

Gordon Matta-Clark: 'Somewhere Outside the Law'

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Abstract

'Nobody could construct buildings the way Gordon destructed them', we read in the issue of *Flash Art* published shortly after the artist's death. In this article we set out from the at once physical and social violence of Gordon Matta-Clark's interventions (their 'cleanlined brutality') so as to introduce the relation—and to introduce the negation in the relation—between Matta-Clark and the architects whom he places 'at opposite ends of the pole' from his own anarchitectural operation. But Matta-Clark proposes not so much an alternative usage of the enclosure of space as the diagram of a new spatial enunciation which, as we try to show, sheds new light on the very terms in which the question of art was posed at the end of the 1960s.

Keywords: Gordon Matta-Clark, Contemporary Art, Architecture, Anarchitecture, Diagram, Photomontage, Urban Renewal, Urbanism

To take on the limits of architecture *itself*, confronting it at the *clinical* (or entropic) point of its material collapse [*effondrement*] and pushing it to the *critical* point of the ideo-logical ungrounding [*effondement*] of its economy—such will have been the primary function of Gordon Matta-Clark's architectural, or *anarchitectural*, anti-work. An enterprise that presupposes the destruction of the 'work': the abandoned building slated for demolition, for a destruction that will take with it all the artistic interventions of which it will have been not so much the 'site' as the 'non-site' and the *seat*. The affirmation of the social character ('to deal directly with social conditions') of this destruction rerouted into a deconstruction (an *unbuilding*) by means of *cuts* (*cut out, cut up, cut away, cut through*) inflicted on the building in an experimental ontology of urban space, also serves as a break with Land Art (too 'literally like drawing on a blank canvas') and with Conceptual Art ('Rather than using language, using walls').¹ *Undoing the wall* [*défaire le mur*] so as to *performatively* and *ephemerally* liberate social space from its 'architectural limits' and from its oppressive private/public dialectic: it is in this new sense that Gordon Matta-Clark uses the term 'non-architecture,' to mark the critical dimension of his projects in regard to the *social function of architecture*, whose capitalist semiogenesis (in the name of 'urbanism', the real *plane of consistency* of architecture) they subject to a counter-investment.²

'Nobody could construct buildings the way Gordon destructed them.'³ The at once physical and social violence of Gordon Matta-Clark's interventions, which he himself qualified as being of a 'cleanlined brutality' (Moure, 2006: 172)—and which we address here in terms of their characteristic *operation*—implies such a radical break with the formalist conceptuality of 'architecture' that the word *extraction*, which he

used to describe his first cut-outs, is the only way in which to introduce the relation—and to introduce the *negation* in the relation—between Matta-Clark and the architects whom he sees as lying ‘at opposite ends of the pole’ from his own interventions in the building.⁴ It is as if one had to begin by going deep inside the building, in order to extract oneself physically from *architectural structuring* by attacking its functional foundations—which are as much theoretical and social as material, given that ‘architectural matter’ is always already semiotically formed by its embedding in the *socius*, and finds itself more *deeply* organized than ever when subjected to the wholly modern will to the planarity and transparency of ‘structures.’ (This architecture, ‘proliferated by the International Style [...] in the development of post-war American imperialism,’ Matta-Clark (in Moure, 2006: 65) explains, ‘reflects the iconography of the western corporate axis’ which ‘has created a dehumanized condition at both a domestic and institutional level.’ Whence the importance of a radical critique of the contemporary modes of the *autonomy of architecture*; a critique that will even go so far as to take the form—the extreme form—of a *Window Blowout* shattering the glass panes of the New York Institute of Architecture founded and directed by Peter Eisenmann.)⁵ So it is not insignificant that this former student of the Architecture School of Cornell University (1962–1968)—known in the US as the ‘Corbu School’—begins his *real-estate operations* by homing in on the foundations of the alternative space at 112 Greene Street (an artists’ house and cooperative).

Some months after its opening by Jeffrey Lew (at the end of 1970), Matta-Clark would excavate a deep hole in the basement at Greene Street and plant a cherry tree in it, along with some turf laid on the soil heaped across the floor, hanging above the whole ‘installation’ infrared lamps that would keep the tree alive for three months, thus determining the duration of the work (*Cherry Tree*, 1971). But what is most interesting here is the way in which the artist (interview with Wall in Moure (2006): 68) explains that he never managed to achieve his ‘real idea’,

which was digging deep enough so that a person could see the actual foundations, the ‘removed’ spaces under the foundation, and liberate the building’s enormous compressive, confining forces simply by making a hole. To be able to pass freely under an area once so dominated by gravitational constraint—that would have been something!

It should come as no surprise, then, that having expressed his will to ‘to alter the whole space to its very roots, which meant a recognition of the building’s total [semiotic] system,’ Matta-Clark himself would conclude that ‘physically penetrating the surface seemed the logical next step.’ *Cutting through* would be a matter of *undoing* the real-estate economy of gravity by disrupting the physico-mental striation of global space operated by the architectural administration of life and of the city—to the extent of inducing the vertigo of a local absolute, its multiple perspectives proliferating by way of perforations.

