TMESIS: insertions and subversions of interstitial territories

Paul Blindell and Penny Sykes : The University of Huddersfield, UK

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. absa-bloody-laity) operates as a language statement for the study of existing and proposed interventions within and beyond the spatial environment. Derived from the Greek term (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 primonial 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.

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’.

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’.

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 2030 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 620 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’. The installation of sump-oil in the existing space, both reflecting (light) and absorbing (sound) which alters our preconceptions of this inhabited territory. The adaptation of the interior reconfigures the experiences of the existing occupier, concealed and revealed. Wilson describes the oil as ‘a material which was so anti-sculpture... making a piece of used sump-oil into an existing gallery space (the work is not site specific in this sense, but site connected).’

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 reformed, reinserted and reconfigured space. The existing stonework at ground level, through a TMESIS of sculptural insertion, is separated from the new 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 roofscape 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, as design language can achieve by the recession of walls, floors and roof, ‘delaminating’ 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.

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 occupied, 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 intimated hand of a master craftman. 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 model 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 immeasurably harmonic, tonal context’ is perhaps most evident within the Cangrande Space: a vertical and horizontal archaeological andontological exposition employed within the Porta del Morbo. The juxtaposed layered histories, light, space, form and material component 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, roof and ‘delaminating’ the elements as they recede – expressing both the historical relevance of the surface form as well as the beauty of the

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 three levels, returning the statue to the air as it intersects the existing concrete (Figure 2).

The spatial composition retains a playfulness of mass and lightness, appearing to exist in harmony; embedded within the existing compound history, yet simultaneously freed from it. 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.

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 Steinbrüner and Rainer Dempf titled Delete: Deleting 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 TME, according to the concept as embodied by Siegfried Giedion in his seminal work Space, Time and Architecture (1941), can be understood as an in-between zone in which multiple forces and agents are at play. In this sense, the TMESIS insertion within an urban territory is a site of contestation between the private and public spheres. The act of ‘breaking’ the visual advertising and communication devices, subverting the visual imagery, is not only a physical act, but also an act of re-conceptualisation and re-territorialisation 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.11

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

The TME 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 re-territorialisation of current urban and architectural theory, citing the works of Deleuze and Guattari as theoretical instigators. The TME can be deployed 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 Steinbrüner and Rainer Dempf titled Delete: Deleting 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 TME, according to the concept as embodied by Siegfried Giedion in his seminal work Space, Time and Architecture (1941), can be understood as an in-between zone in which multiple forces and agents are at play. In this sense, the TMESIS insertion within an urban territory is a site of contestation between the private and public spheres. The act of ‘breaking’ the visual advertising and communication devices, subverting the visual imagery, is not only a physical act, but also an act of re-conceptualisation and re-territorialisation 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.

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

The TME 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 re-territorialisation of current urban and architectural theory, citing the works of Deleuze and Guattari as theoretical instigators. The TME can be deployed 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 Steinbrüner and Rainer Dempf titled Delete: Deleting 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 TME, according to the concept as embodied by Siegfried Giedion in his seminal work Space, Time and Architecture (1941), can be understood as an in-between zone in which multiple forces and agents are at play. In this sense, the TMESIS insertion within an urban territory is a site of contestation between the private and public spheres. The act of ‘breaking’ the visual advertising and communication devices, subverting the visual imagery, is not only a physical act, but also an act of re-conceptualisation and re-territorialisation 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.

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

The TME 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 re-territorialisation of current urban and architectural 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.

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

The TME 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 re-territorialisation of current urban and architectural 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.

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

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 TME 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
public address system. A single ‘commute’ 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 was conceived by Satashi & Saatchi for the telecommunications firm T-Mobile, placed ten concealed cameras within the station as interposition within occupied space. This dual structure belongs to every entity’s readiness-to-hand. This intervention radically alters the function and memory of the concourse – the concourse and the participants within it – the occupation of the interior territory becomes unveiled as the presence one can feel.

Thirty-two years ago, Malcolm Dennyett 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, Dennyett returned to the newly occupied interior. The interventions within the occupied space create their own tensions and resonances, but for Dennyett, 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 penetrate, however loud you shouted’.

Dennyett’s initial reactions are simultaneously responding to expectation and memory. It is the pro- and interposition within occupied 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 TMESS in 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.

TMESS 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 impression of understanding 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 between both conditions.

These classifications of TMESS 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 ‘yielded’ and ‘unveiled’ states which will be brought forward or recede from view.

The TMESS 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. TMESS 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 TMESS as an opendness of material, spatial and metaphorical change.

NOTES

5. Wilson, 1994
17. Oliver Buxton, I used to work here,The Guardian, May 11, 2000
18. Buxton, 2000

All images by authors.