Ant Farm’s use of electronic media was also radically different from attempts to simulate movement through space, as was (and is) often sought by computer graphics and animation via three-dimensional modeling, exemplified for instance by the Architecture Machine Group at Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s URBAN5 (1967) or, much later, their Aspen Movie Map (1978–79). The latter was a project not incidentally conceived as applicable for simulating spaces of potential military intervention and hence for use training soldiers to operate within a new territory. But, as demonstrated in Ant Farm Video, they did attempt to capture something of contemporary relations between subjects and their milieu—not, to reiterate, in the register of depiction or verisimilitude but in terms of modeling visual structures, processes of control, and techniques of power at work in that (televisual) environment in order to develop strategies for opening up alternative lines of communication within it, strategies for occupying a small slice, or moment, of that public realm.

Reflecting on the social function of film as a tool of mediation between subjects and their environment, Benjamin famously argued that the “optical unconscious” revealed by the filmic apparatus not only produces “insight into the necessities governing our lives” but that it “manages to assure us of a vast and unsuspected field of action.” Video was of course a distinct apparatus from film, but as made evident in this compilation, through engaging video’s technical capacities and modes of dissemination, Ant Farm managed both to produce a certain insight regarding forces governing modes of life at that moment—what Media Burn’s artist president identified as “Militarism, Monopoly, and the Mass Media” and their connection to television—and to suggest possibilities for new and historically contingent fields of action.

If a subsequent generation has grown up while ever newer mediums were growing up—those facilitated by personal computing and the internet, with which come updated problems of archiving, collection, access formats, and modes of scholarly reading—Ant Farm’s video work serves to remind us of the importance of continuously interrogating the specific workings of technologies impacting architectural work, not in order to refuse technological change but to ask how to render its effects legible, even how to imagine reconfigurations and alternative spaces of communication that expand the public domain. We might then paraphrase the artist president’s ironic question and rhetorically ask you, “brave Americans,” whether at least once in your life, you haven’t wanted to kick the shit out of your computer?

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Notes
3. These drawings are in the collection of Marilyn Oshman and were included in Ant Farm: Radical Hardware, an exhibition dedicated to pre-Media Burn Ant Farm that was curated by Mark Wasiuta and myself and on view at the Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery at Buell Hall, Columbia University, 24 March through 2 May 2008.
4. The opening menu of Ant Farm Video indicates Media Burn, Cadillac Ranch, and “Way Underground Video,” the latter taking us to a further menu organized within an image of a toy ant farm. Inflatables Illustrated and World’s Longest Bridge appear above ground and Ant Farm’s Dirty Dishes, OFF-AIR Australia, and Time Capsule 1972–1984 below in the ant’s burrows.
5. In this speech, adapted from one given by George McGovern two years after losing the 1972 presidential election to Richard Nixon, the artist president pointed to “an unworthy war,” “political scandal,” and “economic turmoil,” declaring in all too haunting terms the impact of contemporary forces of “Militarism, Monopoly, and the Mass Media.”

Architecture and Animation in the Films of Gordon Matta-Clark
The Films of Gordon Matta-Clark
Films from 1971–77 (with some contemporary restorations), eight programs plus The Wall
New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, VHS and DVD, running times vary, www.eai.org

1964 was a year of transitions for Gordon Matta-Clark. While in Paris, the twenty-one-year-old student scripted a number of alternative scenarios about his future: “If things work financially, I would like to finish school at Cornell and try to get some practical, technical experience in films towards I don’t know what exactly. If I can’t come to NY right away, I would like to enroll in a cinema school in Paris,” he writes in a letter to his mother Anne Clark in April of that year, and asks to talk “about a career with films [sic]” with his former stepfather Hollis Alpert, who was a noted film critic in New York. A week later, Gordon would sketch a few further “ideas about getting tangled up into the film industry,” and after having apparently done some research, he “weighed up” his “options” in more detail. He could either “stay in Paris and attend I.D.H.E.C. [Institut des hautes études cinématographiques]” which would require two years of technical training, or “return to Cornell for a year, then transfer to Columbia” for his senior year “and at the same time try to spend summers working around in films to acquire technical experience.”