The penetration of the ‘basis’ of the architecture of space is thus the first moment of a *trial procedure* (the trial of the foundations of architecture). This procedure pro-poses itself as a *prospective archaeology of its own anti-architectural operation* by dialecticizing the entropic situation of the building within which it is ‘situated’—a building lying at the epicentre of the entropic architecture of Downtown Manhattan,

south of Houston Street, at the beginning of the 70s: a landscape of recession, an abandoned industrial zone populated by rejects and marginals, where artists ‘outside the system’ create *open spaces* (and *open kitchens*) at the very moment when the economic revolution of neoliberal globalization—of which the World Trade Centre, under construction at the time, was the most visible sign—was already in motion.⁶ The *non-standard* de-construction/re-construction operated at 112 Greene Street (and which is also *non-standart*—that is, an art that refuses *to stand up* functionally *on its own*) becomes a sign of what Robert Smithson (1966: 304) calls ‘a dialectics of entropic change,’ as well as an amusingly over-literal confirmation of the Marxist topic of the spatial metaphor of the edifice (base and superstructure) according to which ‘it is the base which in the last instance determines the whole edifice.’⁷ A confirmation which, in this case, also implies Althusser’s (1984: 10) additional injunction to think what the metaphor gives us ‘in the form of a description’, and thus to give ‘a conceptual answer’ to ‘the spatial metaphor.’ Matta-Clark’s invocation of a ‘materialist dialectic of a real environment’ operating via the (post-conceptual) hermetics of that which is ‘inwardly removed’ so as to be virtualized in the affirmation-negation that *it puts in place* refers precisely to the excavation of the architecturological system right down to the edifice of the language that supports it, and whose most compelling metaphors (the ‘semiotic spinal column’ of its ‘theoretical foundations’) will be counteracted by ‘juggling in syntax’ with the ‘architectural structure in its reality.’⁸ This is how Matta-Clark, distancing himself from all sculptural gesture (in defiance of Liza Bear’s suggestion), defines the nature of his operations on *a house*, which is always ‘something very real, especially when one considers its environment,’ going on to specify that it is a matter of ‘disintegrating some kind of established sequence of parts.’⁹ This syntactical disintegration is precisely the proposition of an anarchitecture that operates only through the *cut* of its primary syntagm, indefinitely placed in variation: from an anarchy-ecture said to be ‘SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE THE LAW’, which makes it definitively deviate, into a ‘Narco Tecture’ authorizing all possible *derives* since (II) ‘YOU ARE THE MEASURE’—which one cannot take too seriously as a phenomenology given that (III) the final stance reads ‘A ROCKING-CHAIR ESTATE.’¹⁰ A declination that might be extended as follows, as in a card made by Tina Girouard and photographed for the exhibition *Anarchitecture*, a kind of anti-manifesto in grid form, a word grid permitting all conjunctions (*a/some cross words* in the form of a Wall Text): ‘AN ARK KIT PUNCTURE—ANARCHY TORTURE—AN ART KIT TORTURE—AN ART DEFECTOR—etc.’¹¹

This ‘ETC.’ is also that of a *dis-organizing* (or ‘disintegrative’) placing-into-variation of the endless city whose architecture, given that (as entropy dictates) *nothing works without breaking down*, will be taken across this limit (which had been warded off by a structural effect). The limit will no longer mark a threshold effect but a ‘*threshole*’ effect, taking us into a world where ‘NOTHING WORKS BEST’ given the simple fact of a ‘*direct* and *non productive* response to form following function.’¹² The functionalist productivity of architectural form is thus subjected to an anti-production which *makes a hole* in the ‘system’ by mobilizing the outside that it had denied (entropic catastrophe as a physical outside, deconstruction of everyday urban life as a diagrammatic outside), and by disrupting the metaphorical spatialization of the world-image as architectural structure. ‘NOTHING WORKS BEST’ will thus immediately be metonymically translated into a disarticulated series of *disorder-words* which ‘verbalizes’ the whole process of anarchitectural antiproduction around (*NOTHING*)

WORKS/WORDS: 'NOTHING WORDS BEASTS / BEASTS OF THE NORTH WORDS.'

All things considered, this could well stand as a perfect (de-)definition of the anarchitectural collective which, whatever it may have been in reality (a pure *interchange?* A *theoretical machine?*), could not escape the task with which it defined itself: *How to undo things with words*; the collective of a 'state of mind' that its inspirer had aspired to in the clean-lined antilanguage of his cut-outs, produced *in situ*, but also *off-site* in ever more vertiginous montages whose transmedia expression must equally be seen as a real practice of the anti-formalist subversion of architecture qua marker of power. (In other words: if 'We are anti-formal'¹³ is the form of expression that serves as the machinic opening onto the multiplicity of mediums, Matta-Clark is the proper name of the collective assemblage of anarchitectural enunciation which he induces and deduces from it—*indefinitely*: 'Keeping it an ongoing open process. Not finishing / just keeping going and starting over & over.')¹⁴

Splitting (1974) consisted not only in cutting the exterior and interior of a house (also slated for demolition) vertically down the middle with a chainsaw, but more radically in making one half of it tip backwards—so that the operation of dissection was also a collapsing back of architecture onto its bases.¹⁵ With the cutting out of a 2.5cm 'slice', the vertical sectioning of the building takes the architectural code of the *section* to the letter, redrawing the intact structure of the construction on a 1:1 scale and rendering immediately visible the composition of the material strata that functionally correspond to the housing needs of a working family in a New York bedroom suburb (Englewood, New Jersey). Waiting to be demolished in order to make way for a more profitable residential subdivision of the land, its grounds covered with unkempt vegetation, the house was a cell of the suburban fabric, exemplary of its mode of production and habitation and its expanded reproduction through the expulsion of its precarious tenants. Matta-Clark began by piling into the basement the remains of personal objects and furniture left behind by the former residents (which were photographed as testimony to the subterranean violence of this 'urban renewal.')¹⁶

