**The gaps of architectural life: the affective politics of Gordon Matta-Clark’s Conical Intersect**

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**Abstract**

This paper contributes to a burgeoning concern with the ‘critical geographies of architecture’. The central argument is that recent architecture–geography encounters – inspired by non-representational approaches to material mutability and affective inhabitation – are failing to connect with socio-political framings of the architectural. In this light, the paper aligns Gordon Matta-Clark’s architectural artwork Conical Intersect (1975) with the Deleuzo-Guattarian axiom of micropolitics and macropolitics to re-insert the architectural subject as a microtexture of political forms imbued with (1) asymmetrical assemblages of material volatility, (2) restricted capacities of ‘dwelling or being with’ architecture and (3) bounded notions of living affectively. I suggest Conical Intersect foregrounds architectural space as a meeting of dreamworlds and institutional effects. In its piercing of that space of interaction, the artwork produces an architectural form freed from the conventions of legal and physical constraints to suggest the potency of alternative modes of living with and living in architecture that should be of primary interest to critical geographies of architecture and beyond.

**Key words**

Art; architecture; Gordon Matta-Clark; micropolitics; Deleuze and Guattari; non-representational geographies

**Introduction**

On 24 September 1975, chunks of dusty brick fell from a building situated at Beaubourg 27–29. An unremarkable event in the Parisian district of Les Halles in the 1970s, which was undergoing heavy forces of renewal, were it not for the source of the destructive impetus. There was no heavy machinery in sight, no cranes tearing down the architectural skeleton, no excavators picking at its remainders. Instead, passers-by witnessed the subtle formation of an expanding circular hole as Gordon Matta-Clark sledgehammered a view onto the street from inside the 17th century structure. Employing a range of demolition tools, Gordon Matta-Clark and his two assistants shaped Conical Intersect (1975) through the partial, creative alteration of the building’s plaster, wooden beams, brick and masonry (Figure 1). The result was a twisted cone spiralling through walls, floors, doors and finally through the roof of the adjacent building, where it exited with a diameter half the size of its four-metre wide entrance. Like a gaping wound, Conical Intersect remained in the shadow of the under-construction Centre Georges Pompidou for two weeks, until it was levelled. This paper enacts an engagement with the geo-material imagination of this site-specific public sculpture to critically reflect on an increasingly rich body of work on the ‘geographies of architecture’.

Following Lees’ (2001) call for a move towards a ‘critical geography of architecture’, geographic scholars are tracing and conceptualising the embodied (Jacobs and Merriman 2011; Llewellyn 2003), affective (Adey 2008; Kraftl and Adey 2008; Rose et al. 2010) and material (Jacobs 2006) registers of architectural form. Building on the disciplinary interest with affect and materiality (Anderson and Wylie 2009), this line of work has explored the processual interconnectedness and vibrancies of architectural life, in ways that expand on the representational and semiotic presentations of architecture in previous geographical engagements with architecture (Kraftl 2010). Yet, it is my suggestion in this paper that although affectual accounts of architectural engagement have been fruitful, there has been slippage towards ‘micro-reductionism’ (Delanda 2006), which has insufficiently attended to architecture’s socio-political economies and related agential asymmetries. Following Cresswell (2012, 98), Thien (2005) and Tolia-Kelly (2006), I suggest these non-representa- tional accounts gravitate towards ‘apolitical tendencies’ characterised by a ‘disavowal of . . . attempts to engage with issues of politics, injustice, and power’. Not all geographical scholarship invested with architecture’s affective and political worlds is inclined towards non- representational ideas, however. Many urban scholars remain particularly concerned with the structural contexts of architectural realities (e.g. Jones 2009; Kaika 2010; McCann 2011). Recognising the ontological potency of non-representational approaches, this paper brings together the two strands of geo-architectural thought into an affective politics of architecture that it is attentive not only to architecture’s performativity, corporeality and materiality, but also to the heterogeneous micro-conditions of power these are in touch with. As such, the paper formulates an affirmative response to Kraftl’s call to explore the largely unrealised ‘potential of architectural geographies to challenge and extend (rather than deploy) wider non-representational approaches in geography’ (2010, 411).

In engaging with a particular art performance, this paper builds on geography’s accelerated tendency to draw on art theory and practice over the last decade (Hawkins 2013). Indeed, in line with Brian Massumi’s (2011) emphasis on art practice as holding transformative capacities for social scientists, geographers have productively enrolled artworks of late into a wide- ranging set of topics, including concerns with time (Housefield 2007; Yusoff and Gabrys 2006), the body (Abrahamsson and Abrahamsson 2007; Hawkins and Straughan 2014; Lapworth 2015), air (Engelmann 2015), more-than-human relations (Dixon 2009; Hawkins 2012) and climate change (Yusoff and Gabrys 2011). While methodology has over the last decade become an explicit concern for architectural geographers (Jacobs and Merriman 2011; Jacobs et al. 2012; Kraftl 2010), the promise of art practices, however, requires further exploration. In this vein, I have previously underscored (Dekeyser and Garrett 2015) how direct creative, material interactions with and enactments of architectural space by geographers-as- artists or by geographers-as-curators are charged with a particular, political potency. Expanding on this, this paper proposes the formation of a critical architectural geography, sensitive to the myriad affective and political textures of lived architecture, may additionally unfold through empirical analyses of those existing performances that weave together the artistic and the architectural.

