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Rethinking Urban Inclusion

Spaces, Mobilizations, Interventions

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The Misfit Eye: Scoping Space Inequality, Planned Obsolescence, Isolation and Commodification through the Eyes of Contemporary Art

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Abstract: Why have the problems of dwelling, urban living and built environment become intrinsic to a significant part of nowadays' artistic production? Why do so many artists use space as their medium and interact as creative users of space with the redundancies and contradictions of lived space? How can artworks ranging from portable objects, fixed images and built environments give an assessment of the reification of space in post-Fordist societies? I conjecture that through a critical inquiry into many of modern architecture's values, Contemporary Art (or, more materialistically speaking, the visual arts produced in our time of existence), has been, in a productive and creative way, addressing built spatiality, the physical awareness of space-time, the length of movement and stillness, and the problems and contingencies of belonging and indeterminacy, of permanence and isolation, of placement and displacement. I argue that the visual arts field has inquired, reconceived and reinterpreted the human dwelling, the tectonic and anthropological processes of construction and montage, with a clear perception that architecture works as a life mediator and lever, a purveyor of power and a far-reaching image of power. I have been studying a set of art works developed between 1960 to the present day by artists like Constant Nieuwenhuis, Claes Oldenburg, Hans Haacke, Gordon Matta-Clark, Kristof Wodzicko, Dan Graham, Vitor Burgin, James Casabere, and Angela Ferreira as examples of a bottom-up poetics which deals with such relational concepts as community, street, dwelling and utopia and also as examples of a deferred cultural counter-measure against the colonization of the public domain by the holy alliance between "Bureaucracy and Property" (Benevollo, 1979: 26), what David Harvey (2003) characterizes as "accumulation by dispossession" (pp. 145-152). In this paper, I debate the artworks developed by some of these artists claiming they are strong visual analogies of many of today's "dynamic orders and disorders"² (apud Atlee, 2007: 11) of urban space.

Keywords: Modernism, dwelling, architecture, ruin, monument

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² Gordon Matta-Clark: Notebook, estate of Gordon Matta-Clark, on deposit at the CCA, Montreal, as referred by James Atlee in *Towards Anarchitecture: Gordon Matta-Clark and Le Corbusier*, Tate papers Issue 7, 2007, p. 11 (PDF page number) (consulted on 09.03.2012, retrieved from <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier>). Gordon Matta Clark applies this wording to explain his methodological approach to the space problem where improvisation, un-planning and random decision became keystones next to the trained skills of studio designing.

Introduction

Like in the Greek Anphionic myth where the walls of Tebas were lifted by the melodies Anphyon played, in modern times the visual arts became the spiritual and playful source from which architecture took its prime-matter in the sense that the optical, tactile and sound bites of artistic modernism predicted (in a reflexive and catalyst sense) form and space building, later experienced and developed by the polysemic apparatus of architectural modernism. In his renowned and canonical book, *Space and Time: The Birth of a New Tradition* (1941), a guide book for modernist thinking, Siegfried Gideon balances as a kind of ontology of modern space-making, the cubist painting done by Picasso, *L'Arlesienne* (1912), next to Gropius's Bauhaus building (1925-26).³ Overlapping transparency and space-time as a fluctuating porosity, he would suggest,⁴ had their foundational and pictorial beginning in the Bateau Lavoisier's studio. Canvas was the Pandora box where cubomorphic design and spatial formlessness came out from, turning illusion into knowledge, concreteness into lightness and ornament into structural integrity.

On the antagonistic side of the International Style account, in the North American early 1970s, *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), Venturi, Scott Brown and Iznevor's reading of urban sprawl as a visual environment made out of Fordism and consumerist icons (function following or even obeying media) takes, as Venturi later on admitted (Dryansky, 2006: 129), as its basic role model the early 1960s re-worked photos produced by Edward Ruscha on the Los Angeles's sprawl.

In a certain sense, these examples reflect one side of the reciprocate exchange, the two-way traffic that has been running ever since media, as Beatriz Colomina (1992: 126; 2006: 21-30) put it so bluntly, became the main building block of advanced modernist architecture. Trained architects such as Eisenstein, Lissitzky, Friederich Kiesler, Roberto Matta-Echaurren, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Absalon stepped down from what they felt as a personal dead end into the poetics of the art field in the same way that artists like Tatlin, Malevitch, Theo van Doesburg, Mondrian, Fernand Léger, Moholy-Nagy, Kurt Schwitters, Constant Niuwenhuis, Robert Smithson, Hans Haacke, Walter de Maria, Daniel Buren, Vito Acconci, Dan Graham, Cildo Meireles, James Casabere, Ilya Kabakov, Thomas Demand, Julain Opie, Jacobo Castellano, Los Carpinteros, Andrea Zittel, Pello Irazu, Ângela Ferreira, and Rodrigo Oliveira, in a specific moment of their artistic biography, looked deep into architecture (built, lived or just media) to provide them with the answers they could not find in their own training.

If, in the early heroic roundabouts of modernism, advanced architects took the non-Euclidian reframing of pictorial depthness and the destruction of conical perspective as a source for new unbalanced and eye-catching ideas on three-dimensional visuality and real-space perception, in the last 40 years the process has reversed. Travelling from a narrative

³ Concerning this account, see Mertens (2006) and Colomina (2003).