In a second step which would give the operation its true importance—not planned at the outset: it occurred to him as he carried out the work—he turned his attention to the substructure left intact by the vertical cut: the whole length of the first layer of cinderblock foundations were removed and the back half of the house undercut and supported on jacks so that its entire fifteen-ton weight could be lowered until it tilted back at an angle. This *tour de force*, the outcome of which remained uncertain right up until the last moment, dissociated the architectural box from itself—a synonym for a total, disorienting, and defunctionalized disarticulation of space. The operation used the static structure of the house itself to wrench it from the gravitational inertia that ensured its firm seating, and then to keep it in a state of tension that spread to the whole interior, affecting, *disquieting*, the very possibility of inhabiting it. As Matta-Clark (in Jacob (1985): 33) explains

Starting at the bottom of the stairs where the crack was small, you'd go up, and as you'd go further up, you'd have to keep crossing the crack. It kept widening as you made your way up the stairs to the top so by the time you got to the top, the crack was one or two feet wide. You

really had to jump it. You sensed the abyss in a kinesthetic and psychological sense.

In this way Matta-Clark was able to satisfy his desire, formulated at the time of *Cherry Tree*, to ‘liberate the [...] enormous compressive, confining forces’ from the laws of gravity by acting on the foundations so as to ‘alter the whole space.’

In his 1974 interview with Liza Bear, he recounts the experience of *Splitting with the house*: ‘Throughout the process, there was a terrific suspense, not really knowing what would hold and shift, but the structure acted perfectly [...] She came down like a dream. [...] the whole event gave me new insight into what a house is, how solidly built, how easily moved’. Drawing on his familiarity with the world of dance, in particular through the work of Trisha Brown, who defied the laws of gravity *in the city* with her dancers *walking down walls*, he adds: ‘[i]t was like a perfect dance partner [...] the realisation of motion in a static structure was exhilarating’.¹⁷

One of the effects of the splitting that is particularly well captured (or intensified) by the Super 8 film (silent, 10m50s) is the startling penetration of the light as it *infuses* the space in a manner that places it *in fusion* and violently frees it from its principle of closure. Depending on the light conditions and the position of the camera, what is striking is the sharpness of the gap that traverses the house—sometimes dark, sometimes lit up—and the *traits* of light projected through the crack, which form immaterial (non-enclosing) dividing lines moving with the sun and constantly redrawing the internal space without fixing it. Because of the tilt, the crack widens toward the top, as if the building were *in the process* of splitting, in a generalized placing-in-tension which physically and ontologically unbalances it and opens it up at the same time. For what is at stake here is not the tilting of the house for its own sake—so as to produce a spectacular and/or comical form of architecture—but, through the *necessarily* perilous and uncertain nature of the operation, an overcoming of all the usual limitations of space, an overcoming made possible by *the passage to the limit of the (or a) breaking point* that is approached as closely as possible under the *mobilizing* pressure of demolition (and not just the *motivating* pressure, faced with the urgency of the situation). In this respect, the imminent demolition constitutes a *forcible* and *necessary* component of the operation. As such, the latter will be documented from the perspective of a history other than that written by the victors ‘on the surface of things’.

The theoretico-practical stakes of this operation rest upon the opposition between two types of diagrammatism, an opposition rendered quite visible and legible by the comparison of two photomontages (see Moure (2006): 153, 155). On one hand we have the (now iconic) photomontage showing half of the interior of the (whole) house, sectioned vertically on a plane that coincides with the plane of the material cut (invisible here), and juxtaposing the different rooms, with each in its respective place but shot from its own photo-graphic perspective, thus subverting both the more usual abstract representation of a cubic space and the technical Palladian sectional elevation (here the cut functions as a *disquieting* diagram of general cellularity, or a diagram that disquiets such cellularity). And on the other hand, a photomontage as heterogeneous assemblage of a series of dislocated/dislocating views which (de)composite the cut and the tilt with each other, rendering space intrinsically flexible or pliable at the split (in this case, the diagram decoordinates that which it articulates: below and above, in front of and behind, leaning to one side and the

