

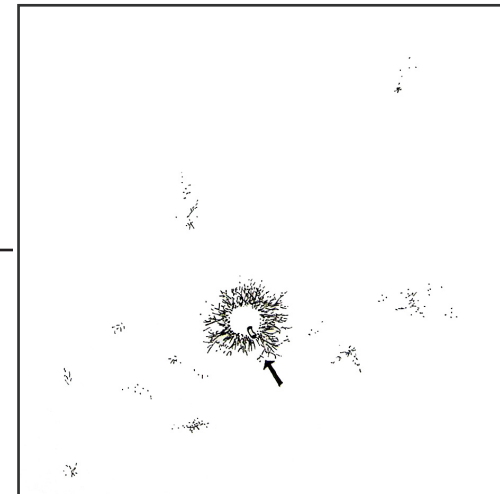
"[The interstitial is] a process of unfolding, of differentiation, and of a quest for information that is often not quantifiable and escapes the logic of analysis systems of traditional urbanism."

Ignasi de Sola-Morales, 'Terrain Vague' in *Anyplace*

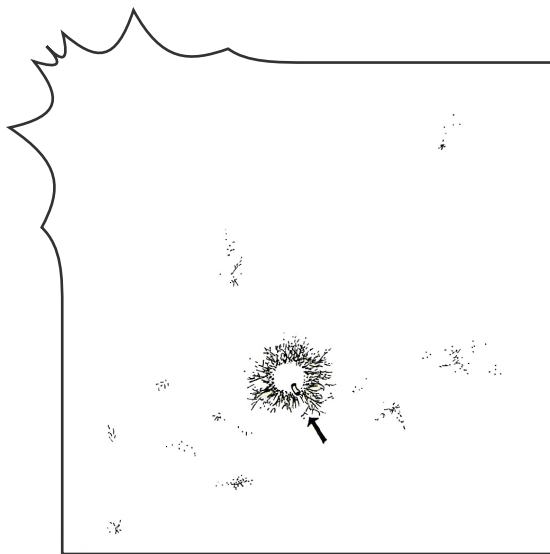
INTERSTITIAL - LIMINAL - BETWEEN TRANSGRESSION AND RECREATION - YASMINE SINNO - 2011

INTERSTITIAL L I M I N A L

BETWEEN RECREATION
AND TRANSGRESSION



MASTER THESIS © YASMINE SINNO 737402
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ARCHITECTURE 2011
POLITECNICO DI MILANO - P. LEONARDO
THESIS ADVISOR: GIAN CARLO FLORIDI



“Inevitably, life between buildings is richer, more stimulating, and more rewarding than any combination of architectural ideas”

Jan Gehl

**I N T E R S T I T I A L
L I M I N A L**

BETWEEN RECREATION AND TRANSGRESSION

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ABSTRACT

In the context of 'terrain vague', a term first coined by Ignasi de Sola-Morales in 1995, one can notice a difference between the labeling 'interstitial' and 'liminal' although they are commonly used interchangeably as synonyms. The latter could be considered as blurred limits of uncanniness on the threshold while the former, 'interstitial', refers more to fragments of urban freedom from within the space. By analyzing the difference between the two, one can come to value the intensities and extensities of the event of transition through such spaces. Characteristics such as vagueness, ephemerality, informality and intensity jump to the foreground. Most notably, these spaces become intricately related to quality, that of urban life. Hence, interstices form adequate indicators of evolving city morphologies. Neither their presence nor their reason of existence is accidental. By taking one trajectory line through Beirut as a case study, one starts to delineate the major catalyst behind the formation of interstices: urban limits. The hypothesis becomes therefore: Interstitial space as a product of urban limits and thus a potential urban regenerator. Intervention, or not, on such spaces start to entail new dimensions. On the architectural scale, the two major terminologies in this field (liminal and interstitial) could refer to two different experiential moments within the terrain vague and consequently translate into two different interventions modes on intermediary spaces. On a larger scale, this could cause dichotomous views of the role of in-between spaces in the contemporary city: Is the liminal transgression or transition? Is the interstitial recreation or erasure? To intervene or not to intervene? And most importantly do these spaces entail delimitation or fragmentation?

Nel contesto di *terrain vague*, un termine coniato all'inizio da Ignasi de Solà-Morales nel 1995, si può notare una differenza tra l'etichettatura 'interstiziale' e 'liminale' anche se sono comunemente utilizzati in modo intercambiabile come sinonimi. Liminale potrebbe

indicare limiti sfocati di estraneità e del *uncanny* (stranezza spaziale) sulla soglia mentre l'atra, 'interstiziale', si riferisce più a frammenti di libertà urbana all'interno dello spazio. Analizzando la differenza tra i due, si può venire a valorizzare le 'intensità' e 'estensità' dell'evento di transizione attraverso tali spazi. Caratteristiche come la vaghezza, la complessità, l'effimerità, l'informalità e l'intensità vengono in primo piano. In particolare, questi spazi diventano strettamente legati alla qualità, quella del tessuto urbano e della vita urbana. Quindi, interstizi formano adeguati indicatori delle morfologie urbane in evoluzione. Né la loro presenza, né la loro ragione di esistenza è casuale. Prendendo una traiettoria attraverso Beirut come esempio, si può cominciare a delineare il catalizzatore principale dietro la formazione degli interstizi: i limiti urbani. L'ipotesi diventa dunque: lo spazio interstiziale come prodotto di limiti urbani e quindi un potenziale di rigenerazione urbana. Consecutivamente, l'intervento, o no, su tali spazi inizia a comportare nuove dimensioni. Sul livello architettonico, le due principali terminologie utilizzate in questo tema (liminare e interstiziale) potrebbe riferirsi a due diversi momenti esperienziali all'interno del terreno vago e di conseguenza si traducono in due diverse modalità di interventi sugli spazi intermedi. Su una scala più grande, questo potrebbe causare visioni dicotomiche sul ruolo del *terrain vague* nella città contemporanea: È il liminale trasgressione o transizione? È l'interstiziale ricreazione o cancellazione? Intervenire o non intervenire? E, più importante, questi spazi implicano delimitazione o frammentazione?

ANNEX

SUMMARY OF DPEA THESIS - Architecture and philosophy - La Villette school of Architecture, Paris

TRANSITION AT LIMITS – PUNCTUATION OF SPACE

Question: How do mobility and the event of transition punctuate our perception and experience of the dichotomist relation limit-space?

Any architectural limitation, as any border, has its 'no-man's-land'. 'Limitrophy' is the study of this 'land': all elements and space that grow at a given limit and the thickness thereof of the latter. We can no longer pretend that we can discuss a limit as we talk about a barrier; it is itself an area to be studied, as it generates spaces, be it by intensity and / or extensity.

Each limit appropriates an amount of energy which it emits again in various new forms. This energy can be hypothetically explained as the product of the duel that takes place between the limit and the dichotomies of order and chaos. The detachment of a becoming form from the 'plateau' of the indeterminate present in itself an event loaded with forms of energy. Gaps and *In-between* spaces arise from this exchange at the boundary between order and disorder. A dynamic is thus hidden behind the formation of artifacts.

The event taking place in parallel with the genesis space-limit is that of transition. It is the generator of places and consequently of limits and the interstitial in between. Transition is inherent to the human creation and to a space 'produced'. Interstitial spaces are as much intermediary space as they are transitory, and are thus related to interactions of the familiar and the unknown.

Transition modifies place. Our mobility is inscribed in a lapse of time and space. When one moves, the world is revealed in successive profiles. We do not see a building

in its entity but our mental work combines different profiles through our journey in time which allows us to visualize the finished artifact. It is precisely in this scenario that the game of the familiar and the unknown unfolds: the effect of our projection and unexpectancy by the same token re-divide the poles present and future. The event of transition plays hence a role in decomposing our experience into four divisions within the space-time axis: a place for an anticipated present, a place for a projected future, and one for an unanticipated present and another place for an unforeseen future. Each of these subdivisions creates degrees of intensity and dimensions of extensity which, in turn, constantly redefine the couple space-limit.

Dynamics of intensities and extensities play an important role on the event of transition in a borderline state. Extensities are dimensional, they are consequences of sociopolitical decisions, and they are additive while intensities are not; the latter are differentiations of potential, permutations of density or connectivity, i.e. degrees of amplitude. The result becomes emergences of flux and movement to incite a return to the state of equilibrium. Intensities and extensities are directly related to the previously mentioned quadripartite division of place by the transition event. A well synchronized rhythm is underplayed which permits us to create a stable reality in a constantly mobile world.

Hamrouni¹ in his thesis argues that space can adopt the allegory of *center* by assimilating feelings of attachment and rooting. This allegory is attributed to expected or anticipated spaces, chiefly of the present, in which the reference point becomes ourselves. The limits of the anticipated takes on attenuated tonalities and the space of the present merges with that of the future: we conceive hence the place in its entity, it becomes a finite object. Hamrouni argues conversely that space can adopt the allegory of *expanse* by assimilating feelings of wandering and exploring. This allegory is attributed to unanticipated unexpected spaces, present or future, in

¹ Hamrouni

which the feelings of drifting and *Unheimlich* propel the limits of intensities and produce an effect of expansive extensity. The intensity of passage and the intensity of the space of the near future are affected by lack of anticipation. We are more alert towards the unexpected.

The 'imaginative vacuum' of a person is affected by her(his) anticipations and aspirations on the one hand and on the limits defined or not, of the actual surrounding on the other. This vacuum continually forms and reforms our perceptions and sensations of the physical place. It is by this paragon of action that one assesses intensities and extensities. This potential for extension generates in oneself capacities of reception of intensities. Through finding in ourselves the Author we find in space the potential. Tom Wiscombe in his article 'Morphology of Haptic Tentacles'² describes the dynamic behind the tentacles: a metaphor of the dynamic behind transitions. Without these oscillations between alternating intervals of dearth and satisfaction, we do not feel the 'existence' of a space. And the architect's duty becomes to create sensitivity to these subtle changes in potentials. If the tentacles are the dynamics of space limitations, the architect is the head of the octopus, the conductor in this concert of fluctuations.

Alongside the event of transition, an inversion of roles and meanings occurs, which generates an architecture described by Deleuze and Guattari as *inverted*. The location of an alley for example can lead to antithetical connotations if the alley separates two locations of uneven intensity. An inversion of architecture occurs hence when this same alley, a place of passage, becomes prohibited to cross.

The concept of 'space' in this reasoning also loses its value. Architecture is no more about space but about network, one that is formed of limits that re-fragment our mobility. Space becomes punctuated: it is only an 'in-between' of these limits, infinitely dissected. Therefore, a place where one cannot see neither intensive nor

² Wiscombe, p. 27

extensive limits is incomprehensible and is part of the infinite, the conceptual and the world of chaos: a sense of disorder invades.

Subsequent to the analysis of these processes, we find ourselves again to the start point: an architecture that is considered paradoxical. The notion of paradox is hence presented as the engine of architectural creation: an oxymoron creation where time and anticipating reinterpret the rules to reverse, empty, and fragment them in order to recreate a new interpretation of architecture; one that based not on the generation of space but on the generation of limitations that, by their continuous repetition, produce architectonic networks. All that remain is a series of limits that defragment our worldview to infinity. It is through this punctuation that we begin to conceive but also experience places. Mobility in this infinite of limits reinvents architecture: we move our bodies towards the other, towards the door of a room, to the limits of paintings on the walls, to the corridor, to the threshold of the house or the edge of the balcony or even to the limit where we can watch neighbors' balconies etc. It is not a space but a set of rules and limits mainly socio-physical that leads us to perceive, understand and use architectonic elements that surround us, be it by degrees of intensity or extensity. Only a punctuated mobile 'space' exists, always amalgamated to the human body and constantly being modified.

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collage

TERRAIN VAGUE “All of the latter matter, but they are fragments of an incomplete puzzle. There is a type of urban condition that dwells between the reality of massive structures and the reality of semi-abandoned places.”

Saskia Sassen - *Making Public Intervention in Today's Massive Cities*

LIMINAL “One might say that the concept ‘game’ is a concept with blurred edges. – ‘But is blurred a concept at all?’ – Is an indistinct photograph of a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct often exactly what we need?”

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1972: 34)

INTERSTITIAL I slipped through to that small alley in between those tall buildings and found a cafe in the middle. Funny how I did not notice that alley before. I had always presumed it was forgotten. Today I was too early on my appointment. That gave me time to sip my coffee and admire the view. Two bearded young men holding books stopped at the cafe, they look like communists. A ‘thing’ that looks like Mister Lebanon is walking by slowly. A hotel servant carrying a garbage bag doesn’t seem so joyful, I wonder where he’s coming from, and what about the veiled women holding that man’s hand. As for the group of teenagers rolling on their skateboards, I can predict that they will make the guards of the ministry of defense delighted to kick them out of their Sanayeh skating alley. The lady drinking her coffee wouldn’t mind also kicking the shoe polisher kid who’s squeezing himself behind her chair to reach some potential client. He’s unlucky though, the bearded communist is not interested. However lucky me! The good looking university student holding his laptop is passing by. and he’s wearing red... oh.. An old man wearing a hat and holding a newspaper blocked my view... This is after all a small cafe in a small alley. Interesting, he’s offering the waiter to pay him double the standard fee. And Mister

Lebanon apparently did not leave; he's still looking at the cravate in that small bargain shop in the corner. A shop owner went out of his store to smoke a cigarette, which reminds me... my coffee must be getting cold...

This is how the forgotten alley made me feel alive again. It is by mistake that Lebbeus Wood speaks on intensities when describing borderline spaces. Such spaces become vivid as they escape the formal standard organization of the rest of the dull city. Try going in and out forgotten urban lands and enjoy the adrenaline rush, the curiosity, the paranoid fear of the unknown. Slip through and feel the borders telling to back away, to keep the amnesia going, to leave the ghosts of the future in peace for that ephemeral time being.

About the *Coffee to Go* in a small alley in Hamra, Beirut

Limit?

L I M I N A L

BETWEEN TRANSGRESSION AND TRANSITION

I N T E R S T I T I A L

BETWEEN RECREATION AND ERASURE

Intensity?

BETWEEN INTERSTITIAL AND LIMINAL _ MISSING PARTS OF THE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The *terrain vague* as described by Ignasi Sola-Morales, are spaces that possess particular qualities that make them notably attractive to photographers. They are spaces that fall out of the normal urban organisation due to their inefficiency to serve a primary function in the urban systems of production, consumption, infrastructure, or recreation. These spaces could range from spaces in between buildings, left-out alleys, forgotten lots, unused transport systems, spaces under bridges. The terrains vagues are not necessarily empty, they can be fully occupied.

From the different terminologies used to describe the 'terrains vagues', two words come to the foreground: 'interstitial' and 'liminal'. Although both terms are commonly used interchangeably, by taking a closer look one can argue a difference: Interstitial acts from within, while Liminal is a condition from without. Their respective usage outside the architectural realm gives hints to this difference.

In order to understand the impact of such an analysis, one must make a step backward and analyze the event of transition that occurs at the *terrain vague*. As Georges Perec would argue, such spaces are not ones through which you can simply slide.³ The event of 'crossing' through the terrain vague alters our perception and experience of the latter. It is state in between 'liminal becoming' and 'interstitial being'.

On an urban scale, the presence of interstitial spaces becomes crucial. Taking Beirut's in-between spaces as a case study, one can understand the link between the interstitial and urban fabric formulation. Quality becomes the key factor. The notion of neighborhood is in fact strongly associated with the presence of in-between, as the making of public space is not simply about accessing and providing space. On another level, upon analyzing such

³ Perec, p. 73.

spaces, it becomes evident that their presence in the city is crucial for the latter's identity: interstitial morphology becomes an important factor in defining urban typology.

One can argue that these spaces gain appeal due to the fact that they are loaded with intensive potential that propel them out of their extensive borders. Gilles Deleuze in a different context describes this alteration as an 'inversion of meanings'. One can explain such a happening through an analysis of the interplay of 'interstitial' and 'liminal'. What are the implications of the theoretical understanding of interstitial and liminal on the architectural and urban contexts? How do different forces of intensities and extensities shape the urban spaces we name *terrain vague*? Does such a differentiation have a resonance in our perception and experience of the 'terrain vague'?

