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Lo^osing Trac K

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Lo*s*ing Trac*K*

by Farah Fares Al Arab

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**I am a wall
I am a horse
I am a stadium
I am a tree
Yet I carry your history
Its hidden within me
Cant you feel it?
I've witnessed you burn
I've witnessed you bleed
I've witnessed you rebel
I've witnessed you free
I am here so look at me**

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Abstract

My thesis investigation revolves around a site: The Hippodrome of Beirut. The Hippodrome is now a void in the city. It was an icon, a place of glamour and social gathering at the outskirts of the early twentieth century city. It has become a left over, a skeleton of a ghostly past, one that only survives in the minds of those who previously experienced it; and that is due to the changing needs and activities of the city dwellers. It lies now in the middle of a congested city, an isolated island, subdued, invisible, and inexperienced by the city dwellers.

The aim of the intervention is not to revive the icon, but to recreate a landmark in the city, some sort of center of gravity, which would depolarize in a sense the city and create a more balanced urban scheme. My intervention suggests a reinterpretation of the space itself, and an understanding of the new culture that is to practice it. It deconstructs the site whether in terms of its many histories or in terms of its actual current physical components, only to reconstruct it as an open space of culture and leisure, while taking a clear position against its exclusive pasts, and thus, transforming it into a civic, democratic pole in the city.

Introduction

The hippodrome stands in the city today as an urban relic, a place charged with physical and sentimental memories, reflected both tangibly and in the minds of the city dwellers. A place of memory is one which has witnessed events that have marked it, it carries virtual or tactile scars that are either brought forth or washed out by time, and by usage of the place itself, whether in similar or different functions. Past events give identities to sites, yet sometimes they contain them, and restrict their usage to a ghostly past, this is somehow a twisted version of a haunted place; "To haunt is to possess some place. Although places are understood to be materially real and temporally stable, that is, they give a spatial "fix" to time; their meanings are made and remade in the present. Places are not only continuously interpreted, they are haunted by the past structures of meaning and material presences from other times and lives" (1)

The expression here: "other times and lives", not only reflects the temporal dimension that is to be taken into consideration in an understanding of a place of memory, but also the subjectivity of those memories. For a site of memory is a representational space, based on the definition of Lefebvre, where individual experience plays a very important role in determining the mental imagery of the site in the minds of the inhabitants of the city, and by doing so, reconstructing varying memories and "ghosts". Such is the blessing and the curse of a place of memory. For it exists in the minds of the people, only in so far as it carries those traces, and that is one of the elements the intervention seeks to challenge, through creating a new identity to the site, thus allowing it to exist beyond its memory, and reach out, reclaiming itself as a physical entity of integral importance, considering the changed nature and the congested context of the new urban fabric of the city of Beirut.

(1). Till, K. *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*. p 9.

However it is important to define the different mental imageries depicting various relations people have with the site, in order to understand first the position of this site and its importance in their lives and in their navigation of the city, which would have a great impact on the reinterpretation of such a place of memory. Mental imagery is the immaterial projection people have of a place or an event. It is a mental visual reconstruction of an element that may be real and may be fictional, of something that may still exist, or which has vanished a long time ago, and the image persists only as an imagined scene based on a story that is told or a verbal myth that is constructed around that object or place. This is the role the narratives; which were written based on interviews with city dwellers on their relation with the site; try to accomplish, through relating different experiences people have or had with the hippodrome complex.

The narratives being the starting point of understanding the site, a full study of it was generated, accompanied by research and documentation, in order to understand the different identities, if not selves of the site, through out its history, all of which having had a varying impact in making of it a place of memory.

Yet on the other hand, the site exists also as an artifact in the city, enclosed it may be, but it still is an island, a void, which is another aspect that is to direct the investigation. The notion of void automatically implies a counter presence of solid or filled entity, which may counter balance or not the latter, hence increasing its physical aspect of void, considering first its scarcity and the level of congestion surrounding it. A void by definition also implies the notion of "interrupted design, a place that is hard to cross, and the settlement for weak, marginal, and barely institutionalized functions" (2). This is another argument that is to be presented, in defense of first the re-appropriation of the site by the city, as a very precious breath out space; but also as a strong claim towards equality, and as a stand against the exclusivity of the practice of gambling, which totally reduces the use of site and its contemporary identity, to a limited user group,

(2). Meyer, D. *The Urban Condition: Space, Community, and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis*. p 239.

versus a much broader potential audience, it being, the whole of the city of Beirut.

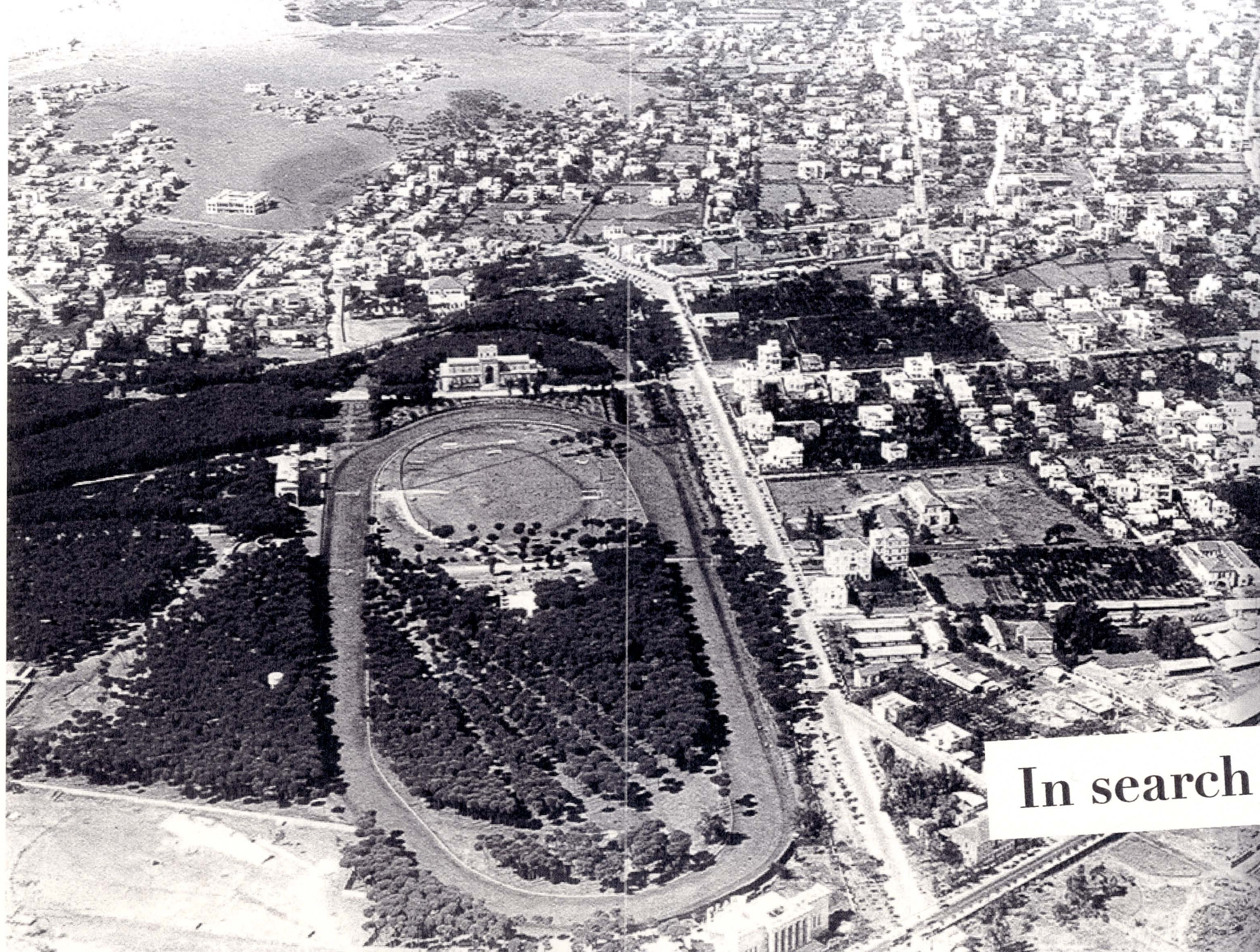
The concept of "hard to cross" presented in the quote above, is strongly reflected in the actual condition of the site, contained as it is, by a wall which stretches around three of its four sides, the fourth being a natural urban edge, created by bordering buildings; which is another factor increasing its alienation at the level of the experience of the city, and rendering the pedestrian passage next to it rather uncanny. This element of containment will be one of the driving elements in the analysis of the site, as well as in the conceptualization of the intervention, backed up by the narratives and design exercises investigating the different possibilities of allowing urban infiltration into the site, whether by totally opening it up, or by creating a play of accessibility in the future intervention.

Finally the driving force behind the vision that is to be presented for the site as an architectural response to all the issues presented above will operate around the notion of re-appropriation, re-interpretation, re-creation, and adaptive re-use (in that case of the pine residence), with the aim of opening up the site to the city as an active center of gravity, repositioning it as a main pole in the urban and social experience of the city of Beirut. The approach to the site will focus at this point on deconstructing the site into its bare elements, in an attempt to understand the spatial impact and potential each had on the site. Then a study of how the site can reach out to its surroundings will be generated by a series of programs aiming to create that missing connection.

As presented in the outline, the thesis investigation will be structured as follows. First, recapturing the different roles the site played through out its history, second the analysis of the current urban condition of the site, and finally the proposed intervention.

The Different Selves

“...In your understanding of a place of memory, try not to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles... and that through realizing the moments when they were absent and the moment they remained unrealized”, a quote by Foucault on counter memory.



In search of an Icon

Retracing the Dolce Vita

Before attempting to reconstruct the aura of the site during its heydays, a brief historical overview will be presented here after.

During the late nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie of Beirut starts to move out of the walls of the old city, to live in suburban neighborhoods, where beautiful houses and gardens were erected. (1)

At this time, the region now known as Mazraa was commonly referred to as "Mazra'at el Arab" at the time. It was a low density rural agglomeration, and was framed to its eastern and southern side by the pine forest of Beirut.

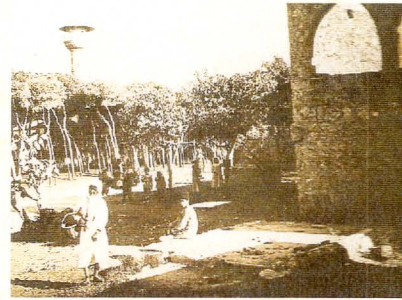
The history of the pine forest is traced back to the days of Emir Fakhereddine, who is said to have planted it in an attempt to barricade Beirut from any possible invasion from the south first, and second, to stop the wind loaded with sands, coming from the southern sand dunes during windy days. So the pine forest provided Beirut with fresh air, carrying the smell of pines, almost all year long. (2)

With the turn of the century and the gradual opening of the city to foreign culture, and urban ideology, gardens, public spaces, promenade paths, wider sidewalks, cafes, theatres, and music booths started appearing around the city. The pine forest itself became a place of promenade, and a music booth was installed there. Already, in 1910, the forest was becoming a playground, where clubs started organizing sports activities, rendering the place increasingly popular. (3)

(1). Fournié, P. *La Résidence Des pins*. p.7

(2). Shayya, F. *Enacting Public Space*. p.1

(3). Fournié, P. *La Résidence Des pins*. p.8



Nabih, age: 81

nostalgic

It all started in 1943, we were young, and it was during the Second World War, the Hitler days, as we used to call them. My dad had a horse, and my brother was a jockey. But my brother died in 1944, he had an accident. And I continued gambling.

During those days, it was all aristocracy, not like today. There was Albert Faraon, the uncle of Henry Faraon, Moussa De Freige and Mohammad Foustok; they had horses running there as well. I used to go to the races, and gamble, me and my brothers, and afterwards I worked there, I attended to the horses, fed it, took it for training.

Those times were different. There were real jockeys back then, and the people were very well mannered, it was a completely different ambiance, and the jury was good, all the people there held very high ranks in society. But I used to gamble too; I only stopped in 1991 when I went to hajj.

Back in the days was I used to go, the events were held on Sundays, and the English would sometimes also organize dog races. But since I also worked there, I used to go on Thursdays as well, and time the horses, how much do they score in one lap, every distance had a set timing for it.

I was stuck there, more like addicted. We used to give the horse a drug, we put it in a carrot and feed it to the horse, it was a booster that made it run faster. Though this was against the law, we would've got disqualified if someone had caught us.

But there was a guy in the jury we knew, he was a junky, so we used to bribe him with a few grams of cocaine.

During my gambling days, we used to go in, buy a ticket, chose a horse, see I used to know which were the best horses because I used to work there as well. i used to play trio or doublets, a player in the crowd. I once won 4000liras, in those days; it would've got you an apartment.

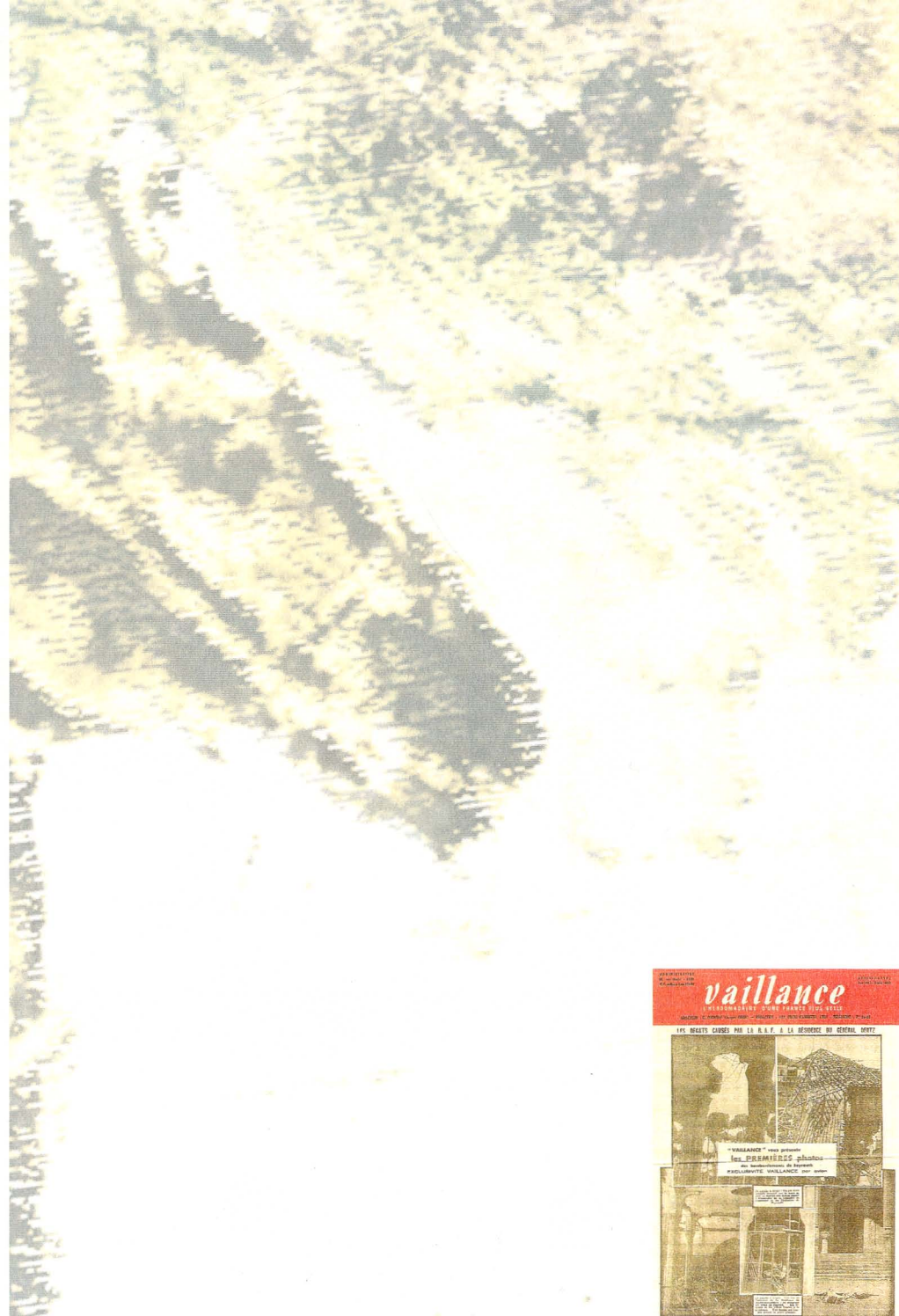
The stadium was different, it was all arches, and there were seats. It was very elitist, even king Hussein of Jordan and his son Abdullah used to come, I used to see them.

