



HOUSE OF ARTS & CULTURE

1994AT

Introduction

Beirut is a complex Mediterranean city, with a stratification and richness of culture due to its long history of exchange, influence, and conflict.

The urban fabric is now fragmented, a patchwork made up of vestiges of different periods.

We define this patchwork as an 'accidental urbanism' where the relationships between different parts are not hierarchical, sometimes not logical, but finally very rich.

We have discovered that due to the above conditions, and as a result of destruction and quick reconstruction, Beirut requires a return to the quality and quantity of public space it has enjoyed in the past.

Although we see that a house of arts and culture may be a kind of public space, it may only remain as a place for access to private culture, but not be sufficiently rich to become a place of public culture also. We want patrons and the public to 'inhabit the culture' of our building.

We think that this quality of public culture can exist only when firstly our building is effectively linked to and extended from the network of the city and secondly, that the networking among the contents in the house should enable programmatic expansion and interpretation beyond their original roles.

Finally, we also want this building to be a temporal frozen moment of the design process, with a degree of calculated accidents and precise discoveries.



Urban context of the site

'A context of reconstruction'

The site is at the edge of the old city and the newer suburbs of Beirut.

The old city is under reconstruction, with a mix of historic buildings and the future construction of new landmarks, ambitious architecture by well known international architects.

For the moment all of our direct surrounding is car park, and we are therefore in a 'context of reconstruction'.



The questions

Beirut is looking for a cultural building.

How do we build a relationship with the inhabitants of Beirut?

How do we attract people to the building, every day, all year?

How will people have easy and direct access to our cultural facilities?

How will the people inhabit these facilities?

Architectural concept

Learning from *'accidental urbanism'*

First we have the well loved Mediterranean lifestyle, where the life is in the street.

Then we have a rich ground made by accident; and we have a lack of public space with many possibilities for use.

To fill this lack, we first propose to extrude the rich ground into multi-level and complex public space.

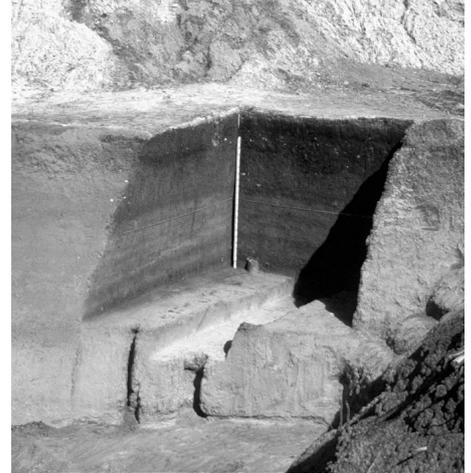
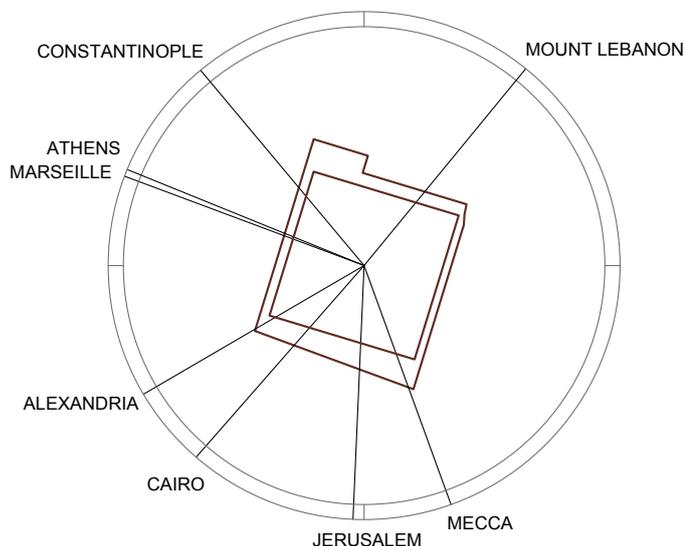
We use all of the volume allowed to bring public space from the street to the top of the building in a continuous loop. This loop is sometimes flat, sometimes ramped, sometimes stepped, sometimes enclosed, sometimes open to the air. It is complex, and it will allow for a multitude of uses, as the public chooses.

We therefore attract people to our building by allowing them their own public space near all of the formal facilities, all day, every day, and all year. This will be a busy building.

We then composed the formal facilities by responding to the specificities of the site, and the entirety of Beirut. Each facility is attracted, as with Magnetic influence, to face cities that have influenced Beirut, including Athens, Roma, Constantinople, Jerusalem and Marseille.

We can now read all of the different cultural stratifications that compose Beirut, from outside the building. And the public looping street inside provides continuity with the city. Just as the living room reappears on the street, with chairs, hearth and altar, so the street migrates into the living room.

Characteristics of the building:



Visual and spatial characteristics

The building is like the city, an agglomeration of programs, and very porous where public space is exterior. Some spaces are high, others low. Some space is in shadow, others are bright.

The raised, sloping and stepped public spaces allow an Architectural Promenade on the raised 'ground' of Beirut, where the public can freely use the diversity of spaces along this new 'street'.

On the exterior solid walls, texts of different periods and languages, all relating to Beirut, differentiate the various blocks and programmatic elements.