⁴ It should be noted that later on Colin Rowe (*Perspecta*, Vol. 8, pp. 45-54) would overpass Siegfried Giedion and Gyorgy Kepes' conceptualization of architectural transparency, pointing out that it was founded exclusively in the "physical qualities" of construction materials (glass, plastic) and kept that same superimposition in the limits of the optical experience of a passing observer receiving visual information rather than one moving and filling the built space with his presence; the experience of transparency was offered by the glazing nature of the Bauhaus and less by its spatial organization whose layers were not multi-directional, Rowe argued.

format to a structural autotelic object, from this to a process and eventually a contextual encasement, Contemporary Art or, more materialistic speaking, the visual arts produced in our time of existence, have addressed spatiality the physical awareness of space-time, the length of movement and stillness, and the problems and contingencies of belonging and estrangement, of permanence and isolation, of placement and displacement.

And by different paths artists have reached the doorstep of architecture. So, today, many artists can be related to the concept of “illegal architect” proposed by Jonathan Hill (2003: 135), a somewhat by-product of the kind of conscious/creative user and doer that Henri Lefebvre was probably discussing when he claimed in his spatial triad (Lefebvre, 1972: 154-155; 1991: 33) the need to reinvent the duality citizenship-urban space beyond vertical decision-making and the social readymade, and the need to go beyond the representation of space into developing space as a topology of practices and representations.

Why have the problems of dwelling, urban living and built environment become intrinsic to a significant part of artistic production nowadays? And again, what leads so many artists to use space as their medium? And here this practice doesn't only point towards the now mandatory white cube, the self-indulgent, abstract and depleted whiteness of exhibition space, but lived, used, transformed, grounded, geographical, and political (here in the broader sense of *polis*, of rooting and convergence) space.

I would put forward as probable cause the fact that for a variety of artistic endeavors Architecture, both as a professional activity and an historical reality, works as a life mediator and lever, a purveyor of power and as such it has become a far-reaching image of power. In general, artists speak of Architecture as a strong depiction of civilization and for many it is not just the vessel that carries the meanings and dialectics of Civilization as a memory bank but the Being itself: Human condition expressed in its totality. Malevitch, for one, foresaw back in 1923 as his ‘blind’ *Architektons* and *Planitas* shapes were being developed, that Architecture had an overall social horizon that the remaining visual arts were yet far from achieving; Architecture became for modernist artists and still remains for contemporary artists the place where extremes like a philosophical speculation or a childhood memory, institution and encampment, live their days in a built humanized environment, in a *maison close* with transparent walls or walls of images (Colomina, 1992: 126-128; 2006: 22).

Built environment mimics the properties of the cultural time of its development and in some way it works as a strong oxymoronic image where ideology never fades out; sometimes it answers and to others it asks to whom does the world belong to, who is master and who is servant, who decides and who obeys. A building besides being an autonomous object (aesthetics, durability and efficiency in real time action) is also evidence to a number of features such as:

- a) the class-oriented possession and use of space with its subsequent economic and political ranking and zoning,
- b) the perception of lived space (public and private) as a medium originated by repetition and agitation inside power dynamics,
- c) the unconscious, deterministic or antagonistic accounts of space that describe it as an anthropomorphic and gregarious concept, and
- d) the behavioral response expected from built form (function inferred as a finality or form becoming redundant and scaling down the need for a one-way body of purposes).

We could paraphrase Baudelaire argument that architecture is a mnemotechnic of the human, of its complexities and contradictions, as much as Art still prevails as a

mnemotechnic of Beauty (Baudelaire, 1976: 290; see also Foster 2002: 67, 71). Modernism in the visual arts as well as in architecture became a process where this return, this memory practice (buildings becoming subtexts in the life of other buildings), was intensified by displaying the gains and losses of industrialization and of Taylorism (turning sometimes what was flat and dull into something significant, essential). This technique of remembrance happened by both fetishizing and refusing progress in the same creative act, by overdetermining or by rejecting the primal scene, the natural instincts, and the ‘carnality’ of the individual in favor of the visual vibrations of mass culture (the savage mind exposed to the billboard and the commuter timetable) by re-dimensioning objects as living things and making machines and artificial environments gain an antropogenetic core needed and celebrated as conveyors of a new barbarism.

Today we look at the twentieth century modern built space as a dialectics between form and experience; a course that maintained a productive relationship with its high and low anthropological achievements. The development of a more-than-natural *modus vivendi* embodied by the Americanization of urban life, the reification of human work as self-control and assembly line obedience, is also observed in the shelves of the drugstore or in the arm’s length of the *Frankfurt kuchen*, the separation between workplace and dwelling so dear to modernists (whether positioned in the arts or in architecture) and the overlapping of countryside by suburbia – all these facts exist as collateral, sometimes unexpected and others planned, traces of routine modern building. One could argue that abstraction (geometry, cosmos, beauty had a savage outcome: serialization. But, on the other hand, the realism that was brought out of the physical and creative design experience of architects established new parallels between what we call life and the ongoing condition of Art. Abstraction, one could argue again, this time in collusion with History, had a Janus-faced productive outcome: the merger of the subjective and the social. So Le Corbusier’s contemplative voyeurism, the outside world looked upon from the window, enhancing a picturesque, dream-like worldview, was also the edge from where subjectiveness was summoned to its correspondences in the social realm. So the four-dimensional synthetic cubism (essence and object narrative), despite being projected into space-time entropy and into the panoptics of the workplace, was given the chance to turn the beholder, the user, into a disbeliever, to encourage a misfit eye towards the accepted, the naturalized. Translucency, playing hide and seek with the empty and the full of new buildings, exposed the cultural and economic crossroads between property and privacy: gentrified possession (of the world, of identity, of legitimacy) is far more complicated to dislodge when a closed door becomes a screen. The androcentric vision of the bourgeois home as experienced in the photogenic observatory of Le Corbusier’s Villas or in the “internal” Domum Theatrum of Adolf Loos (Colomina, 1992: 80) or even in the Farnsworth “skin and bones” aquarium works as a strong reminder of a gender (and also racial and cultural) unconscious in the process of space-making. Space is a human object; the functionalization of the street as space of speed and production, or in antithesis, a space of chance and unproductive actions, as modernist accounts so many times sanctioned and also vilified, actually relates in the mileage of its scarcity and abundance (the synchronism of cash corners and retail strips) to the impoverishment of public space as a democratic tool and to the ever (but not inevitable) dominant entente between state bureaucracy and property.