This working towards a renewed critical geography of architecture is in line with Lees’ invitation for a consideration of architecture as ‘about more than just representation’ (2001, 53). If her focus is on offering greater scrutiny to the role of different kinds of performed inhabitation in the production and negotiation of architectural life, then the present paper stretches the scope of geographical inquiry in exposing the multiple socio-political framings that preclude, channel and delimit the affective potential of that practical inhabita- tion. The journey of this argument stretches across six sections. First, I outline and discuss three theoretical movements within the field of architectural geography since its birth in the 1920s. The paper then turns towards its conceptual vocabulary: a particular Deleuzo-Guattarian reading of the ideas of micropolitics and macrop- olitics (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Massumi 2015; Patton 2000). In their broadest terms, these concepts refer to the role of ‘molecular’ and ‘molar’ segmentarity in the organisation of politics, and to the multiplicity of intimate interactions between the two. In the second section, I introduce Matta-Clark’s Conical Intersect as an ‘an-architectural’ form entangled in a particular socio- economic and geographical context. The three subsequent sections suggest three ways in which the intertwinings of micrological and macrological flows of affect are manifested in the artwork. In the final section, I briefly reflect on the artwork as a particularly political ‘critical spatial practice’ (Rendell 2006) and on its potential for alternative approaches to knowledge production and dissemination in our disciplinary manners of (architectural) critique.

**Architectural encounters**

*Geography-architecture encounters*

To connect Conical Intersect with contemporary architectural geographies, we need to briefly consider the ways in which cultural geography has a history of studying architectural form and practice that largely precedes the more recent geography–architecture encounters primarily concerned with architectural affect and the eventfulness of matter. Geography’s engagement with the built environment was initiated in the 1920s by Carl Sauer and his colleagues at the Berkeley School. In his classic essay ‘The morphology of landscape’, Sauer outlines the concept of the ‘cultural landscape’, which presents nature as a malleable form superimposed by the activities of a particular cultural group (Whatmore 2006). Cultural landscapes, for Sauer, signify embodiments of cultural traditions, family organisations and micro-economies that can be identified and mapped (Wood 2002). Moving on from a decidedly cultural analysis of the architectural based on a culture/nature split, ‘new’ cultural geographers find in buildings the complex expression of social, economic and political circuits (Cosgrove 1984; Goss 1988; Mitchell 2002). More particularly, functioning at the interstice of socio- economic theory and Marxist geography, these theoretical tendencies articulate frameworks that expose the inequality of power-relations represented and reproduced through the vehicle of architecture (Domosh 1996; Harvey 2007; Miller 1987). Addition- ally, Buchli (2006) calls attention to the ‘unhomeliness’ of modernist architecture to point out how its structural and surficial materialities are intimately intertwined with reduced accounts of human sensibility. Indeed, in much of the geographical theorisations of architecture developed from the 1960s onwards, modernity is criticised not only for its reproduction of social relations, but equally for its contribution to a sense of alienation and disorientation felt in large groups of Western society (Buchli 2006).

Responding to both ‘old cultural geography’ and ‘new cultural geography’, Lees posits the described accounts over-emphasise the structural, symbolic and representational and have therefore ‘little to say about the practical and affective or “nonrepresentational” import of architecture’ (2001, 51). Her approach chimes with geographers’ increased interest in both Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005) and non-representational theory (Thrift 2000). Building on these theoretical registers, the architectural shifts conceptually from a static, representational and ‘self-evident form’ towards an eventful emergence that ‘becomes [evident] through a diverse range of more-or-less elaborate, human and non-human processes’ (Rose et al. 2010, 334; see also Latham and McCormack 2004). Such reconfiguration of architectural ontologies has, it is argued, at least two essential implications for apprehensions of architectural living. First, the multiplicity of continuous entangled movements constituting the building ‘always being “made” or “unmade”’ challenges the passive and therefore controllable materiality presented in architectural modernity (Jacobs 2006, 11). Second, it is suggested the accounts stressing structural processes tend to construct binarisms between the ‘active’ producer (architect, designer, contractor, planning council) and ‘passive’ consumer (dweller). Consequently, Kraftl and Adey (2008), Lees (2001) and Llewellyn (2003) predicate how the inhabitant and its affective capacities to negotiate and contest architectural space are problematically ignored in this light, thus calling for cultural geography to develop a renewed account of the correlations between modes of dwelling and architectural affect.