But in the 75 war, the hippodrome was caught up in between, as you know, east Beirut on one side and west Beirut on the other. The stadium was pretty much demolished during the Israeli invasion of Beirut. They rebuilt it after the war. It used to be a single floor from top to bottom, and on the roof of it there were seats as well.

During the war, the races used to take place in the morning, quickly, or five rounds, not eight like before, because they were afraid from the confrontations. And many times the fights would start outside and people would get stuck inside the hippodrome, waiting for the fire to seize to run home.

It used to be loaded with pine trees, we used to climb on them and pick the pines to eat them. The pine trees did not obstruct the view much because as you know the tree has a very thin trunk. But near where the museum now is, the density of trees was much higher, so the horses would disappear only to reappear after a while. There, there used to be snakes, big venomous ones, but with the fire the Israeli caused, most of the trees were burnt out, you know the trees were very old; they were planted back in the ottoman days.

Nothing is like it used to be, everything changed, the condition the hippodrome has reached is disastrous, compared to its previous days, even the people who go there now are not the same; nothing is as it used to be.



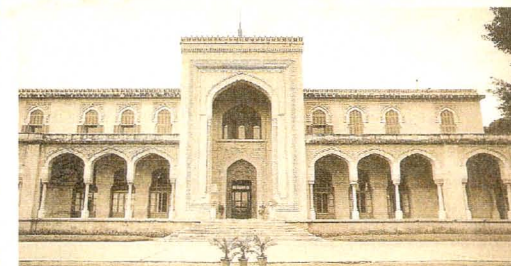
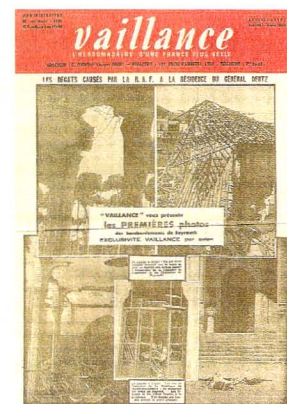
However in 1915, Alfred Sursock enters a negotiation with the ottoman governor, who grants him the northern part of the forest, to create a casino and a park there, as a continuation or extension of the gambling activities and the small horse races activity that was starting to become more and more popular amongst the Christian elite society in Beirut; and that despite the low income nature of the Mazraa area.

However the casino itself was never used as such, Alfred Sursock only finished the exterior of the building, when construction was halted due to the aggravation of the First World War; instead the structure was used as a military hospital.

With the war coming to an end and the French establishing a mandate period on Lebanon, the pine residence became the residence of the French high commissioner, and was transformed into a major political pole in Lebanon, around which gravitated major important Lebanese and foreign figures.

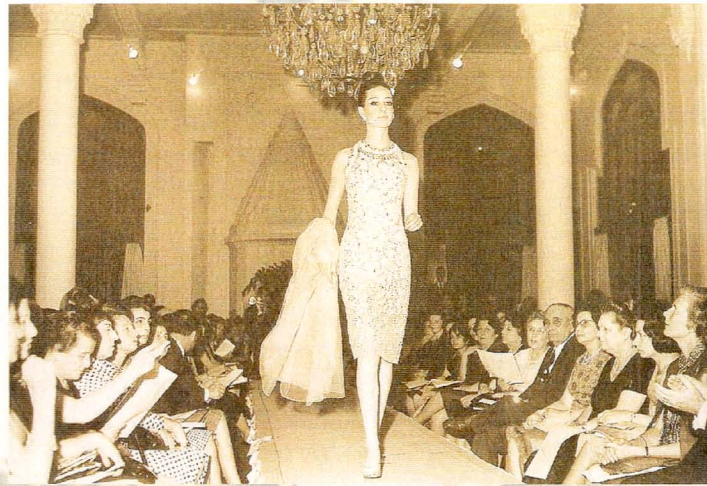
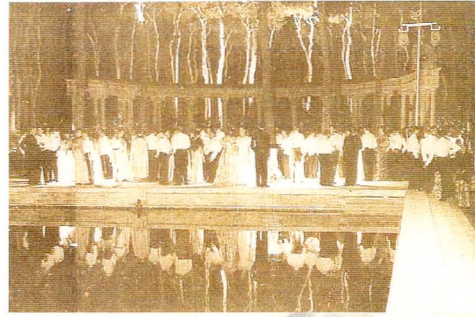
Consequently, the hippodrome witnessed a golden era that reached its paroxysm in the 1940 - 1950, under the direction of Henry Faraon, after the declaration of independence. At this point, the hippodrome became a melting pot for all religious communities in Lebanon. It was a cosmopolitan place, for the banking and commercial elite, who would gather there on Sundays both for entertainment and business deals. "No head of state, no royalty, from the Shah of Iran to the King of Greece and the President of France, would come to Lebanon without paying a visit to the Beirut racetrack" (3)

(3). www.arabianhorse.com



An icon it became, one of Beirut in its glory days. By the use of the word icon, one gives an added temporal dimension, for the word not only grounds itself in the memory of the place, but reflects the notion of changeable/ mutating identity; hence the need to understand the culture that made it become an icon, at the level of the urban experience.

So as a synthesis of the historical brief and the analysis of the narratives, especially those of the nostalgic and the dweller, the image reconstructed is as follows: By the 1920's, the site had turned into an icon with an elitist connotation to it. Its practice was one with a foreign/ western imprint. It was a place of gamble, of social pampering. A place of glamour and luxury in a blossoming city, and the heritage it carried was of a different nature, than that of its surroundings at first, but then gradually integrated and accepted by the local community. It was a place where you would want to be seen, a prestige, and a must. During the days when the races were not taking place, the park in the middle, encircled by the tracks, was used for many other function, especially night ones, hosting events that were organized by the French high commissioner. Balls and fashion shows and music parades were organized there. One brief narrative of a festival organized by the general Gouraud is as follows: "...Luminous ribbons ran across the forest, while sounds of tam tams were playing in the background. The animated show given by the general: "the far east presented in the middle east", was being prepared in the forest. The sounds of tam tams were getting higher...the ball was flooding from the salons of the pine residence all the way to the forest. The general appeared at the top of the stairs, framed by the representatives of the state of Lebanon. More than four thousand guests were now rushing to the gardens and the forest to assist the far eastern procession, called out by the strange music... long fire snakes, and fishes and dragons and other monsters were parading in the forest..." (5)



Farah, age:22
intrigued

It's seven fifteen in the morning, I walk, and it greets me. Still there, just like yesterday... and the day before. Strong, imposing, for you it may be, but a companion in it I have come to find, in the yellowish withering stones, I have found a confident, a soother, and a protector.

I go to school so it's on my right; I walk closer to it, trying to be as far away from the thundering traffic as possible. It distracts me from taxi drivers with their annoying honks aiming to find in me yet another customer, I see orange popping out, crowned by tender shades of green, then pink and purple, I am amused by these incidental hints, and my mind starts to drift, in this undying intrigue, and constant questioning I have of what activities lie behind this wall.

I know from what I see through the window of my room that it's a big space, I know it has a structure to it, and I know that there is a castle. But my mind, being as playful as that of a student trying to delay the thought of approaching school as possible, it starts to draw all those scenarios and fantasies of things that might take place inside, of hidden worlds and secret paths, of enchanted oasis, always finding inspiration from some elements I know to exist from my keen observations. The pool of the ambassador, an open window, the French flag waving at the tip of the palace, the trees, the sounds of running horses during their morning exercises, their panting, the energy they radiated to me at those very brief moments of intersections, all become active elements in one story or another.

For five years, this was the path I took, and the wall remained there, I did not lose the habit, which has become unconscious to me, of having my hands go along its stone lines, as I walked distracted. But I must confess it started losing its splendor with time, the stories started to dry out, my mind was more and more full with increasing responsibilities, burdened by the everyday life. The wall and what is beyond it remained a mystery, but one I have come to think, which was not meant to be solved. I had pretty lost hope.

But one day, I see a billboard on the streets: "Come join us at the garden show, location: The Hippodrome of Beirut..." and I knew the site was calling me. Finally I will be allowed in; I will get to see, to feel to touch everything inside. Finally it was to become real to me. All it took was one public event to be organized and there it was.

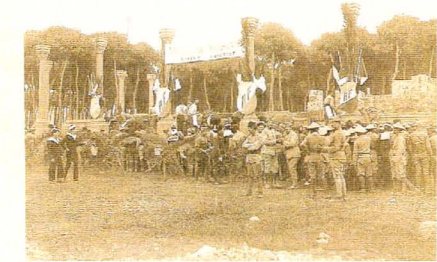
It was a wet Friday afternoon, unexpectedly, I was wearing my sandals. We entered; one entrance for both pedestrians and cars. A wooden board was placed for us to walk over a certain pitch, and then our feet would sink into the sand of the tracks, rather muddy as it was, and then we would find our way to the check in booth and across all the display booths. So there it was. Is that it? Is that all there is to it. I tried counting the pine trees, they seemed too scarce for me, but maybe I was mistaken. I walked around trying to discern some element of glory to it, but the stadium stood there with its grey concrete, and the residence seemed unreachable, and it was as if the only thing that was enjoyable were the created ambiances by those transient users of this place, those shoppers who have come to enjoy one of the very few open air markets in the city. I can't say I was disappointed, but a part of me refused to believe that this was all that lied hidden behind my wall. There had to be more, there must be more; there will be more...hopefully...one day.

The religious diversity the site held had grown to an extent that was pretty much taken for granted, since in the 50's sectarianism was not of any relevant importance.

It is a place men and women experienced alike. Men did politics and business and women competed on who had the most frivolous hats and dresses.

It was a place where events took place on the inside and people fabricated stories on it on the outside. Its surroundings being at first a conservative Sunni entourage, the place was regarded as alien and evil. The actual physical wall encircling the site transformed into a mental one, and a duality was created between the image of the site in the minds of the people who practiced it, and those who heard and watched it being practiced from the outside, and that is clear in the narrative of the dweller: "However, I use to try not to walk next to its wall, on my way to my friend's house. My mum used to say this was a place of evil, because gambling took place inside, and gambling is forbidden in Islam."

Yet the presence of the site strongly influenced the urban experience of the area, first by putting it on the regional map, second by the flow of income it generated to the surrounding inhabitants, and third because of the traffic, and the impossibility of pedestrian crossing during race times, as stated in the narrative of the dweller: "When you would pass by there, you would be able to tell if the races were on or not from the traffic jam, it would be impossible to pass if the races were about to start or had just ended".



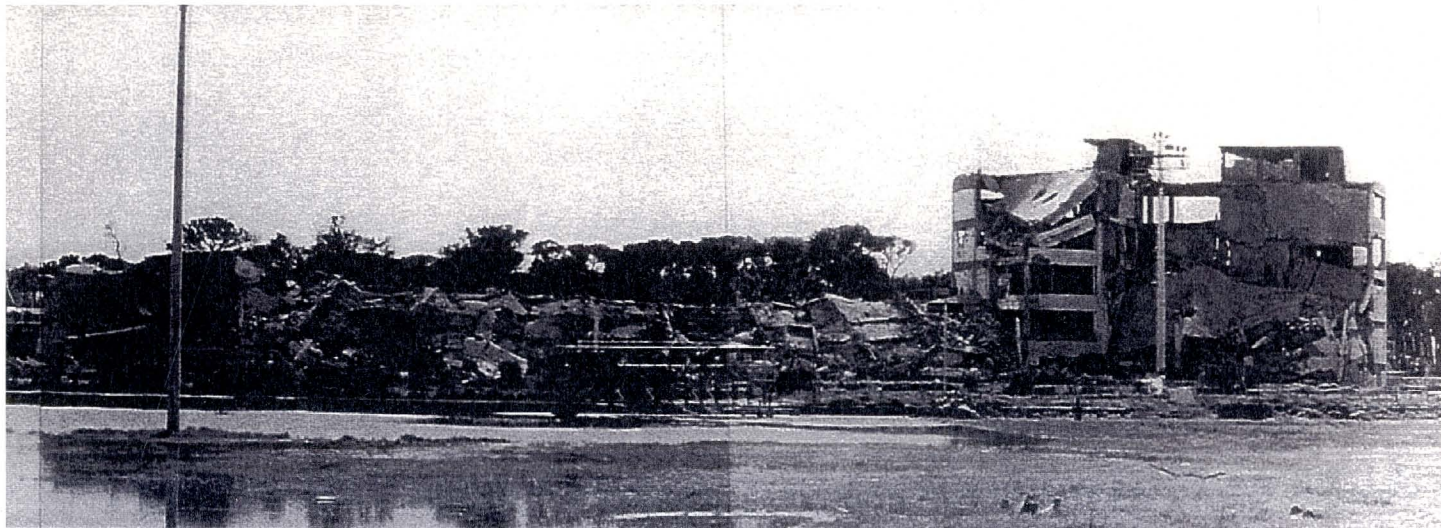
On the economic level, the presence of the hippodrome was very beneficial first to the municipality of Beirut who had given a lease for the S.P.A.R.C.A; the league of Arabian horses responsible for the hippodrome; on the condition that part of the revenues would be given to the municipality, note that the S.P.A.R.C.A was also in charge of the maintenance of the park.

