

# TMESIS: insertions and subversions of interstitial territories

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## ABSTRACT

*The exploration of our environment at physical and perceptual levels creates emergent and transcendent experiences; occupied territories that transform ideas into experiences. TMESIS (the separation of the elements of a compound word by the interposition of another, e.g. abso-bloody-lutely) operates as a language statement for the study of existing and proposed interventions within and beyond the spatial environment. Derived from the Greek temnein [to cut], TMESIS requires both a compound structure (absolutely) and an interposed fragment (bloody) to form a relationship, which places greater emphasis on the original meaning. It creates an enhanced and accentuated reading of the compound/intervention relationship. Wrestled free from these literary relationships, TMESIS is here expanded into a wider spatial context, developing a new methodology for the reading of compound architectures, interior interventions and their enhanced relationships. It provides new opportunities to understand the inherent dialogues and enhanced meanings that emerge through the intervention and subversion of existing territories. TMESIS is explored at three key levels, and introduces Heidegger's 'tool-analysis' as a theoretical construct within which to examine spatial relationships. Through a series of case study examinations, the evaluation of insertion and intervention projects may begin to uncover and re-describe emergent entities and new design perspectives. The first section explores the principles of TMESIS and tool-being with reference to inserted and interposed environments within an existing (architectural) fabric: a descriptive device, which explores the primary concerns of differentiation. The second section will explore TMESIS as a subversion of the existing occupied space and suggest the political and strategic potential of this view within current global and architectural design contexts. The third and final section will propose that current and future experiences and memories can act as a TMESIS within the existing environment: that architecture and design operate as interventions and subversions of the existing paradigm.*

## TMESIS: INTRODUCTION

The history of architecture and the spaces/events within, is also a history of the re-occupation and re-programming of the existing (compound) fabric. It is a history of use, re-use, adaptation and subversion in which the intervention of meaningful fragments creates more relevant contexts and meanings. TMESIS allows these developing dialogues to be viewed beyond their individual existences (architectural fabric and design intervention) and allows them to be explored as inter-dependent conditions.

The examination of design insertion within the architectural fabric is further viewed here within the context of Graham Harman's *tool-being*; the development and rejuvenation of Heidegger's tool-analysis within *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time, 1927) through the presence-at-hand/readiness-to-hand relationship. Heidegger's categorial determinations place objects (tools) in one of these two situations, creating an elemental tension.

The less we stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is - as equipment...If we look at Things just 'theoretically', we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character.<sup>1</sup>

As Heidegger suggests, if we pick up a pencil [-thing] and then place this pencil on the page with which to draw and record, the pencil as equipment no longer exists in our 'tool' conception but becomes an extension of ourselves. Our creative vision and notions of reality extend through the pencil to the page beneath and it withdraws from our visible reading; it no longer exists at the forefront of our consideration, and becomes veiled. When we re-focus and consider the pencil as a tool – equipment with which to draw – it again becomes visible and considered. This notion of readiness-to-hand, as Harman reminds us, is a 'withdrawal from access'.<sup>2</sup>

Architecture, as a compound experience, is a tool which becomes veiled in its occupation; it withdraws from visibility by the very act with which it was envisioned. It is only visible when it is (re) considered, when it ceases to be used, or when it ceases to function. Only when the compound architecture is no longer a functional element does it take on a second condition presence-at-hand – it is missing something as an experience and as an entity. Where the interior territory of event no longer functions, or where the intended function is no longer relevant, it exists in 'a dark subterranean reality that never becomes present to practical action'.<sup>3</sup>

Coupling this phenomenological construct with the TMESIS design statement provides an opportunity to explore the relationships between the interior territory of formal proposition, realised idea and contextual dialogue.

## TMESIS: PASSIVE AND ACTIVE INSERTION

The consideration of TMESIS and the presence-at-hand/readiness-to-hand relationship can be initially explored within (and beyond) the installation 20:50 conceived in 1987 by the artist Richard Wilson. First installed in the Matts Gallery, London, with a number of incarnations in Edinburgh, and more recently, Tokyo, the installation piece presented the waist-high insertion of over 600 gallons

of used sump-oil into an existing gallery space (the work is not site specific in this sense, but site connected). Wilson describes the oil as 'a material which was so anti-sculpture... making a piece of work which is almost invisible'.<sup>4</sup> The installed TMESIS is experienced long before one enters the installation, as the smell of oil permeates the corridors and spaces of its habitation. On entering the space, the viewer is confronted by an aluminium, narrowing, chest-height ramp, which slopes gently upwards to the waist-height level of the oil. This new intervention becomes a black mirror to the occupied space, both reflecting (light) and absorbing (sound) which alters our preconceptions of this inhabited territory. The adaptation of the interior reconfigures experiences of the existing and disorients the viewer's accepted notions of the real.