other). Further photomontages place the parts in variation in other ways: in some, the split cleaves the house as a whole from roof to ground floor, vertically or with a slight clinamen; others multiply it into stripes, extend it into an arc, or make it oscillate around its off-centre/off-centring axis. Running through all of the photomontages, the cut *holds* all of space *in a suspense which allows the void to operate* (the photographs also capture Matta-Clark himself at work, hanging suspended in line with the walls). A sharp, exploded proliferation of photomontages—a montage of montages rather than a collage of collages—augmented by all available means for the expression of space, infinitizing its virtual potentialities and their at once disjunctive and inclusive conjunction (an un-limiting series of *inclusive disjunctions* making space differ from itself). This un-limiting operates through a diagrammatism which has a coenesthetic effect, for the space deterritorialized by the constructivist multiplicity of its expressions—a machinic trans-expressivity—foils both *the optical and kinaesthetic work* of mental collaging (which would reterritorialize it on the image of the lived body—it solicits this collaging only so as to undo it) and the relation of alterity (a non-dialectical relation, in spite of Matta-Clark's own declarations) between the two parts of the house: the spectator/visitor is instead drawn into a *splitting of/in movement-space*, placed in a situation which, rather than 'atmospheric', is one of *kinematic acceleration and cinemato-graphic disorientation*. All the more so in that the house was subject to a third operation: its four uppermost corners—where the roof met with the orthogonal walls—were removed (*Splitting: Four Corners*), subjecting the architectural box to a new separation—a discrowning which now opens it up not only to the light but to the desolate environment that surrounds it; and therefore to the wild vegetation into which the camera plunges, in a final shot of pure greenery whose significance is unclear, except that it provisionally undoes the suburban domestication of nature understood in terms of a 'defoliation' (and in terms of the necessary alliance with 'autochthonous survivors').¹⁸ Shown ad hoc in a gallery (or museum), these four corners refer back paradigmatically to that of which they are the syntactical voiding, in a diagrammatic transfer of the dialectic of site/non-site such that 'it is not only the Englewood, New Jersey house that is "split", but the representational field that it occupies,' outside of any kind of *formalism reconfigured ad litteram*; instead, here formalism is *autopsied* (Fer, 2007: 139).

Indeed the 'iconic' photomontage of *Splitting*, by representing in section the structural relations between façade and interior, associates this autopsy with the restaging of a powerful architectonic schematization whose principle, since Palladio, had itself been linked to the *anatomies* of the *fabrica* of the human body. An *autopsy of a dissection*, then, which, as Caroline van Eck remarks, characteristically produces the return of the anatomico-architectural repressed by *cutting into the tissue/into the living fabric of a house* which can now be seen in each of its autonomous 'plan(e)s,' in contorted perspectives, as the negative presence of its habitation: we enter into the photomontage from the ground floor (also the largest photo) showing in the background, in what was once the kitchen, an old stove, slightly out of place yet still redolent with the marrow of domesticity (we can make out wallpaper and a small picture frame). The process of abstraction constitutive of architecture's movement towards a functional formalism is thus inverted in favour of the exposure of the most quotidian materiality of traces of habitation, multiplied by the effect of a photomontage that juxtaposes scenes of an absent life into which the anatomist-architect's scalpel has cut. Whence the *disquieting strangeness* (*Das Unheimliche*) that emanates from the scene of the crime (complete with *dance macabre*), brought to

light by he who *dances with houses* by giving them to be perceived (or *pierced?*) ‘as a very live element’ (Moure, 2006: 177).

Office Baroque is a perfect example of how the work functions, and is conceived, exclusively diagrammatically: as a machine of machines (an *infernal machine*) that is multi- or trans-enunciative (geometrical, material, gestural, graphic, photographic, filmic, socially ostensive and discursive); a machine whose principle of existence consists in a deliberately induced ratcheting-up, with uncontrollable effects owing to the heterogeneity of its elements and the heterogenesis that it sets in motion. The conditions of the intervention were in principle ideal: Antwerp, an important site of maritime trade and birthplace of the ‘baroque’ Rubens, the fourth centenary of whose birth was approaching. Matta-Clark had been authorized to make an intervention in the company headquarters of a maritime trading operation that had gone bankrupt = broke (‘liquidated’ along with a good part of the former maritime-industrial activities of the city), situated in the heart of the (highly photogenic) historic tourist centre (just opposite the *Steen*, the ‘Castle of Antwerp’, alongside the National Maritime Museum) and slated for demolition by the company who purchased it, and who were unreservedly dedicated to the most speculative practices of urban renewal.¹⁹ This exceptionally *opportune* project testified to a significant recognition of Matta-Clark’s work by one of Europe’s most innovative programmes in contemporary art, directed by Florent Bex, also director of the Internationaal Cultureel Centrum (ICC) where the photomontages of *Office Baroque* would be shown *off-site*, accompanied by a cut-out in the shape of a boat suspended from the gallery ceiling. An *in-site* cut-out which, it was said, seemed more unreal and distanced from the reality of the work than the ‘highly manipulated’ photographic (de)compositions that were at the heart of the exhibition, and which made it, in everyone’s eyes, an *event* (see Diserens, 1993: 113).

Matta-Clark’s original project, which was to have been entitled *Sphere*, proposed to cut out a ‘spherical quadrant’ from the corner of the building that faced onto the street, to its full height (except for the fifth floor, set back from the frontage). This plan would therefore have involved cutting out most of the façade, affording a view into the interior that would have been all the more *public* given the nature of this office building, the implacable and anonymous rigour of whose geometry Matta-Clark’s stripping-bare would have respected, all the better to expose (and *violate*) the intimacy of a site that was by nature foreclosed, the violence that inhabited it taking the dissimulated form of figures and commercial contracts. The municipal authorities, officially for reasons of security but doubtless also through fear of opening up this *negative perspective* on a site so central to the city’s tourist development plans, refused the project, and allowed Matta-Clark to intervene only inside the building. The plan for the cut-out, which was suggested by the overlapping circles made by a teacup on the preparatory design, consisted of the arcs of two unequal circles (45cm and 30cm wide according to the plan, and of a different diameter for each floor) which crossed over, and whose intersection (virtual extensions traced onto the floor) would yield the outline for curvilinear cut-outs in the form of a sloop. As the cut-outs progressed from the large spaces of the ground and lower floors up to the small communicating rooms on the higher floors, the forms gave rise to a series of smaller circular cut-outs in the floors and scooped out of the vertical partitions whose constriction complexified and *disoriented* the whole, before reaching the level of the flat roof where they opened into two circles which flooded the interior of the building with a play of shadow and light.