Micro–macro encounters In shifting away from an emphasis on the structural, macro-components of architectural life towards its micro-textures, contemporary architectural geography has, I suggest, lost some of its political edge and has developed a form of what Manuel Delanda terms ‘micro-reductionism’ (2006, 119).1 Indeed, the intentional and unintentional politico-affective dynamics that resonate through the ‘relationship between architecture and dominant political and corporate interest’ are at least partially omitted in the self-proclaimed strand of ‘critical geographies’ of architecture (Jones 2009, 2520). In response, I attend to the implications of Gordon Matta-Clark’s Conical Intersect as a way of investigating more critically the multi-scalar interactions between the micropolitical and macropolitical dimensions of living with and in architecture. Although the term ‘micropolitics’ was coined by Tom Burns (1961) to study political movements within corporations, this paper is particularly concerned with its Deleuzo-Guattarian lineage as an analytic frame to investigate and trace power, its constitution and its dynamics (see Patton 2000).2 This means paying particular attention to the conceptual tropes of micropolitics and macropolitics as outlined in Deleuze and Guattari’s seminal treatise A thousand plateaus (1987) and, more particularly, in plateau nine entitled ‘1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity’ (1987, 208–31).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 209–10) contest the common interpretation that distinguishes segmented primitive societies from centralised, non-segmented modern societies. Instead they suggest both contain intensely segmented institutions, power-formations and desires, which function according to a dynamic logic between two forms of segmentarity: supple or molec- ular micro-segmentarity and rigid or molar macro- segmentarity. In line with a topological conception of space as constituted by sets of affective connectivities rather than by pre-determined points or categories (see Marston et al. 2005; Massumi 1998), the crux here is that ‘the molar and the molecular are distinguished not by size, scale, or dimension but by the nature of the system of reference envisioned’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 217). For instance, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 225) note, the landlord has ‘a molar side and a molecular side’, depending on the coordinates of its position and of the particular climate it is moving in. The qualitative dissimilarities between micrological and macrological politics does therefore not render the two spheres isolated or even distinguishable (Massumi 2015; Patton 2000).3 Instead, they contain a ‘zone of indiscernibility’,4 implying that ‘every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics’, including everyday modes of living (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 213; Gilson 2007). The quality of this intimate interrelationship is unstable in that it can take the form of both mutual support and tension, thus creating an ongoing possibility of the destabilisation of existing and production of novel micro-macro symmetries (Massumi 2015, 82). Within the dynamic between the two, macropolitics is dependent on more supple micropo- litical assemblages, and thus always exceeds its rigid segmentation, to produce ‘a molecularisation of its own elements, relations, and elementary apparatuses’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 215). In this process, molar investments intervene on the level of molecular desire ‘to limit its multiplicity and shape it to prevailing forms of sovereignty’ (Holland 2014, 94; see also Deleuze and Parnet 1983) and as such, they seek to determine which connections desire, conceived here as a productive force rather than as a negative Oedipal lack,5 is and is not able to establish.

In short, while molar ‘segments’, such as the state, capital or law, present inadequate representations of society, they maintain a certain ability to affect architectural life. As such, and this is where Deleuze and Guattari’s social ontology may be of critical relevance to an architectural politics, the correlations between affective life and macro-powers have to be studied, acknowledged and conceptualised, rather than disregarded. To initiate this journey, following an introduction to Conical Intersect, I outline the three ways in which the artwork offers a critical corrective to tendencies within architectural geography through its assembling of micro- and macro-textures into a conceptualisation of the affective politics of architecture. It does this by revealing (1) the asymmetrical molecularisation of affective materiality, (2) the micro-management of dwelling and (3) the rational, molar segmentation of architectural space.

**The an-architecture of Conical Intersect**

The shape of Conical Intersect was inspired by Anthony McCall’s film Line Describing a Cone (1973), which reversed the logic of traditional cinema-viewing by directing the audience towards the projector rather than the projection, in an attempt to reveal the cone- shaped materialities of the beamed luminous form (Walker 2004). Conical Intersect, like McCall’s cinema experience, engineered a disorientating encounter with a familiar event, presenting snippets of the internal, usually enclosed skeletons of architectural space to passers-by (Figure 2) and revealing an open encounter with street activity to visiting participants present on the site (Figure 3).6 Beyond the immediacy of those lived experiences, the photographic and filmic interventions carry forward their world-making abilities beyond 11 October 1975, when the demolition firm arrived merely two weeks after Matta-Clark initiated the performance.

Although his participation in the ninth Biennale de Paris was definite as soon as he was granted the Theodoron Foundation Award, the specificities of the project, developed in conversation with Georges Boudaille (the curator and organiser of the Biennale) and Nina Felshin (coordinator of the American involvement in the Biennale), took a long while before crystallising. The initial plan had been to dissect the under-construction Centre Pompidou. However, per- haps unsurprisingly, SEMAH (the urban renewal agency for the Parisian district of Les Halles) declined the suggestion and instead pointed Matta-Clark towards a building scheduled for demolition: Rue Beaubourg 27–29. The particular site, built in 1690 and one of the last standing historical cases of architecture in the area undergoing processes of modernisation, allowed Matta-Clark to remain true to his political intentions. Due to the geographical positioning of the site, Matta-Clark was able to perform a critical ‘non-monumental counterpart to the grandiose bridge-like skeleton of the Center just behind’ (Matta-Clark, cited in Muir 2014, 105). The subsequent critiques, arriving from a range of different angles, highlighted the controversy of the work and its particular socio-geographical bedding. Parisian authorities and certain media channels considered it an ‘insult’ to the modernisation of Paris (Lee 2001, 185). Perhaps more shocking to the American artist, the French communist newspaper L’Humanite condemned the artwork on its front page as ‘representative of bourgeois art’, suggesting the residence, embedded as it was amid processes of urban renewal, should have been renovated into workers’ housing, not into a site where absence is celebrated as artistic (Lee 2001).

