

## *Abstract*

*The following document considers contemporary deconstructivist theory as perceived by the American philosopher Mark C. Taylor and explores the formal translation of it in terms of an architectural intervention. The concept of death is considered as that which has been refused or negated by means of Modernism's death-defying ambitions and the return of the refused emphasizes the "between" condition which eternally defers the possibility of conceiving that which is self-existent without relation to other things.*

*The "between" is most evident at the edge where the polar opposites of existence converge and Derrida's "différance" appears by disappearing through the cracks, tears and fissures which prevent the possibility of figuring this un-figurable absolute which has been yearned for throughout the history of philosophy.*

*The proposed design of the urban cemetery celebrates this concept of the "edge" in which these cracks are widened by means of a sort of "inappropriate" use (cemetery), placement (urban) and architectural intervention. An architecture of the refused is devised.*

introduction

## Theoretical Premise

*"Architecture and art are the means by which contemporary man has attempted to transcend the normal and the everyday. The artist or architect does not seek to stabilize the existing reality, but rather to put it at risk, to reach for its limits and so to enter the direct presence of the sacred and the absolute."*(Goosen 2001, p.23)

While the researcher is searching for an appropriate theme upon which to base his dissertation, different possibilities come to mind: From a cultural centre at the Voortrekker monument to an Aids awareness centre, from a multifunctional building to a tourist information centre, and so forth. Yet pondering the condition of the city, the writer wonders whether the design of just another building on an empty stand would really contribute to the improvement of the city as a whole. Would its impact not be restricted, marginal? Shouldn't an issue more generic in nature be addressed? Why the urban sprawl: is it only crime, or the stigma surrounding crime, which prevents some social groups from wanting to visit the city? Is it not the result of the left-over spaces, back alleys and areas filled with refuse between the urban elements which harbour criminal activity? Is it not these residual spaces which disrupt and prevent the city from being continuous, connected, unbroken? This is possibly a better point of departure. Perhaps working with these residual spaces, transforming them through multiple interventions, connecting them, overlaying another layer in the city, which functions on a grid of that which was neglected, will re-establish continuity. These initial utopian visions of the city functioning as an unbroken whole will undergo a process of transformation in the following theoretical investigation. The possibility of continuation will be questioned and its impossibility suggested, after which an appropriate programme, site and architectural intervention will follow, architecture of the refused.

Mark C Taylor's theosophical analysis of Modernism and Modernist Postmodernism figures a contrasting strategy of disfiguring in terms of which the presence of the sacred and absolute is supposed to be entered. Modernism, through the process of negation, disfigures by means of removing figures, while Modernist Postmodernism "disfigures Modern dis-figuring by defacing abstract forms and pure structures with superficial figures". (Taylor 1992, 230) Modernism and Modernist Postmodernism share however at their base an archaeoteological process which is supposed to culminate in and completely define absolute reality. Therefore a unifying theory of the universe emerges, defined by a common denominator: in the

case of Modernism, abstraction and Modernist Postmodernism, this is figuration. Taylor (1992) suggests the impossibility of such a unifying theory which culminates in perfect wholeness or completeness by utilizing the Hegelian abrogation in which the other, that which has no use or value, is simply discarded and ignored during the process of negation. He, rather, proposes a third reading of Postmodernism which neither absolutizes nor erases figures, but "enacts what Freud describes as the process of denegation through which the repressed or refused returns." (Taylor 1992, 230) Suppose, taking modernism as an example, that through the process of purification all which is other (and inferior) has been negated and that a perfect whole is constructed, the latter can therefore exist only by virtue of its difference from the non-whole. Without that which is "between" the whole cannot exist. The "between", being the precondition of the existence of the whole, is therefore also the reason for the impossibility of the whole ever existing, the ever present other which is always extraneous (Goosen 2001, p.104).

