

# Buildings Cast, Carved, Wrapped: The Intervention Practices of Rachel Whiteread, Gordon Matta-Clark and Christo

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## HYPOTHESIS

That the practice of architecture constitutes a practice of *intervention*, a practice which affects and is affected by a series of contexts, either physical or conceptual, all within its grasp and beyond its immediate reach.

To Intervene: to come in as something extraneous; to come between so as to prevent or modify result.<sup>1</sup>

Much like a surgical intervention, an act of architectural intervention operates within an existing structure or set of structures to expose new life or identity through transformation: to intervene architecturally is to come between a multiplicity of contexts, the social, cultural, urban, natural, historical, political and programmatic forces which shape the built realm. To intervene is to either gently tease or radically interrogate with new thoughts and ideas, to invest with new light in such a way as to critically and poetically underscore the very fabric which constitutes the project site, with all its shortcomings and potentials.

Whether they are performed at the scale of a room, a building or at an urban scale, the presence of such alterations can be quite discrete: like surgical cuts, they are skilled, precise, informed, decisive and permanent. Architectural interventions delicately transform, repair or modify existing tissues, leaving seams and scars where there were none, while operating to conceal others.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper will address this notion of architecture as a practice of intervention through the work of three artists<sup>2</sup>, themselves on the margins of the architectural profession. Each in their own manner, the intervention practices of Gordon Matta-Clark (cutting, carving), Rachel Whiteread (casting) and Christo (wrapping) have critically engaged built form in ways which have turned ordinary buildings into extraordinary structures, or sometimes reiterated the presence of great monuments. The three artists share in common the use of existing buildings, of works of architecture, as the very *object* of their exploration: Matta-Clark sets up shop in dark, abandoned buildings, working with a chain saw to strategically reconnect rooms and floors, inside and outside, by reintroducing light, air, and indeed *space* inside these uninhabited structures.

Rachel Whiteread's ambitious casting practice seeks to preserve the memory of built form, specifically of buildings scheduled for demolition, by first producing their cast: for Whiteread, the building is conceived as formwork, to be filled with concrete, resin or plaster, its walls then torn away, leaving the newly-formed cast as only surviving evidence of the destroyed structure. While Matta-Clark and Whiteread celebrate the anonymous, the fabric of urban space, Christo instead seeks the exceptional and the monumental as subject



Fig. 1. Christo, *The Museum of Modern Art, Wrapped*, New York (1971).

of his investigations. By physically wrapping these structures with fabric, Christo is engaging not only their exterior form but their interior as well: deprived of light and air, the spaces inside the wrapper are in effect made uninhabitable, muted, body-bagged. For Christo this process constitutes an act of demarcation rather than concealment: by softening the crisp, square lines of these buildings against a background of evenly defined, yet anonymous structures, the wrappings unexpectedly enhance our awareness of these very monuments rather than simply hide them from view.

For all three artists, built form offers opportunities of both site and conceptual program. By dealing specifically with existing structures, each artist frames his/her work critically against the background of physical and conceptual conditions already in place. While confronting us with realities dormant within buildings, aspirations previously unfulfilled, these interventions illuminate pro-

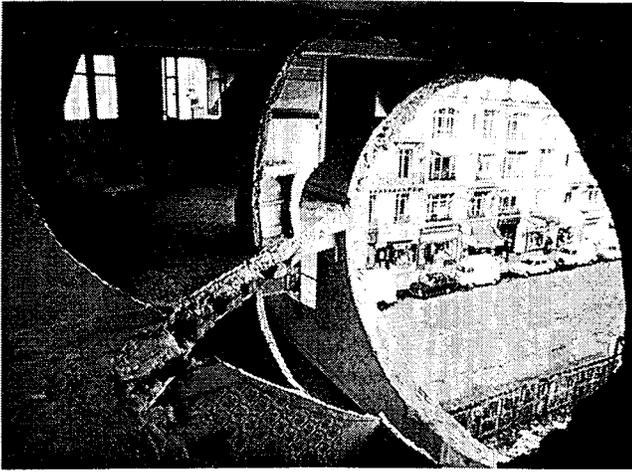


Fig. 2. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Conical Intersect*, Paris (1975)

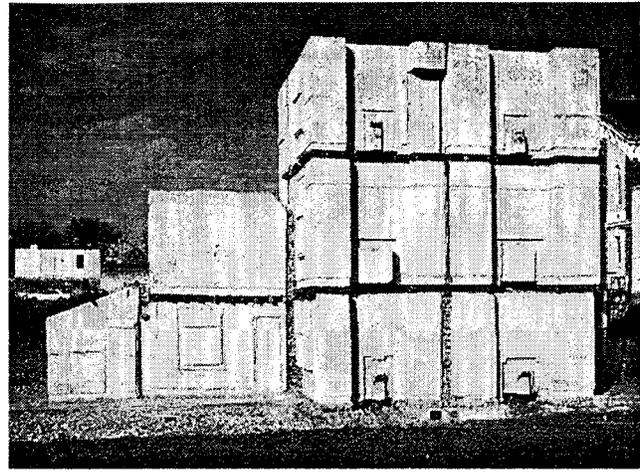


Fig. 3. Rachel Whiteread, *House*, London (1993).

found lessons on the nature of our work as architects. It is precisely this reinvestment of existing built matter, this tweaking rather than the making from scratch, that makes these works so extraordinary and so powerful. Building and intervention merge to create a third, indissociable whole. Each building is presented afresh, new double, yet subtly realigned with its own past.