Taking one line through Beirut as a case study, the aim is to try to understand the generating catalysts behind the creation of interstices and consequently the prospective future of such urban spaces. Borderlines become the key issue. Whether Hamra or the Solidere Downtown area, each referential point gives new hints on how different urban limits generate different interstitial spaces. The in-between is thus defined as 'in-between limits'.

Upon analyzing some case studies according to different interventions done on 'terrains vagues', we can recognize how one can have different approaches towards such spaces according to the way he or she perceives the 'liminal' or the 'interstitial'. Moreover, on a more urban scale, upon analyzing similarly different identified types of 'terrain vagues', one can argue that 'liminal' and 'interstitial' have differing, yet related, impacts on the contemporary city.

As a result, a new paradigm is set to understand the 'in-between' spaces of the 21st century urban context. New layers within the urban fabric start to emerge, ones that have vaguely been described in the previous century and ones that have repercussions on how we perceive and intervene

on the contemporary city and its formal and informal contexts. Some questions come to be thus approached and hypothetically answered such as how one deals with the terrain vagues whether in present terms or as a projection towards future potential?

The focus of this thesis is thus to understand the operational processes and the modes of intervention on the phenomenon of terrain vague from its differentiation between 'interstitial space' and 'liminal space'. Hence the question comes to be: In the context of 'terrain vague', is there a difference between the 'interstitial' and the 'liminal'? Does such a differentiation have a resonance on our perception and experience of such spaces and the importance we assign to them? What are the consequences on the architectural scale and on the 21st century urban fabric? How does one hence deal with such spaces whether in present terms or as a projection towards future potential? And is intervention on such spaces considered always pejorative as contested by Sola-Morales or is there space for negotiation? All this analysis helps thus to answer the main statement of this thesis:

Interstitial space as a product of urban limits and thus a potential urban regenerator.

Since the terrain vague, in its basic nature, falls out of the normative systems of the formal and the regular, and more importantly falls in between professional fields, quantitative or qualitative research cannot solely be adopted. A suggested research methodology would thus include investigation into the history of this notion, in parallel with the analysis of Beirut's interstitials as key case study. Aside from this analysis, part of the investigation method would be analyzing diverse methods of interpretation and the terrain vague and concluding different approach methods from the latter, interventions on the in-between from different domains and trying to decipher common occurring paths and methodology processes.

SETTING THE HYPOTHESIS
DEFINING THE TERRAIN VAGUE, THE
INTERSTITIAL AND THE LIMINAL

P A R T

1

“potentially exploitable state but already possessing some definition to which we are external,” - “strange places that exist outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures”

Ignasi Sola-Morales, “Terrain Vague”, Anyplace

Part 1: Defining the discourse of Interstitiality

Defining the terrain vague, the interstitial and the liminal

Chapter I. Terminologies and definitions

a. Multidiscipline terminologies

Through focusing on the two main terminologies, there are many ways in which the word 'interstitial' and 'liminal' are used in different contexts. These different meanings confer to the interstice and the liminal their inherent qualities and characteristics as interdisciplinary multifaceted notions. By understanding their different usages, one can conceive a well rounded understanding of both terms. However, one term has much more expanded within multiple fields than the other and that is the interstitial. Due to its earlier usage within the scientific realm, the term has evolved into a new mode of understanding the physical world through the minute rather than the extensive.

THE INTERSTITIAL

An Intervention Mode

In fact, in tandem with architectural definitions, the notion of interstitiality has been an emergent subject in the sciences. It became relevant in this realm since 1963. It is described as "a small structural space between tissues or parts of an organ; the interstices of a network are small opening between things".⁴ The word *interstitial* means "between spaces," and is commonly used to denote "in-betweenness" in several different cultural contexts.⁵ The subject has also currently expanded to become an alternative mode of intervention on preexisting fabric: incision-free in-between operations rather than cutting-stitching approaches. It is considered in the anatomy field that the importance of the interstices is undermined and they are trying to re-explore it to find new ways in which

⁴<http://www.wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interstitial_art

one can make operations and cure diseases. Scientist now use the organic interstitial to make heart operations among others without the need of large impact methods. Medical treatments are subsequently heading towards making use of interstitiality in order to prevent incision based operations.

On the other hand, the notion has been repeatedly used in natural sciences to designate an intercellular vital system of communication in the human anatomy, one that disserves waste as well as nurtures tissues. Interstitial is thus used to define vital networks within larger systems, such as nutritive and waste systems in between cells and tissues. The term has been similarly of service in physiqués as a reference to compounds of atoms within metals or networks of fluids that infiltrate pores in rocks. In other words, it is a term used in physics to point out to minute spaces in between closely set material such as spaces between crystals of a crystallized material or fluids in between minerals and within rocks; whereas biologically it is used for the space literally in between other more important organs. Therefore, it is on one hand considered unimportant, and possibly a void, and on the other hand, it is important for its complementary quality of the more important organs and functions.

In the publicity sector, an interstice is also becoming more and more popular as an intervention mode. Television station programmers refer to any short piece of content that is neither a show nor a commercial, but is sandwiched between them, as an interstitial. The interstice is hence also pointed out in publicity, whether on television or on the internet, when they want to refer to adds in between programs. An interstitial webpage serves only to provide extra information to a user during the act of navigating from one page to the next, rather than adding a totally independent input, hence the idea of interstitial as a supportive system vital for the functioning of larger units within a system. It works here on the idea that gaps do exist within broadcasting and in between

Vital network of communication

Supportive system

websites and that these can be made use of to include more advertisement and shorter secondary infills.

Even the well-known animation ‘The Simpsons’ was an interstitial TV program between the Tracy Illman show and commercials. Short animations by Pixar are also taking place in the interstice; they are usually more compelling to watch than their bigger brothers. In fact, the interstitial ads seem to be taking more attention than integrated advertisement, such as the banner adds, because they ‘display in a separate window while you download the next webpage, in contrast with the banner ad which is a more passive form of advertising’⁶. This is usually due to the fact that they are small and more importantly condensed, characteristics known for the architectural interstice as well. Even the interstice is thus being used to invest in and is being consumed within the capitalist society. Consequently, we can notice that even in virtual realm of media and communication, it is becoming hard to keep one space left for breathing.

Active form of Interaction

Condensed

Out of the Norm

Interdisciplinary

The same notion of ‘interstitiality’ has been expanded in the last 20 years into the arts in order to label what could not be labeled, i.e. arts whose basic nature falls between main stream or familiar genres and categorizations, thus making the work difficult to easily categorize or describe within a single artistic discipline. Interdisciplinary, interfiction and interstitial in this context became synonyms. Within this realm the notion of interstitial is being supported and strong belief in its creative values is apparent. Indeed, some of the best artists be it Delia Sherman, Italo Calvino, Ellen Kushner, Terri Windling, Kelly Link, or Gavin Grant, and some artistic genres were being discussed under more amorphous ‘in-between’ descriptors such as ‘magic realism’, ‘mythic function’ or ‘the new weird’. Interstitial art is a term first coined in the 1990s, and increasingly popularized in the early 2000s. In 2002, the literary scholar Heinz Insu Fenkl founded ISIS: The Interstitial Studies, Institute at the State University of New York at New Paltz, and in 2003-04, Sherman & Kushner, who had incited discussion about the

⁶ TechEncyclopedia

need to cultivate artistic 'in-betweenness', founded the Interstitial Arts Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to support artists and art-industry professionals whose creative pursuits are interstitial in nature.

In fact, several questions were raised and many debates were started on the nature of interstitiality as applied to fiction.

Reviewers raised the question of how important the definition, or lack thereof, was to understanding the anthology as a whole and the stories individually. The problem and advantage of interstices is thus this lack of definition and how important the need for definition is in this debate. **It is not a genre nor is it a type.**

Irresolute

"...interstitial fiction mixes and matches these precepts—ghost stories, science fiction, nursery rhymes, detective story, whatever may be handy—as part of a variegated prism to focus on the psychology of existence even while bending its collectively recognized state. ...each "interfiction" shares this sense of disjointed narrative, but in very different ways that do not lend themselves to easy genre categorization."⁷

One could argue that all that has been categorized as interstitial seem to be so far sharing one major characteristic: it is not important, it is subsidiary. Yet, contemporary scientific innovations as well as current architectural discourses prevent such an impulsive dismissal.

In fact, as interstitiality is becoming increasingly a new mode of intervention in the scientific realm, in the architectural realm it is becoming an alternative mode of analysis and urban involvement beyond the scope of formal modes of production. As there are operations that are not harmful that work on the basis of making use of the interstice to access certain areas without harming the total system or making injuries in the rest of the system, such operations could maybe also be translated on the

A Production Mode

⁷ Sherman, p. 304

architectural level to solve or at least point out at certain problems of the built environment. The interstitial space as an idea was however first borrowed by architects from the engineering field where interstitial spaces are used to temper the environments of those around them (such as in refrigeration). Louis Khan was the first to implement interstices within one of his buildings.

Different Worldview

As a final point, the phenomenon of interstitiality plays a significant role within several contemporary theoretical discourses. One can find affiliations on the philosophical level within discussions on Deleuze, Jan Gehl, Kevin Lynch, and David Harvey, to count only the minimum. Moreover, social scientists and urbanists often link the notion with the transition from the Modern worldview to the contemporary scene. Yet, despite all the attention, interstitiality has not yet attained the status of a self-standing subject it deserves.

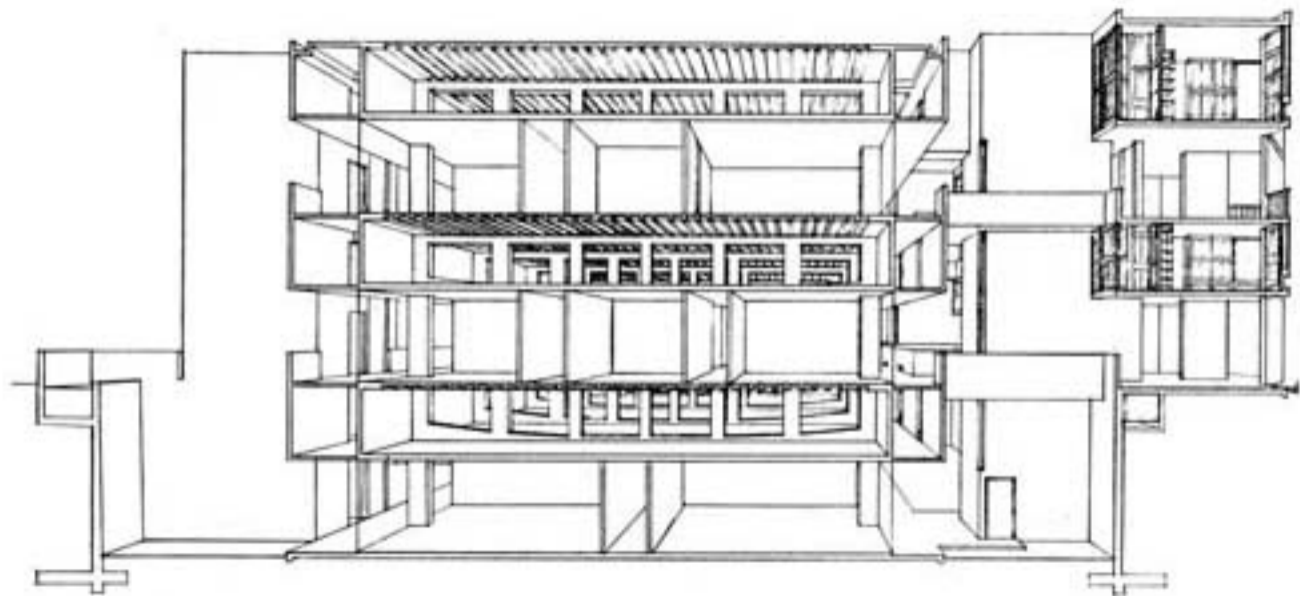
Therefore, I am suggesting in this thesis to focus on the term itself and try to define it in relation with another crucial term that is related to the 'terrain vague' and that is 'liminal'. Hence, one of the aims of this thesis is the establishment of the difference between Interstitial and Liminal as different architectural approaches to the phenomenon of *Terrain Vague* that alter greatly our approach towards such urban spaces.

LIMINAL

On the margin

This brings us to the notion of 'liminal'. Although the latter is not a notion as extended as that of the interstice, it is nonetheless apparent in the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis and art. It is coincidentally yet not accidentally referring in both fields to a state of being 'on the margins' and 'in transition'. In the arts, it becomes synonym to the surrealist condition: a resolution of states of waking and dreaming; whereas in psychoanalysis, it is more a condition of being 'in between' personality traits.





Socially, it translates as being in between social roles, in particular being in transition (as during ritual) between one social role and another, on the verge of social translocations.

Liminality is often employed within discussions on rites of passage, a concept that got first enunciated by Arnold van Gennep in his book of that name to describe the phase between childhood and full admission within a tribe or social group.⁸ Van Gennep describes: "I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*."⁹ Shifts in personalities, social roles among others are types of alterations in which the liminal aspect of the state of 'in-betweenness' becomes apparent. Liminal phase is hence linked with movement and displacement, both mental and physical. It is also a phase vague by nature: "The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous."¹⁰

In transition

Vague

b. Architectural and urban definitions

As we discussed earlier, it is very debatable how the need for a precise definition affects the analysis of the discourse on interstitiality in a positive manner, as this seems to limit the prospects of opportunities regarding the study of this theme. The lack of precise definitions of terminologies for 'terrain vague' has created a field insecure for architects which prevented a clear evolution within this domain. The first aim of this thesis is to create a ground base for such terminologies in order to further explore the potential of such undefined spaces. Hence, instead of directly tackling the different characteristics of intermediary spaces, we have decided here to start by taking the other possible road: working on the different terminologies used in this subject field, and mainly two: the interstitial and the liminal. Although the terms

⁸ Garces-Foley, p. 230

⁹ Gennep, p. 21

¹⁰ Turner, p. 80





referring to in-between spaces are erroneously used interchangeably, there is, as we have begun to see, difference between intermediary space (experience of what grows in between things), interstitial space (prosperous for the emergence of ephemeral situations), fluid space (flux of knowledge of numeric culture, mobility between local and global, center and periphery), public space (related to political connotations), liminal space (place of transition on the threshold) etc.

Ignasi de Sola Morales argues that some spaces fall out of the norms of the functioning city and belong to 'a non-exhaustive system undergoing continuous transformations, based on a series of categories of analysis similar to the "plateaus" of Gilles Deleuze, i.e. to knowledge plans established by specific random points. The five that he initially proposed were: "mutations," "flows," "rooms," "containers" and "terrain vague." These "plateaus" were not stable either conceptually or numerically, as they were continually modified and new ones were added. They thus became instruments of analysis of an urbanism understood as "nomadic science," changing, imprecise, and random instruments.'¹¹ We are interested in this thesis in one of those plateaus, the *terrain vague*, and two of its main terminologies 'interstitial' and 'liminal'. However, before we can concentrate on the latter two, one should grasp the larger scope and try to understand the relation between the different terms used within the theme of the in-between. Within the above mentioned terminologies, a hierarchy can be set to understand the relation between the different notions. Taking into consideration that the largest theme is *terrain vague*, the rest naturally comes underneath. We can first assume that intermediary space includes within it both moments of 'interstitial' and 'liminal', those being moments within the urban experience of the *terrain vague*. On a different level, intermediary space seems to go in parallel, and in contrast, with the more formal labeling of 'public space'. Following this categorization, we will try to hint at the different

¹¹ Sola-Morales, Ignasi de, p. 10-23

etymological and encyclopedic description of the terms at hand.