Arriving at this insight, my utopian visions of establishing a faultless city seem to be in accordance with the Modernist ideal, except for an important difference: The acknowledgement of the existence of these other spaces dislocates the Modernist ideal from within. The Modernist utopia during the process of purification abrogates the existence of these spaces by hiding them, cutting them off. The isolation of the refuse-filled and refused spaces which are not cut off by some physical means tends to create hiding spaces for criminals who mug, rape or murder. The deconstructivist theorists, architects and artists do not attempt to cancel or abrogate this other (spaces in terms of architecture) which possess no or little utilitarian value (refuse), but, rather, try to celebrate them. This does not mean that criminal activity is celebrated, but rather prevented, by means of integrating these refused spaces as an important aspect of the urban experience and reality. Figure 1 offers an example of the celebration of that which has been refused by modernism's search for purity. Miss Lucy Pink is the crushed and compressed metal sheets of an actual automobile chassis caught momentarily at a point in the cycle between its original function and the junkyard (Fleming 1995, p.647). The "between" state of the object signifies change, potentiality and a certain dynamic quality defining its existence. The object is a fragment of time captured in an indefinable form.

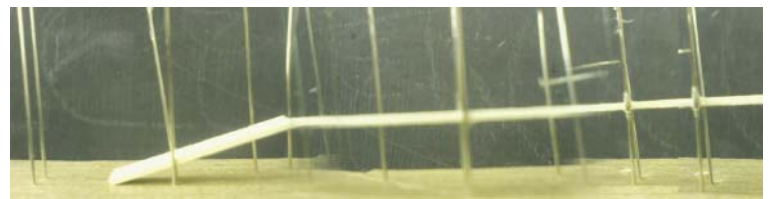




Figure 003: Miss Lucy Pink.

An appropriate theme and site in relation to the theoretical argument would surely then deconstruct the conventional practice in terms of which an open site is purchased and developed. By the selection of the theme and site, that which has been negated at the second phase of the Hegelian abrogation is not negated again in the third and final negation, which would result in a moment of completeness, absolute-presence and wholeness; but through the process of de-negation the final negation does not occur. Instead, the negated is affirmed. Refuse or this extraneous third returns and disrupts this moment of completeness (Goosen 2001, p.96).

The theme: an urban cemetery.  
 The site: A left-over segment

The theme and site selection will be justified both theoretically and practically in the following sections.



Figure 004: Site position

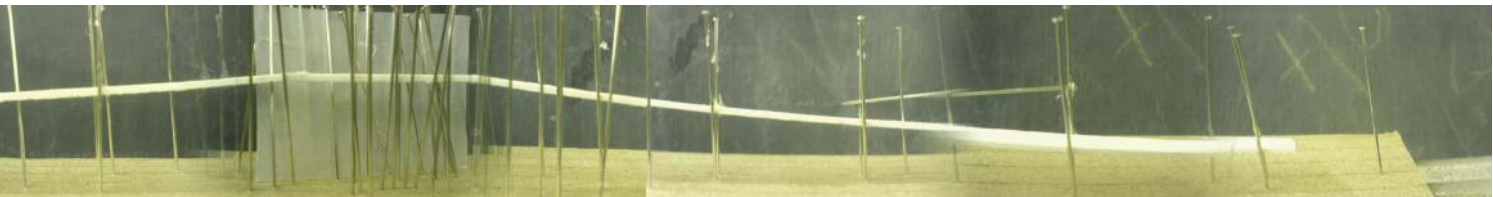


Figure 5: Conceptual Model February 2006



Figure 006: Digital Collage indicating position of site and surrounding infrastructure



If, as Derrida suggests, the act of deconstruction includes questioning the presuppositions on which traditional architecture is built, such as functionalism, it opens up the possibility of conceiving architecture in terms of the excessive, irrational and metaphysical. (Giovanni, 2004) Tschumi states that the level of complexity has become so great that a unifying theory of the universe is not possible anymore. Hence, his interest in the notion of the discontinuous structure is that things do not quite return to that common denominator (Ibid).

The return of the *refused* lies at the heart of this dissertation and influences design responses that is not only concerned with the rational and pragmatic, but responses which incorporate the idea of folly, the excessive, and experience, as part of that which was *refused*.



Figure 007: Photograph of the 15 storey Drie Lelies South Block



Figure 008: Landscape photograph looking west at the Drie Lelies buildings and site