This paper will explore the nature of some of these lessons, their similarities and differences, and how they may inform the work of architects today. The focus will be set on exploring each practice as a whole rather than engaging in discussions of specific projects by the artists. The paper will also challenge the perceived marginality of these practices in favor of broader architectural criteria. In this spirit, it is interesting to observe that each form of intervention involves on some level a weakening of built form, and that none of these aims to meet functional expectations of shelter. While these aims may appear contrary to the traditional ideals of architecture, one may discover behind such narrow standards intensely architectural ideas. Based on more poetic criteria of time, memory, materiality and occupation, these forms of intervention operate to raise and intensify our awareness of the built realm, creating place and meaning out of a careful *re-framing* of the familiar.

## THE BUILDING AS SITE AND CONCEPTUAL PROGRAM

The notion of investing buildings as artistic site and program may be tied to ideas in the field of conceptual art of the 1960s and early 70s. Artists had then begun to bring into question the institutionality of the museum and art gallery, as well as the nature of the work of art itself: there existed a growing sense that works of art were given privileged status, indeed *became* works of art, simply by being placed in a museum or art gallery.

Simply defined, movements in conceptual art emerged in challenge of these assumptions, redefining the nature of the work of art in a twofold strategy: first, by creating and displaying art out of museums and art galleries; second, by opening up typical categorizations in works of art (painting, sculpture, etc...) in favor of expanded media.'

Produced out of this reinvestment of values, conceptual art asks that the viewer reconsider their *own* assumptions as to what constitutes art. The traditional conditions of the nature of the object of art, of the museum as container, of exhibition, are reinvented in the process. As the boundaries of the gallery and art museum dissolve, so too does the viewing process. Gone is the idea of a Sunday afternoon spent at a local museum or gallery to look at works of art. The city, its fabric and buildings, the environment at large, are

redefined as artistic project, as site and program. At the center of the conceptual art movement is the sense that art might exist anywhere, and that it may take on many forms. Conceptual art is in this sense unpredictable, everywhere and nowhere at the same time, free of the institutional traditions which it had sought to criticize. Works are often free of charge, intended for all, encountered either by accident or intentionally, at any time of the day, in a walk through the city, or by word of mouth. Projects by Matta-Clark, Whiteread and Christo spring forth into this tradition as *site-making* procedures, interventions which simultaneously define a place to accommodate the art while constituting the object of art to be displayed.'

The idea of site is here understood in broad terms: it is not simply an empty building lot, a room or street, in brief, spaces which are physically framed with walls, floors and ceilings. A site might in fact require a different kind of framing, only possible in the imagination. Site-making explorations have taken on many forms: at one end of the spectrum, artists such as Dan Graham, Ed Ruscha, Robert Smithson, and even Matta-Clark have taken a documentary approach to the site-making process.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup> Photographs of ordinary, everyday life buildings, streets and places (Ruscha's documenting of parking lots, of buildings on the Sunset Strip, one by one, in its entirety; Graham's deadpan survey of bungalows and bungalow formations) are photographed and presented in such a way as to make the viewer reconsider the meaning of these places and structures.

From these particular works emerges the notion that nothing (physically) new is produced: art emerges instead through a conceptual *re-framing* of existing conditions. Much like the analogy with photographic framing suggests, this process gives new meaning, a new frame of reference, to familiar places and conditions. Simply put, the idea of re-framing implies to look at again, perhaps harder, and tell the story in different, more poetic terms. Such projects are often politically and socially loaded, exposing what is uncomfortable, what we choose not to look at. Graham and Ruscha draw attention to the generic nature of the places they have photographed: the parking lots, bungalows, even the buildings of the Sunset Strip are presented as placeless, generic, ungrounded. If anything, the constructed site in these photographs is precisely the complete *absence* of site. All of us have known such places without necessarily having visited them.

Christo, Matta-Clark and Whiteread share in common with these artists the idea of making place: whether they leave tangible marks on the environment or not, all of these projects critically re-present the places around us in new ways which raise our awareness to them." With the exception of some of Whiteread's more modest casts," these interventions are inextricably tied to the place which they participate to define: they works cannot be moved."



Fig. 4. Gan Graham, *Homes for America* (1907)

As was mentioned earlier, the choice of sites, of buildings to receive intervention, varies a great deal among the three artists. For Christo, who has focused his attention mostly on well-known architectural monuments," the act of wrapping reaffirms the building's or site's inherent monumentality. There exists for the viewer a sense of anticipation and surprise, similar to that which is felt while unwrapping a gift. This kind of curiosity may possess greater drawing power than the buildings themselves: until confronted with Christo's wrappings, the average passer-by may have never *looked* at one such building seriously enough to form a clear memory of it. The intervention forces the viewer into reconstituting the building's appearance *in the imagination*, thus strengthening their awareness of what has been taken away.