Indirectly, the hippodrome provided work opportunities for many local residents of the area, whether with the horses or the maintenance of tracks, greenery and the stadium: "The activity turned into a full-fledged industry directly employing hundreds of people, providing an indirect source of income for thousands and entertainment for tens of thousands of others" (6).

But the identity of the site as a place of glamour was detached from the storming events that started taking place with the beginning of the seventies. It was only until the war was fully launched that the hippodrome started to get affected. The war and its impact on the site will be developed in the part to come.



Counter Ego



A Schizophrenic Scenario in a Ravaging War

Lebanon was a country at war from 1975 to 1991. This civil war was a conflict characterized by the fact that it turned identities into territories, mostly manifested in the creation of the green line, which divided Beirut into east Beirut and west Beirut. The demarcation line was one between the main opposing militias. This generated a no-man's, a land of confrontation which impacted the whole geography of the city. The hippodrome was located at the exact point of demarcation, to the east of Beirut side, which automatically implicated it in all the confrontations that were taking place during the war.

The green line itself owes its name to the fact that grass and trees grew in streets and buildings that were destructed and abandoned along the demarcation line, since all its inhabitants had fled the area, seeking refuge in other parts of the city or even abroad. So the place which was a gravitational point of attraction had turned into the place where literally you would not want to be seen, because that would cost you your life. (1)

The new urban experience led to the creation of a very different mental map in the minds of the residents of the city of Beirut, where new virtual boundaries were erected and actual ones pierced and destroyed. Reference points and landmarks shifted in nature, becoming ones related more to survival than anything else.

(1) <http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/900919/910//beirut/greenline/moystad/index.html>



Shahinaze, age:49
dweller

The whole region here was different. The road was not as wide as it is now, and the buildings you see now were not there. The gate of the hippodrome was made out of wood. When you would pass by there, you would be able to tell if the races were on or not from the traffic jam, it would be impossible to pass if the races were about to start or had just ended.

But the traffic of cars was replaced by that of the sand buffers during the war, and you would never want to risk passing there, except during seize fire days. The sand buffers were scattered from the Mathaf road all the way to Fouad Shehab Bridge, next to Dora and all. At least that's what they used to say, of course we couldn't see since we were stuck on the west side of the Mathaf road.

This area here was mostly damaged during the Israeli invasion in 1982. At the time we wanted to escape to the east side, which is right after the museum, they call it the Chevrolet today, that day we were stopped by the kouwwat militia, and they told us to turn back and die in the west side. During those days, you could not see the wall of the hippodrome at all, because of the sand buffer, and there were no side walks to begin with. Even the French residence was empty.

Anyway the inside of the hippodrome I hardly know. Now I know because of the garden show, I've been going there for three years now. I lived my whole life there, and it took this very recent event for me to be able to have access to it.

You know before the war there were trees, in the middle of the road, between the two lanes. This whole region was a very high end one. But when Israel came, it totally ruined it.

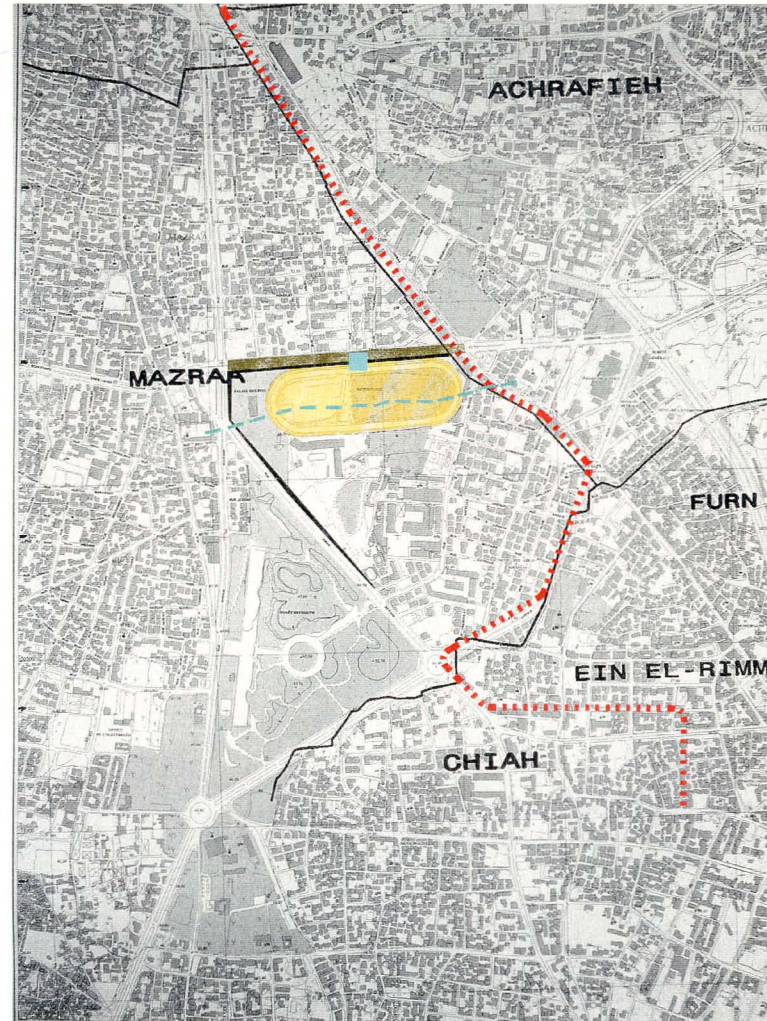


At least, when I used to hear the cheers coming from the hippodrome. I would know the races were on, and for the races to be on, the owners must have got some sort of tip about a cease fire or something, so I would feel relaxed. But there were also days, were there was no bombing, yet no races took place. I think it's because they either moved the horses out, or because the horses died, after the hippodrome was bombed. And even when the war was over, it took them a year to resume the races, the reopening was a very big event, and it was Henry Faraon who took on the charge of rebuilding.

I remember, the first time the sand buffers were removed, I saw how much the wall of the hippodrome was punctured, and there were all sorts of graffiti with big words on it.

The hippodrome in and by itself, as a place, was not really of any relevance to me. Living next to it, and the house being a single storey, I hardly ever had the chance to know what was inside. However, I use to try not to walk next to its wall, on my way to my friend's house. My mum used to say this was a place of evil, because gambling took place inside, and gambling is forbidden in Islam. Now I walk by its wall every day, during my morning exercise. Its funny you know during the war I used to wish there were tall buildings in its place to shelter us from the bombs, but now I thank God a thousand times that I have this green stretch to gaze upon when I wake up, since now as you know our old house is replaced by a twelve floor building and I live on the eighth.

The one thing I remember the most about the hippodrome was the lights that were there, they were tall n slender and very pretty, and I wish I could find a picture for you to see, but everything was lost during the war. This entire strip was very special to me before the war, there was even a tree I really loved, but now it's all gone. This road was the link between east and west during the war; it was the no man's land there. People from both sides would meet up at the gate of the hippodrome to exchange goods like bread n fuel n all, during seize fire. My father used to sell jeans there as well, whenever money was short, he almost got shot once by a sniper. The



This reflected on the spatial practice of the site itself and its surrounding areas. Considering its very critical location, the site was some sort of stitching element in a divided city, it was forced to mutate from an icon of effervescence to one of bare bone survival. The walls; that kept the local inhabitants of the area out; were now discreetly pierced, creating an internal link from east to west Beirut, sheltered by the remains of the pine trees from the snipers that were positioned on the buildings, right outside the walls of the tracks, as reflected on the adjacent diagram.

The navigation of the whole area was different since new elements materialized themselves as street accessories, from sand buffers to threatening graffiti, to war posters, rendering the pedestrian movements almost impossible. This is clearly mentioned in the narrative of the dweller: "But the traffic of cars was replaced by that of the sand buffers during the war, and you would never want to risk passing there, except during seize fire days. The sand buffers were scattered from the Mathaf road all the way to Fouad Shehab Bridge, next to Dora and all"

But the war did not stop gamblers and life lovers from seeking in the hippodrome a breath out place during seize fire. Gambling continued whenever it was judged to be calm, different activities were report to have been taking place during races in war, like those presented by Walid Raad in his 72nd sketch book, as part of his major project commonly referred to as the atlas group, this section of which is called "The Missing Lebanese War". An interesting quote, from a note written on the back cover of the above mentioned sketchbook is as follows: "It is a little known fact that the major historians of the Lebanese civil wars were avid gamblers. It is said that they met every Sunday at the race track -Marxists and Islamists bet on races one through seven, Maronite nationalists and socialists on races eight through fifteen. Race after race, the historians stood behind the track photographer, whose job was to image the winning horse as it crossed the finish line, to record the photo-finish. It is also said that they convinced (some say bribed) the photographer to snap only one picture as the winning horse arrived. Each historian wagered on precisely when- how many fractions of a second before or after the horse crossed the finish line- the photographer would expose his frame."

There is much to be interpreted from this little quote, first being the fact that the social and geographical segregation happening in the divided

city generated a division inside the tracks themselves, one which occurred in the gambling activity, reflected in the designation of who gets to bet on which categories of laps and why, based on segregations between the leftist and rightist movements.

Another added twist is the fact that the gambling activity is not happening on the horses themselves but rather on the time at which the winning horse was taken. It is an act of distancing one's self from the actual event and place, focusing ones attention on the documentation of the act rather than on the act itself, rendering the whole place, the whole activity that was once so gloriously sought after, into a few recorded digits. (Please refer to the 72nd sketchbook, attached to this document in the appendix).

Interestingly, in addition to the notes of the historians regarding technical issues of the winning horse and the betting details, the sheets presented often had quotes describing the wining historian, regardless of whether those were invented facts or not, since they are the projection of a possibly imagined reality, they tend to shed a different image of the users of the site. A few of these side notes are as follows:
"He was imbued with a patience and otherworldliness ill-suited for politics"
"Uncivil and sullenly rude. Haughty and arrogant"
"He is not merely miserable. He is brilliant at it. There seems no event, no matter how trivial that does not arouse him to a frenzy of self-mortification"

1982; Israel invades Beirut.

The site is bombed severely.

The glorious stadium is rendered to the ground.

A major part of the pine forest is eaten up by flames.

The pine residence suffers greatly too.

A ghostly impression floats above the site.

Corpses of dead soldiers were buried in the site.

Army troops squatted in the ruins of the stadium.

All archives present in the offices of the S.P.A.R.C.A were lost for ever.

What remained of the site was a fleeting image that a certain category of the society still preserved of it.



1983

gate of the hippodrome became some sort of a landmark. And there was no cease fire, people pierced into the walls of the hippodrome, and took cover under the pine trees, to get from one side of the divided city to the other.

I remember when I was young, barely three years old; I kept nagging on my uncle to take me to see the horses. My memory of it was that of a very beautiful place, with lots of trees. And when I went back inside three years ago during the garden show, I felt it was even bigger than what I had expected or imagined. I went all over it I even climbed to get to the stadium. I stood in the exact location that Faten Hamama stood, in her movie: "habibati", which she filmed part of it inside the hippodrome, even if you look carefully during the scene where she is leaving, there is a shot of the area I was telling you about.

This whole area anyway was always in turmoil. It was always a marking point, an event place in the history of Beirut. Even before the war, manifestations would take place there, especially during 1971, student manifestations were very violent, I remember the police would throw at them tear bombs, and we used to make them smell onions to counter act the effect. A lot of students died during those manifestations, this area was called " Sahet Teshrin" following the black November where too many students were killed.

Even the independence parades used to happen on this road, I even think the tanks were kept in the hippodrome before the show.

This road is very much immersed in the memory of people. I link in my memory the region with this road not with the hippodrome itself, the hippodrome is of course part of it, but the famous bloody history took place outside its walls and not within it...

Visualising the Israeli Invasion of the Site

This part of the investigation focuses on rendering a visual representation of the first few hours after the Israelis bombed the site, taken from the movie *«Waltz avec Bachir»*: a recent co-production between french and Isreal resulting in an animated documentary, directed by Ari Follman. Please find attached to the document a CD containing the section of the documentary that relates the bombing of the hippodrome.

...up to the moment when the camera got broken, he told me he had witnessed a very traumatizing scene...

“- We arrived to the stables of Beirut.

- You mean the hippodrome

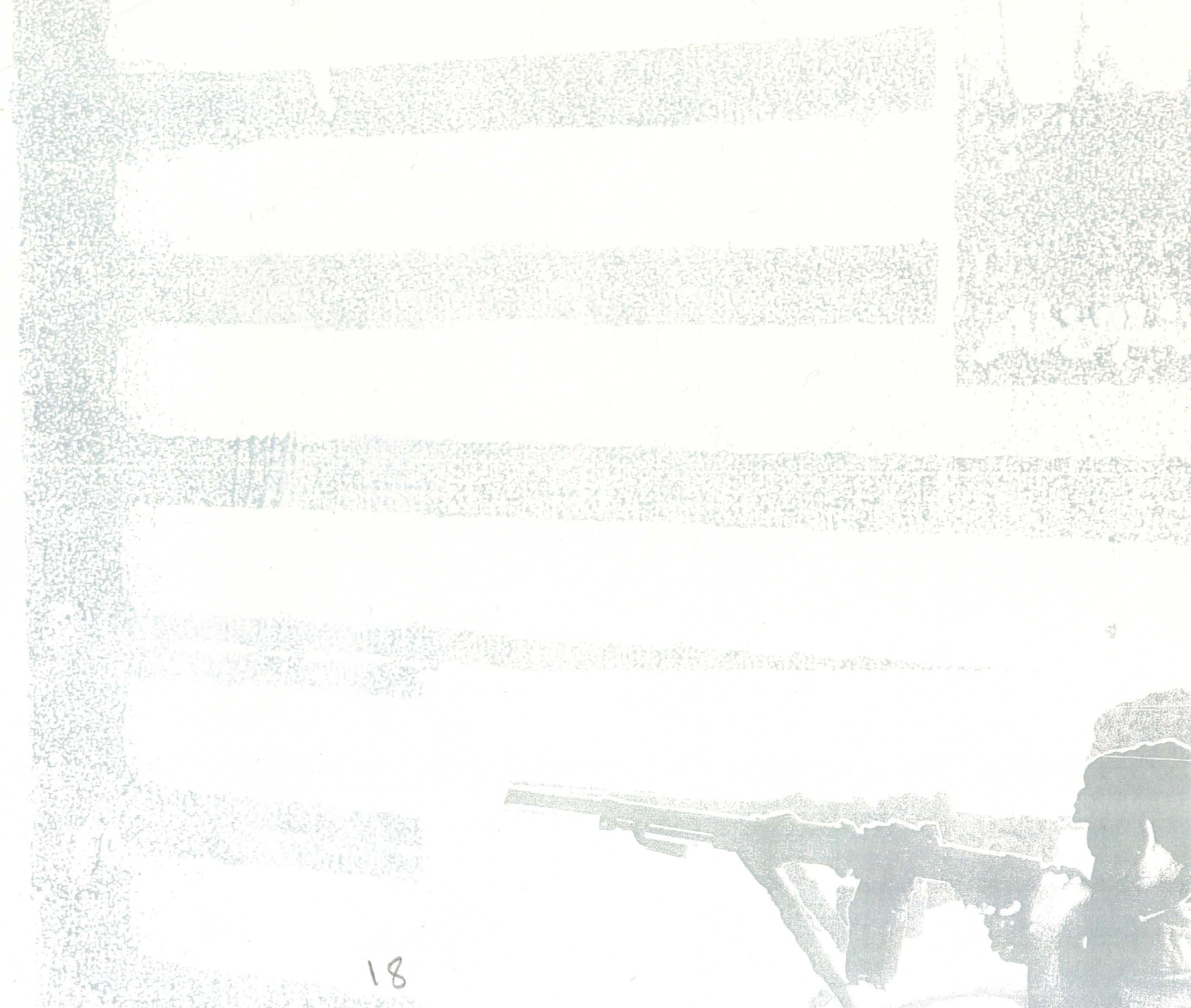
- Yes”

And I saw bodies he said, bodies of pure bread Arab horses massacred.