In the catalogue for Antwerp, Matta-Clark explains (in Moure, 2006: 257, italics mine) that the (hierarchical) arrangement of the space ‘determined how the formal elements transformed from uninterrupted circular slices to shrapnel-like bits and pieces of the original form as they ‘collided’ with partitions and walls. Besides the surprise and disorientation this work stimulates, it creates an especially satisfying mental map’. On this mental map the curves are a principle not of formal organization but of the leashing and unleashing of space, registering the way in which the rather obvious hermeneutics of the initial ‘nautical’ sign-form is metamorphosed into a ‘hermetics’ of signs-forces which *explodes* (hence the shrapnel-effect) any kind of formal metaphoricity to become locally a-signifiant and generically post-signifiant of the ‘baroque’—a baroque whose contemporary physiology comes to contradict and cut through, *in situ*, the seat of this maritime bureaucracy (which had ‘gone broke’).

As intelligible as the scale drawing (reproduced in Diserens, 1993: 291) may have seemed, the building itself was subtracted from all possibility of even virtual synthetic apprehension and, unlike his other projects, eluded what Matta-Clark here calls a ‘snap-shot interpretation’ (an interpretation that is *instantaneous* in the photographic sense of the term)—‘here’ meaning here in this major tourist site ‘where everyone comes to snap a shot.’²⁰ This photogenic setting is somewhat ironic, then, given the not just geographical but also temporal situation created by the intervention: a situation within which one could not help but *lose oneself* (‘to wander from top to bottom’) without any hope of capturing a ‘moment’: the ramified depth of the cut-out fields is that of a ruin in waiting, held in suspense between a bygone era and the immediate future of its demolition, a demolition that is already underway in its dissimulated present as non-site. Hence the need for the hypercomplexity of the large-format cibachrome photomontages to which Matta-Clark turns in order to project us *through Office Baroque*, their superimposed planes embedded into each other in a way that becomes undescrivable as soon as the point of view ceases to be rigorously vertical: the cut-outs cut across each other, the retained beams barring them and creating divergent angles of vision (from below/from above) which accentuate the phenomena of an undecidable high-angle/low-angle shot, the doors flapping in the wind taken up in a ‘panorama of arabesques’ which can only be documented with a 45-degree collage of two photos.... The skewed couplings of the negatives manage to collapse space by making its every direction fluctuate wildly (to the point of making the disassembled/reassembled [*démonté/remonté*] façade dance in a sequence of photos taken from outside with views onto the interior); the staggered perforations of the edges of neighboring photos make planes slide and grate against one another (as in an abstract kinematic time of composite durations); while the artificially tweaked Cibachrome colours complete the derealization of the scene by overexposing—along with the choreography of cuttings which are not so much photographed as photographically extended and intensified or ‘heightened’ in the montages—its *disquieting strangeness*. As far as can be from any phenomenology (of the lived body), then, this is a body totally deterritorialized by a spatio-temporal disorientation amplified by the trans-media ordeal with which the spectator is confronted (and which he cannot disregard *off-site*), a trial procedure that *animates* this space and, with its abstract-concrete energetics, plunges it into a *mise en abyme*.

But Matta-Clark’s refusal of the *snapshot*, a refusal to which his whole practice had led him, and which increasingly prompted him to no longer use static shots unless

they were (dis)assembled [(d )mont ] and their colours artificialized, with the perforations of the filmstrip left visible (which is of a piece with the *de-monstration* or de-definition of these photos in regard to their indexical and documentary function)—this refusal also marks the greatest distance from photoconceptualism’s ‘rhetoric of indifference’, whose format Matta-Clark had borrowed only so as to *d tourne* it from its proper usage: the image is no longer undone from outside via the neutralization of all its non-documentary effects; it is undone by precipitating the viewer into the multiplied *splitting* of an ‘interior’ rendered *inhabitable* by a projection in the form of a hyperconstructivist montage of *deconstructive cuttings* of buildings, cuttings become quasi-bodies which *cannibalize* the viewer by deterritorializing him ‘around and in the round’ (in Briony Fer’s words). For this ‘round’ will have been so *visibly manipulated* that it is strangely disquieting, disruptive even to that presence of a *having-been-there* with which the photograph is usually associated: it is no longer the sign-form of a *real unreality* giving access to the ‘natural’ being-there of ob-jects in space—even if only as *remains*—but the sign-force of a *reality of the unreal* whose genesis the whole dispositif of *unbuilding* has deconstructed by implicating in it the territorial planning of *the present* as ‘ruins in waiting’. Isn’t it this ‘in waiting’ that is clearly at work in the loss of (‘indexical’) reference in photographs (‘throw-aways’) whose montage acts as a critical demonstration of their *original non-site which we inhabit*—tout court, in the post-history that is ours (post-history as history of the non-site), faced with these photomontages which are capable of merging with us, reanimating us with their quasi-body?²¹ Hence the need for the meta-physical subversion of the photographic optic, in photomontages which contradict the supposed transparency of the medium so as to re-present a space that is given only for us to be lost in the ‘circle’ of its deconstructions and of the planned demolition that bars all ‘access’ to it. (*You have to walk’ (through)*, Matta-Clark tirelessly repeats—*but we can’t (get in), and he knows it.*) Excluding all ‘snapshot scenic work’, defying ‘that whole object quality [that] is with all sculpture’ (even ‘extended’ sculpture), it is the *engagement* in this inaccessibility that is, in the last instance, photomontaged and proposed to us as a *dismantling [d montage]* of what Matta-Clark calls a ‘sort of internal piece.’²²