Whiteread and Matta-Clark have instead invested anonymous structures, the prosaic *fabric* of urban space. The buildings are given a new chance: the interventions transform the generic, abandoned structures into unique places. Yet we develop a sense that there are many more buildings just like these for which a similar treatment would be equally well-suited. Whiteread's casts are markers of places that are no more, buildings, places demolished: the project *House*, for example, for which Whiteread produced the cast of an entire row house on Grove Road in London, speaks to us not only about the presence of this particular dwelling, but also about countless other identical-looking houses which used to line the street and the neighborhood." For Matta-Clark, the interventions produce not one but two distinct sites: the floor and wall cut-outs extracted from the project site are displayed in a museum or gallery space, as evidence of intervention somewhere else in the city. The cut-outs, which survived the buildings long after their demolition, stand as the project's material *negative*, symbolizing with irony all that the intervention was not, decontextualized artifacts displayed in a place where they are given new significance.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Whiteread's early casts of single rooms resonate awkwardly against the stark walls of the museum or gallery in which they are displayed.<sup>15</sup>

## WORK PROCESSES

As distinctions between work of art and work of architecture in conceptual art dissolve, so do typical professional distinctions between artist and architect, as well as their respective fields of work. Much like architects, Christo and Whiteread become the coordinators of extraordinary enterprises, having at their disposal heavy contingents of skilled workers, even engineers, at all stages of realization of the works. The artist assumes the role of project conceptualizer, coordinating and documenting the realization while leaving a good part of the craft to others.<sup>16</sup> In addition to these duties,

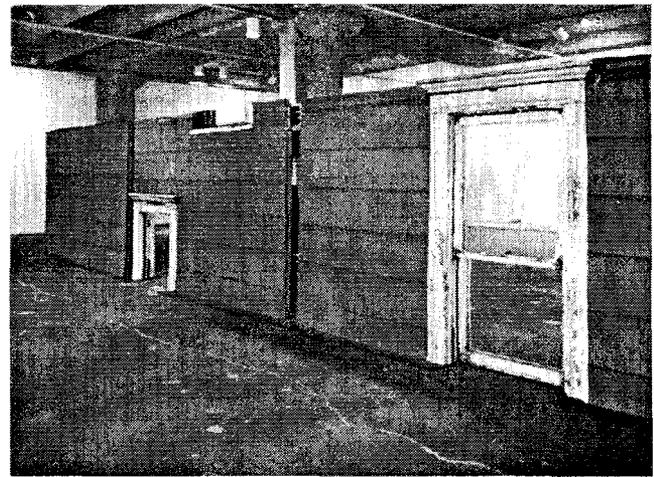


Fig. 5. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Bingo* (Lewiston, New York, 1974) extractions displayed in a gallery space, New York. The cuttings slice with equal intensity through whatever stands in their way: walls, floors, doors and windows alike.

Christo and wife Jeanne-Claude are also gifted fund raisers. first initiating the project idea then raising all sums necessary to the construction of these public works through the sale of Christo artwork (typically renderings of the very project which they are seeking money for) and public speaking engagements. While this process provides the artist with complete artistic integrity over all matters relating to the project, the process of realization typically proves to be a lengthy one: the permissions alone required to gain access to these sites have typically required years of planning and negotiation." Gone also is the notion of artistic confinement: in the realization of his works, Christo attacks these structures from the outside, in the open, and in full view of the public: the realization of the work itself is part performance, part construction site, and no doubt as great a public event as a visit of the work itself, once realized.

Matta-Clark has sought greater personal control in the overall process, having likened his own practice to that of graffiti artists and squatters:<sup>18</sup> the artist takes hold of abandoned buildings, often without permission, working in solitary to define alternate occupations (not unlike squatting) within these structures.<sup>19</sup> Each project begins with a solitary phase of occupation, a search for clues within the building which will later lead to intervention. Similarly, Whiteread attacks buildings from the inside out, which provides a greater sense of privacy. Like performance artists, the interventions seem spontaneous, and deeply ingrained into the places they engage. Yet such spontaneity is partially deceptive. These projects require careful planning and engineering: in each case, the artist must first obtain permission to intervene on these particular structures. The interventions are later carefully drawn to scale, dimensioned and engineered. For Matta-Clark in particular, this more rational aspect of the realization process is often supplemented by the finding of clues on-site, which in turn affect the initial design. The carefully engineered Christo working drawings do not afford this kind of adaptation in the realization of the project.

## TEMPORALITY AND MEMORY

The practices of all three artists cause us to reconsider notions of permanence in works of architecture. Each artist has engaged built form in ways which have exposed unique notions of temporality. While buildings are expected to be durable, none of these practices produces this kind of permanence. All are ephemeral to some degree. The sites of Matta-Clark and Whiteread have, at the moment of the commission, already been scheduled for demolition. Some of

Christo's interventions, due to the fact that they are located in high-traffic areas, have had a life span of only a few days.<sup>20</sup> The sites, the buildings themselves have this kind of permanence, which the intervention transforms, enhances. Yet the works manage to survive in our consciousness through other means.

The three artists share a common interest in documenting the process of realization of their work.<sup>21</sup> These accounts (books, movies, home movies, drawings, models, paintings, and photographs) explore the entire process of realization from the first contact with the building to the unveiling of the project. Long after the buildings have been demolished or the intervention taken down (a phase which is often recorded as an integral part of the process), these published works and exhibitions constitute for many the closest tangible experience of the works: the projects are recreated in the imagination.

Of particular note are Matta-Clark's photographic collages: the artist first began experimenting with this technique out of frustration with his inability to capture the space of his interventions through traditional means of photography.

On a technical level, the projects did not lend themselves to the rectangular frame of the camera: the complex series of diagonal cuts often engage floors, walls, and ceilings simultaneously, forming complex conditions of depth difficult to capture in a single frame, especially with the lack of setback inside the buildings. By assembling several overlapping frames into a single composition, Matta-Clark achieved an almost three-dimensional, exploded quality of representation which rivaled the complexity of the project space he had created. The perspectival collages possess great drawing power, inviting the viewer *inside* the space of the intervention.