Architecture acquired greater significance as a dynamic stage from where many contemporary artists question the conditions of material existence and creatively transcend the fragmentation of everyday experience from within. Architecture became a spiritual subject, a built ‘discourse’ of how art occupies and fills community life through image and theatrics, through productiveness and leisure environment. It has also become a target because, as

viewers, dwellers and users, artists have appropriated the subject of spatial organization and spatial practices, so architecture became sighted as a short-lived form shaped by space-time and shaping it (shaping the multitude of perceptions, shortcutting the distance between subject and object) through the metabolism of place (of former life, of lived experience and memory). Clearly, for artists, this paper will argue, Architecture became raw material and poetics, worldview and incompleteness.

Focusing on this theme, I will address a group of specific artworks produced by North American artist Gordon Matta-Clark, (b.1943-d.1978), *Conical Intersect or Etant donné pour locataire* (Paris, 1975), and Portuguese/South African artist Ângela Ferreira, *Khayelitsha* (1991) and *Maison tropicale* (2007). These artworks provide the material evidence to argue that advanced Art can confront in the public sphere the role performed by Western aesthetics, class differentiation, serialization, property laws and bureaucracy in the making of our lived environment without falling into *agit-prop* rhetoric or into the realm of congratulatory marketing and ornamental passiveness.

Case Study no. 1: Gordon Matta Clark: “you have to walk...” or the gymnastic realism of the cutting edge

The metapsychology of Gordon Matta-Clark’s art was to embrace the abandoned. He worked in old buildings, neighborhoods in a state of rejection. He would nurture a building that had lost his soul.”

Les Levine

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978) was a North American artist best known for his performative and surgical subtraction of space on condemned buildings. A “mezzy minimalist”, as John Baldessari would call him, a fearless character of an unofficial “Urban agit-prop”, as described later in a 1985 article by artist Dan Graham.

An artist, I should point out, whose primary artifacts no longer exist. In her monographic study, Pamela M. Lee (2000) defines Gordon’s (henceforth referred to as G.M-C) artistic rationale as a “mode of production (...) bound up with the work’s destruction” (Lee, 2000: xiii), yet she separates the sacrificial finality of G.M-C autopsy cuts on buildings that could never grow old, from the demolition culture associated with the violent will power of real estate economics. The anthropological and non-productive negativity play that he developed (construction/destruction as a process of creating phenomenological ‘room’ [*raum*] out of the alienation of urban fabric) was in a clearly opposite path than the negativity played by the capitalistic processes of space alienation by time. He was not ‘talking’ about the collapse stage of a dead building (actually none of his cuttings triggered any *tabula rasa*). In fact, the process was more unclear since his interventions had simultaneous foresights: from one perspective, observers could relate the space appropriation/alteration to resuscitation, a rebreathing that allowed the buildings of his “enactments” to endure beyond any mournful stillness, beyond even the daily routine of transience and concealment. From another perspective, G.M-C played within the limits of construction and deconstruction. From his fieldwork, sawing, cutting, extracting, removing, and opening, he made an experience on the idea of *irreversibility*: looking at the exact moment when built becomes unbuilt, such as Robert Smithson had done with his *Partially Buried Woodshed* (Kent, Ohio, January 1970),

questioning the built object as an absolute and exposing its unfinished and metabolic materiality.

The “*ruinments*” (G.M-C own wordplay) were a five years’ enduring experience, the physical expression of a perseverant and self-reliant force of nature; his building cuts experience was full of ups and downs, of misinterpretations; it started with *Bronx Floors* (1973), went through his work manifesto *Splitting* (1974), and finally ended with the *Circus or the Caribbean Orange* (1978) project, which was interrupted by his premature death with pancreatic cancer.

Yet his provoking and sometimes poorly understood sculptural statements are intertwined with many other features; he was an activist of a neighborly and communal use of the city, he strongly advocated and practiced – and this is a focus point that relates to this symposium – the concept of *a city for all made by all*. He was deeply involved in the gathering and consolidation of an alternative artistic community, an open and progressive perception and praxis surrounding the link between citizenship and urban belonging. *Civitas Augences* (the city as a productive magnet for a plurality of beings) and multitask social interactions were the melting pot of many of his collaborations, such as the Food artist-run canteen (1971-73); the 112 Greene Street gallery project; the Anarchitecture loosely organized group (1973-74) casted by Suzanne Harris, Richard Landry, Tina Girouard, Jene Highstein, Richard Nonas and many others; his *Fresh Air Cart project* (1972); or his abstruse acquisition of small and impossible to build parcels of land in New York City, Queens boroughs, which he would call *Reality Properties: Fake Projects* (1974).