None of these study plans ever materialized. Following a brief internship in an architecture office in Rome during the summer of 1964, the young student would eventually decide to
return to Ithaca for three more years to complete his architectural degree. Yet, even if Matta-Clark did not attend film school nor ever received any technical film training, he never abandoned the idea of filmmaking. As documented in these brief excerpts from his early correspondence, film was one of the original components in the young architect’s action plan and an essential element of his composite program. In fact, film could allow us to reframe the artist’s brief spectacular career as a cinematic project—a fairly continuous, even if often interrupted, filming process whose total outcome could be reassessed from the orchestration of a public feast under the Brooklyn Bridge.

Yet other films deal with performances specifically conceived for film such as Clock Shower (1974), showing Matta-Clark climbing on top of a thirteen-story building by McKim, Mead, and White in New York, or his Sauna View (1971–73), recording the operation of a shower and sauna structure, installed in the artist’s New York loft, that functioned as a temporary meeting space. The film Food of 1973, based on the day-to-day operation of the artists’ restaurant in New York’s SoHo in 1971, might also be included among the films that deal with the invention of a social setting.

Then there are the films that address parameters of inhabitation in existing building structures such as China Voyager of 1971, a peeping view of daily life through apartment windows in New York’s Chinatown, and Automation House of 1972, which records the daily coming and going of visitors in a contemporary art space and studio in New York as seen by security cameras. Expanding from the scale of individual buildings to the greater urban network, issues of circulation preoccupy three more films by Matta-Clark, such as City Slivers (1976), recording the movement of people and automobiles in New York as seen through a narrow viewing slit, as well as two films dealing with underground spaces: Substrait (Underground Dailies) (1976), detailing the hidden spaces of New York; and Sous-Sol de Paris (1977), rehearsing a similar project of underground “archaeology” in the French capital.

The most explicitly political of these urban films is The Wall, shot in front of the Berlin Wall in 1976 but never edited by the artist (it became available in 2007). Even a few of the films that might initially seem to have little to do with architecture, such as Fresh Kill (1972)—which displays the spectacular destruction of the artist’s pickup truck in a vast garbage dump in Staten Island—as well as the two videos filmed and edited by other artists on Matta-Clark’s Oxygen Cart (1971), showing the gratuitous provision of “fresh air” to New York City strollers, are obviously related to environmental concerns; therefore they, too, deal with an expanded form of architecture.

But even if cutting and splitting are integral processes in Matta-Clark’s working methods, it would be unfair to divide and rearrange his films into groups according to which are more (or less) architectural, since all of them deal with architecture, either in subject, form, or structure. The recent large-scale retrospective on the artist’s work organized by the Whitney Museum in New York, Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure (2007), also made evident the centrality of film in Matta-Clark’s multimedia projects and suggested that his films can be viewed differently if seen together with the artist’s drawings, writing notes, and photographic collages. Reviewing the films as a “W-Hole” (to use one of Matta-Clark’s frequent wordplays) in fact yields a number of covert analogies among a number of projects that previously seemed little related. This general review also reveals that perhaps the “intent” behind these films is not simply to “document” or “record” certain projects but to reanimate a lost sense of architecture as a collaborative social space.

Such animated correspondences start with the role of the architect in the filmmaking process, as author, director, and performer. In most of his films, Matta-Clark appears more often in front and less behind the camera. In films such as Clock Shower, in which he is the singular performer acting throughout the duration of the film, he had to hire a professional cameraman; yet more frequently he would simply hand the camera off to an artist friend willing to collaborate in a project. But even then, one has the sense that Matta-Clark remains the general director of the film as well as the architect of each particular film setting. For example, in the opening sequence of Food, we see his friend Carol Goodden conversing about the quality and price of fish with one of the fishmongers at the Fulton Fish
promenade architecturale the movement with the surrounding architecture.

based precisely on the lack of coordination, on Le Corbusier's architecture d'aujourd'hui, which means that the artist is somewhere in the same space overseeing the whole operation (in fact, in the end of this scene, Matta-Clark appears carrying his own small portable camera).