It may be said that Matta-Clark's act of carving, of structural weakening, appears to accelerate a process of disintegration already in progress. After all, the buildings are in poor shape and all the carvings can do is further worsen their condition. Yet in a sense these buildings have been granted a kind of stay of execution: the sites the artist has been granted have after all already been scheduled for demolition, and the intervention will in a sense prolong its life span for a few weeks longer. The buildings are uninhabited at the moment when Matta-Clark takes possession of them, so the intervention brings new life, new visitors to the site.<sup>22</sup> The cuttings seem to breathe new space in the buildings, bringing light and air inside in unexpected ways. Perversely, the material building cut-outs, the very elements which were extracted from the building in the first place to form the project space, survive the building long after its demolition.

Much like Whiteread's castings, these material cut-outs serve to illustrate the condition of the building after the death of the building itself. There exists an inevitable sense in Whiteread's work that the building will and *must* die in order to reveal the cast itself. The death of the building is natural and accepted as part of the realization process. The tearing away of the outside walls reveals the intervention behind them. Whiteread's casts are markers: they are reminders of that which used to stand there, ghosts producing a doubled sense of place. The durability of the concrete and plaster casts, enriched with the textures, scraps of wallpaper and colors captured from the formwork, achieve a permanence similar to that of the building which they are a product of. Ironically, the presence of these markers itself may be short-lived: Whiteread's most ambitious casting to date, *House*, had to be torn down after public outrage over the project.<sup>23</sup>

Christo's subject buildings are the only ones which *survive* these acts of interventions. Interestingly enough, the buildings emerge unscathed from the process: the wrapping procedure can actually be reverted completely. Christo has gone to great lengths in making sure that the interventions do *not* alter in any way the buildings or its surroundings at any stages of the realization.<sup>24</sup> Once the fabric is taken down, the buildings return to their original lives, to being inhabited. For those who have witnessed Christo's art first hand, the

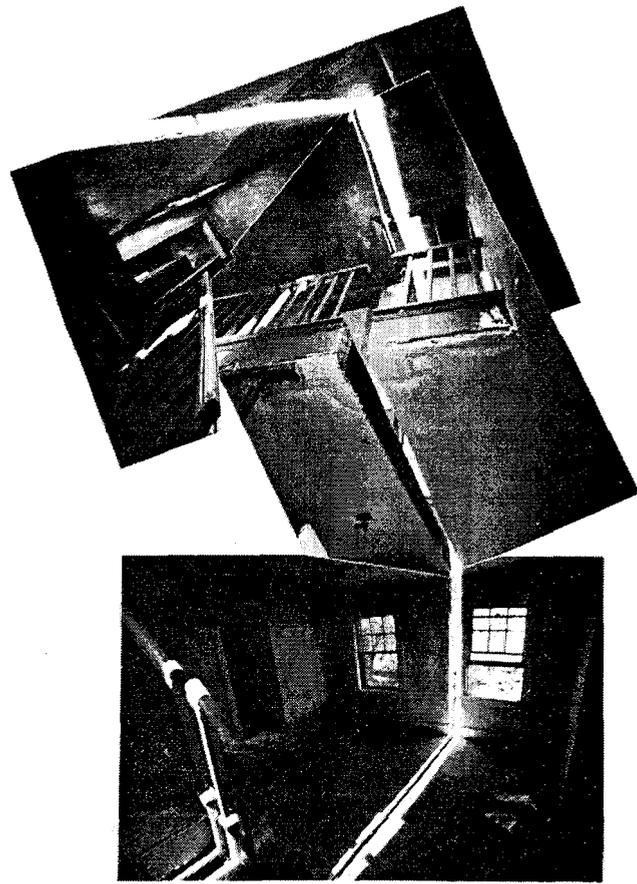


Fig. 6. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting/Four Corners*, Englewood, New Jersey (1974).

project lives on in memory long after the wrappings are taken down: the building itself, once unwrapped, stands as a poignant reminder of the strength of the work. One may never look at the structure the same way again. In this way, the wrappings make us reconsider familiar objects which we thought we knew intimately. Even unrealized photomontages such as the wrapped New York buildings of the early 70s are often strong enough to create this desired effect, the potential of intervention, the possibility of the event actually taking place.

Christo has long had an interest in wrapping living things and beings,<sup>25</sup> and his interest in wrapping buildings, in suspending their life-sheltering function, if only for a few moments, seems only natural in this regard. Christo's art is an art of anticipation: once wrapped, an object's function is suspended in time, in transition.<sup>26</sup> The wrapping also preserves, protects the building from weather and the elements, slowing its aging process.

Each in their own way, the three practices bring about a sense of rebirth in the buildings. The sense of rebirth in Matta-Clark's work comes in the renewed attention given to the abandoned buildings which the artist inhabits, symbolized by the bright new dynamic lines of light. For Whiteread, the removal of the building's exterior veneer formwork is like the shedding of an old skin, of an old life for a new one.<sup>27</sup>

For Christo, the process of unwrapping leads to the building being reintroduced to its surroundings following a brief *absence*. This unveiling may often prove to be a more significant event than the wrapping itself. This process was particularly successful — while perhaps largely unexpected — with the *Wrapped Reichstag* project in Berlin. The building had been the seat of the Third Reich during World War II, and had since stood as a poignant reminder of the

atrocities of the war. As the wrapping was taken down, many noted that the building seemed to have been cleansed from these memories: the building had been re-presented to the city of Berlin!"