It was a totally psychological experience: I watched some people go into that room and walk halfway up the corridor and grab the sides - they thought the floor had gone. They got oil on them...<sup>5</sup>

The interior volume here, a gallery space with the primary function of viewing artwork, is transformed by the TMESIS insertion. The oil and aluminium construction as considered intervention becomes invisible within the viewer's concepts of this place, as the existing space (as broken tool) is unveiled and made present. Perspectives are changed and the 'ceiling as floor, mass as light' experiences are viewed and preconceptions reconfigured. Feelings of vertigo and fear are natural in this context; the passive insertion of the sump-oil has unveiled the occupied space and placed it at the forefront



of our thoughts and experiences. TMESIS as design language can be a passive insertion within an existing, compound territory.

This unveiling of what was (through the use-intervention of what is) can further be explored through active fields of sculptural intervention. The CaixaForum Madrid, completed in 2008 by Herzog & de Meuron, presents a TMESIS of surgical intervention; a re-sculpting and hollowing of the existing form (Figure 1). The new museum is a surgically sliced, spliced and implanted insertion into a relatively nondescript and veiled electric power station, the Central Eléctrica del Mediodía, dating from 1899. The architectural heritage of the brick walls and decorative treatment to window openings were listed, and the architectural program called for the careful consideration of this rare industrial façade. The existing stonework at ground level, through a TMESIS of sculptural insertion, is separated from the now floating brick husk, and through the newly (dis) covered opening, a new plaza and entrance to the museum complex is created.

The existing brick enclosure is operated on further as a rusted and intricately perforated steel addition implanted into and onto the now impotent roof form of the brick shell. These dense yet eloquent structures echo the surrounding roovescape and develop a new reading of the insertion of active TMESIS. The interior sculpting of the existing form provides a secondary reading of this symbiotic relationship, through both the geometric infiltration of angular surface panels, and, as we reach the upper levels of the museum, the now visible vertical additions as the perforated steel roof meets the existing roof line (Figure 1). Where we expect to see sky we are confronted with a new horizon, an implanted mass on the delicate division between existing and newly conceived. It is within this gallery space that we are able to envision and touch the tangible and the intangible; the opposition becomes plausible. As Harman reminds us:

The nature of tool-being is to recede from every view. In the strict sense, we can never know just what equipment is. Like the giant squids of the Marianas Trench, tool-beings are encountered only once they have washed up dead on the shore, no longer immersed in their withdrawn reality.<sup>6</sup>

The TMESIS intervention, through the active gesturing of Herzog & de Meuron's Architectural craft, creates a simultaneous presence-at-hand/readiness-to-hand tension within the industrial power station/museum; a dialogue between occupied and occupier, concealed and revealed. Here, TMESIS is seen as an active sculptural insertion into the existing compound urban territory, which creates new and emergent dialogues.

The discussion of a second stage concept of this active TMESIS examines a masterpiece of modern interior architecture and a timeless example of the sensitive remodelling and re-presentation of an existing edifice, through the detailed and intimate hand of a master craftsman. A detailed exploration by Carlo Scarpa of the Castelvecchio Museum (conceived in stages between 1957 and 1973) is impossible within the limits of this paper, and would serve to give no credit to the expansive qualities of the intervening propositions. By way of brief examination, however, the modelling of the Cangrande space within the Castelvecchio will serve as a sufficient primer for the development of a second-stage active TMESIS.