The wordplay *Anarchitecture* is somewhat metaphorical of Architecture double bind as Art (space as object) and ‘place-making’ (space as time and history). Through aesthetics, i.e., photogene and appearance, architecture keeps out the context of social demise and reification but as place making, it uncovers the rejected, the hidden, it becomes memory. Anarchitecture is the hidden and collateral damages of humanized environment becoming architectural and anedoctical surrogates: the disintegrative, the annihilation, the entropic, the overpowering of commodity, the “cosmogonic intranscendancy of human creations, the surmounting path of disorder and fragmentation by accumulation”.

His interest on space and specifically built and structured space relates also to the fact that he was a trained architect formed at Cornell, “this prison on the hill” as he would describe it early on his staying (Papapetros, 2007: 72). He studied during Colin Rowe’s tenure (which spanned between 1962, G.M-C’s freshman year, and 1990), a controversial and prolific academic period when Cornell’s architectural teaching became known as *Académie Corbu* since Rowe’s allegiance to scoping Le Corbusier as an historical continuity of classical architecture was such that he would picture him as the modernist version of Palladio.

G.M-C’s slow path to architecture, however, was not a child dream coming true but a crossroads and shared decision with his father. His perseverance on the course was somewhat guided by extrinsic influences and G.M-C’s remorseful feeling that people expected some kind of success from him (Papapetros, 2007: 71). His father’s insistence, in a decisive letter where he insisted on the idea that “nowhere” could also be read as “now here”, and that the sense of loss and disenchantment of G.M-C could be corrected by a cognitive and conscious positioning – you don’t know where you’re going but you know where you stand, know what you’re capable of doing, know your dislikes and fears; so architecture was not a passion but just space-time positioning, a *know who you are* but make sure you get a degree.

As a student between 1962-1968 (with an one year interruption in 1964) Gordon Matta-Clark was probably exposed to the paradigm of abstract functionalism (as well as its many nemeses, namely Rowe’s interest on nineteenth century Eclecticism and on more aesthetically

attentive and pluralist architectural production), which enticed the logocentric and isotropic zonification of town and the critique of the *flâneur* and of the unproductive roaming streetscape. He probably heard also about the Athens charter, the modern architecture manifesto, where the separation between car and walker became paramount to any possible human development; and where autopia, Fordism, *horizontal and vertical suburbia*, formal austerity – in which form tracked everything but itself – and open space were viewed as a new form of panoptics, a new way of looking inwards and outwards which had a cubist and Bentham utilitarianism descent; a new way of keeping a vigilant eye on the neighbor, on the co-worker; a new form of self-censorship. All these factors were in motion in many of the new landmarks being built in the New York area; surely in the curricula lectures he would hear about the modern house concept, how structural lightness, window spanning and unity between detail and totality made living spaces more alive and more livable. And he himself, a child of the 1950s, would include in that porosity and transparency a new window and *omnibus* set, the television. Probably he heard ambiguous accounts about how wrong, outdated, slow and autophagic historical towns were becoming (How did he relate that to his New York hometown ups and downs under Robert Moses? Or, later on, how did he react to Lower Manhattan passing into the realm of the omnibus and monumental WTC?) and how the inner city, the old urban settlement, was in urgent need of being saved from real estate developers and “routine-functionalists”. The year 1964, the year he spent away from Cornell, was also a special year at the MoMA as Bernard Rudofsky would curate an exhibition of vernacular and non-Western built architecture which was named *Architecture Without Architects* – was G.M-C a visitor? If so, what were the impacts and the questioning it enhanced on him about modern building design and the role of popular culture in the production of space? Could it be that, like Derain and Picasso in Trocadéro back in 1908 marveled at African plasticity and visual force, he wondered if these were not the real processes of place-making?

He probably got some early sound bites on contextualism, collage, and was aware of dissent and discrepancies within the C.I.A.M’s participants and a sense of incompleteness and disagreement between paper and reality focused by some of Rowe’s critique on modernist urban fabric – although G.M-C described in a 1976 interview with Donald Wall, Rowe’s pedagogical philosophy as a kind of priesthood (Papapetros, 2007: 72). He could also sense on the drawing board the dilatory distance between creative design and corporate decision-making (Buckminster Fuller would deplore this commodification of the architect as early as 1968); this can work as an hypothesis of the conceptual and agonistic cloud where his schooling was produced (Owens, 2007: 163-173).

Can we exclude from his future work the heterodox indoctrination of his early academic years? Dissent is a word we come about when we learn that the partial and surgical disembodiment of dead buildings was performed by someone who was trained to construct, to organize space, to assemble things together in a coherent and performative way so culture, economics and family could continue their own achievements beyond alteration – and we now know that all breaking apart in modernism was produced by someone who used to be a believer and an expert or still was one in an unconscious way. From Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907) to Constant’s *New Babylon* (1953-1974), whether the crisis of depicted reality or that of urban form and the way humans live, the prevailing fact is that authors were less interested in the future and much more interested in relearning the past so they could adjust and correct the inner contradictions of the present.