## SPATIAL OCCUPATIONS

The interventions modify possibilities of occupation within or around the buildings as well. The sites are re-programmed in unexpected ways, while leaving clues as to the former use of the buildings. This transition between old and new occupations is a key moment of tension, particularly in Matta-Clark's work: the cuttings seek to liberate, to breathe new life inside these dark abandoned structures.<sup>29</sup> The artist recalls an art opening where the painter Jackson Pollock, irritated with the stuffy atmosphere in the gallery, punches his fist through the window to allow air inside." With similar panache, Matta-Clark develops an equally brutal approach of carving: by removing sections of floors and walls, the cuttings reconnect existing rooms or create entirely new rooms of their own with.

The presence of Matta-Clark's interventions is typically strong from the inside, where new penetrating planes of natural light can be fully experienced in contrast with the dark interiors. One of the major strengths of Matta-Clark's interventions lies in this ability to create difference with what is already in place. This process operates within the building through the use of contrasting conditions, opposing light and darkness, void against solid, as well as fresh new geometries against the grain of the building. A strong example of the artist's ability to achieve maximum interior effect while projecting a discrete presence on the exterior is the *Splitting/Four Corners* project (New Jersey, 1974). The project is unique as it features a single, *shearing* plane rather than the typical material extractions which the artist had used to create voids or openings within buildings. The plane delicately bisects along its short axis a suburban house in equal halves. While almost invisible from the outside due to its thinness, this cut dynamically activates the interior with unexpected conditions of light.

The process of defining the cuts, of finding those precise moments of release, tends to get more aggressive in the artist's later works. The lines of intervention become increasingly different from the lines of the buildings themselves. The cuttings are precise, surgical: like open wounds, they seem to expose hidden realities lain dormant within the buildings. In early projects such as *Bronx Floors*, the cuts are more timid, square openings which are nonetheless successful as establishing alternate spatial occupations. Matta-Clark later became interested in spherical shapes and circular geometries. In projects such as *Conical Intersect* and *Caribbean Circus*, the cuts immediately establish themselves as a strong and unmistakably foreign presence. The interventions are particularly legible in section, as the cuttings operate in great tension against the horizontal grain of the floors. The notion of verticality constitutes a common theme in many works: Matta-Clark was fascinated with forming ascending or descending spaces connecting earth and sky." Once performed, the interventions become an integral part of the structures. They cannot be erased. The cuttings feel strangely in place, producing an almost seamless environment.

Christo and Whiteread's practices seem to suggest a completely different sense of occupation from that of Matta-Clark's. Whereas the cutting practice seeks to implode, liberate, and open up new inhabitable realms within the solid environment of the building, Christo and Whiteread's work is about forcing the viewer *out* of the site. Whiteread looks to saturate and evacuate any notion of interior space by *filling in* with concrete those very spaces in the building which are meant to be inhabited; Christo's wraps operate like a new shell which suffocates the first." Both keep air, light, and indeed space out, of the building."

Whiteread's work in particular resonates in conceptual opposition to Matta-Clark's, opposing solids and voids, space and *poché*, space and form, inside and outside. The appearance of Whiteread's



Fig. 7. Christo wrapping one of seven women during a performance at the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art (1967).

sculptures is rather a product of chance: the artist is actually working herself into a dark, air-less coffin, never getting a glimpse of the final results until the outer walls of the building have been peeled away.<sup>34</sup>

Much like Christo's, the tangible space of the intervention constitutes one of exterior surface, with one difference: while Christo's wrappings seem to protect and privatize the monumental, the relief of Whiteread's casts is actually the private, interior surface of the outer walls brought into view; a building turned inside-out, monumentalized through the casting process." Whiteread's single room cast (*Untitled*) Room (1993), for example, stands as a poignant reminder of the reductive nature of the modern dwelling. The cast features absolutely plain surfaces on all sides with the exception of 2 small protruding elements; upon further inspection, each element is understood to have been a void inside the walls of the room: the first is a window, the other a slightly recessed door. Given the plain nature of the overall cast, these elements are given renewed importance: they are the only surface details, an observation which only goes to reinforce the reductive nature of the piece.

## MATERIALITY

The practices of carving, casting and wrapping also transform the sense of materiality of the buildings. In each case, the building operates as an *armature* for the intervention. The interventions can neither physically nor conceptually stand alone as a work of art, but rather are inextricably tied to the building or site which they engage, producing a third whole.

Only in Christo's case can this physical process of alteration be reverted. In all cases the building assumes the identity of the work itself, indeed becomes the work of art.<sup>36</sup>

The three practices operate from the standpoint of material economy. For Matta-Clark in particular, the intervention is completed without the addition of *any* new materials: the space of the intervention is one of conceptual absence rather than presence, created by removing material (walls, floors, etc...) from the building as a way to clear space for the project itself." This process is not unlike that of an excavation. The space created by the removal constitutes the very *object* of the removal. There is also the idea that light is used as poetic material, whose tangible presence is achieved

in contrast with the darkness of the interiors (itself a material) which it is working against. Either as dynamic voids or solid masses of light, the cuttings operate with a logic of their own, challenging the building's tectonic and material integrity by slicing with equal intensity and disregard through whatever stands in their way, walls, floors, doors and windows alike<sup>38,39</sup>. The tools Matta-Clark has used over the years (chisels, bow saws, chain saws, hammers, blow torches) speak of the struggles to cut through various materials the artist has come against.