The suggestion by Bruno Zevi that Scarpa was 'a sublime orchestrator of dissonances, in an irremediably harmonic, tonal context'<sup>7</sup> is perhaps most evident within the Cangrande Space: a vertical and horizontal archaeological consolidation exhibiting one of the most important sculptures within the collection, the Cangrande della Scala. The equestrian sculpture of Cangrande, 'fixes the viewer with its piercing eye and sardonic smile' and Scarpa's insistence that 'there had to be provision for a face to face encounter between visitor and Cangrande to absorb the life and activity around him'<sup>8</sup> drives many of the intervention devices employed within the Porta del Morbio. The juxtaposed layered histories, light, space, form and material come to their crescendo at this point as the space reveals and conceals its intimate and processional possibilities. Scarpa's initial act of revealing the existing and marrying the verticality of the space is achieved by the recession of walls, floors and roof, 'delaminating' the elements as they recede – expressing both the historical relevance of the surface form as well as the beauty of the

Opposite  
Figure 1: TMESIS Collage\_CaixaForum

edge condition. The opening of this area allows Scarpa to fully express his intentions, as an active TMESIS of entity is delicately interposed (Figure 2).

The statue and concrete pedestal are lifted from the ground level, returning the statue to the air as it intersects the existing visual and physical line(s) of the gallery space 'to emphasise its independence from the structure supporting it; it is part of the whole, yet it still lives its own separate life'.<sup>9</sup> The interior and exterior dialogue is also expressed here, as the viewer is moved around the gallery space and the sculpture is re-presented. The intersection of bridges and viewing pedestals across and into the space are a continuation of the fluid expression of objects appearing to exist in harmony; embedded within the existing compound history, yet simultaneously freed from it.

The spatial composition retains a playfulness of mass and lightness, of visible and invisible readings. Here, TMESIS allows us to read the insertion not as a tension between veiled and unveiled in simultaneous dialogue, but re-envisioned – the interstitial territory as a tool within time. The TMESIS of action through entities allows the readiness-to-hand and presence-to-hand to be concealed and revealed through changes in context, time and position. TMESIS as an active entity creates an interdependent and symbiotic relationship.

#### TMESIS: SUBVERSIVE INSERTION

The TMESIS insertion within urban territories can also lead to a subversion of the original context – an opportunity to reform viewpoints and experiences. The urban intervention in 2005 by Austrian artists Christoph Steinbrener and Rainer Dempf titled *Delete: Delettering the Public Space* subverted the existing compound architectural surface of Vienna's Neubaugasse. All the existing signage (advertising signs, slogans, pictograms, company names and logos) was covered in primary yellow fabric or plastic; the visual and communicative pollution of the street-scape (later seen in Sao Paulo's 'Clean City' laws of 2007) is brought forward into our consideration (Figure 3).

The installation acted as both an opportunity to question the occupation of our street by visual information and advertising, and, moreover, changes the metaphysical experiences of urban space and events. The increase in foot-flow to the street (one of the principle reasons that many of the resident shopkeepers agreed to this subversive intervention for a period of two weeks) points perhaps to the public fascination not only with the artwork itself, but also with the emergence of a new contextual negotiation between the urban space and its participants. The TMESIS act of 'breaking' the visual advertising and communication devices, subverting the visual imagery, brings a presence-to-hand understanding. The two dimensional surface is unveiled and made present; altering and breaking our conceptions of textual communication through the subversive act.

Exploring the theme of TMESIS as a subversive insertion within the compound urban context, the continuing and globally evolving interventions by the Rebar group through the Park(ing) program of events, signals a temporary and emergent occupation of the urban territory: 'one of the more critical issues facing outdoor urban human habitat is the increasing paucity of space for humans to rest, relax, or just do nothing'.<sup>10</sup>

Responding to an ever-increasing occupation of the city by the private vehicle and its necessary infrastructure, the Park(ing) project utilises the metered parking space as an adaptive opportunity to insert a temporary public urban park. The initial occupation in San Francisco, with a parking space rented between noon and 2.00pm, placed turf, benches, trees and shade within the rented area, allowing the public to participate in and respond to this new intervention. This release of urban space from private control to public event, whilst momentary, creates a surprising action and response as the parking space is made visible and its new possibilities of participation are considered.

Subsequent occupations around the world have expanded on this simple but elegant subversive TMESIS, developing an increasingly rich series of possibilities in a global, urban context. As temporary and momentary occupations of private territory, the subversive

TMESIS can be both a transient and accessible occupation of place, creating new dialogues within the urban environment.