According to Ignasi de Sola Morales, the expression *terrain vague*, cannot be fully translated to English as *land* does not inherently include the urban qualities that the word 'terrain' has in French, whereas the same word in English refers more to an agricultural or geological sense of the word. As for the second term *vague*, Ignasi argues that the term from its German and Latin origins, *vagrwogue* and *vacuus*, engages notions of movement and instability on the one hand and notions of emptiness, vacancy and inoccupation on the other. Terrain vague hence refers to types of places, and arguably spaces, that incorporates absence of use or activity as well as a sense of freedom and potential.¹² Moreover, the term *vague* gives a sense of the indeterminate, the blurred and the uncertain. It is this sentiment that alludes to the fact that the absence of limit is intimately related to expectations of mobility.¹³

On a similar note, the term 'intermediate space' derives from the Medieval Latin *intermediatus* which derives itself from *inter*, referring to what is in between, and *medius*, referring to the middle. Intermediary spaces are hence places, even symbolically, of interaction between different social fields, human activities, similar to spaces of exchange of practices and knowledge. The term dates from the 15th century as defining a being or occurrence at the middle place, stage, or degree, or between extremes.¹⁴ The term is rather general and does not provide a full picture of the different nuances inherent to the *terrain vague*.

Liminal space, on the other hand, seems to be much more case specific as defining a moment within the urban experience of terrain vague. The word derives from the Latin word *limen*, meaning "a threshold". Hence the significance of liminal lies in its relation to the notion of

¹² Ignasi de Sola-Morales, « Terrain Vague », p. 5

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Webster dictionary

entrance; it is related to a beginning or the first stage of a process. The liminal state is moreover characterized by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. One's sense of identity dissolves to some extent, bringing about disorientation. A liminal space is a blurry boundary zone between two established and clear spatial areas, and a liminal moment is a blurry boundary period between two segments of time. Although it is related to the state of in-between, it is more specific, as described, to the notion of 'intermediary': it describes a state of blurriness and 'un-establishment' pertaining to the experience of transition to or from the *terrain vague*. Moreover, liminal redefines systems from the transitional links; the limits between different elements become crucial as they constitute the realm in which the liminal is found. It celebrates the limit, threshold of the experience of movement and transition through such spaces, and all the connotations of vagueness and blurriness of such an experience. The liminal is not merely incidental, it is the experience realized by a movement from inside to outside and outside into inside, through the dimensions of time and movement. It is the moment of possibility, awakening, and change, the moment where we carry the memory of the outside inside and the inside outside. In Victor Turner's *Forest of Symbols*¹⁵, liminality is described as the condition of being on a threshold or in a 'betwixt and between space'. Liminality later on became a metaphor for the Surrealist condition, which is liminal by definition (the resolution of the states of waking and dreaming).

Finally, interstitial space (Latin *inter*, 'between', and *sistere*, 'to stand', i.e. 'to stand in between'), first recognized in 1646, is the in-between fragment that falls out of the normative system.¹⁶ From the Latin *interstitium*, the interstice is described either as a space between one thing and another or a time between one act and another. Architects refer to the leftover gaps between building walls as "interstitial space," being neither inside

¹⁵ Turner, p. 97

¹⁶ Sola-Morales, p. 120

any room nor outside the building. The Latin origin *sistere* refers to a position of standing: when you are in the interstitial, you stand, in between. It is a clear positioning that disregards the shaky feeling one gets when in transition towards a vague space. On another level, the interstitial is the space of the ephemeral and the temporary; ephemerality is in fact a characteristic and maybe a quality of such spaces. Yet, unlike liminal moments, the interstitial is fully anchored from within the in-between space rather than associated with borders and hence context. The notion of 'interstice' comes hence in contrast with that of 'liminal'. Unlike liminality, interstitiality is an event of specificity that is experienced from within an intermediate space. It is a moment that 'stands' in between, it is not a blurred moment of transition as is the liminal moment. Therefore, the affects of interstitiality do not withhold the ambiguity of the liminal. On the other hand, from the abovementioned, we can notice that the main point that differentiates the liminal from the interstitial is the positioning of both moments within a figurative timeline of experiencing intermediary space. The interstitial from its definition does not include a discussion on the notion of limit or entrance, the term presumes a position already in the middle of the in-between space. The interstitial is thus closer to the term *terrain* of *terrain vague*: it incorporates all that is stable and urban in these connotations. In contrast with the etymological analysis, liminal alludes more the term *vague* within the *terrain vague*.

c. Terrain Vague, Interstice or Liminal space

Simple questions of vocabulary, denomination and terminology put in light the vague, uncertain and complex character of the spaces studied here as much from the practical side as from the analysis that had been done on the subject. The use of the concept 'intermediary space' includes under its wing both interstitial and liminal spaces as the 'terrain vague' from within the city rather than on its outskirts. In this thesis, the focus is on such types of

terrain vague, in order to analyze the development and functioning of the inner city rather than a larger scope that could include large spaces on the city edges. The aim is to understand how interstitial space can affect and be affected by the city fabric, the context in which it is inscribed and the life quality of the neighboring community.

As we have seen, differences in definition between the different terminologies before mentioned give mainly clues into how these notions affect the field of architecture and most importantly the urban experience of the *terrain vague*. From the different definitions given to interstitiality, one can attribute it to the notion of network as the interstice being a small element vital to the functioning of the larger system. Be it in science, art, or publicity, the importance of the in-between is underestimated due to its ephemeral and fleeting existence. Yet when one takes a closer look, the presence of such spaces is crucial as they withhold alternative ways of dealing with system in harmless methods or alternative ways of dealing with disciplines that incorporate a large potential.

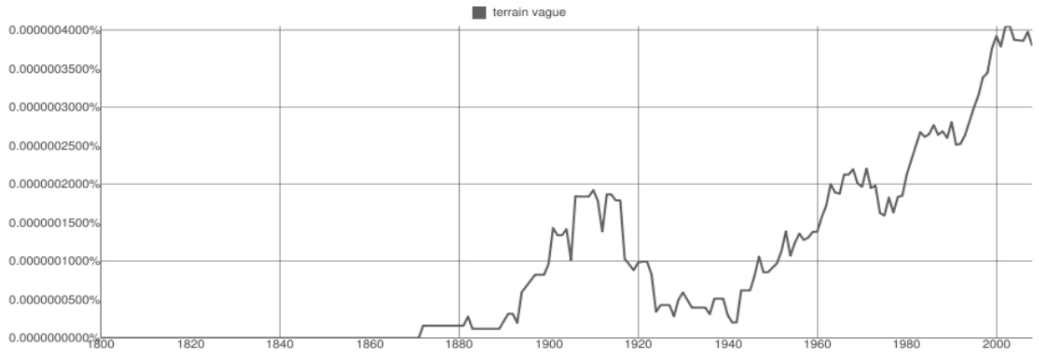
To be interested in intermediary spaces is indeed questioning the link within the experience of 'in-betweenness', not as much 'why the link' but more importantly 'how the link'. Interstitial from this new perspective assumes the moment of being already in-between whereas the liminal assumes a moment of becoming, still on the threshold and not yet within.

One of the thesis' hypotheses is that the differences between liminal and interstitial have resonance on how architects and urbanists approach the *terrain vague*. When perceiving the terrain vague from an interstitial perspective, the focus is no more on the architectural physical boundaries; form loses its importance as the focus shifts to the center of the space at hand. In contrast, we can argue that a liminal approach would focus on the intensive and extensive limits of the *terrain vague*. The

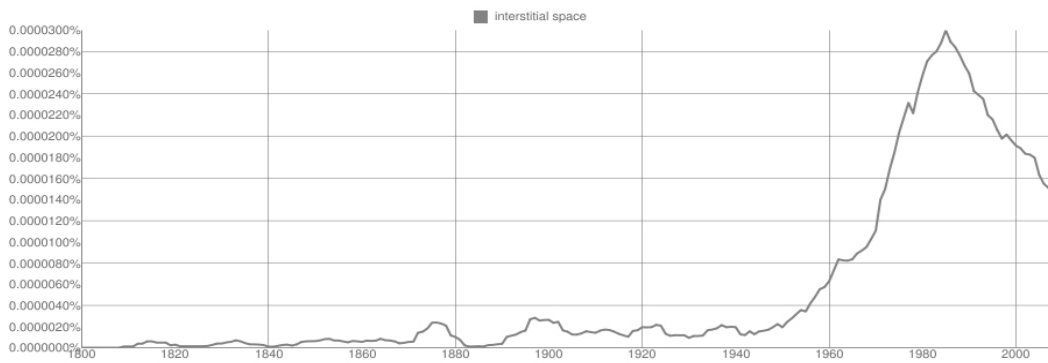
BETWEEN INTERSTITIAL AND LIMINAL _ MISSING PARTS OF THE PLAN

attention is thus drawn on the form and the event of transition through, in or out of the terrain vague.

Graph these **case-sensitive** comma-separated phrases: between and



Graph these **case-sensitive** comma-separated phrases: between and



Graph these **case-sensitive** comma-separated phrases: between and



Figure 3: Ngram Graphs showing respectively the occurrence of the terms 'Terrain Vague', 'Interstitial space', 'Liminal' in published books from 1800 to 2008.

(Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books – see ref.)

Chapter II. Differences in experiences

a. How transition shapes experience

Moving in and out of interstices brings out curiosity, interest, but also fear, discomfort, an urge to cross through without stopping. This amalgam of impression is linked to the fact that such spaces are inherently loaded with intensities and extensities that define their potential as spaces within and without the urban fabric. Keeping in mind those extensities and intensities, the terrain vague could be best described as an event of transition through the different moments of liminality and interstitiality as moments between an unstable becoming on the threshold and a stable being in the center. Hence in order to understand the terrain vague, one should understand first the event of transition through such space types and how this event is loaded with tension that ends up 'reversing connotations', as Gilles Deleuze would put it.

"The transition zone contains the capacity to determine the prospective character of the framed void. It offers the possibility to intervene in the existing urban form, not by filling, but by emptying it. The void experiences a transformation from a neglected urban object to a clearly identified urban subject. This threshold towards the void serves as a mediating element between the two coexisting situations. It acts as a 'coulisse' of an urban theater towards the void."¹⁷

Halil Ramazan

The interest in the 'terrain vague' comes from a preliminary interest in understanding the event of 'transition' through different urban spaces and how the formal and informal contexts, built or not, shape the urban fabric. Understanding solely the built environment does not resolve the notion of dwelling in a city; it is a process of interchange and transition between public realms and private ones that generates ultimately networks of in-between spaces. The difference between liminal and

¹⁷ Halil Ramazan

interstitial is intimately related to the event of transition on architectural limits. This event redefines our urban experience as we move in space. By understanding the event of transition one can understand the impact of liminal and interstitial on the ever-moving ever-changing urban experience.

In architecture, the entryway is where time and space temporarily stop and shift, where there is a confrontation of possibilities with the preexisting conditions. According to Amy Gilley¹⁸, 'it mirrors the non-linear system that is human behavior. The main linear axis is broken into series of lines.' Transition between inside and outside reflects intensities and extensities that define our architectural experience. The act of transition redefines limits in space in a process that breaks the space itself: the act of moving in space fractures the latter into an infinity of spaces, these spaces are called in-between.

It is important to notify that there is no interstitial space beyond the scope of the urban fabric. We cannot discuss terrain vague away from the city. Heidegger in his 'Essais et Conférences'¹⁹ argues: 'there is no passage without bridge that makes apparent the riverbeds as riverbeds'. The bridge is hence generator of place, of a 'habitat'. Place as argued by Aristotle is not only the destination but also the interval to cross.²⁰ More importantly, and still according to Heidegger, it is the thought process that creates limits, and thus intermediary space as such. In nature, there is not passage, the event of transition belongs hence to the category of human thought; there is no natural bridge. The event is inherent to human conditions and to a 'produced' space. This production of space gives hints on how to intervene on

¹⁸ Gilley, Amy, *Fractalled: The interstitial space and Frank Gehry*, Baltimore, p. 10

¹⁹ Heidegger, Martin. « Bâtir, Habiter, Penser » *Essais et conférences*. Paris, 1988, p. 188.

²⁰ Ricœur, Paul. *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Paris, 2000.

such spaces: as we produce, we should be aware of our production.

b. State of being and becoming

“One important condition of a *poché* (different term for intermediary space) is twofold: it is not just containing but it also is a figured or articulated presence, and second, this articulation is figurative, since it already embodies its functional contents as a container which encloses, shelters and has an aesthetic.”²¹

Peter Eisenman

Another theoretical background to take into account when analyzing the ‘*terrain vague*’ is the context of ‘inverted meanings’ set by Gilles Deleuze regarding experiential transformation within the city. It is through the understanding of this phenomenon that we can understand the difference between ‘interstitial’ and ‘liminal’ as a difference between a state of being and a state of becoming.

Intermediate spaces involve a socio-spatial process of re-composition and creation between the institution, the formal, the continuous, the temporary and their opposites. It is a change in condition. Whether between two voids or two fulls, this change according to Eisenman can engender a displacement of expectations. He argues that the idea of architecture as a state of becoming defies the traditional ideas of equilibrium, stability, and stasis. Felix Guattari explains difference between being and becoming. According to him, becoming is defined as becoming unmotivated of the sign, that would thus have a direction and energy that might deal with forces and flows, which could be multiple, reversible, and deformative, rather than linear and transformative. Implicit is the suggestion that it’s a process that can be repeated infinitely, that in its iteration it never produces

²¹ Eisenman, p. 99

the same condition of being; that is in its repetition there is always a singular instance of being.

On a similar note, the liminal moment is linked to this notion of becoming and changes in expectation. According to Andrew Benjamin, the interstitial (used here to designate intermediary space) “has an effect, it disrupts expectations. It is not an empty space awaiting programmatic injection. Rather the complex activity of blurring produces the yet-to-be determined. ... [This] brings a certain plurality into play. This also means that the space is defined by the interplay of finitude and becoming. Finitude is the attribution of content and programmatic specificity.”²²

²² Andrew Benjamin, p. 309

**BUILDING UP THE THEORETICAL
ARGUMENTATION**

PART

2

“... where nature has started to reconstruct the built or (now) ‘ruined’ environment. . . . space[s] that opened in the dichotomy of what we perceive as city and nature”

Gil Doron, “The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression”

Part 2: The interstitial, a significant factor of urban quality

According to Edward Soja, regarding ‘the illusion of opacity’: “spatiality is reduced to physical objects and forms, and naturalized back to a first nature so as to become susceptible to prevailing scientific explanation in the form of orderly, reproducible description and the discovery of empirical regularities ... geographical description is substituted for explanation of the social production of space and the spatial organization of society”²³ Since the 1970s, as he argues, a predominantly socially and politically minded approach was set on architecture. All was reduced to false dualism between designed object and social use. The missing elements in that puzzle were left-over spaces that did not serve the political agenda yet could very well serve the social agenda without the necessary need of fixed design intent.

Chapter III. City: a mosaic of interstitial spaces

As we have set so far, the hypothesis of this thesis entails that the two terminologies, interstitial and liminal, refer to two different experiential moments within the terrain vague and consequently translate into two different interventions modes on intermediary spaces based on whether the focus was on one or the other. The difference in experiential moments come from a theoretical understanding of notions such as the event of transition through architectural limits, the inversion of meanings caused by this event and the intensities and extensities that are produced by the same token due to notions of being and becoming. All this explains on the one hand the *liminal* as a state of becoming through an event transition through limits that causes an inversion of meanings through forces of extensities. On the other hand, the *interstitial* is the state of post-liminal being where meanings have already been inverted.

²³ Soja, p. 223

On the urban scale, this causes two different views of the role of the terrain vague in the contemporary city. On the one hand, liminal becomes associated with the different urban limits existent in the city and a vision of a 21st century urban fabric made out of borders. On the other hand, interstitial becomes linked with a vision of a city formed out of a network of fragments where the missing pieces are the terrain vague.

a. Urban formulation according to interstices

There are architectural works that remind us that we cross and inhabit intervals. Since the construal of the notion of 'terrain vague' in 1995, Architects have been actively engaged in intervening on such urban spaces. Their aim is to discover informal or unconventional modes of intervention on the preexisting urban fabric and to consequently question the role of the architect. The experience of noticing and accepting the place of the in-between within the urban fabric is as important as understanding the white parts within a black and white picture: if you do not take into consideration the white areas you cannot visualise the content of the picture. However, there is a difference between the white void within a two dimensional black and white picture and the terrain vague within a three dimensional city: the in-between urban space is not necessarily empty, it can be full, occupied, even well functioning, yet its occupants or functions fall outside the traditional norms of the city.

