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— Meeting Point

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Dork Zabunyan
& Pierre Alain Trévelo

Pierre Alain Trévelo: The anarchitecture to come

It is vital to look back on Gordon Matta-Clark's work, among other reasons, to highlight little-known facets of a shape-shifting oeuvre. The exhibition "Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchitect", and the accompanying catalogue, do so by revealing Matta-Clark as truly engaged in his era, concerned with the nameless, the have-nots of his time – but devoid of the now-common provocative claim that his art was necessarily political. Discussing his relationship to architecture should help us to further this exploration, which broadens our perception of the urban environment in which Matta-Clark worked, from Paris to New York and Berlin, while inviting us to question our own relationship with the city today – from our persistent worries to our diffuse delights. This is the dual direction of the conversation that follows with Pierre Alain Trévelo, architect and co-founder of the TVK agency, which notably handled the 2013 overhaul of the Place de la République in Paris, and has contributed substantially to reflection on the future of the Parisian outskirts.

It is thus a question of revealing Matta-Clark not only as an artist focused on construction and destruction, but as an architect who renews the positioning of places – at times glorifying them, as in *Day's End*, which, in Matta-Clark's words, was intended to be transformed into a veritable "temple of water and light". As Trévelo emphasizes in our conversation, it is also a question of rejuvenating what falls under the notion of intermediary stretches or zones that so interested Matta-Clark – again,

not to glorify an aesthetics of abandonment or of urban disinheritance, but rather, to remain vigilant over all spaces, however small, in which communities, however ephemeral, are recreated and regenerated.

Dork Zabunyan



TVK Agency, Place de la République, Paris

The Conversation



Dork Zabunyan: Hello, Pierre Alain Trévelo. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this latest *Meeting Point* for the *Jeu de Paume Magazine*. Let me remind readers that you are partner in the international architecture firm TVK, created in 2003.

The specificity of this agency is that you examine your practice by writing texts, organizing series of conferences, replying to invitations for discussions (such as this *Meeting Point* for the *Jeu de Paume Magazine*), but also, by turning to the history of architecture as well as further practices, artistic and otherwise – television series, for example. For you, it is a question of “grasping the complexity and paradoxical character of the contemporary earthly situation, to make it inhabitable and desirable.”

Two main approaches characterize your project: the first encompasses “essential architecture”, the relationship between inhabitable space and its inscription within a history of the discipline; the second, which is really unique to your work, has to do with what you call the “planning” of the planet, taking into account questions of population density, environmental ecology, social and economic instability, etc. Your projects have notably included the 2013 overhaul of the Place de la République in Paris, the transformation of a highway (the E40 in Brussels), and the reconfiguration of the Place de la Gare in Lausanne, currently underway. They always involve places of movement. Are there any other projects that you might care to mention, in a few words?

Pierre Alain Trévelo: It’s true, we’re always working on infrastructure-related topics. We’re now in the process of studying the Porte de Montreuil, for example. We’ve also worked on the outskirts of Paris, and on building programs encompassing complex mixed projects, which could be considered as infrastructural.

Dork Zabunyan: We'll have a chance to get back to this, as I have a question on the Parisian outskirts for you, which was the topic you focused on for your architecture degree, and which even resulted in a book. Let me also add that you participate in exhibitions, such as the recent "Habiter Mieux Habitez Plus" (Live Better Live More) at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal.

The idea of this *Meeting Point* is to undertake a back-and-forth between your practice as an architect, and the exhibition "Anarchitect" devoted to Gordon Matta-Clark, currently on view at the Jeu de Paume. This back-and-forth seeks to pinpoint how Matta-Clark may have influenced you as an architect, as well as how your creations and current projects might help us gain another perspective on Matta-Clark. How might we today consider what could be referred to as Matta-Clark's aesthetics of the hole? From *Floor Holes* in the Bronx to *Conical Intersect* in Paris and *Day's End* on the banks of the Hudson in New York, these projects involved the artist taking over abandoned or disinherited spaces, getting rid of entire fragments, to modify our perception of them, as well as the environment (social, industrial, etc.) in which these spaces were situated.

Pierre Alain Trévelo: What is fascinating in Matta-Clark's work is its ambiguity: for me, it is a question of work that is highly critical toward architecture, even against architecture, which is part of what makes the exhibition so compelling. *Anarchitecture* could be interpreted as the antithesis of architecture – a social and political critique of what architecture can be: confinement, isolation, reproduction, functionality, etc. All of that is known, but is at the same time ambiguous, as it is work by an architect. Of course I think that Matta-Clark's work is that of an artist, but an artist who is an architect. And in my view, the hole is also a space. He started off by digging a hole, drilling through something – first walls, then floors (*Bronx Floors*), attacking core elements of architecture. It was a question of putting them in perspective, in order to propose reflection on these particular elements, as well as to create places, spaces. Ultimately, he also created an opening, a view, a breakthrough. But maybe this should also be considered as a form of availability, i.e. something that would come to define a place through the limit – here, taking a stance against architecture, or what is most beautiful, generous and exciting within architecture. A place is a defined portion of space. Space may be continuous, but a place emerges when it starts to be delimited. This very ambiguity between what allows space to exist and what calls for a type of limit is extremely present in Gordon Matta-Clark's work – particularly when he makes a space visible from the

street, as is the case in *Conical Intersect*. More precisely, he makes a space exist. His work is thus not limited to a critical form or to ruins.