The TMESIS of subversion can take on a more affective consideration, through the sinister interventions of war and optimistic reconciliations of peace. The attack by the Israeli Defence Force on the city of Nablus in 2002 signalled a re-conceptualisation and [mis]application of contemporary architectural and urban spatial theory, citing the works of Deleuze and Guattari as theoretical instigators. The attack utilised a new tactic of urban warfare, in which soldiers moved through the

city not by the existing streets and roads, but through a series of horizontal and vertical tunnels systematically drilled or blasted into the walls, floors and ceilings of the existing urban fabric. In this sense, homes, and the interior living spaces within, can no longer exist as places of refuge and privacy, but are seen as passageways and routes through the inhabited city. It is a 'conception of the city as not just the site but also the very medium of warfare – a flexible, almost liquid medium'.<sup>11</sup>

This subversion of private, ready-to-hand, interior space sees fear and threat as an infiltrated TMESIS, a subversion of the



Above left  
Figure 2: TMESIS Collage\_Cangrande Space

Above right  
Figure 3: DELETE! [after Steinbrener & Dempf]

territory of habitation and as a negative and vulgar interposition within our urban and domestic perception. These destructive infiltrations exist within the presence-at-hand determination; they are the contextual places of division and denial. The restructuring of the urban form can lead to new engagements with our histories, and lead to a reconciliation of deconstructed spatial environments.

A TMESIS of subversion as an act of reconciliation following destruction must respect and make present new initiatives beyond the remnants of war. As Lebbeus Woods reminds us:

Wherever buildings are broken by the explosion of bombs or artillery shells... their form must be respected in its integrity, embodying a history that must not be denied. ...in the spaces voided by destruction, new structures can be injected. Complete in themselves, they do not fit exactly into the voids, but exist as spaces within spaces.<sup>12</sup>

The 2006 proposal *bullet lights* by the artist and commentator, Edwin Gardner, attempts to reverse the meaning and violent intention of the thousands of bullet holes left within territories of conflict (in this instance, the buildings of Beirut). These small puncture wounds, which can quickly become ready-at-hand in the inhabitant's consciousness, are physical testimonies to conflict, division and violence, but are envisioned within the proposal as sources of beauty and ambiguity through light (Figure 4). At night, each of the bullet holes, inserted with a single light source, becomes visible – reversing the meaning and intention to create abstracted surfaces, while suggesting future hope beyond. This simple action produces subtle and ambiguous readings, an insertion with resonances beyond their specific context. The TMESIS of subversion explores the interposition of new and present ideas and meanings into our compound context; the idea is made present-at-hand in tandem with the intervention itself.

#### TMESIS: PARTICIPATION AND MEMORY

TMESIS then can be seen as both passive and active sculptures, and entities, and as subversive interposition. These interventions are a deliberate and physical TMESIS into the fabric of our existing urban, architectural and interior territories. The concealed and revealed states of these 'tools' can be seen to alter our states of perception of both the compound and the inserted entities, and furthermore, the 'tool analysis' itself is not only limited to entities but extends to the participation with, and within, inhabited spaces.

On the morning of the 15th January 2009, the concourse of Liverpool Street Station, London, is swarming with commuters and train travellers focused on their journeys beyond the confines of the Victorian station – routes across the concourse are envisioned and intricately woven, as invisible pathways are planned and transgressed. At 11.00am, a single piece of music is played across the



Above  
Figure 4: 'bullet lights' [after Edwin Gardner]

public address system. A single 'commuter' spontaneously begins to dance, and in quick succession a series of choreographed participants dance simultaneously to the music, slowly engaging the occupied space and commuters around them. The balconies and circulation spaces quickly become galleries; the event 'makes present' the concourse and the participants within it – the occupation of the interior territory becomes unveiled as the functional elements of movement are rendered 'broken'.

*Dance*<sup>13</sup> conceived by Saatchi & Saatchi for the telecommunications firm 'T-Mobile', placed ten concealed cameras within the station as 350 dancers energised the concourse for a period of just three minutes. Reminiscent of a flash-mob invasion' when communication and computing technologies amplify human talents for cooperation',<sup>14</sup> the participatory intervention radically alters the function and engagement with the transitory space.