I was heart broken. Men go to war, but what crime did those noble horses do, to have such a fate?

“All those bodies of dead horses...it was horrible”


He used this mechanism to stay distanced from the war, he took photos of it without participating in it, and it protected him. Yet he was there, so he could no longer deny the truth of what he was witnessing, all those horrifying scenes, they drove him mad: “this is not happening to me” he would keep repeating...






A black and white photograph showing the ruins of a building. The structure is heavily damaged, with only skeletal remains of walls and a few vertical supports left. A person is standing in the distance, near the center of the frame, providing a sense of scale to the devastation. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall mood is somber and tragic.

**Il m'a raconté qu'il avait vécu
une scène très traumatisante.**

A black and white photograph capturing the aftermath of a destruction in Beirut. The scene is dominated by a large, dark, and heavily damaged structure, likely a stable, with its roof and upper walls missing. Debris is scattered across the foreground. In the background, a lone figure stands amidst the ruins, providing a sense of scale. To the right, a large, dark tree stands against a pale, overcast sky. The overall atmosphere is one of desolation and the aftermath of conflict.

**"Nous sommes arrivés
aux écuries de Beyrouth.**



- À l'hippodrome.
- Oui.



Et j'ai vu plein de carcasses de...



**Des carcasses
de purs-sangs arabes massacrés.**



mais quel péché ont commis
ces chevaux si nobles



pour subir un tel sort ?



**Toutes ces carcasses de chevaux,
c'était insupportable."**



**Ce mécanisme qu'il utilisait
pour être hors du coup,**



**c'est-à-dire voir la guerre en photo
sans y participer,**



l'avait protégé.



**Mais en devenant partie prenante,
il ne pouvait plus dire :**



"Ça ne m'arrive pas à moi !"



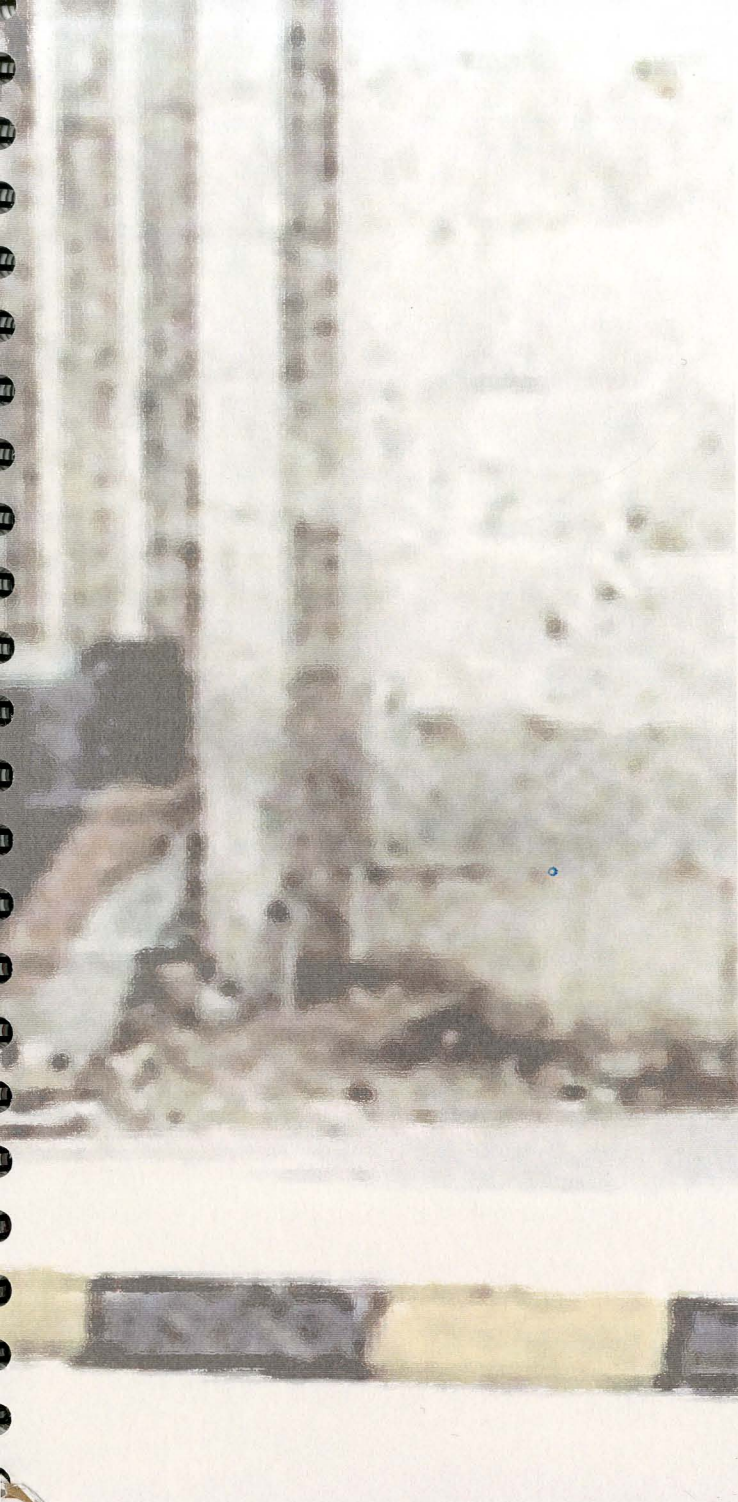
"Ça ne m'arrive pas à moi !"



**Toutes ces horreurs lui sont arrivées.
Il est devenu fou.**



The Descent



Facts Statements of the Current Condition

The title of this part "The Descent" is not one that is drawing a comparison with the icon like identity the site used to be known for. It is rather a descent or degradation of the image of the site itself, vis-à-vis the hopes that got constructed around it after its reopening in 1991.

The reconstruction of the hippodrome was a symbol, rather a message for a country that was trying to rebuild itself after 15 years of war. At its opening, it carried the promise of putting Beirut back on the world map, as a cosmopolitan modern city.

Big festivals were made, and thousands of people rushed back into the site, celebrating its rebirth, and the new modernistic stadium that was still unfinished at the time.

Eighteen years after its reopening, the stadium remains unfinished. It stands in the site, with even the concrete construction of it still undone. Grey, imposing, it reads as everything the old stadium, with its slender like appeal, was not.

Even the practice of the site itself is very much of a new nature.

Races are held on Sundays, the only day of the week during which the site is opened, to a very particular public. The races happen in a highly supervised atmosphere. A police station is present at the first floor of the stadium; armed police officers are found amongst the spectators, whereas the chief of the unit roams around, from one place to the other.



Rania, age:22
indifferent

"Hippodrome", a word from a distance, a word that represents for me a foreign space, a space in Rome or Spain, a space in a movie; a space to which one would love to associate a narrative, invent a spatial presence. The "hippodrome" does not exist for me in Beirut at least for now...

Therefore I am trying to give a name for your site of study, for giving a name establishes an immediate relation, an association, a memory, a presence all of which I cannot pretend. So I would have to call your site the 'area'.

Between that 'area' and me there is no one story, an elaborated narrative, an event. There are clusters, glimpses, and impressions for few simple reasons: it's near my school, it's near your house, it's near frequently visited restaurants, near Ras el Nabe3 were the events of the 2 weeks occurred, and last of all near or within 'khat el Tames'.

Here's my attempt of collecting my clusters of that 'area'.


- I am in class, I am very bored and there is an extra thing to complain about: the smell of horseshit; a smell that I cannot avoid since I am sitting near the window. I wonder from where does that smell come and they tell me there is a place near where horse tournaments are held. I don't truly care: I see neither horses nor tournament. All what I know is that I am bothered with the smell.

- Are there really horses around my school? I can't hear them galloping. I am curious to see them, running with their legs so frivolous, their hair balancing from one side to the other, passing by my window, and running into the distance. Mrs. Malkoum is sulking again; silence in class; it's perhaps the moment to feel conscious of our acts and lack of respect.....

We are walking to your house from school for a usual hang out. However it's probably one of my first times taking that road from school to your house. We passed the museum. And there it is: a long road that does not seem to have an end. A long side walk rendered even tighter by the presence of this imposing wall. There is the road, the cars, the noise, a long stretch of cars, and again the wall, and the side walk, silent, imposing. We walk, a first police man, in his booth. The space is narrow, we can hardly walk. My back pack is weighing on me. We discuss futurities of thirteen year old girls. And I wonder why the barbed wires at the tip of this endless wall. It's a clean wall, a dull wall thought which inspires nothing. Neat it is, at least compared to the dirty calligraphies that are yet to follow once we cross the street. A wall, that most certainly hides something, but which does not reach out in any way what so ever. A left over? A well established left-over, some sort of transitory element. You have the museum, than this stretch, then two old guys smoking argileh on the side walk, the bridge, cinema salwa, and your house. It's a transitional element, shooting straight forward, character less, identity less.

« It's where the garden show takes place every year. » I can see from your balcony a building which brings back images of mandate architecture, almost disappearing in an agglomeration of trees with thick foliage. I see a rectangle of orange and a series of longue lamps. A weird combination I think, between a miniature castles, like a glitch on a familiar place.

A tight entrance...then a green stretch...and people in all sorts of appearances, and garden furniture, spread around in a green context is what I see. Every one is smiling, women in their thirties, siliconed, from different origins, who can only express their appreciation in French. Its no longer a castle, rather an exhibition, of unlikely spaces, considering the scarcity of gardens in Beirut anyway.



حديقة بارك بلدية بيروت
الفسحات والمساحات الخضراء
والحديقة العامة في بارك بيروت
واحة بيئية فريدة وضرورة
حياتية لصحة المواطنين

At the entry point, the visitors are asked whether they want a regular seat that goes for the price of five thousand liras, or a "primo" seat, generally pronounced as "brimo", which would cost you fifteen thousand liras, and would grant you a seat at the second level, where, if you really are a V.I.P, you get to sit in one of the very few enclosed chambers that have air conditioned ventilation. Upon entering the site you are asked to deposit at the entrance or at the police station any possible licensed weapon you may be carrying, as well as cell phones or any communication device, in order to prevent any possible cheating from happening.

Women are hardly found on site, this is why they enter for free if they are ever to enter. And if such an unlikely scenario is to occur it is preferable for the woman to be accompanied by a male companion. This implies that the user group of the site now is, in its majority masculine. The age group of men practicing the site ranges from early twenties to late seventies. Gamblers are mostly with low income, seeking to make a quick fortune, going home penniless more often than not.



– The famous Bsharah el Khoury turn we stop very frequently. Against the endless wall a military tank is parked. I spotted it a while ago. It was not there during our after school walks, a tank which coordinates perfectly with the preexisting barbwire. I look at the soldier, bored as he is; I wonder as to how he can stand it, with no interesting view in the surrounding, standing in this place of transience, it must be very boring, what he does.

Now that I think about it, the characterless wall has gained a certain dimension in this new context, one that has become recently a very familiar site in this city, a sight of tanks and gigolo like soldiers. The identity less wall has gained a function. Now I know for sure, just by the sight of the security measures places along it, that some person of some importance, lives behind it. It has become part of yet another security cluster.

The 'area' does not seem to acquire an entity in my mind. It's a smell, a wall, a tank; nothing in depth not even a skin to be pierced. I've never searched for the entrance, never located it.

I can't associate the 'area' with what is called 'L'hippodrome de Beyrouth'...

The Site in the City of Today

Approaching the site in its current contemporary condition is very much determined by its physical translation in the city. The study will focus on analyzing the elements of containment imposed on the site, as well as its nature as an urban void.



Contextualizing the Object

25



Defining Urban Conditions

The site is located in a highly residential zone, of mostly Sunni inhabitants, to the west, and Christian to the east, it connects in a straight line to the downtown, passing through Sodeco, thus directly connected to the main economic hub in Beirut, yet does not benefit from that in anyway, considering the very enclosed nature of its activity.

Recently, a new tunnel was created linking the Mathaf road to Corniche el Naher area, thus accelerating the car experience of passing by the site, and increasing its visual neutrality and urban alienation. This notion of alienation picks up some of the traits of paths that Kevin Lynch developed in his book *The Image of the City*, where he identifies the importance of designing paths in the city, in relation to one another, but also in relation to the nodes of the city. Thus, for a site like this one, the experience of passing by it should not be a rushed highway one, but rather a more pedestrians friendly, with slow motion like attributes that would allow the city dwellers to acknowledge first the presence of the site, and second to appreciate its spatial qualities, as a unique phenomenon in the city of Beirut.