The radicality of the spatio-temporal deterritorialization of the site *qua non-site* produced by the cibachromes of *Office Baroque* can be gauged by comparing them with those of *Conical Intersect*, an intervention made in Paris some years previously (in 1975), and which consisted in carving out a vast conical volume, through partitions and beams, between the external wall of a house whose third and fourth floors it opened up, to the sloping attic roof of the neighbouring house.

The aim of *Conical Intersect* is elsewhere. It is the Matta-Clark intervention whose interaction with the ‘urban fabric’ was the most *thought-out*. Here the principle of the circular cut-out is no longer limited to one single place/non-place; it is a properly trans-habitational cut-out running through two late-sixteenth-century terraced buildings condemned for reasons of sanitation and dilapidation, in the context of the ‘Gaulist “renovation”’ of the Plateau Beaubourg and Les Halles.²³ The truncated cone Matta-Clark cut into them over two weeks with the help of two assistants was four meters wide where it began in the street-facing wall, two metres wide at the roof of the other house, and its axis was inclined at approximately 45 degrees towards Rue Beaubourg, an important *artery* of north-south circulation. This *breakthrough* does indeed deserve to be called an ‘intersection’ since, on the north side, it took the

building and the road athwart, opening them broadly *toward* one other, while on the south side it had *in its sights* the Centre Georges Pompidou, whose skeletal armature, in the background, thrust skyward its metallic network of spars, bracing beams and vertical ties, and its stacked platforms—a modern technological avatar of the ‘grid’—like a spider inexorably extending its gigantic web. The cone cut into the two old buildings might well have suggested a projectile aimed at the Centre Pompidou (and after all, wasn’t the Beaubourg spoken of as a ‘building with all its guts hanging out’?) Especially as this ‘mental projection’ inclined at 45 degrees was not so different in form and scale to the transparent tubular mantle covering the building’s external escalators—one of the most famous signatures of Piano’s and Rogers’s architectural project. If Matta-Clark presented his intervention as a kind of ‘son et lumière spectacle with neither sound nor light’ (are we to understand: an Anti-Beaubourg?), it was as an ironic publicist of his project for the French public—not only an art audience of spectators but a public of the street, with whom he wished to ventilate the meaning of an intervention which could (and would) be accused of ‘collusion with the forces of destruction and the renewal’ of which the Beaubourg Centre seemed to be the *probe-head*.²⁴ And yet it is this *black hole*, this ‘vacuum-making machine’ that every one of the documentary photos of *Conical Intersect* shows [*montre*] and breaks up [*démonte*], their main characteristic being that they always present (in black and white) *the intersection of interior and exterior* (Baudrillard, 1982: 3).

In his ‘rough draft manuscript’ for the project proposal, Matta-Clark explains that the two buildings, constructed in 1700 for ‘Mr+Mrs De Lesseville’ (a *couple* of buildings) have no great historical importance outside of the fact that they are among the last to be awaiting demolition under the rubric of the ‘general Gaullist-Pompidou inspired “modernization” of Les Halles and Plateau Beaubourg’; they ‘are brought into full relief by a backdrop of the immense bridge-like structure of the Center Pompidou to be opened soon.’²⁵ Matta-Clark would later say that *Conical Intersect* constituted a ‘non-monumental counterpart’ to the Pompidou, but one immediately sees the *problem* here, and the impossibility of resolving it through some ‘solution’ or other: *with its armature of tubing declaring that that our only temporal mode is that of the accelerated cycle and of recycling*, the Centre is not really a centre, but spreads out like a ‘new cob web of culture’ which itself, as Baudrillard (1982: 5) rightly says, already ‘argues against traditional mentality or monumentality.’

Invited under the auspices of the ninth Paris Biennale, Gordon Matta-Clark had initially proposed that his participation would consist in making cut-outs in the platforms and ceilings of the Centre in order (as he proposed, straight-faced) to allow the play of light into the building (see Jenkins, 2001: 5). However, given that he knew enough of the controversy over the Beaubourg for it to have played a part in any intervention he might have made in Paris, the proposed project could be formulated in more radical terms: *since all artistic contents of the Beaubourg are rendered anachronistic by this architectural post-structure to which ‘only an interior void could have corresponded’* (Baudrillard, 1982: 4). This void will be anarchitecturally cut so as to carry out that which the architectural carcass of the Beaubourg declares but which ‘Beaubourg-Museum wants to hide’, Baudrillard asserts.

