their life. They're gonna find this, you know what I mean. It's gonna put their life on a totally different trajectory.

MC: Yeah, well hopefully that happens, whoever comes by has that sense of discovery. We're never gonna make it easy. We're not gonna put up any billboards on the interstate or anything.

GS: That was certainly our experience when we came out here last October. We were poking around. We found the exhibit hall, the first one over here that's down the way from the residency. And then we came over here. And then we could see the one here behind the fence and so we found our way in there.

Well maybe we should—well, we'll wait for one more ore truck to go by. And we'll sign off after this.

[noise of truck passing]

GS: Well thanks so much Matt. It's been a great interview and a lot of fun to see the center out here.

MC: Thanks for coming out.

END OF INTERVIEW