Residential
 Institutional
 Green

Creation of a tunnel which increased the neutrality of the site, at the level of the city

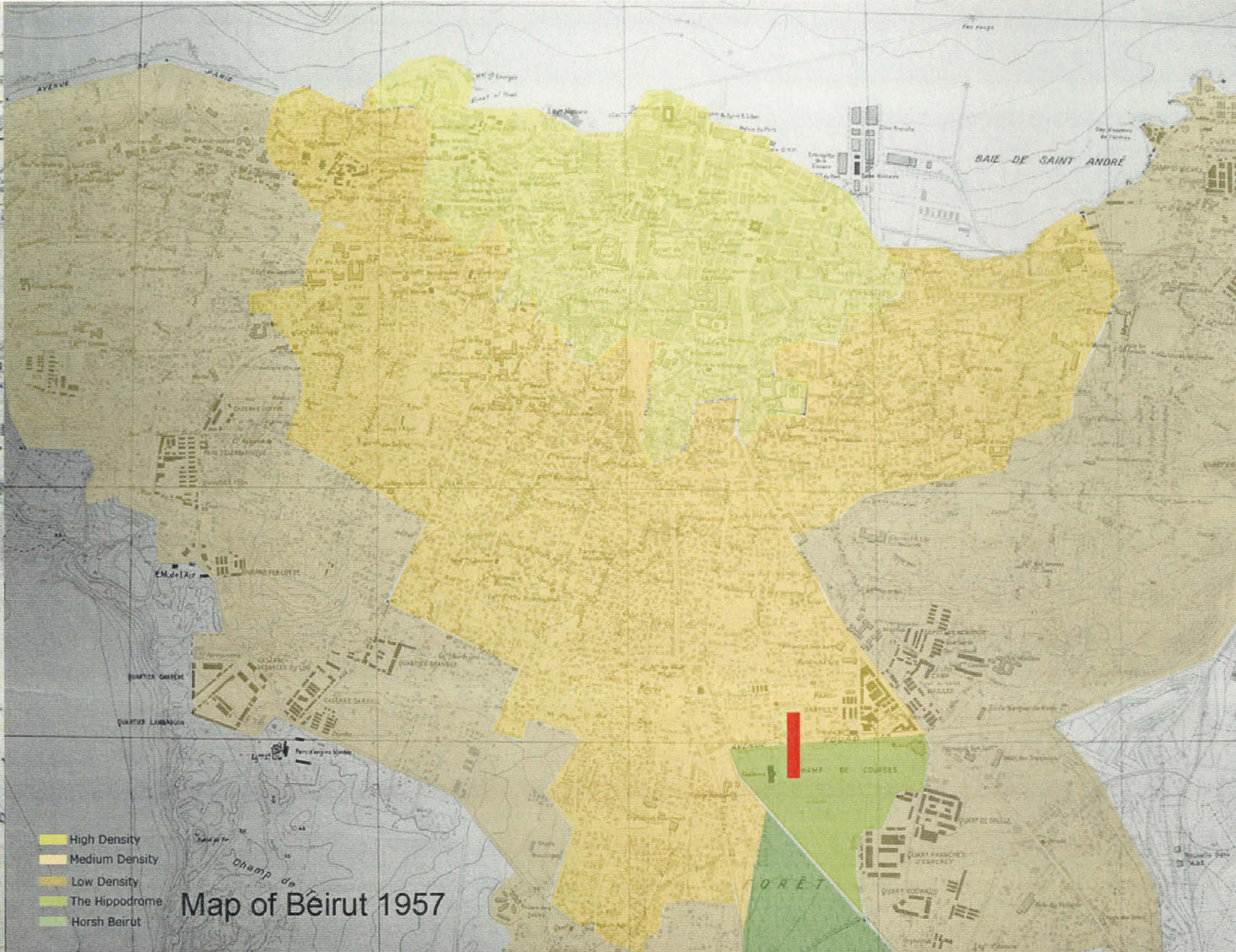
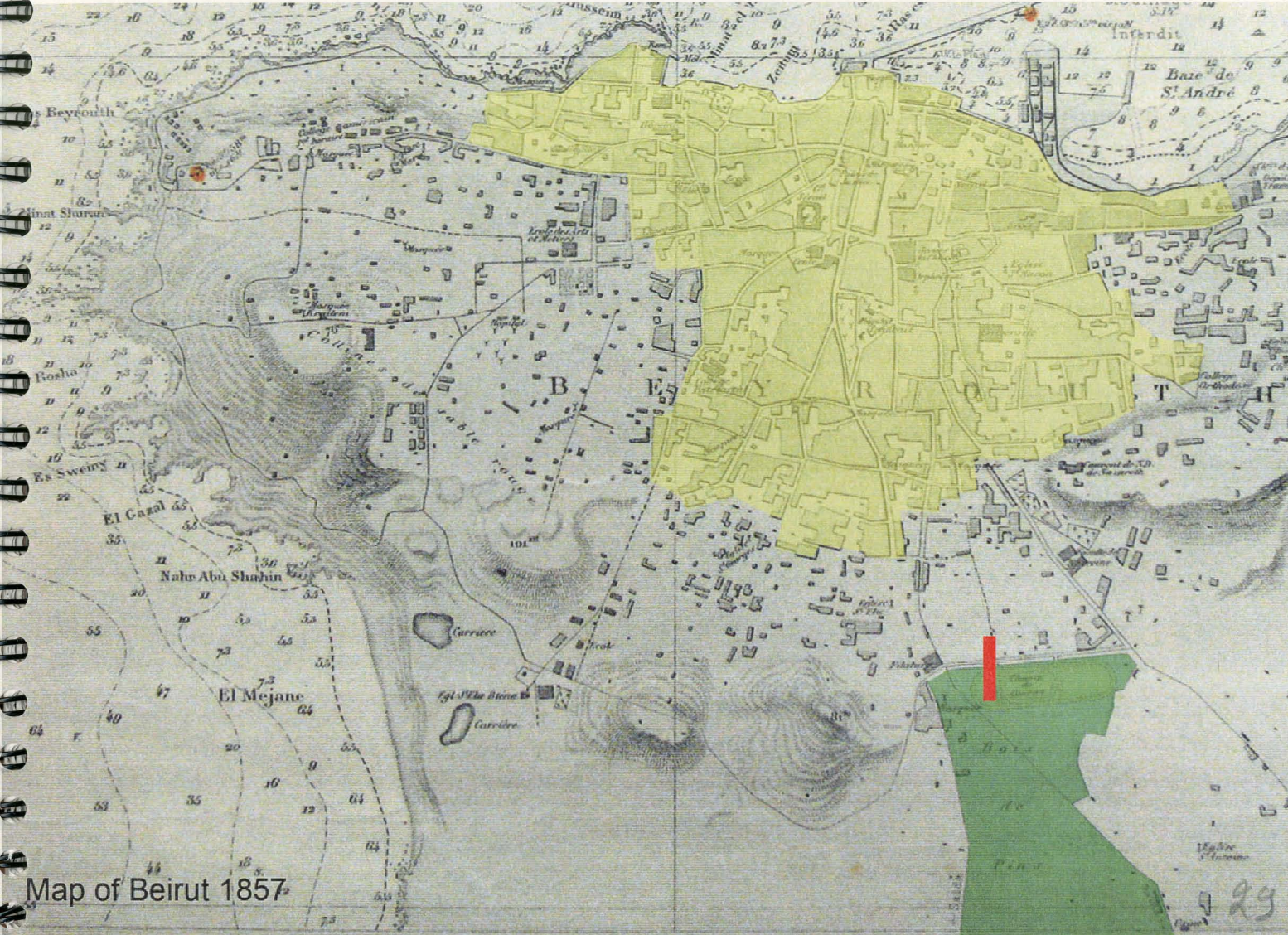
Mapping the Void



Growth of the City around the Site

Before understanding the site as an object in a congested city, it is important to define how the site gained its physical and urban position as a void in that city. This is why a chronological superposition of maps tracing the growth of urban fabric around the site is important.

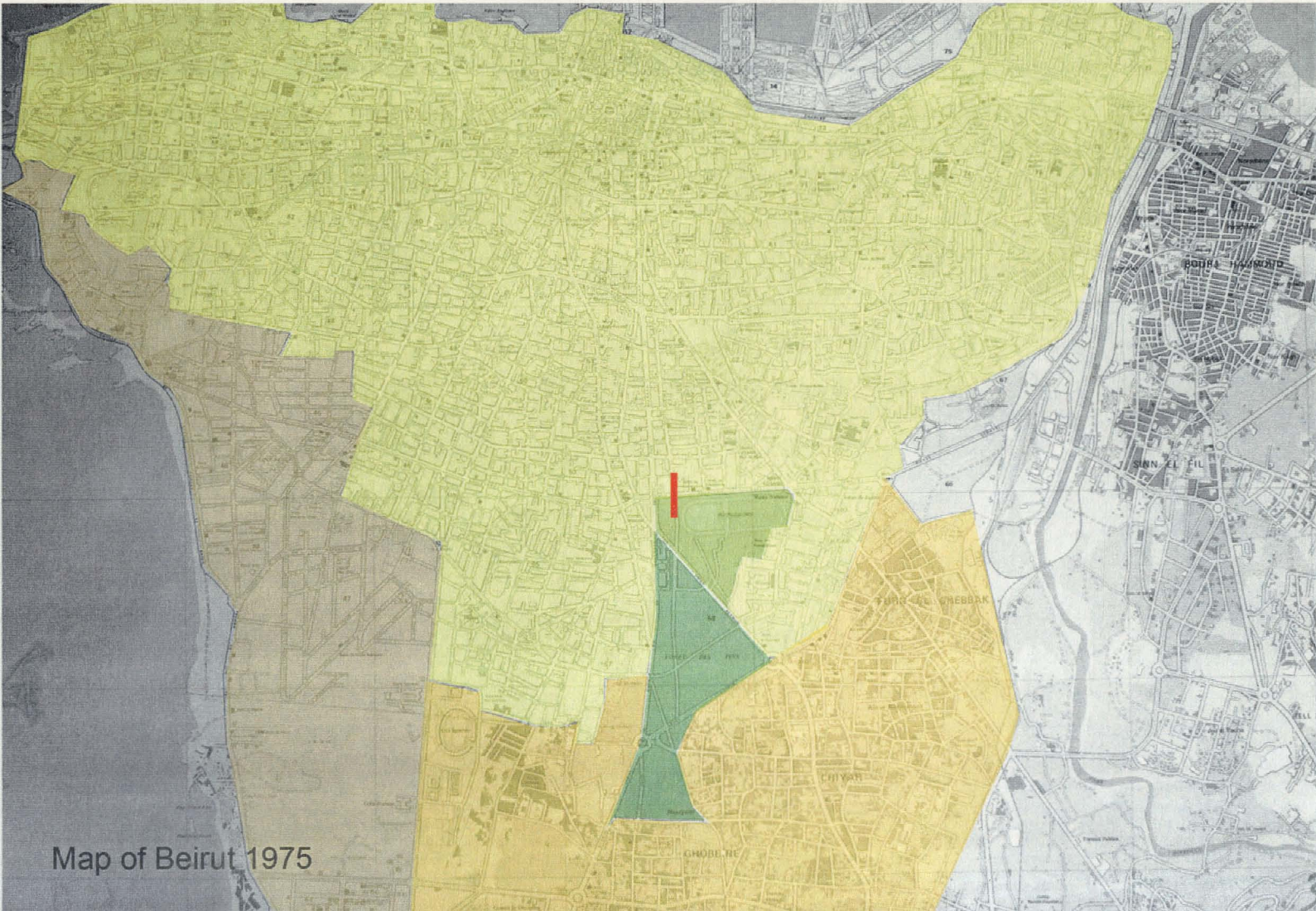
The first map depicts the site in 1857. At this point the site was none existent, since the segregation of the park from the rest of the pine forest only occurred 1915. So it depicts the future location of it, in an area that was still very rural at the time, while the old city was still majorly contained within its walls.



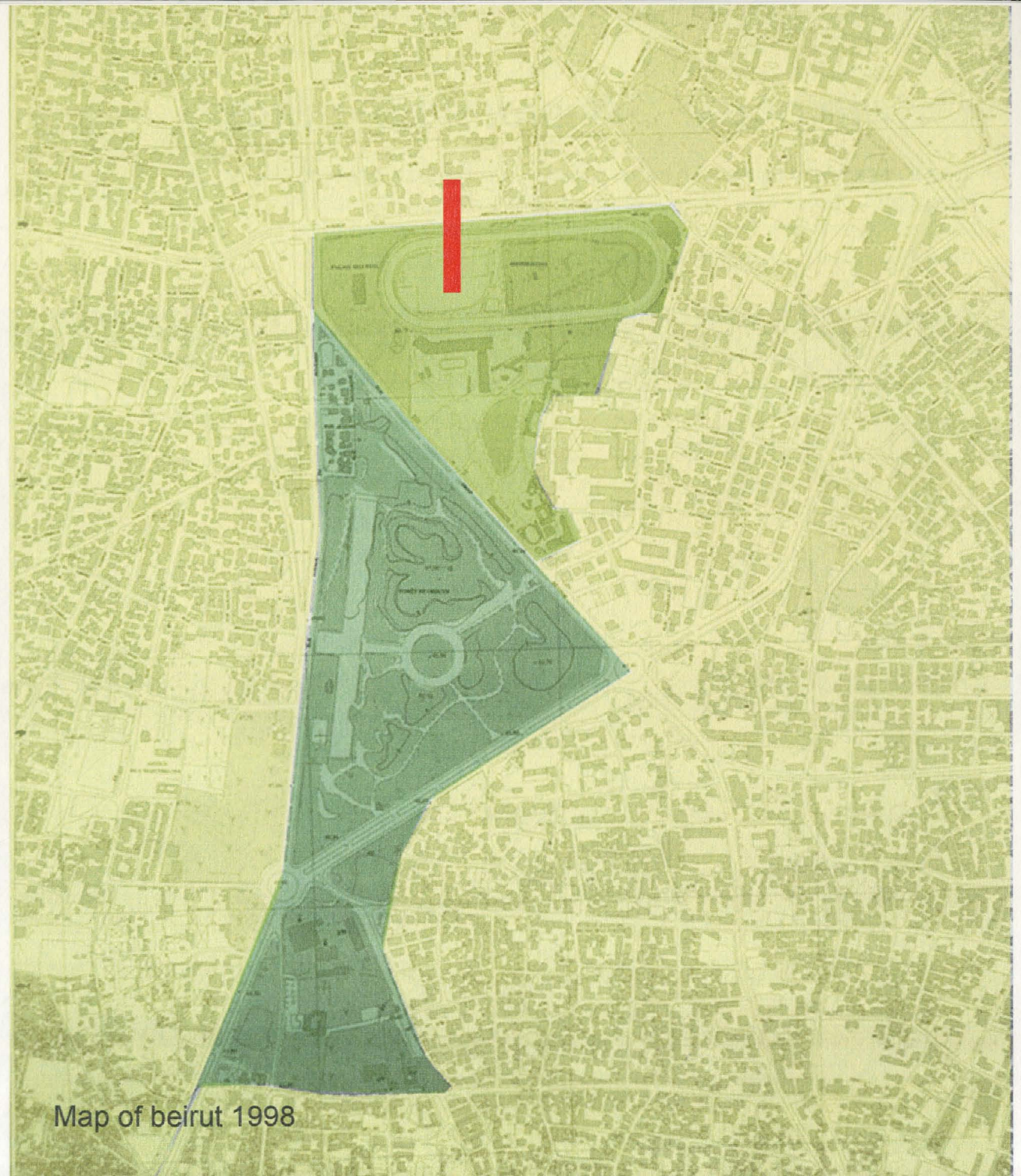
Map of Beirut 1857

Map of Beirut 1957

So as depicted by the maps, this void is one that has gradually gained this character of it. The site being at the outskirts of the old city at first, increasingly became engulfed in a highly dense one, and this the main problem behind the alienation of it, as one of the very few open places of the city.