In a break with everything Matta-Clark had produced up to this point, the *clear* cut-out in the structure of the building, barely built, clad in its protective metallic

skeleton, would have lost all stratigraphic character and would have made a hole in that which replaces all inscription of *duration* within the spaces of life: namely, a *just-in-time temporality* whose surface connections are articulated with ‘the ideology of visibility, transparency, polyvalence, consensus, contact’ (Baudrillard, 1982: 4) which aligns the management of social relations with the principles of a *cultural regeneration* presiding over the urban renewal of the metropolis. We must note here the strong convergence between the neo-Gaullist truth of the Pompidou era, of which the Beaubourg was the ‘international’ shop-window (in response to a May ’68 which was no less so)—Matta-Clark calls it (see Moure, 2006: 183) the ‘general Gaullist Pompidou modernity orgy’—and a new *art context* whose tendency had been anticipated in New York by the progressive transformation of the *creative community* of an ‘artist ghetto’ into a pilot project for the new global economy (and not only that of the art market)—SoHo for short. Matta-Clark would have had no difficulty in recognizing the conditions of the acceleration of the global process in the integrated cultural circuits of the post-industrial metropolis proposed at Beaubourg as ‘the model of all future forms of controlled “socialization”’—a program that Baudrillard sums up, in a phrase with a most situationist ring to it, as that of the ‘retotalization of all the dispersed functions of the body and of social life (work, leisure, media, culture) within a single, homogeneous space-time’ (Baudrillard, 1982: 8).

With this in mind, it is quite understandable that the Paris Biennial should have refused (or relayed the Beaubourg’s refusal of) a project which—to continue mining a situationist vein that Matta-Clark felt very close to—would have effectively rendered this negation of life visible by *detouring the void* of a ‘Centre’ that his operation, in a reversal of the usual procedure, would have *reprocessed into a ruin of the present* before it had even been completed. If the actual intervention kept the Beaubourg in its *sights*, then, it could only do so by acting as a kind of arrow pointing beyond the ruined façades of the last surviving edifices in the ambient void, which become the anachronistic site of a no less ‘extravagant new standard in sun and air for lodgers’ (see Moure, 2006: 256). In this way the visual consumption proper to the museum institution preserved behind the tubular network of the culture-hypermarket could be inverted, in a most Duchampian manner, into an ‘Étant d’art pour locataire.’ A *locataire* which Matta-Clark spells *locatair*—once more in relation to Duchamp, *respirateur* of the *Air de Paris*—in the titles of his film, which also venture a *Conical Inter-sect*, now demoted to a subtitle.

Superimposing the ‘bookish’ abbreviation of *section* (=sect.) onto the anarchitectural cut and its (supposedly) ‘intersubjective’ construction of situations in the absence of any remaining ‘locataires’ (to whom one *gives a present* of a hole of life and light that could be no more than an *Étant-d’art* objected to its contradictory museification), the *sect* effect was guaranteed by way of the meta-irony in the field of the sign [*Du(-)champ du signe*] thereby mobilized against the new Centre’s ‘total universe of signals’ (Baudrillard, 1982: 8). The Duchamp-Effect is confirmed by the declination (or placing into variation) of further names for the intervention, names whose primary syntagm is given by ‘Quel con,’ in explicit reference to Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.*²⁶ The media-commercial play on a *Mona Lisa* reduced to the most common reproduction is thus referred back to the ‘contradictions’ of the Beaubourg-Museum, while the bringing back into play of gender (feminine/masculine, *con/cône*) runs through the *couple* of buildings (*quel cône!*) on the verge of being *shaved* in favor of the same. This is therefore incontestably a tribute to an artist—a great friend and accomplice of

his father, the painter Matta—who was Matta-Clark’s *Godfather*, and to whom he paid vibrant homage upon his death in 1968 by lacing the gravestones of a cemetery with a *Mile of String*, thus reviving a work of Duchamp’s that would become the object of a retrospective (under the direction of Jean Clair) on the occasion of the opening of the Centre Pompidou in 1977. But no less evident here is Matta-Clark’s anarchitectural difference in relation to the anartist who made no mystery of his sovereign apoliticism, and who in 1968 saw fit to remind us that ‘art is not like a political movement’. Propelled by the intersection into the (non-)place of the *hypercontemporary reprocessing* of art and culture, the problem becomes that of *the difference one can object to it*, when resistance to the ideology of cultural production no longer knows how to take any path other than a reactionary one, by setting forth a defence of art and of the artist with incontestably Duchampian overtones. As a Baudrillard (1982: 5) afflicted by ‘simulation’ writes, denouncing the humanist fiction of the culture around which the opponents of the Beaubourg had rallied: ‘Culture is a precinct of secrecy, seduction, initiation, and symbolic exchange, highly ritualized and restrained. It can’t be helped. Too bad for populism. Tough on Beaubourg’.

Something which, *in the field*, may suggest the necessity of a ‘godfathercide’, had it not already been carried out by that anarchitectural targeting, like a new ‘étant donné’, of an *otherwise* contemporary art, opposing to the Disneyland of the aesthetic dream (whether aristocratically distanced or democratically shared) a collective laboratory of practical fictions.