In a later scene from Food in which we watch the restaurant patrons eating their fish meal, the camerawoman stops in front of a large table with the artist and several of his friends and asks Matta-Clark (off camera) what she should be filming. “Just walk around... talk to people,” Matta-Clark is heard mumbling. This casual answer divulges the peculiar sense of sociability enacted in these ostensibly unscripted film projects. Sociation is first displayed in the purportedly communal form of filmmaking, in which each of the participants can be temporarily granted the role of camera(wo)man and coauthor of a particular scene while the architect remains the overall event planner. Food also highlights Matta-Clark’s attention to “people,” whose presence in these predominantly architectural films is striking. Films, such as Tree Dance or Pig Roast, are entirely based on the balanced choreography or aggregate circulation of human subjects. This mode of sociation is not only limited to subjects but also extends from subjects to objects. In Automation House, for example, live yet largely immobile human subjects interact (or fail to interact) with one another and yet constantly converse with parts of the modernist glass interior of a New York studio space. One might be reminded here of the functional presence of live actors in early architectural films such as Pierre Chenal's 1930 film L'architecture d'aujourd'hui, on Le Corbusier's villas. Yet in that case, humans appear mainly as models that are perfectly coordinated with the architecture. In Matta-Clark’s Automation House there is a more playful interaction with the building based precisely on the lack of coordination with the surrounding architecture.

While in Chenal's and Corbusier's “promenade architecturale” the movement of people is prescribed by the architecture, in several of Matta-Clark's film projects, the movement of people is the architecture. In Sauna View, for example, the artist's attempt to explore the alternative social possibilities of voluntary congestion, architecture consists not only of the built partitions that occlude part of the camera frame, but also the confluence of unidentifiable headless bodies, legs, and torsos mingling in front of the camera behind the architectural dividers. Even in films in which architectural spaces appear devoid of human actors, as in the two projects filmed in the New York and Paris undergrounds, people are present in the soundtrack of the film, in the form of recorded interviews and conversations between the artist and city officials telling stories or outlining regulations related to these vacant public spaces. Both in congestion and in emptiness, then, there is a distinct sense of social animation that enlivens Matta-Clark's building explorations and perhaps comes out more alive in his films than in any other media used by the artist.

The sense of animation as a communicative device expands to the viewing and framing techniques employed by the artist. In certain sections of Splitting, the camera records both the exterior and the interior space of the New Jersey house through the one-inch incision that divides the two longitudinal walls and the roof of the derelict building. The narrow building cut becomes the camera eye, as if the house itself can perform an endoscopic view of its interior (the peculiar viewing conditions of États donnés by Marcel Duchamp, Gordon's alleged godfather, come to mind here). This serves as an example of how the building in Matta-Clark's films can act alternatively as a camera and a screen—both the surface and the apparatus of projection. In a 1976 interview, Matta-Clark described that while he was raising and pushing the walls of the New Jersey house, the building behaved so responsively to his manipulations that he felt as if he had "the perfect dance partner." Perhaps through the camera work done in Splitting, the building also ostensibly becomes a "filming partner.”

In City Slivers, a similar viewing condition extends into the urban scale: here, by putting "vertical mat strips in front of the camera lens," the camera appears to be filming the streets of New York through the narrow slits of the urban fabric as if the city is peeping at itself. For Matta-Clark, then, both the building and the city act as another film “collaborator” to whom he, as the director, could temporarily pass the camera. By being part of this filming partnership, this often derelict form of architecture is reinvigorated as an active agent and becomes part of the social network that animates the artist's projects and his films.