Map of Beirut 1975



Map of beirut 1998

However it is important in the understanding of the scarcity of open spaces in Beirut, to try and map the site in relation to other open spaces, while analyzing the nature of those spaces, and whether or not they can be labeled as “voids” in the city.

Clearly, as depicted by the diagram presented here, the major if not the only two other open places in the city are the adjacent Horsh of Beirut, and the golf club, locate more to the southern side of the city.

Horsh Beirut, having previously been part of the pine forest as well as the hippodrome site, has been renovated after the burning of a major part of its trees due to the civil war. Yet the park which was designed for the public, finds its self enclosed to it, with only one third of the park being accessible to the inhabitants of the city, the rest being only accessed upon special permission from the municipality of Beirut. Based on the article written by Fadi Shayya on Horsh Beirut, the park has been closed based on a municipal decision aiming at preserving the young trees and allowing them to grow in “healthy” conditions, while also prohibiting certain practices from taking place (1). This notion of surveillance and forceful restriction of practices strongly contradicts a public space by definition. So based on the definition of an urban void presented in the introduction, the Horsh might as well be read as a green urban void, one which may be gazed upon from the outside more than actually being practiced.

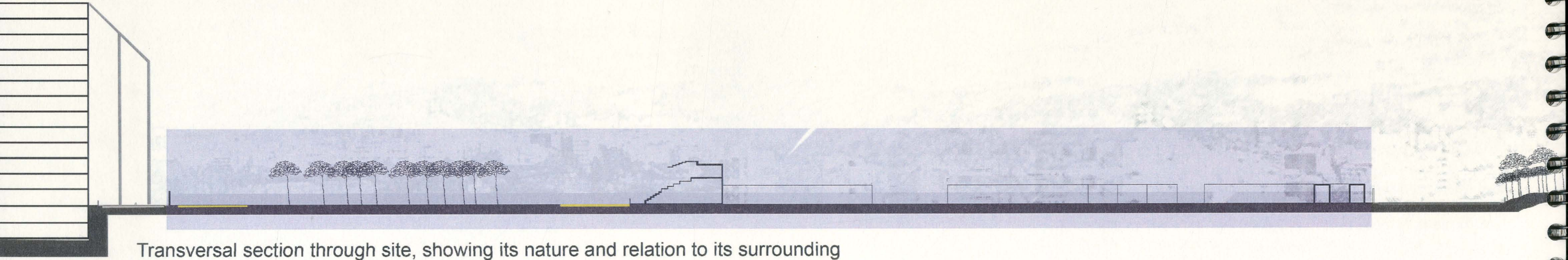
The other open space presented in this diagram is the golf club. The golf club was established in 1923, with the aim of providing the elite society of Beirut with an entertainment and sports center. It has now developed into becoming a much gentrified space, housing a golf course, a tennis center, and swimming pools, out door basketball courts. Also it houses a central building which contains a squash court and a billiard room. It also contains: “a lovely family picnic and sun-tanning garden adjacent to the swimming pool” as mentioned in its official website. (2) So this place is only practiced by members and their guest, and the membership is one which costs 5000 dollars, hence automatically dictating the type of people who would practice such a space.

This clearly brings forth the need of the city for an urban open civic park, which creates equality amongst its inhabitants.

(1). Shayya, F. *Enacting Public Space* .p2.

(2). <http://www.golfclub.org.lb/>





Transversal section through site, showing its nature and relation to its surrounding

The Void Translating into an Island

Due to the nature of its containment, the site has been transformed into a green island in the city. It differs from the rest of the urban fabric in its openness and green lushness, that being one of the main elements of surprise when entering the site, which in itself is a restricted act, which almost all the city dwellers are deprived from. This is clearly depicted in a brief narrative written upon entering the back of the site, for the first time:

« I approach the site, this side of it, being the Tayyouni side, I had never experienced before, I am stopped at the gate by a man, one amongst a few, sitting around chatting at the entrance: "I have an appointment with Mr. Nizar Nasrallah...can you please direct me to his office?" After a few phone calls, the man who had asked for my name and checked my identity, allowed me in, with a few directions as to how to reach the stadium from behind, where the administration offices were. I had entered a place which very few regular city dwellers had ever accessed.

For the first time, in the city of Beirut, I was walking in an open space, hearing the sounds of birds chirping instead of the noise of the traffic and the honks. It was as if I was transposed into another place, another context, another world.

The greenery grew every where around me; half landscaped, half crazy...the place needed some maintenance but still it was breath taking, just like that.

At one point, right before reaching the piazza facing the back of the stadium, there was a barrel vault, or at least that was the first image that crossed my mind upon seeing two rows of big trees, the foliage of which being so tightly intersected that it truly created a natural barrel vault!! How's that for a scenery in Beirut!!!

The site came out to me as an enchanted island rising from a destitute ruin.»







A black and white photograph of a long, high stone wall. The wall is constructed from large, roughly-hewn blocks and runs diagonally from the upper left towards the lower right. To the right of the wall, a person in a light-colored coat and dark pants stands on a path, looking towards the wall. The background shows a street with trees and a building. The overall scene is somewhat desolate and emphasizes the scale and presence of the wall.

The Wall: Element of Containment

The condition of the site as an urban object is caused mostly by major elements of containment which denies it any sort of communication with the exterior, rendering it an impenetrable entity in the city. So the study now will focus on those containing factors, being the wall, the streets and surrounding zones, which are of rather different nature than that of the site.

The wall is the first element of the site, if not the only one, the inhabitants of the city come into interaction with, on a daily basis. A factor of mystery it is for sure, for it participates in the construction of the aura and the imagined scenarios people fabricate in their minds about the site, since most of them can't pierce it or see beyond it, this is clearly reflected in the narrative of the intrigued, and also in the graphic representation of this narrative, as it is shown in the image here.

This said the site only exists for most of the city inhabitants as a wall, which participates in the objectification of the site, both physically and in the minds of the people.

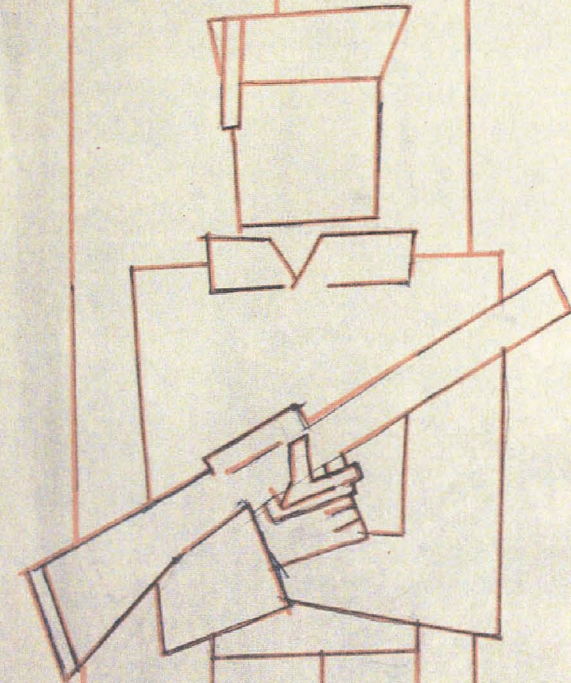
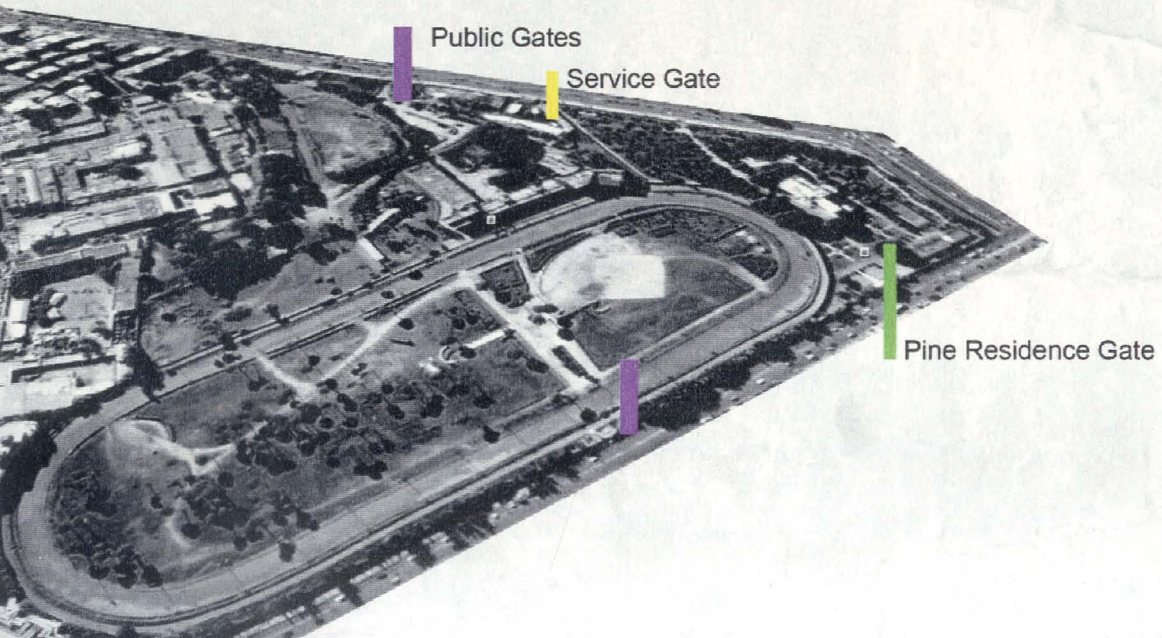
Based on that, the mental image most city dwellers have of the site is strongly influenced by the physical appearance of this wall.

So a full description of the wall needs to be presented. It is a 2.40 meter high wall, made of yellowish brown stone. The state of the stone, in terms of aging and cleanness very much differs from when the wall is enclosing the site, to when it's bordering the pine residence, for at the level of the pine residence, the wall has been resorted, the stone is new, but also mounted by a metal fence, thus increasing its height and the security measure of the pine residence.

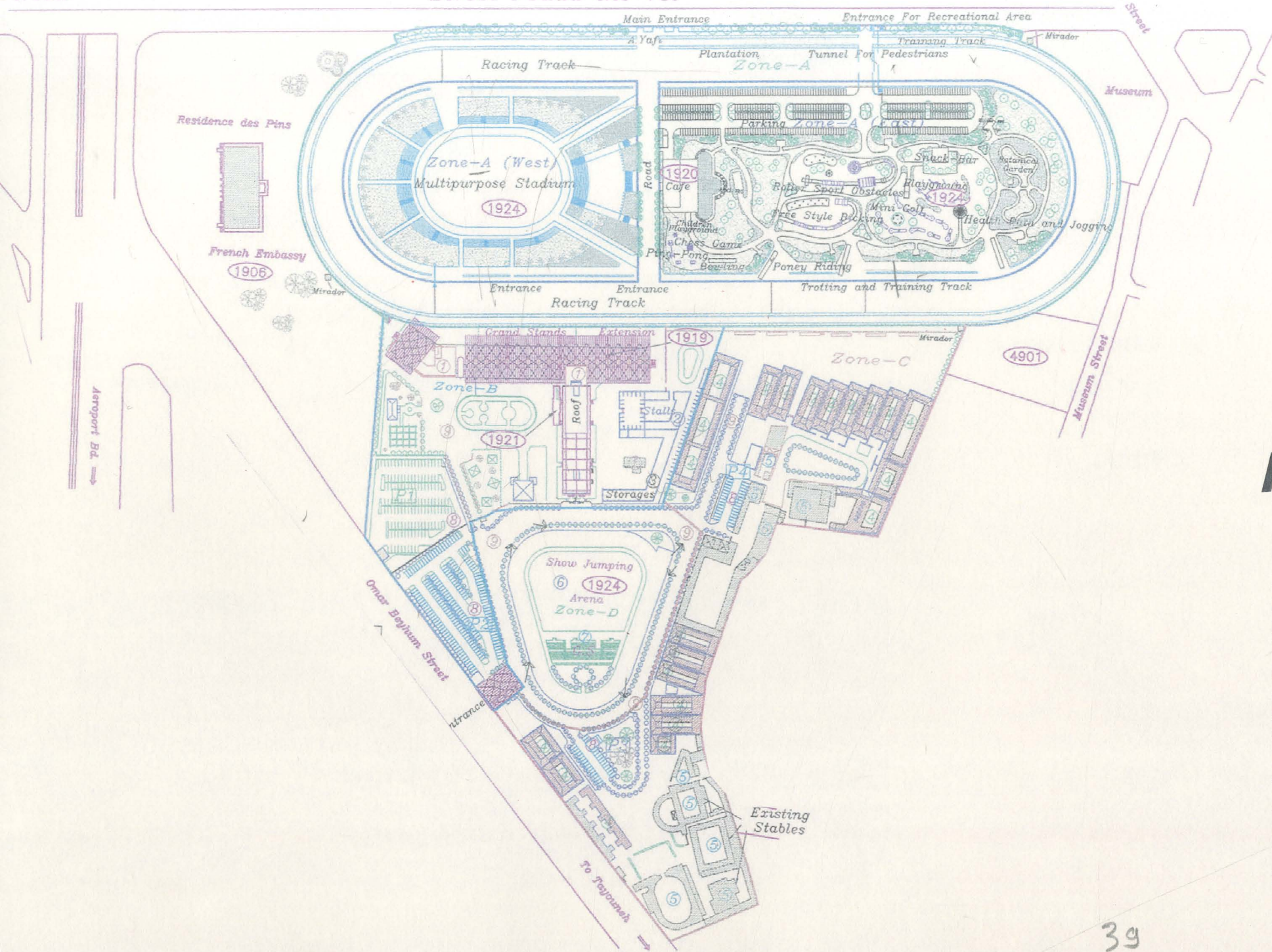


graphic translation of the intrigued narrative

It runs continuously around three sides of the site, the northern, western and southern sides, punctuated by three types of openings. The first type is the one which leads the "public" into the hippodrome on Sundays for the race, it is present both on the northern side, referred to as the Mathaf road, and on the southern side, referred to as the Tayyouni road. The second type of openings is the service openings, only present on the Tayyouni side, next to the first type of opening, which mostly is used to transfer supplies for the horses into the site, as well as a horse gate, for when the horses are taken out by their trainers for a promenade around the site, this being the second incidental (and very pleasant) manifestation of the site, and its "inhabitants" at the level of the city. As to the third type of openings, it is the "fortified" gate leading to the pine residence. This gate, which is a passage for quite a different user group into the site, is a very intense instant, in the practice of walking by the wall. A military tank is positioned at this point, as well as a soldier booth, concrete blocks and barbwire, which add a whole new dimension to the wall at this point, and increase its alienation somehow due to the repellent feel it creates for anyone who tries to practice walking by it, especially that at this point the pedestrian is forced to go down on the road, in order to cross over this "barricade".