Conical Intersect was archetypal of a range of notable legal and illicit site-specific architectural interventions performed by Gordon Matta-Clark in the 1970s across the USA and Western Europe in a series of soon-to-be demolished family houses, public institutions and industrial warehouses. His critical approach to architecture is often summarised as containing a sensitivity of the ‘an-architectural’, denoting his troubled relationship with modernist architectural practice as an architecture- graduate-turned-artist (Attlee 2007; Muir 2014). Rather than bluntly destructive, anti-modernist or anti-architectural,7 this paper considers the an-architectural in Conical Intersect as a force of creative alteration seeking to productively destabilise what architectural geographies are, what they do, how they form and dissolve, and where they might be taken when conceived through different registers.8 In suggesting alternative narratives of the urban condition, Matta-Clark’s alteration is in line with the thought and practice of the Situationist International who were roaming the same streets of Les Halles and mapping the district’s psychogeographies two decades earlier (Muir 2014). Although Conical Intersect is more site-specific by nature than the situationist practice of drifting, both exhibit a reorientation of urban life towards more embodied, affective ways of inhabiting cities.

To further trace the politics of Conical Intersect’s ‘an- architecture’, in the next three sections the work’s interconnecting micro-macropolitical imperatives are unpacked. Attention is given to (1) the asymmetrical distribution of access to material fluidity between the molar and the molecular, (2) the micro- management of dwelling and (3) the affective implications of the rational, rigid segmentation of architectural geographies.

**Gaps: Conical Intersect and material volatility**

In forcing a gap across Beaubourg 27–29, Conical Intersect literally enlarges the incoherencies always at play in architectural matter. As such, it attends to the volatilities and instabilities of matter by shifting heterogeneous architectural processes of construction, maintenance, decay and demolition to the fore:

A house [. . .] is definitely a fixed entity in the minds of most people. It needn’t be. So one of the effects of my work is to dramatise the ways, or stage ways in altering that sense of stasis. (Matta-Clark, cited in Walker 2009, 114)

The architectural structure, most often experienced by its inhabitants on the level of surfaces, is cut open in an attempt to expose ‘how a uniform surface is established’ and how it, at least at some point, will be dismantled forcefully (Matta-Clark, cited in Walker 2009, 33). Indeed, the artwork reveals the instabilities of the everyday urban materialities commonly thought of as ‘exist[ing] necessarily and unshakeably’ (Merleau- Ponty, cited in Dewsbury 2000, 487). Passers-by on Rue Beaubourg and participants inside the 17th-century structure witness the hidden foundations of familiar structures and their impossible fragility: snapped cables, splintered wooden beams, cracked roof tiles, edgy surfaces. This chimes with the architectural geographies of Jenkins (2002, 226) and Grosz (2001), who have urged architectural theory and practice to ‘dispel the myth of buildings as being static, closed and materially constant’. Modernist architecture, in its attempt at ‘building for eternity’ (Bois and Krauss 1996, 61), sidelines the unavoidability of the entropic distortion and disintegration of architecture (Lee 2001). Conical Intersect thus contests the idea of matter as a controllable form to be subordinated to human activity in its exposing of the numerous procedures of repair and maintenance at play to uphold the sense of a building ‘characterized by perfect order, completeness, immanence and internal homogeneity rather than leaky, partial and heterogeneous entities’ (Graham and Thrift 2007, 10; see also Edensor 2011).

However, and this is where the work departs from current tendencies within the geographies of architec- ture, while its urban imagination is in line with Edensor’s (2011) in that it accepts and perpetuates the mutability and volatility of matter, it considers more critically the real conditions of their articulations. Jacobs and Merriman, in particular, go some way to address the issue of difference in recognising ‘[w]e may live in, sleep in, or work in a building (or do all of these things). We may own a building, visit a building for work or leisure, or maintain or clean a building’ (2011, 213). They do not, however, elaborate on the implications of the diverging densities and qualities of connections between a heterogeneity of actors that make up architecture. With Conical Intersect, Matta- Clark sheds particular light on the unequal distribution of access in processes of architectural emergence and disappearance. As indicated in the previous section, the spatio-temporal specificity of the artwork is by no means secondary information. Conical Intersect is as much an intervention into a particular building as it is into its environment. The architectural void that is Conical Intersect functions here as a visceral translation of what had been termed ‘Le Trou des Halles’ [the hole of Les Halles] during and after the succession of demolitions in the market area (Muir 2011 2014). The development of the modern art institution Centre Pompidou, with its unconventional architectural style and form symbolising the promise of progress, was one of many steps taken as part of the privately funded urban renewal programme in the historic quarter of Les Halles (Muir 2011 2014). As a two-week architectural intervention, Conical Intersect symbolises and renders visible the destructive impetus of the socio-political economies of planning in the Parisian 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Through the performance of a hole in the centre of a homely site, Matta-Clark’s three-dimensional work materialises the felt painful lack that may come with acts of dispossession and community eviction as a result of the rising value of the area’s real estate. Outside of the immediate environment of the work’s position, it speaks to the ‘unjust structures of dispossession, exclusion and violence that define and shape the experiences of many of the world’s urban dwellers’ (Vasudevan 2014, 17).

