In the 1960s and 1970s New York City struggled with deindustrialization, white flight to the suburbs, and a collapsing infrastructure. Economic decline as well as social and political upheaval roiled the city during these decades. At the same time, however, Gordon Matta-Clark and other young artists colonized New York’s 19th-century cast iron lofts for making, exhibiting, and performing art. Beyond the purview of museums and commercial galleries and theaters, they created alternative venues that they ran and often owned. Matta-Clark realized the potential within the urban ruins of New York’s postindustrial landscape for artistic invention, political theater, and eventually community rejuvenation. Here government support he and other artists, performers, and architects received from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the National Endowment for the Arts (which NYSCA inspired) are crucial to understand. Examining Matta-Clark’s evolution as an artist-architect and community activist through his photographs, photocollages, and films, this paper explores their influence on urban policy as New York resurrected itself through media, service, and real estate economies during the late 1970s and 1980s. To conclude I trace the resonance of Matta-Clark’s ideas and projects for public policy through the urban ruins of shrinking cities like Buffalo and exploding ones like Mumbai.

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