Whiteread and Christo employ instead no less economical strategies in which a single, amorphous material (for Christo: canvas; for Whiteread: concrete, resins or plaster) registers the shape of the building through a formal process of transfer. In either case, the original building becomes a true armature, which holds up or contains the materials of intervention. These processes of transfer of form engage the buildings' exterior shell, in effect neutralizing each in their own way their architectural function of spatial and weather control.

For Whiteread, the building shell is reduced to the role of mold, its walls, floors, constituting the planes of basins which hold up the poured materials as they cure, before they are ultimately torn away from the casts. For Christo, the wrapping operates as an outer layer hanging over the building, in effect softening the clean, square angles of its form. While structurally independent from the first (a new steel armature separates the building's outer shell from the wrapping itself, in order to prevent damaging contacts), this new layer conceptually fuses with the building envelope<sup>0</sup>. In an attempt to resolve the appearance of spontaneity in his project renderings with the difficult technical reality of achieving these same commissions, Christo uses dynamic patterns of cables holding the canvas tight around the building to offset these precisely engineered, fitted and sewn wrappers.

An important aspect of what makes these forms of intervention so successful is that these practices, which we all have use for in everyday life (forexample: molding acake, cutting paper, wrapping a birthday present), here are brought to anew, unfamiliar, monumental scale<sup>40</sup>. For Christo and Whiteread in particular, the use of these materials at such a large scale produces solid, impermeable, ghostly building doubles<sup>2</sup>. The richness of materials employed in the construction of the building, is in effect neutralized, abstracted, the openings silenced<sup>41</sup>.

As was suggested earlier, the interventions produce in most cases (Christo being the sole exception) irreversible physical transformations within the host buildings: the interventions cannot be removed from the site. A further architectural paradox is the idea of a building as an act of building: for Whiteread and Matta-Clark in particular, the interventions imply a necessary phase of destruction in order to achieve these architectural transformations. There exists irony in the fact that an act of demolition in our culture may take more time, precision and effort than an act of construction.

For all three artists, there exists real ambiguity as to defining where the intervention starts and buildings ends: these projects simply cannot be defined in terms of masses of concrete, swaths of canvas, or spatial voids. For Christo and Matta-Clark, the buildings become as much part of the intervention as the intervention itself. In the case of Whiteread, the building remains as an essential part of the realization process. The mold-cast split is not entirely *clean* either: wall textures and colors, scraps of wallpaper, evidence of the first life of the building, are pulled away from the walls and registered onto the new cast, forever becoming part of the building's new double long after its demolition.

## CONCLUSION

For Matta-Clark, Whiteread and Christo, the artistic process may not be one of expanding means but rather one of refining a limited set of skills in order to illuminate the specific qualities of their project

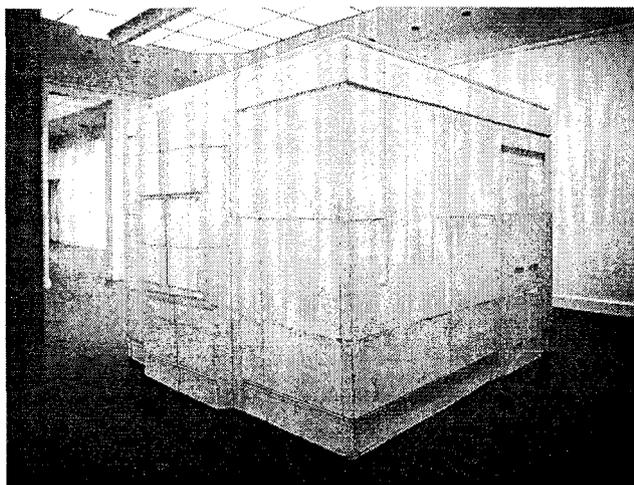


Fig.8 Rachel Whiteread, *Ghost*, London (1990)

sites. Each artist has remained true to a single medium of intervention, perhaps gaining increased knowledge with each project as to the critical potential of their respective practices. This process places emphasis primarily on the site itself, in order to recognize forces already in place and to raise our awareness to these forces through delicate transformation. Matta-Clark's cuttings focus our attention beyond the confines of the room which we are in: like x-rays, they pull together, re-connect with great strength and poetry. Whiteread and Christo fabricate a double, itself perhaps more powerful than the original building, yet made from the same lines.

Of particular interest is the idea the fact that architecture might not have *existed* in these buildings prior to these receiving artistic intervention. These works bring about (or at least confirm) a new presence in these buildings, a new sense of place. For Matta-Clark and Whiteread, this proposition pulls out of anonymity the very fabric of urban space. Christo's work instead makes us realize how important certain monuments are by taking them away from us. A different kind of architecture. An architecture without architects.

This is a principal strength of a practice of intervention: the notion that not only new lines, new gestures, produce architecture, but that architecture may instead be a product of past lines and new, informed gestures, however subtle. The image of an architectural intervention may not be that of a stand alone building but rather that of a more discrete practice which uses the surrounding contexts and forces, both built and conceptual, in which it is located: intervention and host become a single, coherent, renewed architectural whole, a product of the past and the present. Such an architecture presents a program which exceeds its traditional bounds, told by outcasts, by those interested in looking at built form through different prisms. The process of making architecture may be as much about learning from these lessons which lie on the periphery of our profession.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Yolande Daniels and Randy Ott for their insight and support; to Nina Hofer who, unknowingly, introduced me to Rachel Whiteread's work, at which point all the pieces of this puzzle began to fall in place; and finally to Sheila Kennedy.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Concise Dictionary, Seventh Edition*. (London: 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Matta-Clark: born 1943, New York City; died 1978, New York City.