Conical Intersect is also an, albeit unsolicited, active intervention into these macro-processes, where architectural alteration is enrolled as a device of memory-production. By partially removing a structure’s facade, Matta-Clark discloses its interior settings and transposes the narrative of the ruin-as-rubbish into one that engenders the lived reality of the dwelling and the traces of past stories it bears. Therefore, his critical interaction with the temporality of matter calls for a radically diverging politics of rubbish, one that reconsiders the functionalist valuable/valueless dichotomy in its reinterpretation of boarded-up architecture as an ‘admixture of waste and life, of decadence and vitality’ (Neville and Villeneuve, cited in DeSilvey 2006, 324) embedded with possibilities of playful and political modes of sensibility. The lifespan of architectural spaces, whose fading or replacement would otherwise remain unnoticed in the conventional political realm, is expanded in space and time through his production of an anti-spectacle of architectural provocation that lives on through material (film, image, text) and immaterial formations (individual/collective narratives).

As a multi-mediated performance, the artwork thus reveals and intervenes into the asymmetrical correlations between the molecular, affective registers of everyday experience and the molar forces of planners, councils and property developers involved in steering material (in)coherence. Without reducing urban politics to the simple injection or ‘molecularisation’ of macropolitical ideas into the ‘microphysical fabric’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 226), as is arguably the case in political economy accounts on architectural design (see Jacobs and Merriman 2011), Conical Intersect confronts us with the situated worlds of difference and demands active reflection on the constitution of the affective flows of decisionmaking processes that inform the destructive and constructive forces (un)shaping global cities. This is what political theorist Saul Newman refers to when stating ‘planning, as it is usually conceived, is [. . .] the idea of a certain order of space imposed from above upon pre-existing social relations by a cadre who claim a superior technical knowledge’ (Newman 2011, 347). Macrolog- ical assemblages, through their regulation of participation, delimit the capacity for thorough micrological engagement. In actively refusing to be confined by these dynamics of molar segmentation, in claiming the right to participation, Matta-Clark’s artwork becomes a desiring-machine that introduces ‘an element of dysfunction’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 31) with capacities to outline and inspire lines of escape beyond the dominant legal and social flows of architectural emergence. If in this section I have shown how Conical Intersect reminds us of the political limitations to the material eventfulness of architecture, the following section explains the ways the work induces extra insights into the micro-assemblages of architectural dwelling.

**Spheres: Conical Intersect and the micro-management of dwelling**

Conical Intersect is a sphere cut with the street in mind. It is angled up 45° to allow passers-by to witness the interior body of the residence and the multiple layers of stories and memories of dwelling usually enclosed by walls, floors, ceilings and other architectural substrata. The work’s concerns with accounts of dwelling accentuate those recently appearing in the field of architectural geography. Central to the latter is a recognition that modes of dwelling – inhabiting, decorating, furnishing – are not mere forms of consumption; instead, it is argued, they are active, multi-sensuous reconfigurations of affect and matter (Jacobs 2006; Jacobs and Merriman 2011; Lees 2001; Llewellyn 2003) and thus need to be ‘valued to the same degree as the planning behind them’ (Llewellyn 2003, 269). For Strebel, dwelling therefore does not simply entail ‘a response to given material environments, but comprises practices that actively change and shape these same material environments’ (2011, 259). The artwork discloses some of these processes by physically forcing what Matta-Clark termed ‘thresholes’ into the interior/ exterior and private/public boundaries of architecture (Muir 2014). In contrasting the personalised interior – remainders of blue stylised wallpaper, hanging lamps and wooden window framing – with the more neutral qualities of the facade, his method of calculated reconfiguration reminds us of the role human subjectivity plays in ‘dwelling or being with’ architectural spaces and the unique narratives and atmospheric qualities these contain (Jacobs and Merriman 2011, 214; italics in original).

Yet, the work also disrupts ideas of ‘dwelling with’ architecture by revealing its socio-political limitations. While diverse and personified to some extent, the rooms exposed in Conical Intersect maintain a strong sense of familiarity. What’s more, the mere sense of unexpectedness encountered as the walls collapse violently, without structural intervention of official construction site workers, is telling in that it highlights the micro-relations between inhabitants and the spaces inhabited. In this respect, a key concern highlighted by Matta-Clark’s physical intervention is the one questioning the non-physical, legal boundaries that confine the degrees of openness to material alterations to a mere scratching of architectural surfaces. The unequal limitation of legally accepted creative material engagements starts to problematise utopian understanding of what ‘dwelling or being with’ entails. If Jacobs and Merriman go further than most accounts in acknowledging there are ‘different modes of dwelling and inhabiting’ (2011, 213), they do not ponder sufficiently on the more significant question: what constitutes the logics that produce delimitation and difference? The renting tenant might not be allowed to paint or drill into a wall. Similarly, a planning request to open up one’s own dwelling by removing a wall might be refused by the local council. While the shocking affects emanating through an encounter with his art performance confront the viewer with the restriction of accepted material interactions with space in modern life, it perhaps more significantly challenges our acceptance of such reduced accounts of affective dwelling. As such, in moving beyond the legally and socially accepted, his intervention de-familiarises the established understandings of the relations between individual agency, dwelling and architectural space, as gained through processes of emotional, cognitive and legally sustained habit-formation. One of the central questions underpinning Conical Intersect is thus the following: what sorts of affective experiences would unfold in the light of a more libertarian understanding of dwelling in space that centralises the individual and collective over the lawful? Starting from Merleau- Ponty, for whom the building is a ‘collection of possible points upon which . . . bodily action may operate’ (cited in Kraftl and Adey 2008, 227), we may state part of the political intent of Conical Intersect is to experiment with and expand the ‘possible points’ available and the ways in which we choose to interact with them. His is an architectural world of dwelling in which desire maintains its polyvocality and excessiveness, in other words, its capacity to operate as ‘a molecular affair’, and does not give in to molar pressures of univocality, belief or representation (Deleuze and Parnet 1983, 96).