So here we refer to dissent in an ontological sense, a mix and match between praxis and poetics, as Gordon Matta-Clark’s operations were very much related to primordial concepts of

human space: he drilled, excavated, expunged, subtracted, cut, dismantled but also filled in, occupied the thingness of an artificial resource in the same way that early human communities would explore and transform the topography and mimic nature so that they could stay and survive.

Gordon took the urban building in the same way a mountain, a landscape or even a climate disability was addressed creatively by nomadic or enduring communities; the boiling fact was that for a late twentieth century nomad, the real lived landscape was the urban space, the city, its interstices and hideouts, its passageways and unplanned playgrounds, its anonymous, filled or emptied, spaces. This late modern New Yorker Amphyon didn't need to build from scratch so he decided to display the already built – a mixture of bio-constructivism (the volumetric imitation of nature's erosion and depletion processes; change as slow disappearance) and readymade (as found object and recontextualization) can be detected here.

We should also consider another biographical element, already somewhat referred; i.e., a few facts that might us help understand G.M-C's critical stance before the "storm of progress". He was the son of Chilean surrealist painter and former architect Roberto Matta-Echaurren; he was nested in the exiled and nonconformist surrealist New York community, he knew people like Duchamp (his godfather), Kiesler, Breton and many other agents of surrealism, not just from the bookshelves or museum and gallery walls but from real live experiences.

For surrealism, building is a poetical metabolic exploration of the organic and the inorganic. The city (*la ville*), the aggregate of buildings and streets, is esteemed as an disjunctive *cadavre-exquis*; it is from this discontinuous corpse produced by estranged authors, from this mixture of brothel and communion mess, as Baudelaire would put it, that planners and bureaucrats like hasty housewives try to break away by "correcting" and "cleaning" out the ever pervading dust and inadequacies of real indeterminate and unproductive forms of life and of space occupation, by imposing "quantitative spatial practices" (Stone-Richards, 2005: 256). Yet the city is, above all, the place where those who conceive life as a far from imaginary caesura of conventionality are active and approachable.

Surrealist novels like Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) or André Breton's *Nadja* (1928) explore the "undoing of space (*dessaisissement*)" (Stone-Richards, 2005: 256) as an effective mean to experience place through the symbolic and iconographic deciphering of chartered and organized space, specifically through the erotic collage of dream into the urban fabric.

There is also in G.M-C's artistic attitude a Baudelairian grip closed in to the surrealist valorization of the outmoded as raw artistic material. Baudelaire was a disbeliever of the idea of progress. He sensed that modernity was a collusion of two storms: permanence and novelty, playing and struggling in an uneven game. Change existed and dwelled in a world covered by conventions and traditions; everything new had to become and come from an environment of things and ideas already made. It was just a question of inverting or adjusting the paradigms: marrying love with carnality, *Aufklärung* and bourgeois ideals with Satanism, family with Sapphic love. It was just a question of looking into the glamourized picture of modernity for what was mutant and altered, for what did not react to the aesthetics of progress.

G.M-C's building cuts are reflexive captions of this physical and material sense of disorder; his works also nurture an informal (a calculated absence of form) and an anthropological perception of urban isolation, voyeurism and physical bareness in the space-time conjuncture of late modernity. No longer seen as an absolute entity, space becomes unclear. Like the double-faced cubist portrait where wholeness is displaced (Mertins, 2011:

51), G.M-C's cuts turn the wholeness of built fabric into a multifaceted open yet illegible construct.

This can be seized in the twofold experience of his 1975 Parisian intervention, *Conical Intersect or Ettant donné pour locataire*. Production and reception, the making of and the concrete experience of his project showed how ruin, entropy as built form, can reach new meanings, i.e., "remain alive" through creative and intelligent artistic interventions, but it also showed the contextual limits of these interventions.

In a counter-clockwise almost agonistic rhythm and depending mainly on his workforce and traditional construction tools, G.M-C produced a conical and ocular centric concavity; this was done in a tight schedule between September 24 and October 10, 1975. However, unlike his previous New York cuttings, in particular the Day's end (Pier 52) "indoor water park" experience (as he called it) which forced G.M-C to elope to Europe to avoid some serious legal problems with the New York Port Authority, this extraction was done within the law but not without some backdrops (initially G.M-C proposed a radical intervention in the then-already-iconoclastic building site of the CNAM – the Beaubourg project designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers). *Conical Intersect* appeared as a clearly identified and legitimized artistic contribution to the French Biennale. However, he was not aware of the past life of plateau Beaubourg and how local passersby, preserved from the glories and mundane credits of advanced art research, saw his conical excision as a metaphor of the enduring gentrification and modernization of the Halles and the 4th arrondissement. The hole that could be seen opening and exposing the inner and secluded parts of the building (architectural volume no longer working or existing as a shell to be filled with closed rooms but as the "dematerialization of all solid traces" dividing what is hidden from what is visible, an unheimlich reading of *Le Plan libre* [Free plan] and *La Facade libre* [Free façade], Le Corbusier's spatial concepts originally voiced in a brochure edited for the 1927 Stuttgart Weissenhoff housing show) reminded viewers of the famous *Trou des Halles*, the lunar landscape produced by the demolition of the Halles Market and Slaughterhouse and its neighboring working class dwellings and low-income retail shops (see Lee, 2000: 185-197).