Dork Zabunyan: Yes...or to adulation of the building site, or deconstruction, or destruction itself. This idea of ambiguity is extremely interesting. It is somewhat present in a related question: what is the critical dimension of Gordon Matta-Clark's artistic activity? It is true that the Jeu de Paume exhibition strives to highlight Matta-Clark as political, in the sense that his urban interventions have a critical posture, rooted in the social and economic realities of his era. But do you think that the contemporary transformation of cities like New York still allows or authorizes interventions like Matta-Clark's? I ask this given that New York today is closer to a form of rationalization of its spaces to serve commercial society than to the subtly utopian "delirium" conceived of by Rem Koolhaas, whom I'll quote: "It is now up to the architecture of the late 20th century to openly embrace the extravagant ambitions and achievements of the metropolis" (*Delirious New York*, 1978).



Harry Gruyaert, *Gordon Matta-Clark et Gerry Hovagimyan travaillant à Conical Intersect. Rue Beaubourg, 1975* © Harry Gruyaert / Magnum Photos

Pierre Alain Trévelo: I cannot claim to know what Matta-Clark might propose, but I could say that the type of action and perspective he brought seems extremely necessary today, for me. I am unsure of the form it could take. But I can try to explain why I think it is necessary. You've just taken the example of New York and the exponential development in terms of urbanization, of the 20th century belief, faith in metropolization. We in developed countries tend to think that we've gained some perspective on these questions – but the world is metropolizing and urbanizing faster than ever! We imagine that our developed societies have entered a new era because growth is no longer what it once was. But it was during the 1970s, an extremely interesting time in which Matta-Clark was working, that a shift occurred in reality. Later on, the discussion turned on globalization, but the shift really occurred then. Developed societies supposedly entered into another phase of history, and yet, the world that has been global and unified since the 20th century just isn't there. The quantity of land being urbanized is growing at a staggering rate, particularly in Asia and Africa. Consequently, questions of gaining perspective on what is happening around the globe, and the nature of architecture, strike me as entirely healthy. As an architect, my work consists of production, construction, but today I don't think we can produce and construct the planet without contemplating zones of freedom and spaces of opening. This might seem limited, and perhaps it is necessary to go beyond the idea of spaces of opening, to imagine that the land use, consumption and rationalization assumed by urbanization go hand in hand with the opposing idea of non-consumption, non-rationalization. Without necessarily speaking of balance, the presence of opposites needs to exist. The 20th century undoubtedly allowed understanding on how transformation entails being thrust into something unforeseen. Architecture is inevitably optimistic, in fact, but it cannot resolve problems on its own. Gordon-Matta has something direct, extremely sensitive, and extremely hedonistic, with sun, water... There's a whole part of his work, and of his life in fact, that strikes me as really interesting. It's not addressed in the exhibition, and indeed, it's more difficult, because it's a question of his relationship to cooking, to food. He had set up a restaurant. There's something really primitive, banal, simple in all of this.

Dork Zabunyan: It's true that this point could perhaps even merit a whole other exhibition! You've also worked closely on the ring road that circles Paris, as a space that radically separates the city from its suburbs. A collective publication resulted: *Paris, La Ville du Périphérique*, published by Le Moniteur in 2003. Might we imagine that in this long interstitial line, Matta-Clark would have found places to take action to restore social ties, or to invite us to transform ways of living in a community?



Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day's End (Pier 52)*, 1975

Courtesy The Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark et David Zwirner, New York / Londres / Hong Kong. © 2018 The Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark / ADAGP, Paris

Pierre Alain Trévelo: I would have been really curious to see a work by Matta-Clark on road infrastructure. We might imagine any number of things, but the artist has the power to go beyond what you can imagine, to be elsewhere entirely. The idea of the road or of infrastructure as a public space strikes me as interesting. With his interventions, Matta-Clark considered the social dimension of space open to the public or the collective – at any rate, a space in which forms of sociability can take place. As in the restaurant mentioned before, *Food...* that was collective living. In his eyes, there was nothing better than mealtime for people. At TVK, we are seeking to assert the importance of public space, the part of the planet that is shared. But urban planning is based on capitalism, property, on real estate profitability and ultimately, on real estate – a concept that no one understands, which is in itself quite

fascinating! A twelve-year-old child learning concepts won't understand the idea of real estate, and I think that many adults can't define it either.