We can divide consequently the interstitial spaces or spaces in between in two categories: Spaces of transition and 'residual' spaces. Each category has its own characteristics, is formed differently and is approached differently by the individuals and the collective. They participate in the continuum of urban scales and play as a social support between city, neighborhood and building. They are hence rarely functioning as a scale on its own, clearly defined in the sense where interest is more on the

forms of sociability rather than on the architectonic scale. Otherwise, it is a notion of in between where a potential of freedom, disorder, chaos, resistance, green space can come to be. This notion of in between is not only a physical in between. It is also one that is metaphorical, social, political, 'paradigmal'...

It is also a manifestation of a shift in the nature of the city's modes of being as viewed by the idealized modernism period as manifestation of greatness, to a nature that is more inclusive of notions such as fragmentation and eclecticism; as David Harvey puts it: "from modernist cityscape to postmodernist: great signifiers that got jettisoned and ideals of progress in favor of '[f]iction, fragmentation, collage, and eclecticism, all suffused with a sense of ephemerality and chaos', in terms of imagination, design, and day-to-day life". The development of the notion of 'interstitial' is hence pertinent to our contemporary worldview as arguably defining a shift in perception from the element to the fragment and from the momentous to what is in-between. A new paradigm is set thus to understand these 'in between' spaces of the 21st century urban context. New layers within the urban fabric start to emerge, ones that have been vaguely described in the previous century and ones that have repercussions on how we perceive and intervene on the contemporary city and its formal and informal contexts.

In the 19th century, especially in the context of western cities, a shift in the understanding of the urban fabric seems to first bring out the question of interstitiality. In the context of urban densification and industrial development, Aurélie Flamand, a student at the Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris, argues that particular attention has been given to the development of the modern apartment but also to the structure and new specializations of buildings on one hand and private spaces on the other. Hence, as she explains, many authors have come to determine and define rigid categorizations for the public and the private sphere, the former being more and

more a space of activities, of representation, and of display, while the latter gets specialized in forms of familial life, protected from exterior influences.²⁴ From this rigidity in specialization of urban space, a need to create links and spaces of encounter between the different spheres became apparent. Liminality became a necessity for linkage and interstitial for encounter. Hence, the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th have been marked by an interest in increasingly developing cities with special attention to how the urban context 'appears', hence the interest once again in the liminality of the terrain vague. All these interests in the urban context increased the interest, whether social, political or architectural in the formation of those interstitial spaces. From the portico to the secondary passages to the alleys and the dead-ends, are the spaces conceived as transitional spaces, or spaces of transgression? Is their status one of recreation or erasure?

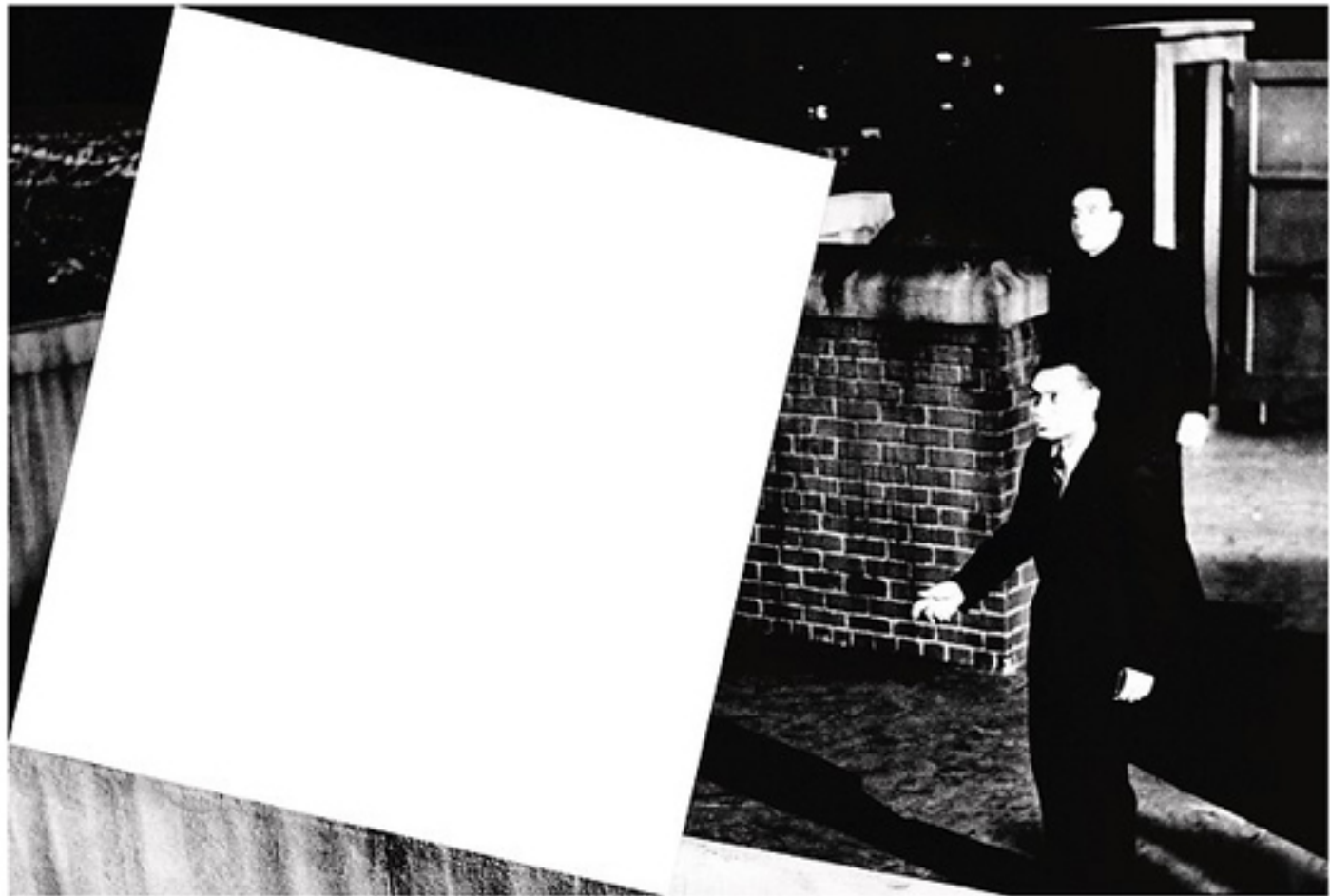
b. Making of public not simply accessing

In-between spaces are not the public space but it has a potential to be one, or something else. This potential has inherently value as related to the context, as no interstitial is so without a context. In Berlin, for example, holes play the role of open connective secret places, their connective quality should be extended, offered to citizens as usable.

The design process of the interstitial becomes hence similar to the creative process of a montage. A montage is a design procedure used by architects to intervene on the interstice while some of the fragments (or gaps) of these montages are left for the users to fill, modify, design. According to Jonathan Hill, "fragments of other sites are brought together in a new location, while still, to some extent, evoking their previous settings."²⁵ He evokes Baldessari's work as an exemplary case study of the essence of montage: the design stage of selection and

²⁴ Flamand, p.3

²⁵ Hill, p. 95





*Violent Space Series: Nine Feet (of Victim and Crowd) Arranged by
Position in Scene, 1976*

Black-and-white photographs on board

24 3/8 x 36 1/2 in. (61.9 x 92.7 cm)

Collection of the McNay Art Museum, Bequest of Robert H. Halff

© 2009 John Baldessari

Photo © McNay Art Museum

rearrangement of components is in his work as important as the end result itself. In fact, Baldessari juxtaposed unrelated components of what seems at first sight irrelevant content while the real importance in his work is actually the fragmented blanks around the fragmented pieces he had collected.

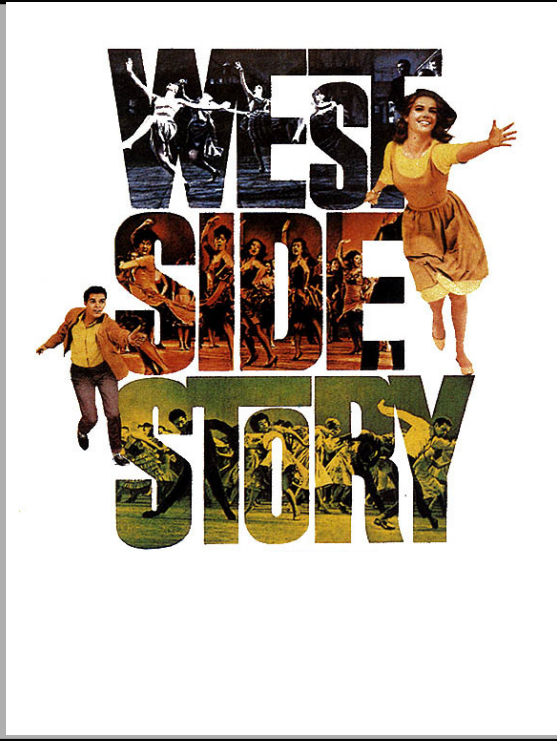
However, intermediary spaces are not always spaces of linkage, which makes the making of public through them a problematic issue. They are sometimes considered as spaces of disjunction/dysfunction. Access and linkage take on new connotations. Hence, they become synonyms to spaces of trouble, squats of young people in the entrance 'halls', violence in the 'caves' and 'alleys', traffic of all kind in the parking space. Rehabilitation project on the political level tend to set interventions less on the built and more on the collective areas. And when lack of financial resources is apparent, intermediary places become spaces of residual where all unwanted 'waste' in the private and-or public sphere are thrown in these spaces. However, if interstitial spaces are controlled to the maximum due to collective paranoia, the outcome could become what we call 'gated communities', or for the better a community with a lack of imagination and hence lack of control on the materiality of its space; thus no more space for experimentation, for potential sociability or for the possible. Some of the interstitial should stay experiential so that the city could remain a 'livable' system, and where a negotiation between public and private is still possible. In fact, these spaces have been since the 19th century spaces for experimentation under the title of 'living together', as a negotiation between the public and the private. According to Fourier, they represent a model of society on a small scale for inhabitants. As for Godin and le Corbusier, the focus the interior street, the individualized dimension of space in one type of interstice.²⁶

²⁶ Choay, *L'urbanisme, utopies et réalités*, p. 8

According to the conference publications of 'Actes de la Journée Interstice'²⁷, held in Paris in July 2009 as part of a research initiative from Action Bretagne, intermediary space generates different types of actions. It's a different mode to dress a new cartography of human resources:

1. The interstice is a space: a space available but not exploited in the geographic space of the city, in the social space of our relations, in the mental space of our representations, it's a type of space that is not 'devalued' and constitute in itself a human reserve of initiatives. It's hence a space of potential susceptible of inhabiting situations of interactions where the individuals produce a collective without a pre-determined function.
2. The interstice is an interface: just like silence between two notes, there is no rhythm without interstice, nor is there movement. We perceive in it the pulsations of the city. It's a nomadic space that invites us to move, go to the encounter, explore, experience. Interface between ideas and people, it constitutes a new grammar to culture. The interstice makes us rediscover the political aspect of public space.
3. The interstice is a fold: it lets itself be seen as a multi-layer putting in visibility different levels of human experience: social, aesthetic, intellectual. Hence, we can separate our sensations from our comprehension. The layer most profound of the sensible becomes intelligible. The fold of the interior becomes the exterior, as when we leave the private space to go to a public one and vice versa.

²⁷ <http://labo.recherche-action.fr/actes-de-la-journee-interstice-culture-territoires/>





c. Notion of neighborhood

When discussing the notion of ‘quality’, examining public spaces and private ones within a district or a city does not supply enough information to understand the development of the area and attribute to it quality characteristics. One should also understand the quality of space between buildings, the quality of left-over spaces, empty lots, to count but few examples in order to have a clearer view of the area’s quality.

This becomes apparent when it is reflected in scenographic terms: in the movie west-side story, for example, most of the plot is shot under the bridge, within empty lots, by the staircase, in the back alley etc. These informal spaces and the events occurring in them withhold the true meaning of the neighborhood at hand: the conflict begins in the side areas of the street, its negotiation and its climax is under the bridge, and its ‘resolution’ is in the empty semi-enclosed lot. All these places are one form or another of what we have defined as interstitial spaces of the ‘residual’ and of the resistance. Hence, these spaces are where social conflicts are resolved, where consensus takes place and where negotiation is clearly the status quo, metaphorically and physically.

Similarly, according to Zizeck, an important political theoretician that approached architecture from a novel angle, the interstitial space is the proper place of utopian dreaming, a reminder of architecture’s great politico-ethical responsibility.²⁸ He steps into the architecture field only to claim it for his radical social theory, only to provoke and challenge. According to him, a ‘leftover’ space is an answer to phenomenon of *class struggle*.

Thus, when speaking of interstitial we often hear of the relation individual-collective. It is a matter often discussed in terms of collaboration, negotiation and social

²⁸ Lahiji, p. 7

and urban transformation valorized by the interstitial spaces.

Since the 20th century, the notion recurred mostly in urban sociology as a critique to the large social housings as compared to individual housing which inherent contained more of those intermediate spaces. The main statement was that such spaces are mandatory to create a home, a sense of 'inhabiting' rather than 'habitat'.²⁹ Spaces of transition through the liminal interstice become hence interesting for researchers, then architects. These spaces are moreover considered spaces of dirt, disorder and of a DIY (do-it-yourself) scheme. They are taken by default as places of the collective and require an effort and a capacity from the inhabitants to adapt and transform those spaces. Some are spaces of 'squat'; they welcome unexpected programs that participate in transforming them into spaces of potential appropriation.

Chapter IV. Missing gaps or breaking mortar

From the basic definition of *terrain vague*, as first proposed by Ignasi de Sola-Morales in 1995, one can extract the basic essence of such spaces: Characteristics such as vagueness, complexity, ephemerality, informality and intensity come to the foreground. In parallel, from the main terminologies used to describe the terrain vague, one can extract the basic essence of the experience through analyzing such spaces. Thus similarly, moments such as transition or transgression, erasure or creation, being or becoming, come to the foreground. The outcome is an amalgam of characteristics mixed with an amalgam of experiential moments that finally portray a rounded vision of what the complexity of the terrain vague entails.

The contemporary urban fabric becomes hence metaphorically similar to an ancient Greek vessel where one can either focus on the missing elements within the composition or on the adhesive that bonds the remaining of the pieces together.

²⁹ Notions mentioned mostly by Henri Lefebvre

Chapter V. Beirut: a case study

I began to be interested in the interstice and the terrain vague after witnessing how they are related to the notion of limit and the situation on the edge. I started working on this subject because it is one of the major outcomes of creating a border and of crossing borders within the city. Coming from a city constantly and repeatedly divided by cultures and politics such as Beirut, it is always a worry in one's mind: how to move through urban spaces without moving through territories of an invisible 'other', those territories ranging from demarcation lines to small alleys to forgotten lots.



R E S U L T S
ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN
P O T E N T I A L S

P A R T

3

“... the ideal place for a certain resistance to emerge, a place potentially open to alternative ways of experiencing the city.”

Ignasi Sola-Morales, “Terrain Vague.” Anyplace.

Part 3: A product of transition through urban limits

According to Iain Borden and Jane Rendell, boundaries present themselves to us as the edge of things, as the spatial and temporal limit between the here and there, in and out, present and future.³⁰ The boundary in all its manifest forms – wall, façade, gate, fence, river, shore, and window – appears as a discrete separation between alternate sides of its magical divide; things are dispersed and ordered in space. Yet, for postmodern urban space, in which architects assay the wrapping and layering of space, and urban managers increasingly review its representation and control, nothing could be farther than the truth; boundaries are not finite, but zones of negotiation. Thus, as Borden puts it, while dominant boundaries between social groups may now be disappearing, they are also being replaced by new scarcely visible limits demarcating centers of power.