Notes

1. See the interview with Donald Wall in Moure (2006): 61. Note also Gordon Matta-Clark, ‘Completion through removal’, undated catalogue entry, in Moure (2006): 89.
2. Matta-Clark, ‘The earliest cutout works’, undated, in Moure (2006): 136. See the December 1974 interview of Matta-Clark with Liza Bear in reprinted in Moure (2006): 166.
3. See Castle (1979). There is thus a true *ruse of history* at work in the fact that the Matta-Clark Archive is today deposited in a Centre for Architecture. That one can retroactively judge this *necessary* does not contradict the proposition.
4. According to the full version of the interview with Donald Wall deposited at the CCA (Montréal) with Donald Wall (cited in Ursprung (2012): 30). Only an abridged version has been published, see Moure (2006).
5. Invited in 1976 within the framework of the exhibition ‘Idea as Model’ organized by the New York Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, Matta-Clark would attach photos of South Bronx buildings with smashed windows between the windows of the Institute—before breaking *from outside* all of the windows, with the use of an air rifle. His participation would be immediately suspended by Peter Eisenman, who went so far as to speak of a *Kristallnacht*—and had all of the windows replaced within the day.
6. In 1971 Matta-Clark, with Carol Goodden and several other artist friends (Suzy Harris, Tina Girouard, Rachel Lew) opened an alternative space/restaurant called *Food* situated in (what was to become) the SoHo neighborhood. Artists are at once the most virulent dissenters against it and its

involuntary agents, with the gentrification of what would be announced and architected, after 1973, in SoHo.

7. In the sense that Le Corbusier was able to write in a phrase that is still cited today: ‘To establish a standart [sic] is to exhaust all the practical and reasonable possibilities, to deduce a recognized type consistent with function, maximal return with minimum expenditure of means, manpower, and materials, words, forms, colors, sounds’. See Le Corbusier (2008): 186.
8. See Marianne Brouwer, ‘Laying Bare’, in Diserens (1993): 51–52.
9. Matta-Clark, interview with Liza Bear (1974) ‘Gordon Matta-Clark: Splitting the Humphrey Street Building’, *Avalanche*, December 1974; reprinted in Moure (2006): 172.
10. See Matta-Clark’s ‘Proposal for Anarchitecture’ (1974), Notebook, reproduced in Sussman (2007): 97, plate 41.
11. Reproduced in Mark Wigley, ‘Anarchitectures’, in von Ameluxen, et al (2012).
12. Matta-Clark, Notebook, in Moure (2006): 376–7 [italics mine].
13. Matta-Clark, ‘Our European Heritage’, Notebook, undated, in Moure (2006): 365. The note reads: ‘Anarchitecture refers to ways of functioning—we are anti-formal’.
14. Matta-Clark, Artcard headed ‘Anarchitecture’, reproduced in Moure (2006): final pages (unpaginated).
15. The house and surrounding grounds had been bought, not without a speculative aim, by Holly Solomon, the wife of the gallerist who was a very close friend of Matta-Clark. But the project of urban renewal was never completed. The Solomons would organize a bus tour to go visit *Splitting* following the other ‘works’ in June 1974.
16. Two photographs of these ‘remains’ would be presented in the small-format artist’s book (seventeen black and white photos, without text) made by Matta-Clark (reproduced in Diserens (1993): 170–174).
17. See Trisha Brown Company, *Man Walking down the Side of a Building* (1970) and *Walking on the Wall* (1971). Matta-Clark’s partner Carol Goodden danced in Trisha Brown’s company. *Splitting* would also mark the end of their relationship. See Matta-Clark’s interview with Liza Bear in Moure (2006): 175.
18. See Matta-Clark, Notebook ca. 1969–71, in Moure (2006): 75. In these fragmentary texts entitled ‘Cannibalism Suburbia’, Matta-Clark opposes to the ‘cannibalism’ of suburban gardens (‘Industrial garden estates’), industrially developed against all the ‘spontaneous forces of life’ (beginning with the forests) the need for a ‘renewed cannibalism’: ‘Now is the time for a renewed cannibalism...’, in which anarchitecture, in the form of an ‘*eat-a-ecture*’, will participate. Which refers us back in turn to the first ‘slices’ of wall cut out by Matta-Clark in the context of the running of the restaurant-cooperative *Food*: at which time he made, very performatively, a *Wall Sandwich!*
19. In a manuscript text bearing the title ‘Office Baroque’, Matta-Clark mentions the future construction of an ‘ANTWERP HILTON’. See Moure (2006): 228.
20. Note the Antwerp Catalogue (1977) in Moure (2006): 256-7. It recommends ‘eluding what I call snap-shot interpretation’.
21. Matta-Clark’s expression ‘throw-aways’ is found in his interview with Judith

- Russi Kirshner (February 1978) in Moure (2006): 319, 317. At the beginning of the interview, he recalls that ‘no one in America outside of New York has ever seen—very few people have ever seen—any of [his] projects’ at all’.
22. See Matta-Clark’s comments in Moure (2006): 319–321. Especially when he comments on ‘even with the people who have escaped the so-called “sculpture habit” by going into some sort of landscape, or extra-gallery, extra-museum type of territorial situation’.
 23. Introductory text to the film *Conical Intersect* by Gordon Matta-Clark and Bruno de Witt (1975, 18.40m, colour, silent, 16mm).
 24. See Matta-Clark’s interview with Elisabeth Lebovici in Sussman (2007): 132–3. He also notes ‘a silent “son et lumière”’, as we read in the titles of the film. See Matta-Clark interview with Judith Russi Kirshner in Moure (2006): 330.
 25. Gordon Matta-Clark, ‘Étant d’art pour locataire’ in Moure (2006): 182.
 26. See Matta-Clark’s interview with Gerry Hovagimyan in Jacobs (1985): 88.

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