In addition to challenging contemporary theorisations of dwelling as a productive force, Conical Intersect equally speaks to those studies of architectural geography primarily concerned with notions of engineered affect. The latter problematise the primacy of architects, designers and planners in the construction of spatial atmospheres (Adey 2008; Kraftl and Adey 2008). Their concern lies, in the words of Kraftl and Adey, with

how affect is literally designed to operate in many ways, and how architectural design operates via discourse and practice, materiality and immateriality, ephemerality, and stasis to channel, preclude, and evoke particular affects. (2008, 226–7)

Affective engineering has mainly been theorised in relation to public, often carefully governed spaces,9 addressing the ways through which architectural design and planning affects the forms, relations and intensities of inhabitation in these specific structures. Here Matta- Clark’s creative alteration expands on existing accounts in exposing the delimitation of affective life is embedded in each modern architectural form, including that of the (sub)urban home, and is therefore not a unique characteristic of a bounded set of strictly governed spaces. The politics of restricted micro-affective life are intimately tangled up in the macropolitical attempts at state regulation regarding dwelling and laws of private property. In pointing at how some of the dynamics of what Deleuze and Guattari term ‘micro-management’ exceed the limited set of those more immediate, calculated forms of architectural design Adey (2008) speaks of, Conical Intersect offers a broadened insight into the miniaturisation process of molar regulations and its interconnections with the lived realities of dwelling (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 215–16). Although this dynamic is clearly not streamlined flawlessly without interruptions or shocks – it operates in a ‘zone of impotence’ where something always flees capture or definition (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) – the molecularisation of molar segmentation intends and most commonly succeeds in structuring an unbalanced right to architectural capacity. In the following section I show the ways in which the artwork further emphasises the affects of rational macro-segmentation on architectural micro-living.

**Walls: Conical Intersect and architectural macro-segmentation**

The wall, as a contact zone between multiple worlds, is a key conceptual concern the work incorporates. While architectural geographer Jenkins asks ‘what is the boundary of a building?’ (2002, 232: italics mine), the performance of Conical Intersect pushes this to inquire: what does the boundary of a building do? The following statement hints at his investigation into the affective politics of boundaries:

By undoing a building I open a state of enclosure which had been preconditioned not only by physical necessity but by the industry that proliferates suburban and urban boxes as a context for insuring a passive isolated consumer – a virtually captive audience. (Matta-Clark, cited in Von Amelunxen et al. 2012, 96)

In Conical Intersect, it is in reworking the wall that the wall and its implications become apparent. Material structures of architecture are considered here not just ontologically as ‘endlessly (re)constituted’ (Edensor 2011, 250; Jenkins 2002), but also as possible restrictions on human experience and affective excess. Through its sculptural three-dimensionality, Conical Intersect indicates this pertains some truth on two levels: through the construction of inside–outside divisions on the one hand, and by the strict dividing of rooms inside the house on the other. As these limitations dissolve, the space attains an almost shocking, uncanny transparency that surprised the artist himself:

In fact when you got to the top floor and looked down through an elliptical section through the floor that was cut out, you would look down through the fragments of a normal apartment space, but I had never seen anything like it. (Matta-Clark, cited in Moure 2006, 268)

This is in line with Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of the house ‘segmented according to its rooms’ assigned purposes’ (1987, 208). Similarly, for the Lettrists, the precursors of the Situationist International, modernist architecture divides ‘life into closed, isolated units’ and eradicates ‘opportunities for uprisings or meaningful encounters’ (Internationale Lettriste, cited in Pinder 2005, 148). Conical Intersect’s openings suggest the boundaries of modern dwellings are not only a product of, but also generative of addictions to withdrawal and isolation in their constitution of rigid distinctions between private and the public life. Through its architectural alteration, the work generates a metaphorical gap revealing the experiential void that is always already embedded in modern modes of architectural practice and dwelling that over-rely on the ethos of the private (privacy and property), of the secure and of functional progress (Waggoner 2011). In doing so, Matta-Clark’s Conical Intersect extends existing geographical concerns with architectural materiality not only by suggesting its relations to molar segmentarity delimit the lived capacities for the expression of desire, but also by indicating macro-processes are equally invested in the particular social formations that generate the specificities of desire in the first place (Smith 2007). The narrow, hegemonic social ideals of progress, security and private property thus affect the qualities, capacities, and intensities of the dwelling body as a molecular desiring-machine.