On London's Kingsway in Holborn sits the church of Holy Trinity. It represents a good example regarding the struggle between social strata, government and community on the in-between space. Forsaken by 1991 as a place of worship, the church rapidly became a focus for the many homeless and street-people of Holborn, but a line has been drawn: a place of wood, blue, 3 meters high, spans the full length of the holy trinity. It is meant to repel the unwanted and the unwashed. 'It is the architecture of separation, of clear blue water between spaces and peoples'.³¹

According to Simmel 70 years before Lefebvre³², 'boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially'. He explains that boundaries do not cause sociological effects in themselves, but are themselves

³⁰ Borden, Iain and Rendell, Jane, 'Thick Edge' in *Intersections*, p.221

³¹ Jarman, Derek, Film 'Blue', 1993

³² Borden, p. 225

formed by and in between sociological elements. Once we understand this, we can see how each point of view re-represents the city and how interstitial space is the space where opportunity for negotiation lies. We are interested mostly in the negotiation between the role of architect and the social system of community and city. The blue screen of holy trinity starts to show this interchange. Guy Debord describes these events also as spectacles, hence not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.

Moreover, Borden questions: do you have the right of passage, as you momentarily pass through the thickness of the edge? It is open yet it is an illusion because inside you are either a worker, visitor or a trespasser. Feeling is of unbelonging lingering in places where you feel uncanny and unwelcomed. “The go-between screens of broadgate become a form of mirror where not returned a view of broadgate but a view of us playing a role within it [...] We are expected to play a role, cast-members; we are checking whether we are on the right stage.”³³ Hence, the boundary is no more a plane but a zone, it lies in the negotiation between flows and divisions, whether physical or social. “The boundary is a thick edge. So is architecture”.³⁴ We have thus a public urban identity that affects our interplay on the physical realm, on architecture. Our identity alters preconceived boundaries, literally but also psychologically.

According to the explanation of a sociology professor, founder of the European program ERASME in anthropology of space, ‘S. Czarnowski, cited by Françoise Paul-Lévy, we define limit as follows: a limit unravels an interval between two contiguities. It is the interval and the passageway: a passage that permits progression between fields without ever crossing the boundaries of the fences’.³⁵ Hence it is mainly through the understanding of

³³ Borden, p.232

³⁴ Ibid., p. 250

³⁵ Ben Othmane Hamrouni, Insaf. *Limite et son franchissement*. Paris, 2009, p. 10.

architectural limits in general that we understand the creation of in-between spaces.

It is important to notify that each limit, similar to any frontier, has inherently its own 'No-man's-land'. This includes the in-between space and the thickness of the limit itself. Kevin Lynch from MIT writes in his book *The Image of the City*: "The limit could be something other than a barrier that dominates the surrounding, if we see through or cross through it easily, or she is somehow incrustated in the area that surrounds it. It becomes hence similar to knitting in cloths; it's no more a barrier, but place of exchange between zones stitched together."³⁶ However, when it comes to space types such as 'terrain vague', we can reason that the limit's thickness is affiliated with the notion of 'liminal' whereas the in-between spaces are affiliated with the notion 'interstitial'. This affiliation is rather experiential than physical, which creates confusion when it comes to grasping the essence of the notions at hand.

Robert Venturi argues that architecture is produced at the point of encounter of used forces and the space as much internal as external.³⁷ In fact, each limit appropriates a quantity of energy that it emits again in metamorphosed forms. Even a wall, primitive example of a limit, "is dressed, and even immobile, is active: it communicates to the one resting on it an energy of movement".³⁸ This energy is arguably the product of the dichotomies between order and chaos. In fact, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze defines chaos as the collection of determinations that emerge and disappear incessantly. Chaos hence is prelude to creation itself, and before a form is created, a struggle against chaos is manifested in order to alter the 'state of erasure of all contradictions, the reign of the undetermined'.³⁹ As a consequence, the detachment

³⁶ Kevin Lynch

³⁷ Venturi, Robert. *De l'Ambiguïté en Architecture*. Paris, 1995, p. 88.

³⁸ Père-Christin, Evelyne. *Le mur : un itinéraire architectural*. Paris, 2001, p. 5.

³⁹ *Dialectica*, Volumes 1-3, Paris, 1947, p. 278.

from the *plateau* of the undetermined, as Deleuze would describe it, present in itself an event charged with forms of energy that transform the place where they are manifested. The *In-between* spaces are born from these mechanisms of exchange at the limits between order and disorder.

Chapter VI. Impact of limits on the urban fabric

Intermediary spaces are spaces in between that grow from within but they are an outside. So they are an inherent component of the city but they do not follow the order of the surrounding city. They are of the city but not in the city. They are an inevitable result of the city and they belong to the disordered order of the city. This is why Governments usually decide to hide these spaces rather than exposing them. Their physical limits become accentuated in order to dissimulate them from the public eye because once the public eye sees the mess they complain and revolt. Plus, they dissimulate such spaces through thick boundaries so that they do not have to deal with unwanted guests who would occupy unwanted spaces by the rest of the communities. Plus, they dissimulate them so that they do not have to explain the dirt behind. A dirty city gives a bad figure to the order at stake.

Nonetheless, what one should point out here is that such spaces are the reason why order can prevail, 'the exception that makes the rule'. Hence, when a new event is set forth in a city whether it is a civil war or a transport system that is created on the already set city mesh, empty pocket spaces are bound to exist within the new set paradigm. It is inevitable. And these spaces more than often are needed to dissimulate the forgotten grids and to serve moreover as a side story to the new programs being implemented. This is where the old wagons are forgotten, where deposit spaces for transport litter are designated. According to Lebbeus Woods, systems collide and fusion

and dismantle to form new modes of order, not chaos.⁴⁰ In-between spaces are the outcome of this collision of urban systems: a situation where a rich community side by side with a poor one includes more than often a terrain vague in between that regulates the transition, be it an unused transport system, a large scale park, small alleys, to count but few examples. Therefore, in-between spaces are fertile ground to incite the creation of forms and new mechanisms of organization of this world. Mental mechanisms of what we perceive and assimilate are, as described by Lebbeus Woods, vicious circles that constitute the basis of the living organism. Our perceptions operate in a mode to self-regulate in order to preserve the logic and legitimacy of a stable construed reality. Hence, the world revolves around us and our perception. According to Aristotle, the human being tends to take himself as reference and the order of things is adapted to him. Hence, we create our own orientation towards the external world. And since we are mobile, the 'order of things' is displaced with our movement; the intensities and extensities are constantly altered. Within this complex cognitive system of the urban and architectural fabric, liminal becomes the blurred moment where alterations happen, the interstitial on the other hand is where those intensities and extensities start to restabilize before being labeled as private or public, communal or exclusive, and the like. We will always need those interstices to stabilize the bubble called our 'urban reality'; to bring back to order the illusion of secure urban life.

⁴⁰ *BorderLine*. Éd. Lebbeus Woods et Ekkehard Rehfeld. Vienne, 1998.

a. Borderline Intensities – Extensities

Emerging theories in urbanism examine the urban landscape as a “matrix of connective tissue that organizes not only objects and spaces but also dynamic processes and events that move through them”.⁴¹ Since the evocation of the notion of network and rhizomes by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, web like sprawl and voids became the dominant presence within our modern metropolitan worldview. This was coupled with an increasing concern with looking at “forces instead of forms, at the rhizomatic instead of the figurative”.⁴² Interest has shifted hence into a focus on both intensities and extensities within the urban network. Extensities refer to physical boundaries, forms and limits; it is what can be measured and put dimensions to, it is additive. Intensities become however this world of forces that we evoked: a series of tensions, whether density or heat or gravity etc., that are modified through alterations in amplitude, they are not additive. These intensities and extensities define our perception of the urban realm and especially intermediary spaces where these shifts in amplitudes and variations in forms and dimensions appear.

Spaces on architectural limits are spaces of intensity by excellence. Whether crossing a household edge, crossing over a bridge or passing through an alley in between buildings. We cannot pass a limit without being affected by what we experience and what we inhabit as aspirations and memories relative to our knowledge of the space itself. These spaces are considered in-between not only due to their physical situation but also due to the experiential dichotomies they link.

Intensities and extensities play a major role in defining the importance of the terrain vague: you cannot

⁴¹ Corner, James. “Recovering Landscape. Essays n Contemporary Landscape Architecture”. New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press., 1999

⁴² Ibid.

simply slide through such spaces as George Perec⁴³ would argue. According to Eisenman, the interstice could be a void within a void, an “overlapping within space of space, creating a density in space not given by the forming of a container within a profile”⁴⁴ He proposes that the interstice could also be conceived as a matrix of forces resulting from relationships of figure/ground or figure/figure. One could agree that it is indeed these interactions of in-betweenness that generate shifts in intensities that affect greatly our perception of the terrain vague to the extent that this latter could no longer be considered an invisible desolate space.

Within these paradoxical relations inherent to the terrain vague, extensities tend to related to the moment of liminal and to the realm of the visible. On the other hand, intensities lean more towards moments of interstitiality and to the realm of the articulate. One could imagine that the realm of the visible is distinct from that of the articulate and assume therefore a division between moments of liminality and those of interstitiality. However, as Michel Foucault argues, in our contemporary world, even visible is articulate, and thus there is an excess of articulation. According to him, the visible becomes more and more a question of image rather than substance.⁴⁵ This is one the main dilemmas when discussing differences between interstitiality and liminality: is the terrain vague overruled by image or substance? It is a conflict between effect and affect, affect as a form of articulation concerned with “forms of architectural effects that displace our conventional or expected experience of space.”⁴⁶ Expectancy becomes hence altered; limits of this new unknown vague space become blurry. The interstice becomes a ‘sensual gap’ where noticeability plays a major role. As Jonathan Hill describes it, these sensual gaps occur for example through juxtaposition of senses, or when all but one of the senses expected of an experience are present. Sounds and silent

⁴³ Perec

⁴⁴ Eisenman

⁴⁵ Eisenman, p. 6

⁴⁶ Ibid.

start to have their own intensities in the interstice, just as silence could be malevolent in uncanny spaces and familiar sounds assume importance. The intensities create hence effects of lingering but fluctuating tension, rather than instantaneous shock.

This effect takes its own time within the experience of the terrain vague; the time lapse is in expansion. The transition from the liminal exterior to the interior of interstitial space increases our attentiveness gradually as we become more conscious of the changing intensities and extensities at play. The depletion of some of the senses absent in the terrain vague heightens awareness of it and consequently other senses. Those are familiar strategies used in cinematography when presenting either strange places or interstices. In the Japanese pavilion at the Venice biennale of 2008, the author Junya Ishigami took on a similar approach through the latent appearance of interior illustrations: one could only get rid of the blurriness of the liminal once he had adjusted his senses to assimilate intensities and extensities of the interstitial that he could not once capture. And although such transitions are common to all spaces, in the terrain vague they take on heightened hues. Same goes for the painting of Robert Ryman, in 1994, at the Tate Gallery, London where neither the walls of the gallery nor Ryman's paintings were just white: the artist had played on slight nuances of colors to increase awareness towards sight and situation: "My paintings don't really exist unless they're on the wall as part of the wall, as part of the room".⁴⁷ This relation project-context-mobility is what differentiates the experience of the terrain vague through the moments we have evoked.

On a more urban scale, one can argue that we cannot feel the city unless through the terrain vague. We feel intensities and extensities, deviations in sensual experiences, rather than numbing of the continuum. That is how we sense the city; the sensual is in the interstice,

⁴⁷ Hill, p. 112

where the morphosis and the osmosis occur. According to Deleuze, architecture will always be on the side of forms, the figurative, the optical while the divided individual of the contemporary city would look for forces instead of the distant. “The space, in its folded interstices can no longer be either comfortable or efficacious in the manner postulated by the Modern Movement’s efficient model of enlightened tradition.”⁴⁸

b. Inversion of meanings

Terrains vagues, and their representation in photographic art, bring us to the fundamental problem of contemporary social life: a fear of disorder, indeterminacy and the strange, and of a call for the ‘management’ of forms of resistance to hegemonic structures of control designed to impose order. Thus, Solà-Morales Rubió argues that the eye of the photographer is drawn to terrain vague because of its potential exception from forms of power. It connotes expectation, of the other or the alternative. It possesses possibility in a landscape otherwise colonized by the structural violence, rationality and order of architecture and planning. The subject of architecture is the citizen: the subject of terrain vague is the nomadic stranger, subject, however, to forces that ‘other’ and estrange.

Inverted geometries described by Deleuze, Guattari and Debord take on experiential significance when it comes to transition through the ‘terrain vague’. Roles and signifiers are inverted to include their paradox. Henri Focillon defines architecture through internal space: “it is not in the internal mass that reside the profound originality of architecture as such [...] Giving a defined form to a vacant space, it creates its proper universe [...] If we’d think about it, the one most singular marvel is that

⁴⁸ Sola-Morales, p. 123

we have conceived and created a reverse of space”.⁴⁹ We can deduce hence that architecture is not static, it rests on this interrelation interior-exterior that redefines intensities and extensities inherent to architectural space and thus reverses meanings through the transitional event.

By ‘giving a defined form’ within an interstitial space one has to be aware hence that the principles that define such spaces get to be inverted: interior to exterior, natural to artificial, public to domestic; which makes it crucial to be careful when intervening on such spaces. In his critique of Israeli military strategy, Weizman describes how the military chefs base themselves on philosophical and architectural theories to reinterpret elements within the space of combat or use them to their proper ends. In-between spaces hence become borderlines for the familiar and the unfamiliar, building entrances become suspicious and forbidden to enter, a window becomes forbidden to look through. Even a border becomes a space for interaction rather than simply an enclosed event. The location of an alley for example can lead to antithetical connotations if the alley separates two locations of uneven intensity. An inversion of architecture occurs hence when this same alley, a place of passage, becomes prohibited to cross. Tschumi describes in ‘Architectural Paradox’ how for a text to be read or experienced, it has to follow cultural codes.⁵⁰ However, since the terrain vague falls out of social codes by nature, the paradox here lays in the fact that such spaces do belong to the functioning of the city and yet fall out of its organization, hence another inversion in signifiers related to a more urban scale. This might be directly linked to the creative processes that form and alter the terrain vague. In fact, according to Deleuze and Guattari, process works between mechanism and organism on the one hand and chaos on the other.⁵¹ It is this constant interrelation between mechanisms and

⁴⁹ Zévi, Bruno et Focillon, Henri. « Définition de l’architecture par l’espace interne » Boudon, Philippe. *Sur l’espace architectural : essai d’épistémologie de l’architecture*. Marseille, 2003, p. 52.

⁵⁰ Tschumi, Bernard. « Architectural paradox » Hays, K. Michael. *Architecture theory since 1968*. Cambridge, 2000.

⁵¹ Deleuze, p. 54

chaos through the process of creation within the city that come to create intermediary spaces that end up including all the paradoxes of both poles. This is why such spaces are described as uncanny, *Unheimlich*, by Anthony Vidler who sees in such spaces a certain repulsion combined with an unexplained attraction, the same attraction described by Morales as felt by photographers.

In Denver's progressive art scene, more specifically in the Rhino District, an interesting intermediary space exemplifies what we are evoking theoretically. Within a derelict building and a desolate lot between fancy new developments, a raw 'underground' space called Rhinocropolis incorporates an informal development of art activity, where art is displayed and bands are playing. The space is transformed from within. This incomprehensible space is described by its users through shifts in meanings and inverted programmatic organization: "I could not believe that it was full to the brim after seeing its subtle exterior [...] the most provocative thing about this venue is that it's not really a formal venue at all [...] the walls feel heavy, and it's difficult to tell where you are or where you should be [...] the kitchen turned into service station [...] in a space so informal [...] a space designed to incorporate".⁵² Furniture in such a space have inverted connotations as well, a hair dresser chair instead of a sofa, a plethora of things stacked into a pile creates partitions, hair products stacked in the sink, a shower tub as a container for bottles etc. Hence, in such interstices, users, objects, programs get to incorporate new meanings. Affiliations and programs that are not allowed to exist or co-exist start to do so in the terrain vague, same goes for political connotations and social strata.