Excuse these digressions – let's get back to the idea of the road as a public space. Today, this space is reserved for a function – cars, or trains for a railroad. Okay: these are stories of mobility, efficiency. But travel infrastructure is fascinating in that it reproduces the ground on a scale nearly so as to become nature once again. It replaces nature, and Matta-Clark's work with *Day' End* consists in rediscovering sun and water, which also represents a relationship to nature. For me, these infrastructure sites contain such potential beauty, such power, revealing a cosmic relationship between humans and nature – cosmic, or even telluric. It would be extraordinary for an artist to intervene on the ring road. At TVK, we often say that the ring road is only in its beginnings. It might be hated now, but rather than about hating or adoring things, the question is about inhabiting them.

Dork Zabunyan: Yes, and to put them in perspective in time as well. My last question is precisely about this temporal aspect. In your architectural projects, you use the notion of "seriality", as in television series, in the sense that you conceive of your buildings as contexts that you occupy over an extended period of time, with the transformations that this entails for the spaces and their inhabitants alike. In this way, you raise the need to question "this progressiveness in the ways in which the earth was considered by humans in time. The earth was the subject of a project, taken as a site to be developed to accommodate people. It was established, levelled, drilled, flattened, heightened, raised, in fine, constructed." Can you touch back upon this seriality that establishes time in space, and that furthermore calls for the architect to be imaginative? You also use the word "scenarization", which you define in the following terms: "Scenarization seeks to carry out the transformation of a territory by actively taking into account the time and rhythms that may structure it (...) [presenting itself as] a process, which considers the temporal density of a territory, placing its multiple temporalities and the hazards of the context at the heart of the project's creation."

What is for you the temporality at work in Gordon Matta-Clark's interventions? Is it necessarily ephemeral due to the imminent destruction of the buildings that he physically confronted, or perhaps in anticipation of the memory remaining of them once they were destroyed?



TVK, plan highlighting the space associated with the ring road (pink) and the Seine

Pierre Alain Trévelo: Indeed, one common interpretation of Matta-Clark's work is attached to the notion of ephemerality, particularly in the work on buildings being demolished, etc. But I think that his work isn't limited to that, and is more complex and deep.

Gordon Matta-Clark interrogates a temporal density and a multitude of temporalities, and the idea of continuity at the same time. I think this comes across best in his films, because these films – particularly those in which you see the work being made – are continuous time. The time of building. We might also speak of a time of destruction, but for me, it is also construction through destruction, and vice-versa. Continuous time is also discontinuous, time with its breaks, a form of seriality. What is striking is how Matta-Clark links ephemerality and permanence – even eternalness. As you said, memory surpasses the mind of the individual, and is also

found in works that last concretely over time. Architecture always has this temptation to be eternal, knowing full well that it might not remain so. Works, and film, in particular, have the ability to be eternal. The latter links different temporalities, addressing both continuity and breaks in time, which is for me one of the fascinating elements of time, which must be used to consider space – time as both continuous and discontinuous.

Dork Zabunyan: It's just another positive ambiguity in Matta-Clark's work! Thank you so much, Pierre Alain Trévelo, for participating in this *Meeting Point*. Let me recall that you are a partner at TVK architecture firm, which has a beautiful website featuring your productions, texts and lectures. It is also possible to stroll around the Place de la République, then head over to the Jeu de Paume for the exhibition, or go to the Lausanne Train Station...

Pierre Alain Trévelo: Not just yet, the studies are underway, it'll be done in eight or ten years! The train station has to be completely overhauled, so it's a huge amount of work.

Dork Zabunyan: A very long time, but not eternal! Thank you, Pierre Alain.

Pierre Alain Trévelo: Thanks a lot.





Place de la Gare, Lausanne © TVK



Thursday, 28 June, 2018. Dork Zabunyan interviewing Pierre Alain Trévelo at the Jeu de Paume a few weeks prior to the opening of the exhibition “Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchi-

Pierre Alain Trévelo is the founding partner of TVK with Antoine Viger-Kohler. Born in 1973 in Gap (France), he is an architect and urban designer, graduated from École d’Architecture de la Ville et des Territoires in 1999 (DPLG – ENSAVT Marne-la-Vallée) and in Urban Design at Harvard in 2004 (MDesS – Harvard GSD). Co-founder of TOMATO a group gathering 13 future architects who published the book *Paris, La Ville du Périphérique* (Le Moniteur, 2003), he taught at École d’Architecture de la Ville et des Territoires in Marne-la-Vallée from 2000 to 2015 and at Sciences Po Urban Design Master from 2006 to 2012. He has been guest critic and lecturer at numerous schools of architecture and institutions in France and abroad, including EPFL, UDP Santiago (Chile), ETSAV Barcelona, Hochschule Bremen, ARC USI Mendrisio, ENSA Marseille, ENSA Nantes, IVM...

Dork Zabunyan is Professor in Film Studies at Paris 8 University. His main publications include *Foucault va au cinéma* (Bayard 2011), *Les Cinémas de Gilles Deleuze* (Bayard 2011), *Passages de l’histoire* (Le Gac Press, 2013), and most recently *L’insistance des luttes* (De l’incidence éditeur, 2016). He contributes to *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, *Trafic*, *Critique* and *artpress*.

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