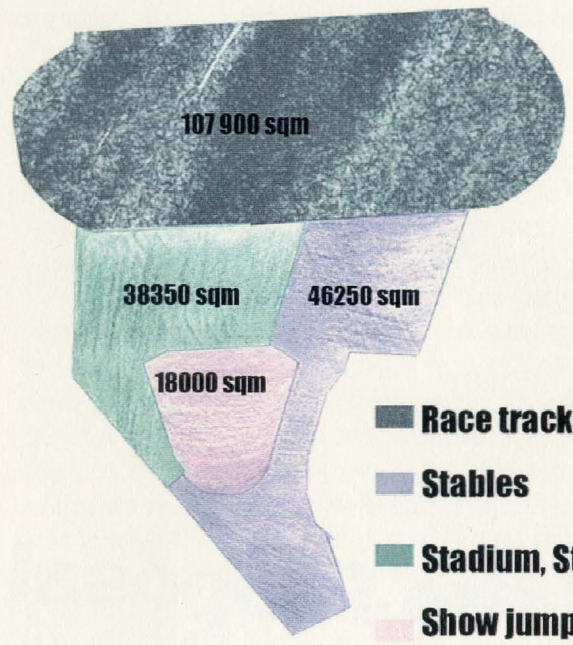


graphic translation of instance in the indifferent narrative

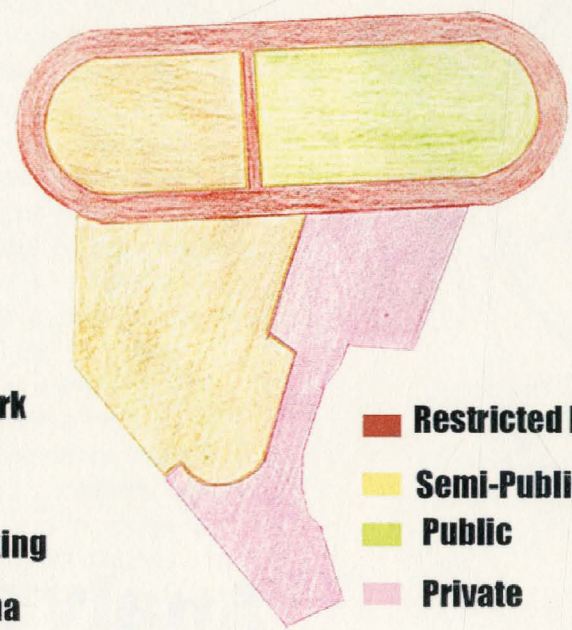


Analyzing the Proposal

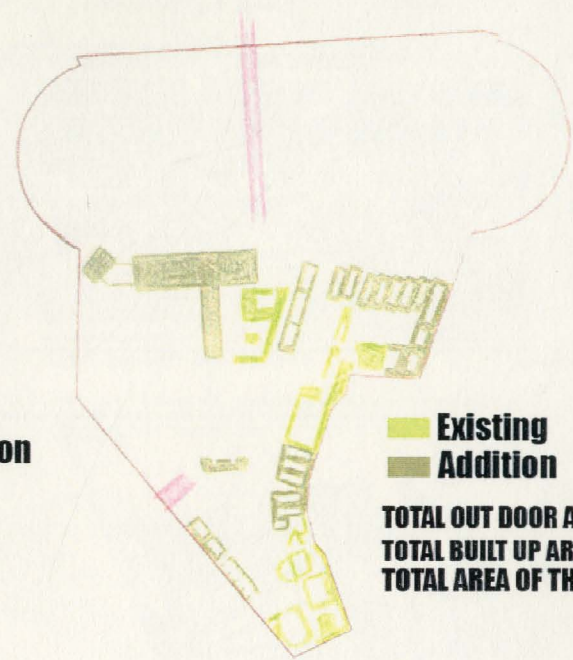
1992, once the war was over, reconstruction on the site was initiated; a proposed scheme was presented by Samir Ali Ahmad, which offered a new stadium, a twenty first century structure, which was to also include restaurants and a larger accommodation for spectators. The master plan was designed to also include a horse back riding school, an out door multipurpose terrace and a public park. The part dedicated to the service and sustainability of the hippodrome was redesigned based on the model of the traditional Lebanese architecture, which, added to the language of the stadium, was meant to create acknowledgment of both the past and the future in the site. However the major issues of the site were not tackled, like the issues of exclusivity, of making maximum use of the site and appealing to a wider variety of city dwellers. Also the proposed project practiced a high level of amnesia, disregarding the war years and the impact they had on the site and on the country.



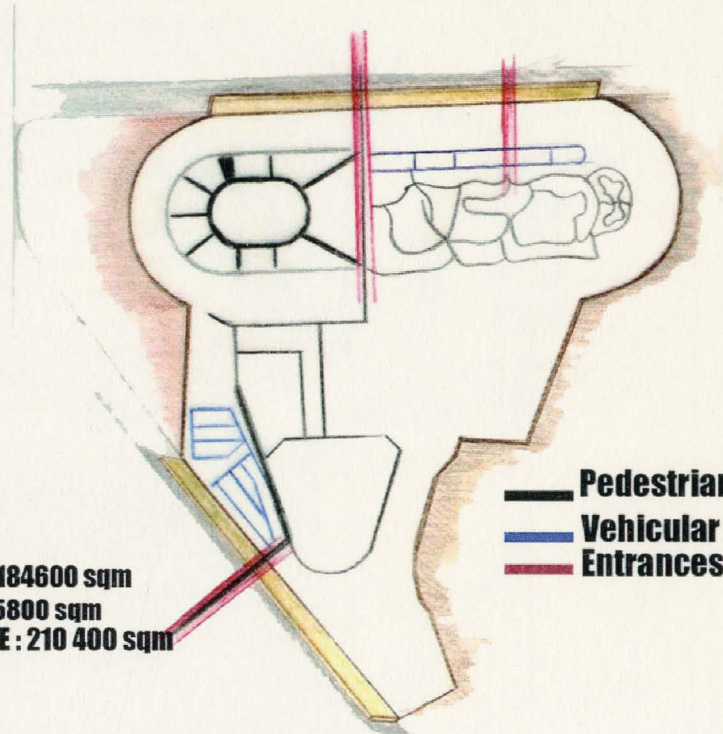
- Race tracks and Park
- Stables
- Stadium, Stall, Parking
- Show jumping Arena



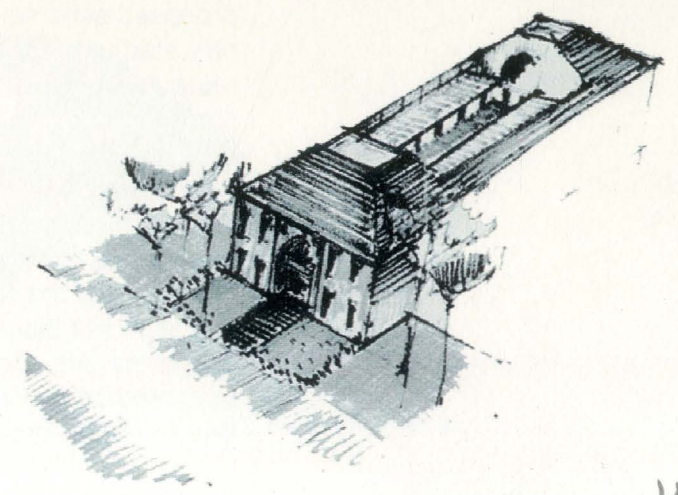
- Restricted Function
- Semi-Public
- Public
- Private



- Existing
 - Addition
- TOTAL OUT DOOR AREA: 184600 sqm
TOTAL BUILT UP AREA: 25800 sqm
TOTAL AREA OF THE SITE : 210 400 sqm



- Pedestrian Access
- Vehicular Access
- Entrances



The Intervention

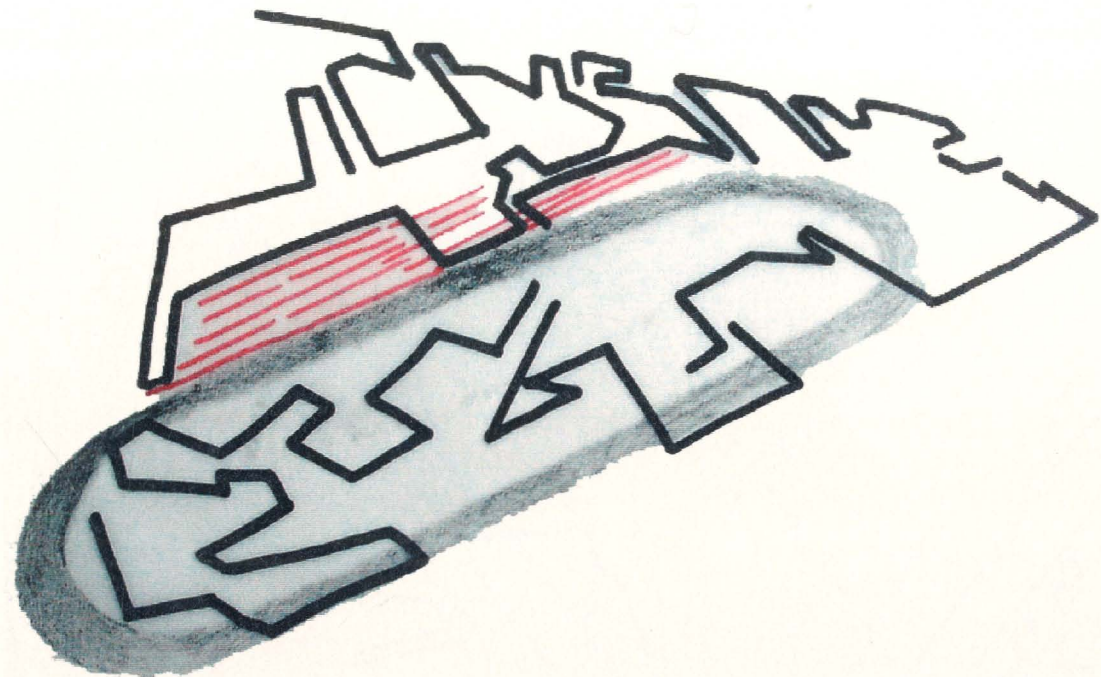
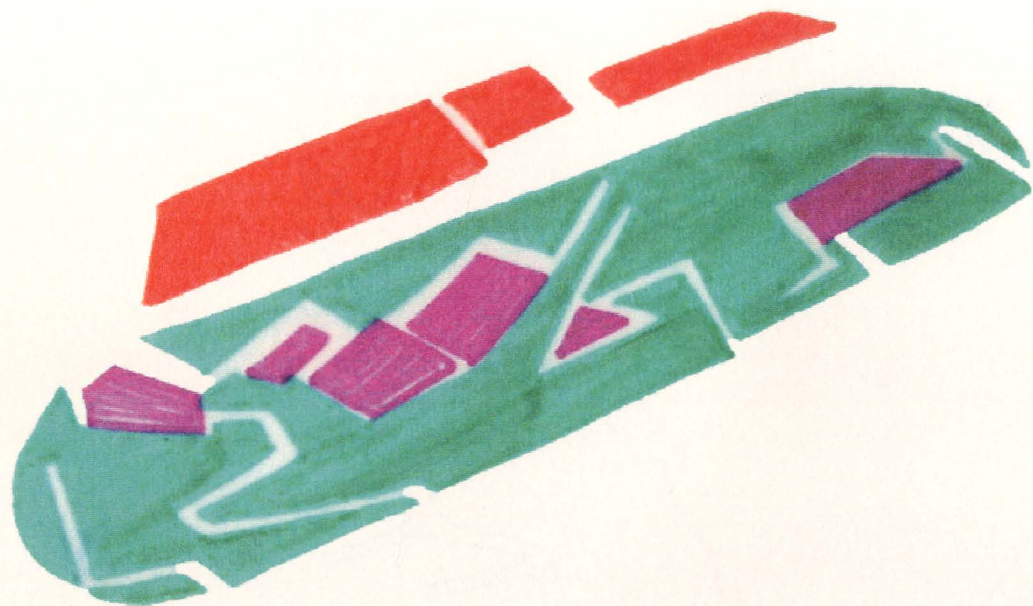
After having analyzed the site in its current condition, while relating to it the impact many factors have on transforming it into what it is today, a proposal for the site will be presented.