Another filmic element that enhances the sense of animation in Matta-Clark's films is their distinctively cinematic use of time. As is well known, all of the cutting projects were performed on buildings that were slated for demolition; therefore the artist's work had to be done rather fast, and in some cases, had to end the day that the house was finally bulldozed. The film in fact underlines the “countdown” process by making it shorter, shrinking the final days of a building in a ten-to-fifteen-minute-long film. The feeling of impending destruction is predictably fulfilled by the ceremonial appearance of the bulldozer in the final scenes of the film, as for example in Bingo and Conical Intersect. Here it is as if we are watching the film in reverse, as we witness all the building cuts that were performed with great care and physical effort during a number of days suddenly evaporate in a matter of seconds under the weight of the machine. The uncannily monous demolition makes the spectators even more aware of the crucial differences between the two forms of destruction imposed on the building, one by the artist, the other by real estate. We could then look back and reenvision the cuts as restorative surgical devices, preparing the house for its final disappearance. Thus the film preserves the memory of both the building and the building cut, which has a limited lifespan.
but can be prolonged indefinitely via filming. Film here, then, creates a peculiar form of building preservation: that inconspicuous house in Englewood, New Jersey, achieved iconic standing by being symmetrically sliced.

Part of the animation enacted in these films is the reanimation of history, not only the history of a particular building, but also the histories of architecture and film in general. Reviewers of Matta-Clark’s films have highlighted the artist’s references to earlier cinema, such as his imitation of Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, and Charlie Chaplin in *Clock Shower*, the quotation of Japanese monster movies in *Fresh Kill*, or the slapstick moments in a number of his cutting project films, as in *Day’s End* when Matta-Clark is shown wrestling with a stubborn floor beam that he has to saw, axe, and finally kick with his feet to make fall into the Hudson River.¹³

While these references to film history are rather explicit, Matta-Clark’s quotations from architectural history in his film projects may be more subtle. Fellow multimedia artists such as Dan Graham have pointed out the relationship of Matta-Clark’s work to contemporary debates on architecture, as well as his interest in the work of Louis Kahn, Robert Venturi, and Michael Graves, all of whom experimented (in different ways) with the use of history in architectural practice.¹⁴ More recently art and architectural historians such as Thomas Crow and Anthony Vidler have shown how Matta-Clark in fact ruminated on several aspects of his education at Cornell, and especially the writings of Colin Rowe—his teacher in architectural history, theory, and criticism—on formal typologies in Renaissance and Mannerist architecture.¹⁵

In fact, a careful viewing of Matta-Clark’s films discloses a number of additional references to architectural history that may pass undetected while examining other records of his projects. For example, in a brief running shot in *Conical Intersect* showing three visitors posing among the cuts of the French Baroque building, we watch the male figure in the center raising his arms in a diagonal gesture to grasp the two sides of a large circular wall opening. This evidently staged gesture renders visible the anthropometric character of Matta-Clark’s design (in one of the artist’s schematic pencil drawings for this cut, the diameter of that circle is marked as being 2 meters).¹⁶ Yet by inscribing himself into a circle, the male actor also performs an anamorphic reenactment of the Vitruvian figure whose endless iterations in Renaissance architectural treatises might have been known to Matta-Clark from the copy of Rudolf Wittkower’s *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* that was part of his library (now at the Canadian Center for Architecture [CCA] in Montreal). Such subtle invocations of historical models are in fact reminiscent of one of Matta-Clark’s earlier performances in 1971, when the artist hung himself upside down from the interior of a metal roof structure to represent “the self” as part of a “macrocosmic whole” (that performance was not preserved in film).¹⁷ Perhaps a similar pretext of cosmic symbolism underlies Matta-Clark’s acrobatic and superficially jocular performance in *Clock Shower*, in which we watch the artist strive to inscribe himself inside the perimeter of a circular town clock on top of a public building in New York by being awkwardly suspended from the clock’s large metal digits. It is revelatory to know that the artist originally intended to perform this acrobatic exercise in the nude, yet because of complaints from staff working in nearby buildings, he wore a black body-suit and short raincoat.¹⁸ Had his original intention been carried through, the subversive reference to the Vitruvian figure might have been too literal; in this disguised form, the analogy between the microcosm of human labor and the macrocosm of the urban network is perhaps less visible yet more projective in its updated cosmological underpinnings.