⁵² <http://www.examiner.com/architecture-in-denver/the-interstitial>

Chapter VII. A visual urban history

a. Written events on urban fabric (different limits – different typologies)

The attempt is to re-conceptualize architecture as a space of flows – not as an object in space, but as the product of, and interrelation between, things, spaces, individuals and ideas. Tschumi is most persistent architectural theorist in this movement: architecture cannot be dissociated from the events that ‘happened’ in it.⁵³ Adrian Forty regarding ‘strangely familiar’ remarks: “buildings are made and remade like any cultural object each time they are represented, surrounded with change and people’s experience.” Architecture is thus produced, reproduced, designed, experienced, at once social temporal and spatial. It’s a medium and not a message, a system of power relations and not a force, a flow and not a line. Consequently, same effect could be seen on the evolution of limits in the city and their consecutively produced space.

In the context of environmental design, interstitial space has been recently acknowledged as a crucial factor to preserve the sustainability of a project or an urban fabric and a tool to sustainably interfere on the built environment in relation to density and settlement patterns. Although this could be a promising approach, it seems to be rendering the subject to solely one aspect. Interstitial includes a larger spectrum of aspects when considered as an outcome of creating a large diversity of limits and fragments in the contemporary city. This incorporates the political decision making processes within the city, as well as the dynamics of the economical global market, hence the acute interest of politicians and social scientists in the topic.

⁵³ Tschumi, *Questions of Space*, p. 88

past. From these we can start to relate intermediary spaces with evolution and a shift in world perception. And just like how petroleum infiltrates the interstitial within rocks and in between crystallized material, different limits in the urban fabric shape and are shaped by the terrain vague. One can make a list out of the different types of those limits:

- Buildings brown fields
- Difference of scale
- Fall of industry
- Massive Urban planning
- Demarcation line
- Transport line

Each of these limits ends up stimulating different interventions and different projects, aside from other influencing factors that contribute to this game.

The first limit is the most common one, usually seen in dense urban systems. Whether city or suburbs, building codes specify plots and areas in which one can construct under strict rules and borderlines. The outcome is left-over spaces around these that are left untouched and are usually taken for granted. Brown fields, economic blanks, demolished lots, desolate buildings, the types could be many but the reasons are the same: disorganized urban planning or simply the work of time on the city. Since the context of such spaces is usually as important to take into consideration as the program that needs to be injected for any project to be well implemented, a suggested approach is usually one that acknowledges equally, if possible, both liminal and interstitial considerations.

A second limit evoked here is related to the 'scale' as a caliber of difference. As the city grows, the dimensions tend to grow as well. Taking Beirut as an example, the lack of control in this context has created a proliferation of towers that accumulated in the city and replaced gradually the traditional small brick-roofed houses. The result is the creation of smaller empty lots devoid of 'breathing space' where it is almost impossible to

build in a humane way. Such spaces end up forgotten, even hidden. Their threshold is diluted, leaving the interstitial vulnerable. Occupation of such spaces becomes ephemeral and mobile.

On a different level, the fall of industry has produced major changes in the contemporary city which on its turn have created forgotten spaces on the limit of desolate industrial sites. Such spaces have however a certain quality of rust and steel that seems to appeal artists and architects, the outcome is usually an adoption of such sites for artistic, 'greening', or 'fill-in' purposes. In either case, liminality does not play a role as interest is focused on injection rather than transition.

The city of New York includes many intermediary spaces, especially due to the superimposition there of the old Manhattan plan that goes in diagonal with the newer rectilinear grid of the city. The intersection of the old and new plan forms triangular interstices occupied by informal illegal street sellers and artists. This is yet again another form of urban limits created this time due to massive urban planning. Such limits are sometimes complex to recognize and understand as they fuse into the city, although they are usually clearly exposed.

Socio-political conflicts can also be major catalysts of borderlines within the city and interstices around them, those ranging from demarcation lines to historical gates etc. It suffices to contemplate the 'no man's land' created by the Berlin Wall to understand how much such type of limits can be productive of intermediary spaces, dictating to these their future functions. In such cases, liminality needs to be primarily dealt with since the limit condition is predominant. One cannot implement a project on such spaces unless the transition through these limits is well taken into consideration.

A similar limit when it comes to outcome is that of desolate transport systems. Here again, the presence of such limits is crucial for future interventions on the surrounding interstices. Scale plays also a role here: there's

Therefore, intermediary spaces, through studies of their context, the limits on which they are situated, the historical reasons behind their creation and the interventions that are implemented on them, form an alternative reading of the city's narration. They become fragments of history written on urban fabric. We are not condemning hereby the functioning of formal cultural places and cultural activity, but rather suggesting that there might be other ways of conceiving cultural development: parallel to an intervention of filling territorial space, we propose to liberate cultural forms by opening spaces to the in-between.

Implementations on the terrain vague are not solely based on design intent and context requirements. Many of these are guided by the reasons that got these places to exist. Studying the reason of existence can alter our perception of the final outcome. In fact, the terrain vague can be considered history written on urban fabric. This style of writing works by omission, transgression, transition, erasure and recreation. What we can physically see of this narration, when it comes to intermediary spaces, are the urban limits on which these spaces are almost always created. The diversity of these limits is associated with diversity of the interventions.

b. Different limits – different scenarios

When describing holes in the city, Peter and Alison Smithson describe them as made by: site abandonment, industrial dereliction, clearance of planners of historic centers, new connective systems that cut great swatches into the urban fabric. These appear in cities that had industrial pasts: Glasgow, Berlin, Jerusalem, in cities in England, such as London and Worcester.⁵⁴ We can notice from this statement that some cities are more vulnerable than others to the creation of intermediary spaces or contain already more of these, the reason being history, particular urban configuration, or an industrial

⁵⁴ Smithson, p. 172

a significant difference between an unused train station and an unused railway line. Such spaces are also particular for their placement usually in the city, they are most of the time inherently hidden from the public eye by differences of leveling: connective holes in underused and disused railway yards in Berlin could be seen in 1970s only from air.⁵⁵ Spacious areas in city center, they remain secret because they are situated one level above or below the surroundings, over viaducts or crossed by bridges. These end up forming a new layer of places in the city. One approach is usually to reconnect their potential to the city and to help refocus the attention inwards, i.e. towards the interstitial. Smithson had proposed to implement a poetic gesture of reconnection as a mode of intervention on such spaces. The virtual Bay Bridge, as we will explain anon, falls into this category: “once a central transport artery of a modern metropolis, into an eclectic, ‘piecemeal’ community housing an alliance of difference and otherness.”⁵⁶ The terrain vague along such limits takes on more impressive connotations, the worst places in cities are usually signaled along lines of transport; ruins, dirt, or illegal actions, plus deserted buildings get to be created, the terrain vague become ‘*sites de berges*’. Transport railways used to divide also socially the urban fabric: ‘on the other side of the line’, even more for small country cities than big cities.

⁵⁵ Smithson, p. 194

⁵⁶ Leaver, p. 119 - 120

Chapter VIII. Liminal Beirut

- a. Defining the city's borderlines**

- b. A line of interest**

- c. Walk the line**
 - i. Hamra: overlay of historic periods**
 - ii. Downtown: demarcation and erasure**

OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS
MISSING GAPS OR BREAKING MORTAR?

P A R T

4

“That zero panorama seemed to contain ruins in reverse, that is—all the new construction that would be built. This is the opposite of the “unromantic ruin” because buildings don’t fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built.”

Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey”

Part 4: Interstices as potential architectural tools

Chapter IX. Urban Potential

a. Networks of gaps and fragments

[The interstitial is] a process of unfolding, of differentiation, and of a quest for information that is often not quantifiable and escapes the logic of analysis systems of traditional urbanism.

Ignasi de Sola-Morales, 'Terrain Vague' in *Anyplace*

There are consequences to understanding the different experiences and the different limits that form the terrain vague within the urban fabric. By viewing the city from this perspective we come to realize that the terrain vague is actually not as *vague* as it claims to be. It is as a matter of fact a genre of urban chaos overruled by an organization that goes beyond single human inputs. The outcome is a disjointed view of the city focused on either the liminal on the one hand, which creates an image of a city made of borders and frontiers, or focused on the interstitial on the other hand, which creates a patchy view of the city made of fragments. Both views are related to the economical and productive systems of the city. In the 1990s, Laurence Roulleau-Berger commented on intermediary spaces as the worlds of 'small urban production'. The interstices in the city become what assembles populations in precarious situations and where socializations produce alienated cultures that can be mobilized in processes of affiliation, urban and economic.⁵⁷ Liminality can be for example cause for problems in the city on the social level. As Jane Jacobs describes it when discussing American cities, such spaces that acknowledge urban edges become frontiers in the city; they can cut pedestrian movement in an area, create functional deserts, prevent the flow of people, which is a phenomenon necessary to prevent segregated centers in

⁵⁷ Berger, p. 149

the city and to keep a certain level of security in the streets. Interstitiality on the other hand, without its fragmenting ability tends to produce self-supported bubbles in the city that work on a parallel organization to that of the rest of the city. As described by Yamazaki in William Gibson's book *Virtual Light*⁵⁸ when describing the interstitial space under the Bay Bridge⁵⁹ : "The integrity of its span was rigorous as the modern program itself, yet around this had grown another reality, intent upon its own agenda. This had occurred piecemeal, to no set plan, employing every imaginable technique and material. The result was something amorphous, startlingly organic. At night, illuminated by Christmas bulbs, by recycled neon, by torch light, it possessed a queer medieval energy".

Hence flow of circulation is a major component in deserting limits and city frontiers. The result is the division of the city into two types of areas: areas of free circulation and areas of no circulation, doesn't matter built, private, empty, accessible etc. Buildings in this sense cannot be considered themselves obstacles to this flow, as without buildings there is no need for streets. Therefore, there is a close relation between limits, flow, program and the terrain vague that becomes a result of their interplay.

There are thus physical processes that transform, in photographic sense, a latent reality into a visible one. Not about empty or full. It's an act of difference between presence and absence and this interplay makes it important to differentiate the liminal from the interstitial. The specificity of intermediary spaces is hence in the way they link different spheres, scales and logics, spatial and social, that seem often separated. One definition of interstice is the gap or space between tesserae in mosaics, which is usually filled up with grout. The width of the interstice may be wider or narrower, depending on the desired effect, but it is usual to try to keep the width fairly

⁵⁸ Leaver, p. 120

⁵⁹ Refer to the previous section of the thesis

constant for each separate mosaic piece. Likewise in the city, it is important take into consideration scale when analyzing what could be considered as interstice and what could not. It is equally important to keep the interstice under control when making a nice mosaic, therefore equality and consistency in the organization of the interstices may be hidden but they are present.

**b. Liminal: Transgression or transition?
Interstitial: Recreation or Erasure?**

Liminal: Transgression or transition?

Intermediary spaces have types. They differ from where they are and they're defined by what they divide or link. Their importance is defined by the importance of their edge; they gain this significance through the different reasons of their creation as they can be great indicators of urban historical changes. We evaluate them consequently by this token and not only by their future potential of use or filling.

Since edge is mostly related to notions of liminality, the nature of the former is reflected on the latter. As we have seen, liminality creates not just a moment of containment but also a figured or articulated presence. Eisenman, when describing the term *Poché*, presents it as an articulated solid between two void conditions, either between exterior and interior or two interiors. He defines its condition as twofold: although it has an articulation, this articulation is figurative “since it already embodies its functional contents as a container which encloses, shelters, and has an aesthetic.”⁶⁰ On a similar note, liminality also presents a condition of figurative articulation, in the sense that even though it is a moment of containment, this latter also has an aesthetic and a figurative relevance. Therefore, whenever the intervention on architecture is related to this

⁶⁰ Eisenman, p.99

containment, it is consciously or not elaborating on the liminal effects.

Transgression or transition? The question is relevant to how users deal or are meant to deal with the liminal intentions of the project and its limits. Hence, when a limit such as the desolate transport lines creates liminal moments of desolate lots, governmental organizations are keen on concealing such spaces behind large borders, making out the figurative containment their main attention. Their aim is usually to 'hide the ugly' and prevent bad publicity from spreading due to lack of maintenance. The outcome of such reactions towards public desolates spaces is reflected on those who happen to go through such areas. The event of passage becomes transgression. The unwelcomed inhabitants of such spaces such as homeless people become transgressors. Some organizations become even specialized dealing with such unwanted guests. In France for example, politics have been thus created behind the search for urban requalification in the city of Paris. Those have been interested in working on the intermediary spaces and spaces on the edge, both happen to be very similar in this scenario.

In parallel, transition becomes the welcomed moment of passage. Transition and transgression become therefore a negotiated process between authorities, users and architects, in order to determine the current or future quality of the space. Current evocation of limits and future implementations constantly redefine this process. Gordon Matta-Clark puts this process in light when in *Conical Intersect*, Matta-Clark's contribution to the Paris Biennale of 1975, he manifested his critique of urban gentrification in the form of a radical incision through two 17th-century buildings designated for demolition near the Centre Georges Pompidou, which was then under construction. In this manner, the artist had exemplified the importance of liminality in showing/concealing the confrontation between transgression and transition.

Interstitial: Recreation or Erasure?

All individual processes [...] result in embodied systems. They are already conditioned by significance. In this sense, the production of the interstitial can be seen as a critique of the operational idea of process.

Peter Eisenman, 'Investigations of the Interstitial' in *Blurred Zones*

The use of the concept 'interstitial spaces' is relatively recent, and is still limited to a restrained circle of specialists of the city fabric. It's sufficient to question the bank of knowledge Urbamet to realize the small number of works being done on spaces between street and building, between building and building, and between street and street. Regarding the 'Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement' by Pierre Merlin and Françoise Choay, it does not present, in the three consecutive editions of 1988, 1996, and 2000, any entry for intermediary or interstitial space, and for 'open space' the authors refer us to 'green space'. 'Interstitial spaces' are simply evoked within the article on 'public space' in the following form: between public space and private space, architects and urbanists distinguish space called 'interstitial', especially regarding habitat. Hence, we label as spaces called 'privatif' reserved to private usage without ownership, and by 'collectif' or 'semi-public' a space reserved to the usage of a neighborhood. But these two types of spaces do not correspond in general to precise juridical notions.⁶¹ Hence, these spaces, due to the lack of proper understanding are only existent according to the usages they welcome; they do not benefit from an existence on their own since they don't have a 'juridical' existing status. Therefore, one might think that their process in one of erasure, of a constant strive to eliminate memory, presence and historical data.

⁶¹ Choay, p. 335

- i. Case of Beirut Downtown**
- ii. Case of Beirut post-2006 Suburbs**

The Architect's role

a. Difference between projects on the threshold and projects on the middle

i. Interstitial or liminal

Architects are currently using the 'interstitial' as an innovative form of perceiving the fragmented 21st century urban fabric and as a new opportunity to interfere on the latter and on the established community through interdisciplinary interventions and changing formally established role plays of authorship. In this fashion, interstitiality becomes an opportunity for recreation rather than deletion. Such a positioning of the subject helps understand whether and how the role of architect is altered by this contextual positioning of new modes of understanding not through mainstream creative processes but through interdisciplinary interventions on interstitial brown fields. The notion of 'creative process' is therefore contested when an architect interferes on the 'interstitial'.

The duality between recreation and erasure is not a process therefore owned by the authority of the architect. The work on the interstitial is thus a work of resistance; it is also a political act. However, that is maybe why it is a mode of chaos, a mode of destruction inherent to the capitalist system itself or to the city, and created by this system. It brings change and possibly collapse to the normative systems. But it also cannot be made solely by one author. Hence, to consume such spaces and to make them either clear, useful or signifying kills the quality and the capacity of such spaces.

Jonathan Hill describes in his book "Actions of Architecture" the interrelation in the creative process between architect and user. He claims that neither is superior to the other, the role of architect and that of the creative user.⁶² This could not be necessarily said in the case of intermediary spaces. The interstice is not just

⁶² Hill, p. 88-89

another site; it has some specifications that could keep the architect out, as well as the authority of one specific creative user over another. It is a question putting in contrast once again the role of architect in ‘vernacular-wannabe’ spaces. Thus, we can conclude that it could be hard for the architect to intervene on the interstice as Ignasi de Sola-Morales would preach, yet it is not entirely unlikely as one might estimate.