In his re-scaling and deliberate extracting of significant tectonic parts of two anonymous seventeenth-century bourgeois households waiting a definite and compulsory demolition, G.M-C enhanced a hidden problem for theoretical voyeurs and short-time users of the Parisian background: its governing powers were still exerting the commodification and aesthetization of space initially inaugurated by Baron Haussman, the controversial 'partisan and designer' of Napoleon III urban renewal.

So the discourse of the historical city as a 'lost paradise' enters the neo-cubist abstract empire of the inorganic and the immaterial and one cannot avoid observing that this path turns the conical figure into a visual counterpart of Louis Aragon's 1928 *Le Paysan de Paris*, his poetical-journalistic-symbolic inquiry to another condemned Parisian urban environment, *Le Passage de L'opera*.

G.M-C addresses in a different and intricate tactic the figure-ground spatial relation developed by Western visual arts, in particular, by cubist and post-cubist pictorial forms (Crow, 2003: 113-114). In a sense, this absent three-dimensional geometrical figure, *Conical Intersect*, metaphorically indicated by secondary images (the cuts) puts in evidence and showcases in a inwards-outwards dynamic the decisive factors behind the social production of the modern urban environment: as *figure*, the houses explore the eyewitness-voyeuristical nature of the baudelairian flaneur; as *ground*, Le trou des Halles stands for amnesia, non-image, mass extinction and mass production, in short, the context becomes a noun, a moving and talking picture, or, as Louis Aragon would put it, a "moving tattoo". *Conical Intersect* can

also be read as an unexpected *social condenser* (a term coined in 1928 by Soviet architect Mozei Ginzburg) that frames in the artistic event, the social complications of urban renewal and the communicational limits of public art objects and pure visuality.

Case study no. 2: Angela Ferreira's spatial metaphors

Unlike Gordon Matta-Clark, Portuguese-Mozambican-South African artist Ângela Ferreira (b.1958), whose art works have been a recurrent presence in my research (Pousada, 2009; Pousada, 2011), doesn't have academic training on architecture. Yet we can clearly scope in many of her works, such as *J.J.P. Oud/Two Houses* (2001) and *Maison Tropicale* (2007), a critical and imaginative approach to the retroactive effects of modernist architecture in the sense that she sets them within our contemporary perception and interaction with urban space's rhetoric: oppression, obedience, cooperation, submission, dissent, contradiction and upsurge can embody built forms and have a dynamic purpose in the metabolic processes of urban space.

Angela Ferreira's artwork reassesses how contemporary sculpture can mediate/deal with *subjectivity* (in her specific case, the critical perception of the readymade speech that envelops modern architecture as an impossible narrative; her own questioning of the crustaceous and die-hard aspects of colonial ideology, Lusophonia, in the making of Portuguese modern identity and its unconcealed present existence) and *narrative* (storytelling about an object [her parents' house in Mozambique] a community, even about the demise of a community self or the suppression of memory – African of European origin and their diaspora) without becoming a surrogate.

She's been an attentive outsider focusing on European modernism tensions and unresolved polarities. One recent example of her "factography" on the casting of lived space between utopia and historical context is her *Maison Tropicale* (2007) project. As in other previous experiences (*J.J.P. Oud/Two houses*, Oporto-Rotterdam, 2001), she takes as material base to her work the misadventures of an architectonic object; in this particular case, the nomadism *fin de siècle* of three replicas of a one-family prototype dwelling developed by the talented master of pre-fabricated constructions Jean Prouvé (*Maisons Portiques*, Issoire, 1939-40; *Maison Standard*, Meudon, 1949-50) and his brother Henri Prouvé. These replicas were designed to be sited in tropical and subtropical regions still under French colonial administration, respectively in Niamey, the capital of Niger, and in Brazzaville, Congo's capital. Mechanical construction (an operational relation between static frameworks and climate control), transport logistics (the *maisons* were fabricated in France and travelled by flight to Africa) and business opportunity (to promote the French metallurgical industry of aluminum) were defining vectors of this architectural project but, in the long-run, post-colonial Niger and Congo saw the decay and engulfment of these high-tech structures. They became ghosts of a modern past where the words uttered in 1931 at the first French congress on colonial urbanism by Albert Sarraut, "(...) for now on the



Ângela Ferreira, *Maison tropicale*, 2007. The neo-cubist framed corridor (details); a video still showcasing one of Prouvé's Prototypes standing in New York. Photographs taken by the paper author at the 2008 Angela's exhibition Hard Rain Show in Berardo Museum, Lisbon.

European building will be supported by colonial pilotis!” (functionalism adapted to passive tropics) never came around. Migration flow and speculative rescue, Judith Rodenbeck calls it neocolonial repatriation (Rodenbeck, 2010: 108), by a French businessman excised these buildings from their ruinous post-mortem reality and turned them into real estate super-valued trophies, exhibited in the Seine and Hudson riverbanks, as newly found archeological artifacts of an unfinished and outmoded dream: the modernist architectural dream.

