

The Interruptive Spaces of Gordon Matta-Clark

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'It is not necessary to create a world, but the possibility of a world', Jean-Luc Godard, 1985.

Gordon Matta-Clark is a producer of architectural accidents. If architecture is meant to be built, Matta-Clark has instead replaced it with spaces of collapse and removal. His (here presented) interventions caused defences on the existing structures and led the given architecture to fail its initial goal of solving specific problems (stability, protection etc). Matta-Clark's 'building cuts' were actual holes on the building that tested the building's support system. Fundamental elements to the architecture became absent and challenged the building's stability. One could characterize this work as an assemblage of architectural 'errors', but in reality, Matta-Clark's actions were formal and aesthetic investigations on a tangible architectural vocabulary that targeted the symbolic and cultural status of architecture. They are comments on a conventional architectural system; a play at the very limits of property and its appropriation; of the proper and the improper. Can architecture be produced through destruction? What is the sense of ownership? What is the essence of a property? These are some of the questions that arise from this experimentation at the very edge of architecture's potentialities.

Places outside architecture, without architecture or extra-architectural were at the very core of these investigations. Matta-Clark referred to his spaces as 'interruptions': metaphoric gaps, voids, leftovers or undeveloped places; interruptions in our daily movement. These places demonstrate an alternative attitude towards building; one that attempts to erase any principles or foundations that could rationalize space. The crudeness of these interventions opposes any sense of good taste and design. These fragmented and therefore, 'improper' spaces challenge the classic conception of a coherent and well composed architectural space. This recognition of architecture's paradoxes allowed Matta-Clark to reject any spatial absolute. He passed through walls and doors, floors and ceilings, roofs and foundations. He deprived his audience of any fixed points that could relativize space and underlined the idea of a vital cut opposed to an organized system.

Gordon Matta-Clark's work refused the distinction between the 'the sitting room' and 'the street', the 'here' and 'there'. What he did was to redefine their relation by reinterpreting any given architecture. He managed through the interpretation of the existing (either as physical structure or a fixed idea) to address important architectural issues. Matt-Clark believed that: 'What we understand as building or see as the urban landscape is just this sort of middle zone...., that given ingredient which is somewhat useful and obedient, but is really just the beginning of speculations about what could be beyond it and what numbers of direction there could be'. Architecture became for him an indefinite, liberated form of expression, where every route becomes contradictory, paradoxical and finally possible.

Document 1: *Day's End* (1975)

Gordon Matta-Clark's Pier 52 intervention on Hudson River's warehouses was a series of large cuts into a 600-ft long metal hangar on the pier. Sections were removed from the floor and ceiling, along with portions of the western and southern sides of the building. The cuts managed to expose simultaneously, the river and sky, creating a changing sculpture of light out of the structure. Matta-Clark argued that he had created an indoor park in a previously decrepit space, but the piece felt dangerous to the visitors who were afraid to cross the large cuts. The police shut down the opening event and the artist faced an arrest warrant.

Document 2: *Splitting* (1974)

Holly's and Horace's Solomon house, in New Jersey, was a narrow two storey suburban house. Matta-Clark sliced a one-inch wide vertical line marking the exact middle of the house's longer axis. The cut extended from foundation to roof through the entire body of the house. It neatly and impeccably divided everything in its path: floors, walls, stairs, railings and landings. Shadows, light, weather were admitted into the house and liberated the typical American house. By opening up the house and organising collective viewings of it, Matta-Clark made the place accessible to an external kind of voyeurism that challenged the idea that architecture is there to protect and give shape to dreams of utilitarian perfection for a 'better' world.

Document 3: *Window Blow out* (1976)

In December 1976, Matta-Clark was invited by the Institute of Architecture to exhibit together with the New York Five in the show *Idea as Model*. His proposal was to place in every window casement of the Institute a photograph of some old or new building from the South Bronx of which the windows had been broken and vandalized. This way, he wanted to comment on vandalism as the social reality of many 'ideal' urban schemes. In order to avoid the pure aesthetisation of the project, he got the permission to break some of the windows of the Institute. But after a late party, he returned in the exhibition and shot holes in all of the windows of the building. The Institute was outraged. His action was one more expression of range against the architectural machine of development. The shooting aimed to mimic the despairing delinquency behind the endemic vandalism in the city.

Document 4: *Real Properties-Fake Estates* (1973)

Matta-Clark and a group of artists (the Anarchitecture group) bought and possessed during a period of years, parcels of gutter space property in Queens and Staten Island. They gathered written documentation, exact dimensions and full-scale photographs of these properties, but these were literally inaccessible. They were places that could be owned but never experienced and certainly never occupied. The plans of the sites themselves were schematic grids upon which property lines governed the real estate. The paradox of buying an unusable land as part of the exchange market functioned as a critique on the notion of property and land acquisition that were part of the architectural market.

Notes

¹ Jean-Luc Godard cited in Robert Stam (ed.), *Reflexivity in Film and Architecture, From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc-Godard*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

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