Rachel Whiteread: born 1963, London. Lives and works in London.

- Christo: born 1935, Bulgaria. Lives in New York. Christo's wife, Jeanne-Claude, is his principal collaborator and handles the business aspect of the artist's projects.
- <sup>3</sup> Gordon Matta-Clark is a co-founder of the *Anarchitecture* group in 1973 in New York City, which brought together artists with a common interest in space-making or space-marking alternatives to traditional architectural practice. The group put together 1 show, entitled *Anarchitecture*, in 1974.
- <sup>4</sup> See Rorimer and Goldstein, *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965-1975* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 1995); also Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972).
- The inaugural exhibition held at the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, entitled *Rooms*, in 1976, canonized these practices of intervention on buildings. The exhibition invited a number of artists, including Gordon Matta-Clark, to produce an intervention within the old school building. See Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the index part 2," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernists Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).
- <sup>6</sup> Refer to the following photo-documentary projects: Dan Graham, *Homes for America*; Ed Ruscha, *Even Building on the Sunset Strip; Thirtyfour Parking Lots; Twentysix Gas Stations; Real Estate Opportunities*; Robert Smithson, *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*. Each Ruscha project was published in book form, while Graham's was published in *Arts Magazine* in 1967.
- <sup>7</sup> Matta-Clark explored this notion of documentary as artistic project as well: in *Fake Estate* (Queens, 1973), the artist acquired a number of minuscule real-estate parcels from the City of Queens for \$25 a piece, which he then proceeded to document through maps, photography and legal documents. The properties are so small (1 foot square parcels and the like) that they cannot be built out or inhabited. By acquiring and documenting these, Matta-Clark was attempting to bring into light the bizarre accidents within gridded systems throughout the city which formed these parcels in the first place.
- <sup>8</sup> In all fairness, the work of Robert Smithson has spanned a broad range of investigations, from the making of documentaries to the creation of land art works. Graham has also explored architectural and landscape installations but remains better known for his documentaries and video works.
- <sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note Christo's formulation in naming his wrapped buildings projects: for example, the wrapping of the Pont-Neuf in Paris is named *The Pont-Neuf, Wrapped*, as if to suggest the same place, but in another dimension.
- <sup>10</sup> The single room casts (*Untitled*) *Room* and *Ghost* are small enough to be moved into museums or galleries.
- <sup>11</sup> Christo refers sarcastically to this part of his work as his *portable art*, the paintings, collages, renderings and small wrapped objects (books and the like), which the artist sells at a high price to finance the construction of his large projects.
- <sup>12</sup> The portfolio entitled (*Some*) *Not Realized Projects* of 1971, including proposals for 1 Times Square, MoMA, and the Whitney, in New York, confirmed this artistic interest.
- <sup>13</sup> For this particular project, Whiteread and project sponsors Artangel Trust and Beck's in fact considered many possible buildings before settling on the definitive, Grove Road site.
- <sup>14</sup> A good example of this practice is *Splitting/Four Corners* (Englewood, New Jersey, 1974), a project which included the cutting of a single plane bisecting along its short axis a row house in equal halves; the project also featured the removal of the wall corners at the junction with the gable. Matta-Clark reinstalled these 4 corners in a gallery in the same relative positions. Also see the *Bingo* extractions (1974), in which the facade of a typical suburban New Jersey house is cut up into 9 equal squares. Several of these squares were later displayed in New York City galleries.
- <sup>15</sup> See (*Untitled*) *Room* (1990) and *Ghost* (1993).
- <sup>16</sup> This is hardly a new idea (the great works of the Renaissance are a good example), but such practices are fairly original within the realm of contemporary art.
- <sup>17</sup> This may prove a lengthy, if not impossible process: Christo has tried to push a proposal for Central Park for years without success. Similarly, approvals for the wrapping of the Reichstag in Berlin took over 20 years. The Central Park project remains an ongoing objective.
- <sup>18</sup> Matta-Clark often did not have permission to intervene in the buildings he had selected. See early projects such as *Bronx Floors* (1972-73) for an abandoned apartment building in the Bronx, and *Days End* (1975), which is sited in a pier shed on the Hudson River.
- <sup>19</sup> Matta-Clark did employ occasional collaborators in the realization of later, more ambitious pieces (often because of time constraints), but the initial solitary phase of occupation remained as an integral part of the creative process.
- <sup>20</sup> The standard Christo installation is meant to be displayed for 2 weeks from the moment of its completion. The *Valley Curtain* project (1972), had to be taken down only 28 hours following its completion because of the threat of incoming storm. The project consisted of a suspended curtain spanning 1,300 feet across a valley traversed by Highway 325 in Rifle, Colorado.
- <sup>21</sup> The idea of reproductions of the work of art itself as works of art could constitute the subject of an entire article!
- <sup>22</sup> Soon after the realization of *House*, Whiteread's most ambitious project to date, in late 1993, the artist was awarded the prestigious *Turner Prize* in England. The largely misunderstood nature of the project, combined with the award of the *Turner Prize*, produced an irresistible combination of events which led to the demolition of the cast in January 1994.
- <sup>23</sup> Perhaps for safety reasons, visitors were seldom allowed inside Matta-Clark's projects. Of particular note is Matta-Clark's last project, *Circus- Caribbean Orange*, realized for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Visitors were allowed inside the building in small groups led by tour guides. Impromptu openings were also organized for *Splitting/Four Corners* and *Days End*.
- <sup>24</sup> The notion of preserving these structures intact is an important condition in any of Christo's large scale works. Early technical notes for Christo's *Pont-Neuf, Wrapped* project, for example, conceptualize this approach to the building: "stone work to be fully protected; no anchors in stone work; protruding edges of stone to be fitted with coverings to protect against abrasions from the fabric, ropes and supports; coordination with traffic control agencies to maintain boat, barge, automobile, and pedestrian traffic." Christo, *The Pont-Neuf, Wrapped* (New York: Harry Abrams Publishers, 1990), p. 60.
- <sup>25</sup> Christo wrapped trees, women and flowers in the 1960s.
- <sup>26</sup> Christo first began exploring possibilities with wrapping by focusing his attention on various small objects, notably books and newspapers. There is a delicious irony in the idea that these objects suddenly acquire enormous value because of the wrapping but still cannot be opened.
- <sup>27</sup> "The surface of the sculpture provides the site of exchange between destruction and creation, the oscillation between what is known and what is other [...] The surface of the sculpture is the point of contact between the cast and the original, but also that between both cast and original and viewer." Rachel Whiteread, *Shedding Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), pp. 12-14.
- <sup>28</sup> This comment comes from friends who witnessed the unwrapping of the Reichstag and the ensuing press on the project.
- <sup>29</sup> Says Matta-Clark: "The thing I would really like to express by that way of working is the idea of transforming this static, enclosed condition of architecture on a very mundane level into this kind of architecture which incorporates this sort of animated geometry or this animated, tenuous relationship between void