Peter Eisenman in his article ‘Processes of the Interstitial’, hints indirectly at the quality of the interstice as a change of perception from within when he describes the importance of acknowledging the interstice’s intensive presence within the relatively absent *terrain vague*. He states: “In order to see the interstitial as an affective difference from its condition as an articulated presence between two spaces, its status as an embodied figure must be changed. This change in status could be proposed initially as a presence within an absence, or a double absence. [...] Such a condition of space might require a different design process, one that could begin as spacing rather than forming.”⁶³ The interstitial is used here to describe both moments of interstitiality and liminality, linking them to a shift in the design process.

The role of architect hence in such spaces is inevitably problematic. According to Ignasi Morales, “the entire destiny of architecture has always been colonization, the imposing of limits, order, form, the introduction into strange space of the elements of identity necessary to make it recognizable, identical, universal.”⁶⁴ It is precisely this shift from the uncanny to the identified, from the uncivilized to the cultivated, that is behind the dichotomy erasure-recreation within the processes of the interstitial. Therefore, the implementation of the architect becomes a challenging yet stimulating and thought-provoking task.

⁶³ Eisenman, p. 100

⁶⁴ Morales, p. 6



Working on the interstitial is indeed a critique of the operational idea of process in architecture. Interstitial spaces are according to Tama Leaver: “new spaces of resistance populated by those people that cannot or will not easily fit into the blank urbanized world surrounding them.”⁶⁵ Interstitial cannot be hence produced by a traditional authorial process of design because an author only produces what is previously known. The process of spacing can progressively develop different means of expression, ones that are different from the traditional means of architectural representation.

Furthermore, ephemerality in this context is linked with interstitiality. It is a negotiating element between the different poles and possibly an easy getaway to abridge the architect’s task. It helps build, rebuild, un-build within the terrain vague without compromising the true essence of what these spaces are. Hence projects on interstitial moments are often valued for their ephemerality. It is often a characteristic and maybe a quality. Since such moments are temporal, users change. Moreover, new users who flee the rest of the ordered city come to be in these areas, people such as the outcast, the unwanted, the homeless, and the chaotic. The interstitial spaces are spaces where also programs change, as we will see further on in some illustrative examples.

ii. Different case studies

The analysis of different interventions implemented on the *terrain vague* gives clues to how different actors perceive such spaces and how the notions of interstitial and liminal come to play within this context. Each of the implementations is different yet one can observe similarities in the approach on a theoretical level depending on the actors intervening. From observing the different projects held on the *terrain vague*, the diverse contributions can be summed to ten major modes which

⁶⁵ Leaver, p. 122

we will discuss later on and give some case studies. These are:

- Interaction architect-user-inhabitant
- Fill in the blank
- Green intercession - Breathing space
- Alternative or Artistic
- Support or addition to preexisting fabric
- Setting a dialogue between old and new
- No man's land into no state's land
- No man's land into no architect's land
- Un-intervention

Depending on the urban planning and the urban rules set within different cities, some of these approaches are not considered as possible scenarios. Within cities such as Beirut, the notion of breathing space for example is already contested. The approach hence changes in favor of more realistic yet contrasting methods such as 'fill in' in parallel with 'alternative'. The outcome of one intervention or another alters not only the architectural connotations of the specific site but also the urban fabric around it.

One of the most important approaches that we can observe on intermediary spaces within the city is that of 'No Man's land into no state's land'. This is an attitude in which a certain sector of the informal and unprivileged community within an urban context decides to occupy without legal right or prior notice a certain left out, abandoned or unused area within a neighborhood. These areas are usually as informal and unprivileged as the community that comes to settle there. Some examples of this phenomenon are the many occupied post-war half-demolished buildings and sites within Berlin or Beirut and its suburbs.

Instead of taking one of those as reference, an interesting case study to take here is the abandoned Bay Bridge of San Francisco as described in the novel of

William Gibson, *Virtual Light*, in which the bridge is described as damaged, unused, amorphous collection of society's most unwanted in a near-future San Francisco, out of mechanisms and laws. It is considered as an interstitial space on a number of levels: it is literally in between the two landmasses of San Francisco, it is metaphorically in between the gaps of the ostensible monoculture and finally paradigmatically the bridge "exists between the end of modernism and whatever comes next"⁶⁶ The description of the bridge and its occupants provides many hints in which one can understand how a space left out by the formal community becomes a 'no man's land' to be later on occupied by illegal settlers and unwanted communities that turn this no man's land into a 'no state's land'. The phenomenon is purely interstitial. Since there was no formal architectural or urban involvement the intrusion was organic: what you find is what you get, what you occupy is what you consume. The bridge is described as housing many criminals but existing 'outside the broader political and legal structure of the surrounding city (San Francisco) and thus all the different citizens exist in (a sometimes uneasy) alliance'.⁶⁷ Actors in such scenarios do not show interest in form. The occupation emerges from the center and the in between to exploit the maximum potential of the span of the bridge until unwillingly colliding with its limits, therefore no interest in the liminal situation of collision. "The integrity of its span was rigorous as the modern program itself, yet around this had grown another reality, intent upon its own agenda. This had occurred piecemeal, to no set plan, employing every imaginable technique and material. The result was something amorphous, startlingly organic. At night, illuminated by Christmas bulbs, by recycled neon, by torch light, it possessed a queer medieval energy."⁶⁸

Another similar approach is the 'no man's land into no architect's land'. The main variable between the two is

⁶⁶ Mahoney, p. 168

⁶⁷ Davis, p. 233

⁶⁸ Leaver, p. 120



the type of actors at play and how well inserted these are into the formal and political organization of the city. In fact, for this approach, it is not an illegal settlement with the *terrain vague* that is happening, but rather a vernacular yet legal maneuver handled by a community on the intermediary space of its own neighborhood. Such an approach is not very common as it requires a well grounded sense of civil responsibility. Therefore, it is a scheme rather common in cities such as Munich or Toronto. In fact, an exemplary case study would be a recent project held in Munich, celebrated in Germany for its ingenuity, where the entire neighborhood for a period of a couple of years implemented changes on their district and intermediate spaces within it with the aid of a planning map of the area drawn by the citizens themselves and a model similarly produced.⁶⁹ Within this organizational project, intermediary spaces were considered as integral complementary elements of the rest of the neighborhood. Special attention was given to the integration of those within the vicinity and making use of them by private or mostly collective use. This mode of intervention includes both a work on the liminal as well as on the interstitial although the interstitial plays a larger role. As the community is almost equally interested in

⁶⁹ Realstadt

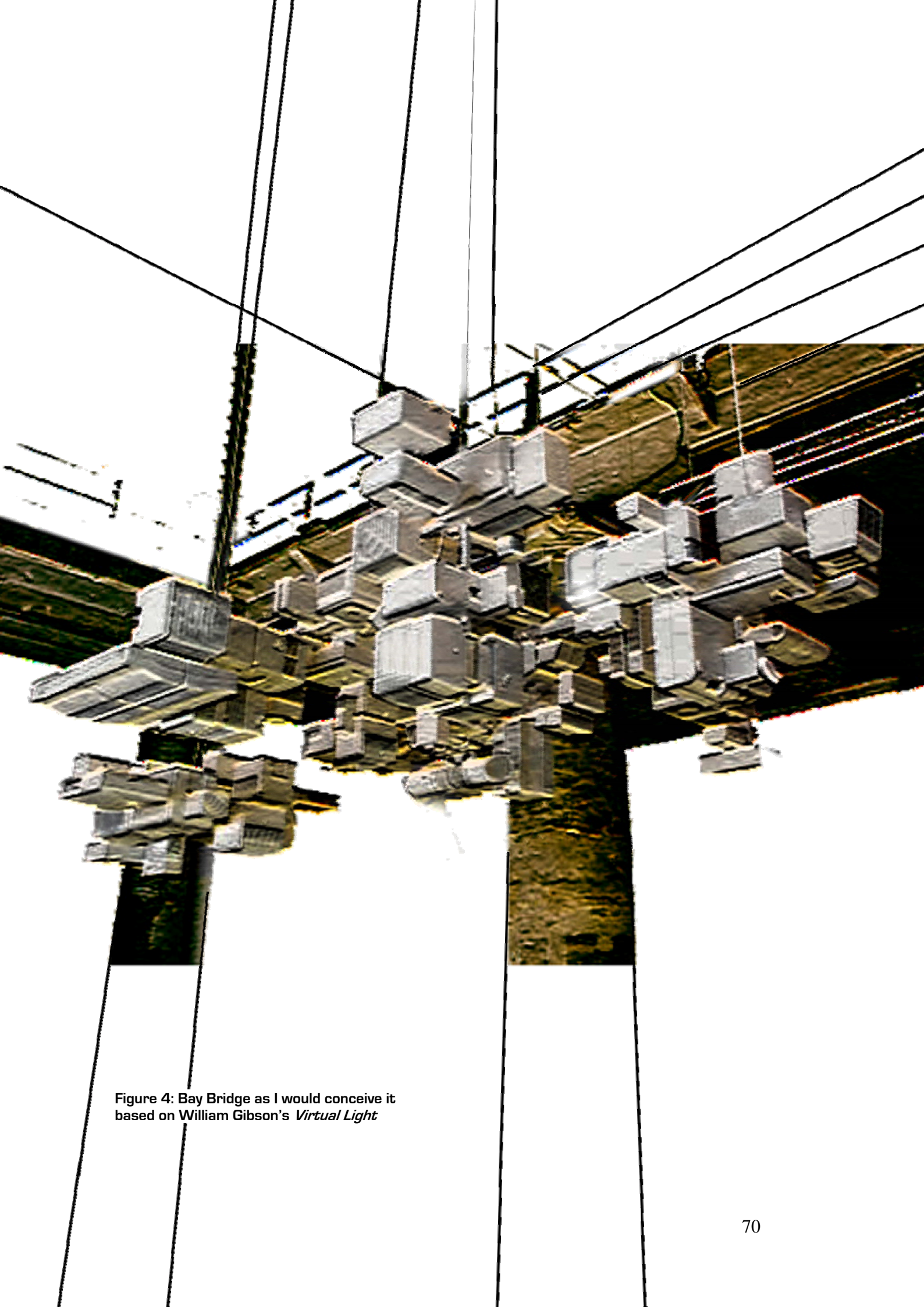


Figure 4: Bay Bridge as I would conceive it based on William Gibson's *Virtual Light*

embellishing the aesthetic and formal aspect and in parallel improving the value and space quality of their neighborhood, both attention on threshold transitions and on transformations from within are employed.

A third approach worthy of mentioning is that of the interaction architect-user-inhabitant. In this mode, the architect has a significant role on the creative as well as the organizational level. It is an innovative creative process where roles of authorship are shared and thus challenged. A good example of such interference can be the project entitled 'Eco-Interstice' realized in 2006 by the French architectural firm *Atelier Autogérée* in East of Paris, St. Blaise area. This project is an attempt by architects to collaborate with the local government structures as well as the inhabitants of the area, the local organizations and a professional association specialized in running training programs in eco-construction. The aim is to explore the potential of transforming the intermediary space of the plot 56 into a space collectively self-managed. The structure has the quality of an unfinished project with the potential for further construction, "the construction site becoming itself a social and cultural act".⁷⁰ Such a project is situated more on the liminal rather than in the interstitial. "The project has an important take on the notion of proximity and active borders. Neighborhood walls transform the boundaries of the site into interactive devices, which rather than separating, multiply exchange and connections."⁷¹ A strong interest in keeping the interstitial open for change and interpretation is withheld while a good establishment of the liminal is set to define the formal boundaries that are thus relatively fixed and ready to receive input. Moreover, liminality is accentuated as the entire project seems to revolve around the notion of passage, a corridor of activities between buildings of a community, while still keeping the vagueness of the edge or the threshold.

⁷⁰ Atelier Autogérée

⁷¹ Ibid.



Figure 5: Collage - photographs of the project 'Eco-interstice' by *Autogeree*

Architects and inhabitants are not solely the actors interested in intervening on intermediary spaces. Many artists have created alternative ways in which the potential of such space types is interpreted. The examples vary greatly from temporary performances within interstitial spaces, to short film, to light installations ‘shedding light’ on these areas. Architects have a prominent role in such projects, yet their status change, they are not the designer-constructor, but rather the artist-rebel-manager-socialist etc. Interstitial appreciation or liminal approaches alternate in such spaces according to the ephemerality of the projects and to their mobility, to how much they are considered a built structure or an installation. We can safely assume that this mode is the most spread as it varies greatly in medium and since attention was given since the beginning of this century to the unused, the rotten, the alternative and all that attempts to fall out of the radar of mass culture. Few case studies are worthy here of mentioning, one is a balloon truck in New York, the other is a wooden giant ball in Madrid, and finally a sequel of urban interventions on abandoned intermediary spaces in Sao Paulo. The first project entitled ‘Spacebuster’, invited by Storefront for Art and Architecture, is meant to open the intermediary space for collective use and explore the possibilities of the different context. It is interesting because it includes construction aspect that requires the presence of architects and engineers, yet it is a mobile project. It is an inflatable balloon shaped space that protrudes out from a van and can fit up to 80 people. “People enter the bubble through the passenger’s door of the van walking through to the back down a ramp right into the inflated space. The bubble is supported by air pressure generated by a fan underneath the ramp. The membrane of the bubble is translucent so people on the inside can see schematically what’s going on outside and vice versa. So the membrane acts as a semi permeable border.”⁷² The architect and artist hence play a role of initiator: they offer a place for gathering, displace it within different interstices of the city accentuating thus the potential of the latter and invite



Figure 6: ‘Spacebuster’ by Storefront
for Art and Architecture

⁷² Markus Bader



people to come and make use of the new found space within the intermediary spaces. “The material is a translucent plastic that allows the events taking place inside of the shelter - screenings, lectures, dinners or discussions - to be entirely visible from the outside. Likewise the exterior environments become the events' backdrops.”⁷³ As a consequence, interstitiality is predominant since this mobile device creates on one hand ephemeral spaces that do not hold formal connotations related to the surrounding, and on the other hand the outcome becomes a space within space, disregarding the relation to the limits of the external space and hindering the transitional entry phase to the entrance door of the van.

On a similar note, the second example holds comparable qualities of ephemerality, yet mobility is not a characteristic. The project entitled *La ciudad Imprevista / Utopia Real 04*. ‘The city Unforeseen’, started as an international student workshop commissioned by La Casa Encendida in the Lavapies district of Madrid. It soon developed to become a real project insitu that transformed a fenced-in left-out lot in the district into a public Japanese garden with stage and teahouse. The in-context quality, unlike the previous project, created opportunities for a particular involvement of the neighboring community. The creative process became a collective interaction between architects-students on one side and the neighbors and locals on the other. “Everyone who worked on the rehabilitation of embajadores 25 felt like “cracks” (genius! talented!): julianne, isa, román, [...] delphine, susana, that neighbor the electrician, and so did jesús and paulo. But most of all the neighbors, neighbors, neighbors. Lavapies marvelous landscape. Without their illusion, encouragement and their “cañi y castizo” talent from all around the world, we would have never accomplished it.”⁷⁴ As a consequence, a strong intention was to well set the project in context, the visual aspect was thought through. However, the liminal moment was not

⁷³ storefrontnews.org

⁷⁴ raumlabor.net

present since no blurry transitional period was presented. The only architectural structure was set in the middle as an iconic wooden ball plus a stage. The creative intention was therefore oriented towards the interstitial moment, i.e. regarding the space from within; within the terrain vague and within the community. This example shows how liminal is not necessarily linked to immobile structures or to the involvement of a community.

