

“Urban Ruin and Renewal through Another Lens: The Photographs, Photocollages, and Films of Gordon Matta-Clark”

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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.

Mary N. Woods is Professor of Architectural History at Cornell University. She is the first to hold the Michael A. McCarthy Chair in Architectural Theory there. In her teaching and scholarship she focuses on how film and photography shape and mediate our experience and understanding of space and the built environment. *Beyond the Architect’s Eye: Photographs of the American Built Environment* (Penn Press, 2013 and 2009) explores tradition and modernity in New York City, the American South, and Miami through art, documentary, and amateur photography as well as architectural photography. The Ashgate imprint of Informa will publish her *Women Architects in India: Histories of Practice in Mumbai and India*, a history of modern and contemporary architecture and conservation from the independence struggle to the present day, this summer. Woods has received fellowships from the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Creative Center for Photography, Fulbright Foundation, American Council of Learned Societies, and the American Institute for Indian Studies. Her current projects include a study of Mumbai’s architecture of the night with photographer Chirodeep Chaudhuri, a documentary film on Indian cinema halls with director Vani Subramanian, and the imagery of urban ruin and renewal since the 1960s in New York and Mumbai from which this paper is drawn.