Her creative answer to this event was an art project originally exhibited at the 2007 Venice Biennial which embraced two sections: the first had an anthropological reading developed through the audiovisual and photographic material that Ângela Ferreira produced during her visit to the Prouvé’s prototypes original backgrounds. In this travel and inquiry she was accompanied by filmmaker Manthia Diawara, who directed a small documentary disclosing in their promenade on architectural absence and everyday routine on the historical and spatial epilogues of the estranged buildings. Finally, this research materialized into an object with neocubist vibrations, the corridor/container (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). It’s with this object that Ângela Ferreira poetically represents the thingness of the *maisons tropicales*, disassembled and numb, resting, waiting to become a conceptual baiting on the relation between truth and power, authenticity and disguise, memory and commodity. In many of her works, it has become evident how advanced architectural design and artistic achievement have accommodated, willfully or unconsciously, urban planning politics, becoming not only aesthetic recipients where ideology finds its way but a far-from-dispassionate partner in the top-down decision making concerning the routines of space and the serialization of intimacy and privacy.

Far from finger pointing as an armchair general the wrongdoings – the “you asked for it” of modernist idealism – what one infers from her “visual analogies” is a productive questioning of the *a priori* concept of “architectural autonomy”. She posits a valid disbelief on the conceptualization of architecture as a thing in itself, as something that intensifies and persists in a closed territory (the architectural form and its variations and mutations). She reviews a contradiction already detected and debated by the twentieth century historiography on modern architecture. From Manfredo Tafuri to Beatriz Colomina, the historical accounts consent that the new ways of living dreamt, designed and built by Adolf Loos, J.J.P. Oud, Walter Gropius, Richard Neutra, Le Corbusier, Bruno Taut, Ernst May, and Mies Van der Rohe, new ways thought as facilitators of historical change, thought to overcome the separation between living space and working space, and the millenary opposition between town and countryside, provided instead a space-time ground for the naturalization of bureaucratic and economic reification, social control and social isolation, colonialism and, in nowadays post-Fordist societies, gentrification as a role model for urbanscaping. She does that review in the context of her own positioning as an artist born in a former European colony (Mozambique) where modern spatialization lived next door to non-Western modes of space production and where the modern built environment was the public image of colonialism. The fact that she lived and studied in South Africa during the last years of the Apartheid regime is also a significant fact, as will be shown as *Khayelitsha-sites and services* (1991-1992) and the *Werdmuller Centre-Studio version* (2010) are discussed.



Ângela Ferreira, *Sites and services*, pictures taken by the artist in Khayelitsha, Capetown, S.A. 1991-92. Photographs taken by the paper author at the 2008 Ângela’s exhibition Hard Rain Show in Berardo Museum, Lisbon.

Her originality has a double nature: The first one is the way she short-circuits the borderline between architectural spatialization and non-architectural/artistic spatialization by producing objects that work as material and iconographic interpretations of the after-effects, whether haptic, cultural or anthropological, of space design and space decision-making. Her work is a clear-cut example of Robert Smithson's Non site concept: "A metaphor (deprived of any expressive or naturalistic subjects) between a syntactic construct and a composite of ideas" (Smithson, 1996: 295).

The second one is the way she relates modernist built form with her own autobiographical perception of urban life as a fragmented and erratic hide and seek game between property laws, racial laws, post-colonial trauma, productive citizens, and creative use of space, family memories and unfinished identity. Two significant references, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, rise up in her art works in the way she weaves phenomenological transparency and its neo-plasticist genealogy (*Duas Casas/Two houses*, J.J.P. Oud, 2001), modern space as the kinetics between inside and outside (*Random walk*, 2005) and "skin and bones" pragmatism (*Khayelitsha, sites and services*, 1991-1992 [see Figures 4, 5 and 6]; and *Maison Tropicale*, 2007).

Yet they appear not just as decisive references for the ideological contextualization of European utopian design thinking inside her artistic work, but as supporting actors for her specific study on how built form relates to the dispossession of individual autonomy in community dialectics (her own account as a living witness of the post-colonial endeavors of African Europeans, specifically Portuguese migration to South African Apartheid in the mid-1970s). Mies and Le Corbusier, as well as Donald Judd and Anthony Caro, provide her with a "clean drawn (...), clean countoured (...) Good Design" (Greenberg, 1995: 180, 184) apparatus, with the formal surplus that she fills in with a serious questioning of how patriarchal and parochial visions of life framework and hands tie the way we relate emotionally and mnemonically with built space and already non-existent space. In short, how material emancipation is alienated from spiritual emancipation.

Khayelitsha-sites and services (1991-1992) and *Werdmuller Centre-Studio version* (2010) are two of her art projects/works with interesting features to be addressed in the context of this discussion. They both relate to the same urban spatiality, Cape Town, South Africa, and to a gentrified reading of space where architectural content and altered, unpredictable human context were treated as separate constructions. Both urban placements were originally designed as immobile objects, iced images.

Khayelitsha-sites and services refers to a particular place in the space-time continuum: the abstraction/gestalt of functionalist/Fordist urban planning migrating into a real space based on the political economy of Apartheid and the prescribed urban movements and dwelling logistics of its racist Group Areas Act. The almost formless planar field seen in Figures 4, 5, and 6 is located in the township suburban rings of Cape Town, South Africa (on Google Earth we can still perceive the grid behind the Babelic occupation of the Township). The word itself comes from Xhosa and it means "new home". This designation underscores, in the Group Areas Act political context, such concepts as segregation, pass books, limited urban circulation for non-white, curfew, displacement, forced removal, tribalization of the non-white education system, racist leveling of the non-white curriculae and criminalization of non-white working skills. The area was originally built and prepared in 1985, in the western outskirts of Cape Town, which was then one of the most segregated cities of South Africa. Its main function was to redirect through compulsory measures the Xhosa migration into Cape Town. The area was provided with a rudimentary water supply infrastructure and with some sanitary facilities localized at strategic points. In 1991, Khayelitsha stood in the pictures

depicted by Ângela Ferreira as an empty, stilled territory; nowadays, it stands as one of the fastest growing and poorest suburbs of Capetown, with almost half a million residents.