These rational structures and codings of architecture, in the act of intervention, become a site for micropolitical contestation and for the disruption of their taken- for-granted presence, functionalities and implications. At its core then, the work underscores and forges ‘indistinct fringes, encroachment, overlappings, migrations, acts of segmentation that no longer coincide with the rigid segmentarity’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 228). As such, while resonances of the sentiment of the architectural critiques positioned by ‘new cultural geographers’ (Buchli 2006; Harvey 2007) and by some contemporary urban scholars of political economy (Jones 2009; Kaika 2010; for a critique, see Jacobs and Merriman 2011) may be drawn from Conical Intersect’s intervention, his performance avoids falling into the trap of victimising the local and instead, more helpfully, insists on our agency to overcome the superficiality of the boundaries that undermine desiring-productions of alternative urban dwelling. It opens the space up to populate our urban imaginations and worlds with novel conceptions of being-in-architecture; ways of living built on pillars of open-ness, social mobility and creative spatial experimentation that expand architecture’s capacity to affect and be affected. In the final section, I further reflect on the relevance of Conical Intersect’s geo-material imagination to architectural geography and, more broadly, to non-representational tendencies in human geography, and explore the methodological bearings held within the artwork.

**Conclusion**

The central aim of this paper has been to position Matta-Clark’s artwork as a case study to further recent debates taking place in the realm of architectural geography on material mutability and agency (Edensor 2011; Grosz 2001), and affective resonances of inhabitation (Adey 2008; Jacobs and Merriman 2011; Lees 2001; Llewellyn 2003). To avoid a ‘micro-reductionism’ of these themes, following Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on the need to study and map the different micro-macro assemblages inflected within each mode of political practice and space, I have attended to Conical Intersect to argue for a re-configuration and broadening of what is considered as the ‘political’ in architectural geographies. The architectural, in this paper, is formulated as the microtexture of macrological power-centres on three overlapping levels. First, Matta-Clark’s performance sheds light on the inequal- ity of socio-economic power-relations at play between a multitude of actants in the (un)shaping of the building event. Second, a concern with the politics of the architectural condition is rooted in the connections Conical Intersect draws and aims to disrupt between paradigmatic understandings of what dwelling entails, strict political legislations of material engagement and inhabitants’ different (often highly constrained) negotiating power over ‘engineered affect’. Third, the architectural gap produced by Matta-Clark affirms the affective void that emanates from the social paradigm and its material manifestation that prioritises the values of functional, closed-off living and of private property over the potential of more communal ways of interacting with space. Through the active intervention into material boundaries then, Conical Intersect evokes an alternative architectural form freed from the conventions of physical, legal and social constraints, while hinting at the possibilities of the kinds of living such novel spatial iterations might entail.

Conical Intersect may find its greatest resonance within geography in the realm of ‘non-representational geography’, with its ontological concerns with the vitalist processes that make up space, bodies and matter (Anderson and Wylie 2009; Thrift 2000). Indeed, the work’s geo-material imagination echoes an increasingly common openness to the radical ambiguity of space: ‘I don’t know what the word “space” means . . . I keep using it. But I’m not quite sure what it means’ (Matta-Clark, cited in Muir 2014, 7). But Conical Intersect also underscores the possibility of further aligning novel developments of space, matter and bodies in ‘non-representational’ architectural geography (see Jacobs and Merriman 2011; Kraftl 2010) with assemblage-thinking that incorporates difference into the very foundations of its political conceptualisations. The uneven densities, tensions and sharings found within each constellation is however not, by any means, determined by the forces of macro- segmentation. Instead, the micrological and macrological are axioms in a constant state of tense (re-) articulation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), within and beyond architectural sites. Taking seriously these inter- actions means opening up to a politics of hope that regards the micropolitical as the space and force ‘of the political event that potentially unmoors it’ (Manning 2009, np; see also Amin and Thrift 2002). This is revealed in the affective micropolitics of Conical Intersect, where, in stretching some of the fissures and unstable materialities inherent to molar segmentations, it has primed seeds for what Massumi (2015, 58) terms a political ‘alter-accomplishment’ to the stabilising and normalising forces of ideology, law and social tradition (Hawkins 2010). The intention is here not to develop ‘a causal model of the emergent relationship between micropolitical interventions and macropolitical out- comes’ (Barnett 2008, 193). It is rather to suggest the necessity to maintain an openness to forms of ‘active experimentation’, since, as Deleuze and Parnet emphasise, ‘we do not know in advance which way a line is going to turn’ (1983, 137). Indeed, Conical Intersect and other artistic articulations of the political may hold unforeseeable yet world-shaping forces that may well unfold extra-institutionally outside of the spheres of state politics and policymaking. As such, I see a danger in Kraftl’s suggestion that architectural geographers should

instigate critical policy readings of extant – as well as historical – architectural programmes such as current, nationwide hospital, school and ‘sustainable community’ projects in the UK. (2010, 412)

Instead, a critical geography of architecture might be better positioned to formulate radically diverging geo- imaginations that destabilise, rather than co-constitute the existing macrological rigid segmentations that have tendencies to ‘subjugate [desire] to law and introduce lack into it’ (Deleuze and Parnet 1983, 96). Geographers are well-placed to formulate an alternative architectural politics of desire and to ‘describe the assemblage in which such a desire becomes possible, gets moving and declares itself’ (Deleuze and Parnet 1983, 97).