Returning to Matta-Clark’s first film project, *Tree Dance*, documenting his 1971 performance at Vassar College, the tree-sit installation and performance recorded in this film is apparently related to the experimental tree colonies and tree housing projects by young architects that appeared on
both sides of the Atlantic in the beginning of the 1970s. However, this filmed performance is also related to Matta-Clark’s own early drawings depicting intricate tree architectures or urban networks in the form of vegetal grids and forests whose branches are filled with energy arrows and alchemical symbols. These drawings show that Matta-Clark considered the tree as part of a larger energy network that has infinite organic extensions. If for Abbé Laugier, Viollet-le-Duc, and a number of both Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment architectural theorists, architecture starts with the manipulation of the tree into a man-made organic habitat, Matta-Clark would answer that anarchitecture also starts with a similarly transforming vegetal enclosure. Tree Dance would then become not only the reinvention of a “spring fertility ritual,” as Crawford described the artist’s performance, but also the film rehearsal of a rare moment in the history of architecture in which the origins of building and unbuilding circuitously coincide.

Extensions and analogies such as these show the intrinsic affinities of Matta-Clark’s multimedia projects with both the history and theory of architecture. Yet, it is only recently that the former architecture student whose projects were often classified in museum catalogs as either “photography” or “sculpture” has been rehabilitated in architectural circles. Crucial in reframing Matta-Clark’s work was the deposit of the holdings of the Gordon Matta-Clark Estate to the CCA in 2002 and the exhibition Out of the Box organized there in 2003–4, which included archival material from the artist’s estate. Here, for the first time, Matta-Clark’s work was exhibited side by side with the projects of well-known architects from the 1950s to the 1970s, such as James Stirling, Aldo Rossi, and Cedric Price.

Perhaps Matta-Clark’s laborious inscription into the sculpted clock circle shown in Clock Shower has become symbolic of the legacy of his work in contemporary architectural debates: “Times change” is now the allegorical message of that film. It is precisely the hand and leg movements of the irreverent anachitect pushing the digits of the clock backwards that can presage those changes and even speed up, cinematically, their realization. Historically, architecture always had a place for the “prodigal sons” who radically question its premises and attempt to undermine its institutional foundations. What better way to welcome back this itinerant anachitect to the chronicles of architecture, a discipline whose fixed perimeter he fought so hard both to extend and circumvent, by publishing a review of his film projects in this journal? SPYROS PAPAPETROS Princeton University

Notes
1. Gordon Matta-Clark to Anne Clark, 20 Apr. 1964, Archives of the Canadian Center for Architecture, Gordon Matta-Clark Estate (hereafter CCA-GMCE), HCON2002:0016:017, folder 4. Anne Alpert Clark was originally a surrealist painter; Hollis Alpert was a well-known writer and cofounder of the National Society of Film Critics in 1966.
2. Gordon Matta-Clark to Anne Clark, 27 Apr. 1964, CCA-GMCE, HCON2002:0016:017, folder 4. Founded in 1944, IDHEC is the most well known film school in France. Its list of notable graduates includes Alain Resnais, Louis Malle, Andrzej Zulawski, Theo Angelopoulos, and many others. In 1985 the school was renamed La Fémis (Fondation Européenne pour les Métiers de l’image et du Son).
4. The estate of Gordon Matta-Clark deposited in the Archives of the CCA also includes outtakes that were not used in the edited films, as well as films by other artists or filmmakers about Matta-Clark’s works that were not done by the artist himself, such as a film by Jaime Davidovich of Matta-Clark looking for “Fake Estate” properties in Queens (the original film is in Fales Library, New York University). I am grateful to Gowndolyn Owens, curator of the estate, for her knowledgeable input in this review.
5. Crawford has directed and produced a film on the artist’s father Roberto Matta, and she is currently completing a film on Gordon Matta-Clark titled The Anarchitect. For her personal account of the Matta-Clark films, see her “Twenty Adventures,” in City Slivers and Fresh Kills: The Films of Gordon Matta-Clark, ed. Steven Jenkins (San Francisco, 2004), non-paginated.
7. For a description of the film on the Berlin wall, see the account by Thomas Crow in Desires, Gordon Matta-Clark, 102.