Khayelitsha's monosemic and low-cost industrial-built materiality became an object-subject with a dualist presentation: a group of documental photography, laconic, reduced to a post-human, austere and anti-narrative perception, and small-scale, portable and composed three-dimensional built objects.

This sculpture experience offers a set of visual impressions that recall the codes of Donald Judd's *Specific objects* (1967-1968), yet we should not fall into hasty conclusions: in the small floor objects there is clearly a reasoning between Khayelitsha as place, as a discernable social reality, and Khayelitsha as pure physicality, as a built, unconscious and unexpected statement. It is the latter which Judd reiterates in his seminal text (Judd, 2005: 184-187) about the thingness of the built artistic object and where he challenges the otherness, the subordinative content locked in European modernism. This concreteness and behavioral response to the phenomenological and syntactic features of the artistic object become primary outlines.

The next of Ângela's intervention/assertion, a rotating scale model, a kind of metaphor on space-time, concerns a retail and office building, *The Werdmuller Centre* (1969-76) designed by South African modern architect Roelof Uytendogaardt (b.1933-d.1998) and bounded by a different part of the same urban environment where the Khayelitsha "ready-made" gridded township surface was raised. Both structures are legacies of the Group Areas act which was launched in full power over the Cape Town metropolitan area in the initial years of the shopping center opening. One, Khayelitsha, is a consented legacy of Apartheid and the other, The Werdmuller Centre is an unplanned damaged victim. This paper's thinking is also construed from the video recording of Ângela's contribution for the international panel discussion at Tate Modern, "After Post-colonialism. Transnationalism or Essentialism?" (Tate Modern, London, 08.05.2010).

The building is sited in Claremont Main road and has been for many years a love and hate story ranging from a 'non-functional, doesn't get out of the way, icon' to a 'piece of activism, a moment in world history where sculptural design embraces the aspiration of a democratic South Africa'. A failed retail project motivated, some would argue, by design problems (poor space and logistics management for would-be shoppers) and by periods of commercial decline and slow, this was a hulking development that turned this Cape Town area from a middle-class retail strip into an informal commercial center mainly targeting the low-income commuters of the Claremont railway station. Communications project manager Carole Koblitz (Tolly, Haikman and Berman, 2007: 6) describes the Claremont Main road as a "San Andreas fault separating success from economic disaster".

The programmatic objectives of Uytendogaardt's architectural thinking had a clear Le Corbusier fingerprint best exerted by his famous five points conceptualization of modern architecture (pilotis, free façade, free plan, horizontal ribbon windows, terrace garden). *The Werdmuller Centre* (1969-76) was supposed to work as an inclusive non-segregated space whose ambiguous relation with street life, which was expected to persist into the building's inland, and labyrinth interior organization were supposed to work as catalysts to this objective. Yet many point out the difficult, uneasiness physical experience of walking through

a shopping center with loads of dark, damp crannies and dead ends”.⁵ The historical architectural context surrounding the building had also suffered what experts describe as “tooth gapping” with the demise of the original colonial colonnade architecture.

The Werdmuller Centre won Ângela’s interest and curiosity as an art theme probably because, as in many other of her case studies, it was a strong example of how good design, non-referential aesthetics and a self-governing and utopian sense of public space were unable to prevail over the space as commodity culture of post-industrialist space planners, specifically those that under the Apartheid regime defined, for years to come, the timeline of urban accumulation and demographics for that specific Cape Town environment. The sense of an anticipated yet long-run ruin was probably a defining factor. Despite the surplus value that the ‘right’ form, the ‘right’ poetical attitude towards space, the ‘right’ playful and anti-bourgeois view of the outside world though striving conceptual properties ‘furnishing’ this building with Bauhausian and Le Corbusier’s stamina, these properties were not tangible in the mass of everyday experience lived by the assorted people using and working in Claremont Main road.

The epilogue of this disability reached a bureaucratic conclusion when in 2007 a Draft Heritage Statement signed by Peter de Toll, Henri Haikman and Andrew Berman recommended an agreement to begin demolition to be granted to the building’s owners. Meanwhile, the architectural community of Cape Town began a struggle to protect it; they claim that the building was condemned from the start, not because of its unpleasant and unfriendly approach to the user’s scale or even the unheimlich behavioral pattern developing between random walk and prescribed movement, erratic disorientation and menu promenade, but because its owners never tried to adapt the building to new and different functions. Function was always an inadequate partner of this structure where city and building, encasement and suppression of privacy, were identity prints. As we look at the photogenic nature of its beautiful multifaceted and sculptural shape, one cannot avoid recalling Constant Niuwenhuis’ New Babylon Models and ask how communities can deal with memory and preservation of modern architecture without turning this heritage into a passive useless ghost in the understanding and re-making of urban spatial relations, in other words, how to turn them into “social condensers”? When beauty does become a cenotaph culture, i.e., a criterion to protect and extend the life of failed buildings, can we use its holocaust as a guidebook against repetition and entropy?

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⁵ Retrieved from a response to Bowen and Fataar (2012).

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