Further, Conical Intersect takes as its conceptual starting point the impossibility of a critical positioning ‘outside’ of a situation. Instead, the embeddedness of the subject pushes Matta-Clark towards an active, participatory critique of immanence. ‘It engages becoming, rather than judging what is’ (Massumi 2015, 71). Along these lines, Matta-Clark may be positioned as a critical geographer whose spatial practice troubles ‘normative assumptions about scientific method and spaces’ (Hawkins 2013, 64) by ‘re-envisioning the geographer not merely as a (critical) bystander, but as an active and creative producer of space’ (Gallagher and Prior 2014, 279). Hawkins (2011; 2013) maintains the world of art practice, in the realm of geographical scholarship, is still too often regarded as a separate world whose suitable home is the studio, art gallery or museum. An exception to this paradigm is the ‘experimental geographies’ of artist-geographer Trevor Paglen, for whom ‘actively experimenting with the production of space’ has become ‘an integral part of [his] own practice’, both in terms of analysis and in terms of creative dissemination, in ways that move beyond the potential of well-worn practices and procedures (Paglen 2009, np). Similarly, and as an exception in the realm of architectural geography, Jacobs et al. produced fold-out drawings as part of their research output to ‘create a compellingly and suggestive visualisation of the “impersonal affects” of high-rise interiors’ (2012, 137). In the case of Matta-Clark, it was the material intervention of his subject of examination that provided him with a multi-sensuous apprehension of the architectural that would have unlikely emerged through distant contemplation: ‘It seemed to take cutting through it with a chainsaw to get to know it’ (Matta-Clark, cited in Bear 1974, 37). This mode of creative enactment elaborates on and may significantly supplement emerging movements towards ethno- graphic methodologies in architectural geography (see for instance, Imrie 2003; Jacobs 2006; Jacobs et al. 2007 2012; Jones 2009; Kraftl and Adey 2008; Llewellyn 2003; Dekeyser and Garrett 2015). Furthermore, site- specific interruptions and their mediations may help disseminate architectural thought to audiences unreachable and with affective qualities unimaginable through conventionally-written, uni-sensual research outputs. It is indeed through creative engagements with, and even physical alterations of our topics of research that our modalities of (architectural-)geographical critique may start working politically as portals into novel worlds, that is, as portals into existing worlds experienced anew as impermanent, penetrable and open to affective forces of becoming other.

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**Notes**

1  Two exceptions here, as I will go on to show, are the works of Adey (2008) and Kraftl and Adey (2008) on architectural design in airports that state that the inherent uncontrollability and fluidity of affective life, and thus the problematics of a sense of over-determination, should not push us towards a dismissal of significant contemporary political questions of architectural space. As Adey posits regarding the intentions of airport designers: ‘[w]hat is important is that the airport authorities want the quantitative possibility that these effects will happen’ (2008, 448).

2  The Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of micropolitics has seen a wide appropriation in range of scholarly fields beyond political theory, including media studies (Pisters and Lord 2001), education studies (Olsson 2009; Webb 2008) and environmental theory (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010).

3  As such, as Patton (2000) underlines, Deleuzo-Guattarian understandings of society depart from those found in Marxist philosophy. Their philosophy particularly renounces ‘the idea that contradiction is the motor of historical progress and argue[s] that a society is defined less by its contradictions than by its lines of flight or deterritorialisation’ (2000, 6).

4  For a reflective discussion on Deleuze and Guattari’s and Agamben’s notions of ‘zone of indiscernibility’, see Gilson (2007).

5  Indeed, in Deleuze’s The logic of sense (1990) and even more explicitly in his collaboration Anti-Oedipus (1984) with Guattari, desire is not an imaginary force that derives from a negative universal lack, as in Freud’s account, but instead is a real, productive force of ‘joy’ (also see Deleuze and Parnet 1983, 100). For a more complete overview of Deleuze-Guattarian desire, desir- ing-production and desiring-machines, see Protevi (2009, 90–101).

6  I employ the term ‘participant’ to refer to a variety of forms visitors’ active involvement in constituting the art installation may take. As Morris notes, ‘from undertaking specific activities to walking through the work and simply confronting what is there’, participants are ‘[s]een as integral to the completion of the artwork’ (2011, 318).

7  Matta-Clark’s suggestion for an alternative conception of the labyrinth, one that is not built on strict spatial regulations that aim to clearly distinguish inside from outside and architect from pedestrian, has often been employed to exemplify his counter-position to architectural modernity (Walker 2009). His critical stance towards modernist form and structure, it is further argued, is rooted in his dissatisfaction with his own architectural training at Cornell University, where he was taught by preeminent architectural theorists of modernity, including Colin Rowe, and where he ‘never had a sense of the ambiguity of a structure, the ambiguity of a place’ (Matta- Clark, cited in Bear 1974, 36). Accordingly, his dissections into the built environment, including Conical Intersect, are oft conceptualised as aggressive assaults on the functionalism and desire for control of architectural modernity (see for instance, Singh 2008).

8  In this paper I thus follow Muir (2014) and Walker (2009) in emphasising Conical Intersect as more creative and productive than destructive. To describe Matta-Clark’s intervention as a force of destruction (see Lavin 1984) is to dismiss the productive potential of destabilising the (often inherently violent) hegemonic logics of the legal, the economic and the social enrolled into architectural life, and of constituting novel relationships with the object of knowledge (Muir 2014, 49–50). Moreover, to speak of Conical Intersect in terms of destruction equally disregards the multitude of often subtle material interventions performed by Matta-Clark and his assistants, including leveraging, skewing and tilting.

9  These include airports (Adey 2008), train stations (Adey et al. 2013), schools (Den Besten et al. 2011) and prisons (Van Hoven and Sibley 2008).

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