The internal logic of the interior space is disrupted and rendered invalid – a conception defined not by physical, territorial boundaries but by points of connectivity; the infiltration of routes. As the dancers multiply and create lines of engagement, a new perimeter boundary is created. It is a fluid edge condition, which sees members of the public join in with the event – the act of participation creates an organic internal narrative all of its own. The concourse is rendered actively visible and is re-defined as a three-dimensional, undulating, fluid territory, rather than a dissected two-dimensional plane. The surrounding glazed balcony and stairs are delineated and made visible, the intervention delivering an engagement by the participant and the spectator. TMESIS can be further considered as an insertion of event and participation: 'beings themselves are caught up in a continual exchange between presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand. This dual structure belongs to every entity...'.<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting here that it is not only the insertion of an 'event' that changes our engagement with the spatial environment, but that all participation (action and interaction) is in some way an interposition within occupied space.

As the 'Dance' performance ends and dancers dissipate into the crowd, people are left to continue their journey, but now retain

the memory of the occasion and a changed perception of the station as transitory occupation. This lingering of event within memory leads to a final reading of TMESIS – the intervention of memory within space.

An object that is not consciously noticed at the time of a first visit, can, by its absence during subsequent visits, provoke an indefinable impression; the absence of the object becomes a presence one can feel.<sup>16</sup>

Thirty-two years ago, Malcolm Dennett was the boss at Bankside, London's city-centre power station. Gilbert-Scott's most significant post-war commission, Bankside was built in two phases between 1947 and 1963, and supplied the increasing demands for energy within the very heart of the city. Decommissioned in 1981, the building stood empty for many years before the now celebrated and admired Tate Modern revitalisation by Herzog & de Meuron was completed in 2000. On the day of the public opening of the gallery, Dennett returned to the newly occupied interior. The interventions within the occupied space create their own tensions and resonances, but for Dennett, it was the presence-to-hand experiences which most significantly affected his understanding: 'It is the silence that hits you first – an overpowering, high-ceilinged vault of air you feel you could never puncture, however loud you shouted'.<sup>17</sup>

Dennett's initial reactions are simultaneously responding to expectation and memory. It is the TMESIS of memory, and of absence, which reveals a sensory unveiling within the space. It is the noise, not the physical intervention or emptiness, which acts as the memory trigger for experiences: 'the turbines were grinding away, there were people everywhere'.<sup>18</sup> The presence-at-hand unveiling of these memories, within any new insertion into a concrete territory, creates a momentary shock to both the physical and unconscious states. Altering and reconfiguring memories through experience is mirrored in our negotiations with that space. Dennett is able to read the relationship between intervention and existing structure through these memories: 'It's good that they've kept the girders, the rusty ductwork, the dirty

bricks: there's a relationship to the plant as it was.'<sup>19</sup> The internal negotiations between memory and insertion are brought forward into consideration. A TMESIS of participation and memory places the occupant at the centre of any narrative reading of a designed space. It creates a simultaneous veiling and unveiling of the spatial environment through interaction, memory and experience.

## CONCLUSION

The examinations of the design language statement TMESIS within the context of architectural form (as compound word) and interior insertion (as interposed fragment), within the context of Heidegger and Harman's tool-analysis, presents not only a categorisation of design approaches, but also proposes future methodologies and understandings of interior, architectural and urban interventions.

TMESIS provides a re-definition of interior architectures within architecture; suggesting a symbiotic relationship between fabric and intervention. The previously held understanding of the occupied and the occupier as separate elements is an imprecise understanding of the inherent qualities of the potential. Through these case study examinations, a more developed relationship occurs between the existing and the interposed, which must be understood as inherent within and beyond both conditions.

These classifications of TMESIS can suggest new methodologies and potentials. The act of constructing or withdrawing an entity within any context is an intervention which can profoundly affect our previous conceptualisation of place. The readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand tensions should be considered as opportunities to express the 'oneness' of the entity, while recognising the 'veiled' and 'unveiled' states which will be brought forward or recede from view.

The TMESIS of occupied space further places our participation in, interaction with and memory of the spatial environment as central to any evaluation of occupied territory; an insertion of events within an existing body. TMESIS suggests that all

design exists as an intervention, but it is the engagements with this intervention which enlighten the design intent. Interior architectural exploration and design practice can utilise TMESIS as an operand of material, spatial and metaphysical change.

## NOTES

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