- and surface". Judith Russi Kirshner, "Interview with Gordon Matta-Clark", IVAM Centro Julio-Gonzalez. *Gordon Matta-Clark* (Valencia: IVAM Centro Julio-Gonzalez, 1993), p. 391.
- <sup>30</sup> Matta-Clark later recreated this very gesture himself by blowing out with a shotgun the windows of the Institute for Art and Architecture studies in New York, where the artist had been invited to intervene. The public was never allowed to see Matta-Clark's intervention, because Peter Eisenman personally paid for the windows to be replaced prior to the opening...
- <sup>31</sup> Matta-Clark has explored, through means other than carving and cutting, a fascination for the underground. See: *Descending Steps for Batan* (1977), an installation and performance in memory of Matta-Clark's deceased brother Sebastian Matta, and the *Underground Paris* (1977) documentary.
- <sup>32</sup> See also *Infiltration Homogen für Konzertflügel* by Joseph Beuys (1966), a piano wrapped (silenced) in green felt.
- <sup>33</sup> For the wrapping of the *Kunsthalle Bern* (1972), Christo made a slit through the canvas at the main entrance so that visitors could enter the building and view the project from the inside.
- <sup>34</sup> The casting of *House* is in fact hollow: planes of rebar were laid out against the outside surfaces of each room, then sprayed with concrete, producing a hollow shell. The cast was then slightly doctored up from the outside, its edges crisped, particularly around the windows. The 2 flanking houses to the project site remained during realization so as to provide additional bearing capacity.
- <sup>35</sup> The discrete presence of a sloping floor is registered in *Untitled Floor/Ceiling*. As the material settles in the form, the top surface becomes perfectly horizontal while the lower surface adopts the sloping imperfections of the floor: this produces a thin cast at one end and a thicker cast at the other.
- <sup>36</sup> Matta-Clark often referred to the demolition of the buildings which contained his works as the demolition of the work itself.
- <sup>37</sup> The carving process as a way of making space first emerges in Matta-Clark's work in a series of drawings around 1972. The artist would cut through thick stacks of paper as a way of marking the outer surface, producing deep, spatial incisions. The cutting or removal process was not new: artists such as Dennis Oppenheim (*Ice Cuts*), Lawrence Weiner (*Wall Removals*) had, each in their own way, explored this process in their own work. Matta-Clark himself was involved in the realization of *Beebe Lake Ice Cut*, an Oppenheim project, while studying architecture at Cornell. In *Double Negative*, Michael Heizer later explored the idea of carving as well.
- <sup>38</sup> Some cuttings were actually more selective and respectful of the material logic of the buildings. For the *Rooms* floor cuttings at P.S.1, for example, Matta-Clark removed only the flooring and ceiling materials, thus exposing the floor joists within the openings.

- <sup>39</sup> The *Pier In/Out* and *Bingo* extractions were cut in such a way as to feature within a single fragment solid wall parts and glass elements of windows.
- <sup>40</sup> This process of wrapping of solid elements with opaque fabric may even constitute for some a wasteful, redundant practice: after all, covering up the windows would achieve the very same effect from the interior of the building.
- <sup>41</sup> Works by Claes Oldenburg produce a similar kind of defamiliarization: everyday life objects are blown to a new unexpected scale, and placed out of context within the public realm.
- <sup>42</sup> All 3 practices are indexical to some degree: Says Krauss: "As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and the cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms, or the actual referents of the shifters. Cast shadows could also serve as the indexical signs of objects....". Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index part 2," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 198.
- <sup>43</sup> Anthony Vidler notes the "disturbing qualities of the blank windows." Anthony Vidler, "A Dark Space," Lingwood, James, ed., *Rachel Whiteread, House* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p. 70.

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