The final example of ‘Alternative intervention’ comes from an initiative to reinterpret urban space under the question ‘How to intervene in megacities?’. Arte/Cidade is a sequel of four urban installations that were implemented on the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil since 1994. The focus was on notions of globalization and global reconfigurations of economy, power and art. The projects consisted of strategic alternatives for the city’s global restructuring: reactivation of certain spaces in order to decentralize urban politics. All four of them took place in abandoned places but from different points of view: an inactive slaughterhouse for ‘City without Windows’ to discuss ‘thickness’ in 1994, two left-out buildings for ‘City and its fluxes’ to discuss flux and changes of scale, a railway station and an industrial plan for ‘City and its Stories’ to discuss fragmentation and the post-industrial future, and a neglected industrial area for ‘East Zone’ in 2002 to debate on reoccupation of such spaces by informal illegal users. This condition of preexistent structure was inherently present in the intervention decision as a potential to approach the city fabric. Both perspectives of interstitiality and liminality are thus a given since the subjects dealt with are directly related to notions of threshold, transition, flux and context on one side and notions of program, quality, dwelling and reuse on the other. Moreover, this was due to the plurality of actors in these projects plus the variety of interpretations and points of views held around them. The outcome is well rounded work focusing on the broader understanding of what the terrain vague could entail. “To point out programs which relate to the dynamic indetermination of these interstitial territories. To promote interventions which would



Figure 6: ‘Spacebuster’ by Storefront for Art and Architecture



potentialize urban situations linked to communities resistant to the existent design of the city and to the prevailing economic and social interest. A possibility of introducing new urban strategies.”⁷⁵

Sites of *terrain vague* have been the subject of an exhibition in 2004 in the Carnegie Museum of Art’s Heinz Architectural Center, its title being ‘Terrain Vague: Photography, Architecture and the Post-Industrial Landscape’. The organizer was Tracy Myers, curator at the Heinz Architectural Center. She states that the exhibition addressed the question of what these places mean from one point of view, which is the photographic point of view.⁷⁶ The attention was thus drawn on the quality of such spaces as Sola-Morales sees them, i.e. spaces that “embody meaning in their own right and should be valued for that rather than seen as places that need to be dealt with in some way”.⁷⁷ This is a mode of intervention that is ‘intervention-less’. It is the position taken by the professor Sola-Morales towards such spaces. The photographs were from various artists and displayed in a critical manner issues of unresolved spaces, social routine, and trends in urban design. “Another part of our attitude is that we should not be frightened by holes in the city; it is important not to try to fill every hole as if we were developers.”⁷⁸ Taking this approach from an interstitial/liminal point of view, although qualities of the space are kept as a liminal space external to the city’s functional or functioning processes, the potential of the interstitial space is however kept unexplored. Liminality thus takes over as the main affect of the space, as opposed to an eliminated possible effect.

When defining spaces of difference, Peter Eisenman speaks of liminal spaces. He discusses it in terms of movement between interior and exterior, but also between one interior and another. He considers that

⁷⁵ Nelson Brissac from Arte/Cidade

⁷⁶ Myers

⁷⁷ Sola-Morales from Myers

⁷⁸ Smithson, p. 172

intermediary space works by ‘undoing tropes that divide’. “The interstitial here has an effect, it disrupts expectations. It is not an empty space awaiting programmatic injection. Rather the complex activity of blurring produces the yet-to-be determined. ... [this] brings a certain plurality into play. The building takes on the quality of the determined and the yet-to-be. ... the terms of ineliminable plurality – an unoriginal irreducibility – are that the building can only take on the quality of a plural event. This also means that the building is defined by the interplay of finitude and becoming. Finitude is the attribution of content and programmatic specificity.”⁷⁹ Eisenman here interprets intermediary spaces from a purely liminal point of view defining it as a state of becoming that produces a plurality of events revolving around content and program. Setting a dialogue between old and new is in fact one of one of the ways one can approach the *terrain vague*. It is a method of manipulating minute spaces that are created due to overlays of urban history on the same fabric. Eisenman in his own terms had accurately defined this method as focusing on the liminal. It is the predominant moment as the attention in such cases is mainly on techniques of linking, of assembling between different materials and genres of architecture due to differences of age, and of understanding different spatial fluxes that occur in intermediary spaces. The project of Le Fresnoy by Bernard Tschumi is a good example that presents, through his book entitled ‘In-between’, the issues and stakes at play in the exchange between old and new that produce the in-between and the liminal. An additional work worthy of mentioning here is the master thesis project of Halil Ramazan Dolan for the Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University. This project discusses the *terrain vague* also from a liminal point of view. Sited in the 13th ward of Paris, near ‘Place des Rungis’ adjacent to the peripheral belt highway, the project intervenes on a former train station and a decommissioned freight yard of the little belt railway system called ‘petite ceinture’. Instead of addressing the space itself, Halil orients his interest to the limits of those places adjacent to the historical buildings

⁷⁹ Benjamin, Andrew, p. 309



Figure 6: Arte/Cidade with Vito Acconci, project on *terrain vague*



and neighborhood surrounding the site. The outcome is a set of repetitive layers of walls almost extruding from surrounding building, playing as a threshold allowing circulation and creating spaces usable for communal activities. The scheme is thus building by extension. He had decided to implement in this manner an ‘open-ended’ structure: an addition to the older surrounding buildings and streets, which are proposed to be either used as a communal space by neighbors, or transformed into a stage from which one can simply contemplate the *terrain vague* intentionally left as is, linking thus the latter as an integral part of the urban fabric. “The transition zone contains the capacity to determine the prospective character of the framed void. It offers the possibility to intervene in the existing urban form, not by filling, but by emptying it. The void experiences a transformation from a neglected urban object to a clearly identified urban subject. This threshold towards the void serves as a mediating element between the two coexisting situations. It acts as a ‘coulisse’ of an urban theater towards the void.”⁸⁰ This strategy of building by unbuilding the inner interstitial and working simply on the liminal is almost a conscious one from the architect which uses this liminal as a tool to draw attention to the interstitial. He describes his purpose as “homogenizing of the existing situation and maintaining of territory through extension of existing” and his *topos* being “street as public room obeying solely public obligations and property boundary”. This is one of the examples that shows how this crucial play of liminal/interstitial can produce negotiation between the role and presence of the architect and the ‘architect-less’ position of Ignasi Sola-Morales towards the *terrain vague*.

Filling in could be the worst solution to interpret the *terrain vague* and the least interesting for our subject as it denies the potential of such space types as described in the first part of the thesis. This type of intervention

⁸⁰ Halil, p. 3

denies any adequate interpretation of interstitial or liminal and treats the space as any other blank space in the city. In these cases, new constructions are held following normal programmatic implementations and traditional creative processes. Older strata of information in these spaces are usually ignored, especially any informal or illegal usage of these areas, be it by the community or foreign occupants and the like. Jonathan Hill however discusses intermediary spaces in this context as gaps (not necessarily empty) in unfulfilled tension, waiting to be filled and transformed by experience.⁸¹ In this position, the intent is conformist with the formal organization of the city and projects a rounded view of the city as one integral entity. This position could be considered opposed to Morales' although both acknowledge the importance of such spaces for the well functioning of the city. Therefore, although this intervention mode denies the terrain vague its inherent qualities, it is sometimes what the neighborhood needs considering that acknowledging the city's residues and their potential requires a certain effort that cannot be sustained in many situations.

A project in Glasgow was created by Alison and Peter Smithson as a response to holes created in the city by abandonment. We can label their approach as 'green intercession': a land renewal program of planting trees in small holes in the city's fabric. The 'holes' were of different types and scales, yet the reason of their existence is the same: unused old railway yards and stations. According to Smithson, those spaces are not dead but rather 'resting'.⁸² Another project in London, entitled 'Robin Hood Gardens' in Tower Hamlets made by the same architects, makes use of a space in-between residential buildings. The product is a central green mound made from demolition material from around the area. These projects follow the same approach: that of greening, becoming more and more popular as attitude with the rise of sustainability concerns. It makes use of intermediary residual space to create breathing spaces

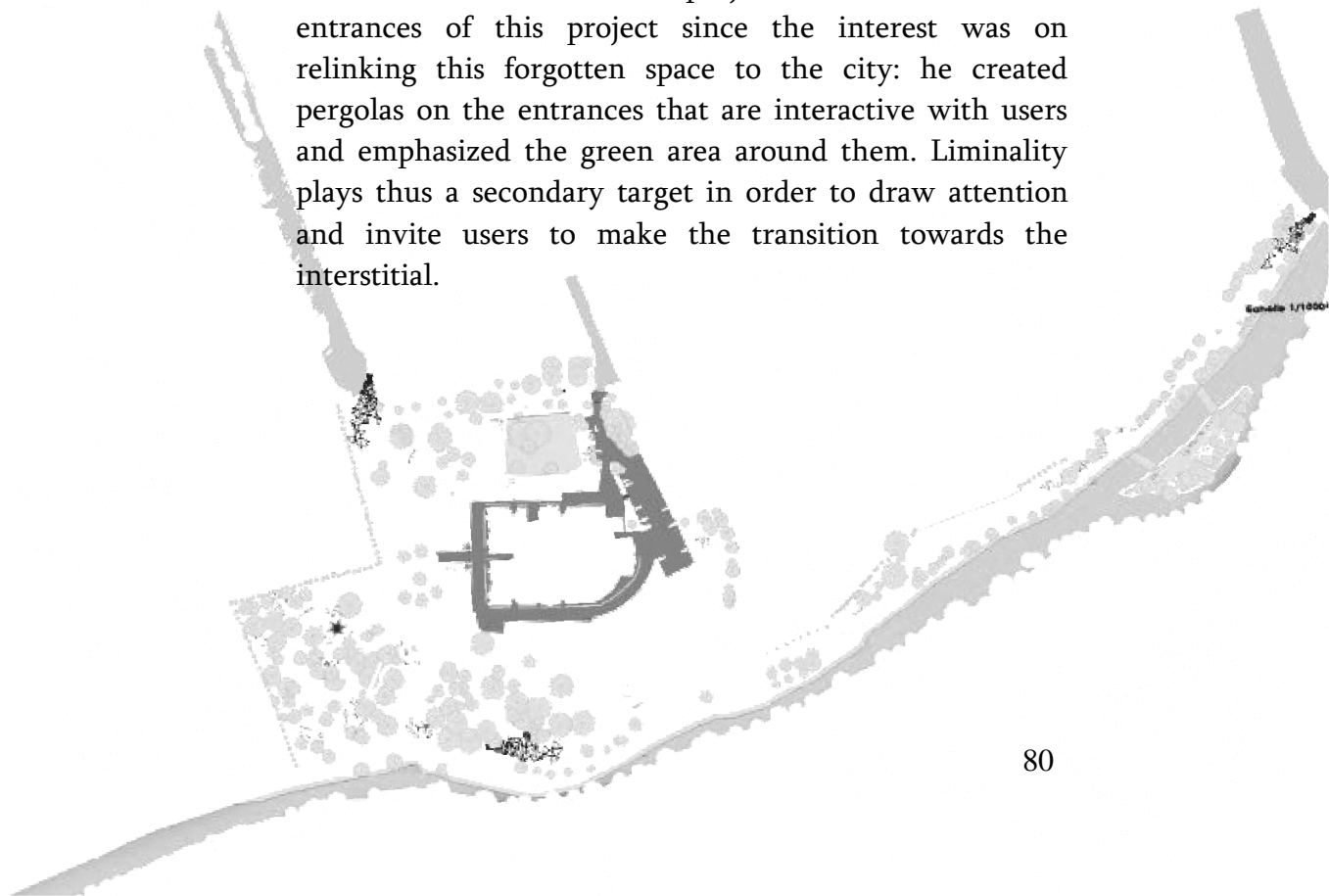
⁸¹ Hill, p. 110

⁸² Smithson, p. 76



Figure 8: "Les Interstices Urbains", project by David Aurélie

within the city. This approach goes mainly in the direction of interstitial as it is concerned in programmatic revival of the space from within. Since this approach does not include commonly much structural edification, liminality becomes less apparent as a design attitude since the space's edge is not particularly accentuated and not much use of the edge's potential is shown. The only liminal intake in such projects is the concern in cleaning the borders of the 'greened' areas and giving access for the public to reach those areas. However, some case studies of 'green intercession' have shown great interest in liminality due to the position and shape of the terrain vague. Once such spaces are on particular limits, the interplay interstitial-liminal is modified accordingly. We will try to analyze these effects in a later section. On this note, one case study is interesting to mention here where the intermediary zone is along a riverside separating two parts of Marseille and creating a shortcut between the city and the Borély Park. The space is inserted within a residential district yet it is not open neither to the city nor the neighboring area. A student project entitled 'Les Interstices Urbains' done by David Aurélie from the Marseille Art Academy proposes to choreograph this space, understand its polarities, create a link to the peripheral fabric while preserving the quality of the interstitial. The focus of his project was however on the entrances of this project since the interest was on relinking this forgotten space to the city: he created pergolas on the entrances that are interactive with users and emphasized the green area around them. Liminality plays thus a secondary target in order to draw attention and invite users to make the transition towards the interstitial.



C O N C L U S I O N

P A R T

5

The interstice is in the detail, in the momental preception of the fragmented elements that constitute the fabric in which we dwell

Conclusion

Interstitial space is not the planned void, but rather the unplanned left-over, either full or empty. It is that which escaped the eye of the architect or planners and lingers in temporality until event or program are injected into it, whether by the community or the architect. Case studies of some interventions such as the artistic ones show how this temporality is usually related to perceptions of interstitial and alters significantly from notions of liminality and threshold. In this context, interstitial implies also a certain movement as opposed to its former condition as a static interval. Whether movement of forces and intensities, dynamics of flow or actual physical movement, the terrain vague viewed through the interstitial moment is no more a stable entity, its boundaries are in expansion.

What we can see reflected in the case studies are notions discussed on the theoretical level by different philosophers, architects and theorists who took interest in writing about intermediary spaces and the terrain vague. This interchange between theory, practice and intentions, has produced difference between projects that focus on the liminal and others that pay more attention to the moment of the interstitial.

From these different case studies that we have presented, one can conclude that the specificity of intermediary spaces is in the way they link different spheres, scales and logics, spatial and social, that seem often separated. New cities development and auto-regulated planning start to enclose a great deal of architectural systems that multiply circulation and access ways in order to multiply possibilities of relations between inhabitants. We are interested hence in the relation between individuals, in the relation to the other, of the social and urban models at hand, of the link between places of constraint, places of choice, those

imposed, or those that link, or supporters of links, and likewise of rupture of such links and scission.

Similarly, in the different case studies we got to witness how different attitudes towards the terrain vague, interstitiality and liminality shape the creative process and the final outcome of the project. Form, function and other criteria that often compose the guidelines of architecture, become in this context secondary layers. Liminal and interstitial become the primary paradigms. Consequently, they become the notions through which we discuss the previous criteria. As a consequence, when discussing the contour in relation to intermediary spaces, Eisenman argues: “In the interstice, the contour assumes a new function, since it no longer exists as a transparency between interior and exterior but becomes a porous membrane whose primary task is to create a density of space.”⁸³ This could be the closest description of the relation liminal-limit: The latter becomes a realm, a ‘density’, in which the former can be manifested. An example of this was the intervention ‘addition on preexisting’ with the project ‘Urban threshold’ of Halil Ramazan where the architect made use of this threshold density as design intent. Likewise, blurring becomes a consequence of this relation contour-liminal. As suggested by Deleuze, blurring is a process in which there is an absolute proximity, a co-precision between field and plane. There is a need to blur the contour between background and figure, a task performed according to Eisenman in two ways: on one hand, destroying the clarity of the figure by another clarity, therefore two clarities produce a blur, and on the other hand wiping, where distinction between two figures becomes blurred. This is seen, in different degrees, in all projects where there’s affinity between the intervention mode and liminality, especially when architects intervene. As for context and surrounding, those are also discussed through liminality. According to x, the in-between is a notion, it is neither a concept nor an image; it is used as an alibi, when

⁸³ Eisenman, p. 101

discussing proximity, to talk about what is surrounding.⁸⁴ The liminal becomes hence undetached from context, an event previously seen in interventions such as 'No man's land into no architect's land' or 'Interaction architect-user-inhabitant' where context defines the liminal and vice versa.

⁸⁴Tschumi, p. 145

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