Refocusing The Approach



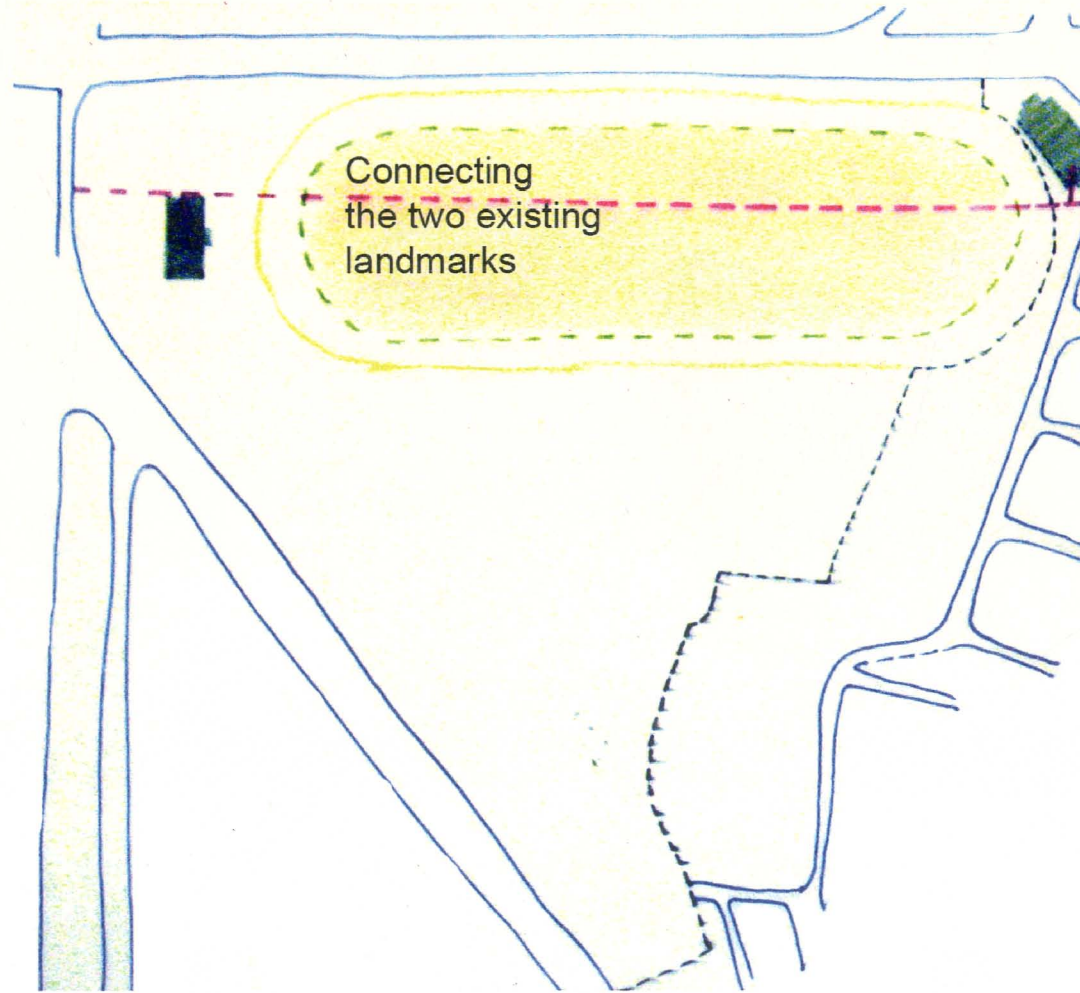
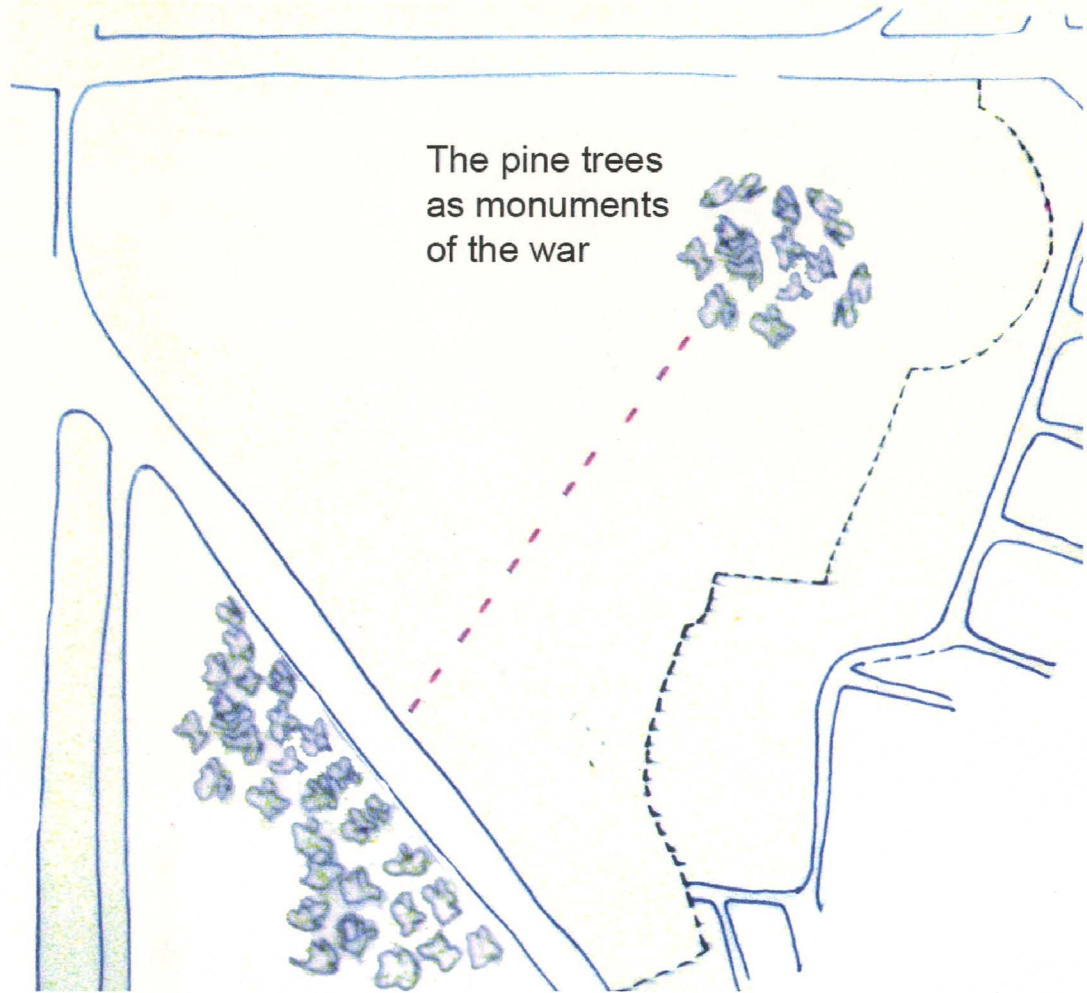
Deconstructing the Wall

Envisioning an intervention has been a work in process, going in parallel with all the research, field work and analysis. It started first with brief design exercise, aiming at resolving the most direct physical aspects of the site, such as the wall, to which the approach was first based on deconstructing it and making it more penetrable, as shown in the perspective and the diagram presented here by.



Deconstructing the Site

However, as the understanding of the site was becoming more and more deep, a shift in the design approach occurred, which aimed first as a primary exercise at deconstructing the site, element by element trying to read it only as a result of each of those elements. This process is shown by the series of diagrams presented here.



Still within the same exercise of deconstruction, links were investigated in an attempt to stitch back the site to the city through pedestrian and vehicular connections (diagram 1). Diagram 2 here shows the negative space formed by the possible connections, translating into mini sites. Those subdivided entities would allow for many programs to take place within the boundaries created by the connections.

diagram 1

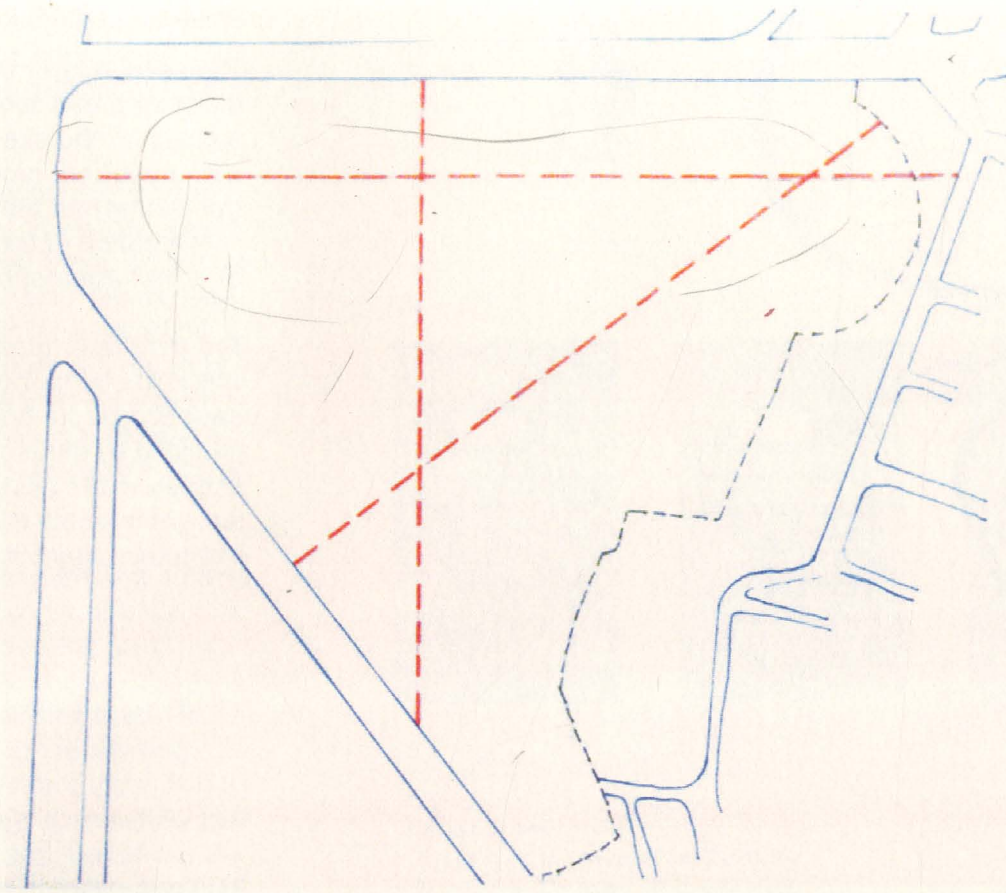
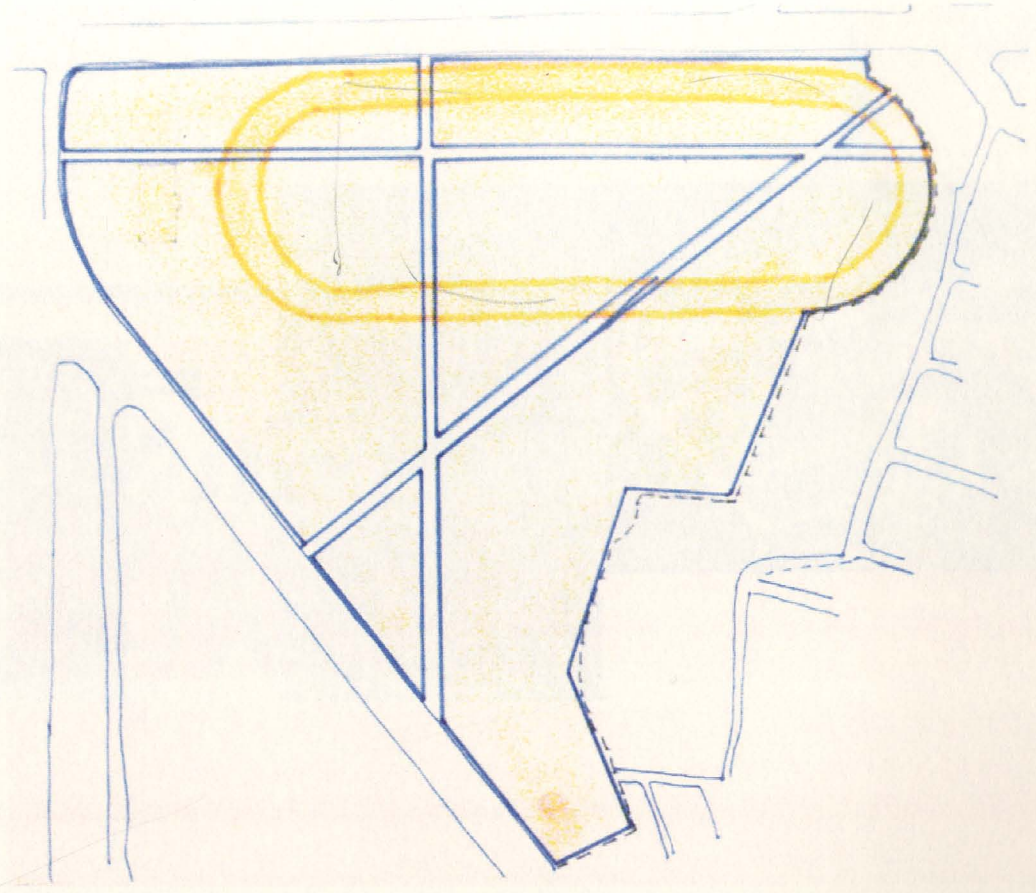
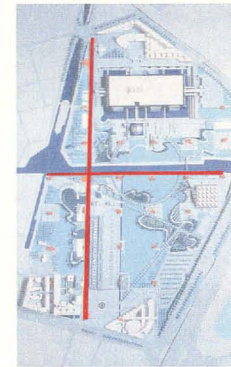
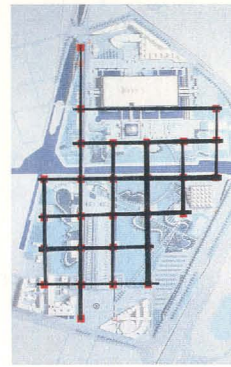
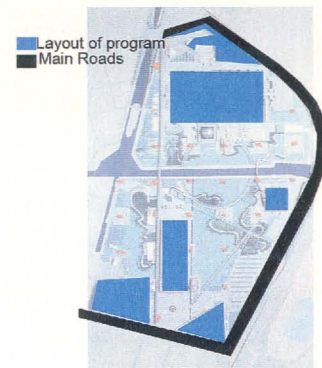
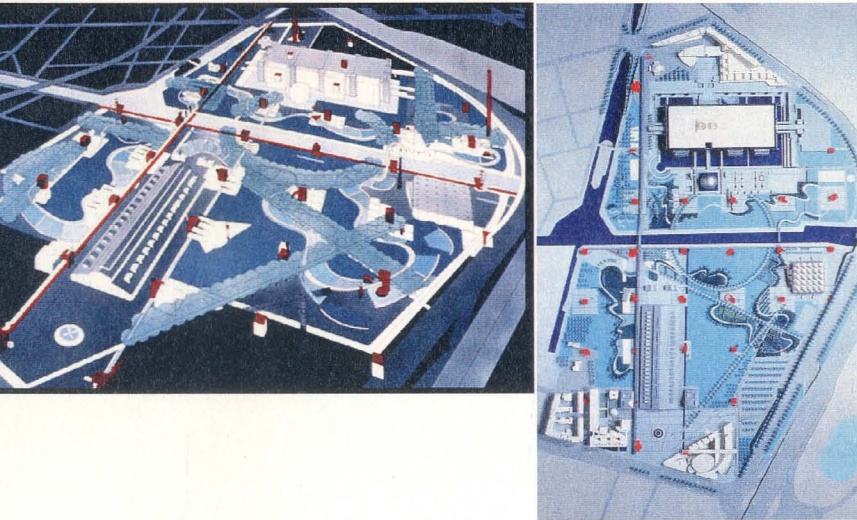


diagram 2



The Case Study: Park de la Villette



This approach led to the investigation of a case study, being the design proposal of Bernard Tshumi for the Park de la Villette in Paris, which was actually the winning competition. Tshumi's approach was mostly inspired by his deconstructive theories on architecture, aiming at the "none meaning" and filling up the 25 hectares of space, turning the site into a "21st century urban Park".

The approach was based on a layering of three main systems, the first being a grid of 120 meters interval, with a red architectural folly placed at each of its intersecting point, creating some sort of small landmarks, or navigation references for the people practicing the huge site, the follies adding up to 35 in total.

The second layer of the project was the major connections, linking different urban zones to each other through the park, and which read as a cross on the site, each of its arms being an open covered five meter wide structure, providing the two major pedestrian routes in it, and translating into the main organizational elements of the site. This axial configuration of urban paths within the site is similar to the diagram 1, as a first attempt of linking the site back to the city.

The third layer of park de la Villette being the programmatic layer, which was organized around the axis mentioned above, thus creating easy access for pedestrians into the various programmatic attractions provided by the project.

Actually in his design proposal, Bernard Tshumi turned the former slaughter house of Paris into a multidisciplinary facility housing science institutes, music institutes as well as playgrounds for children. (1)

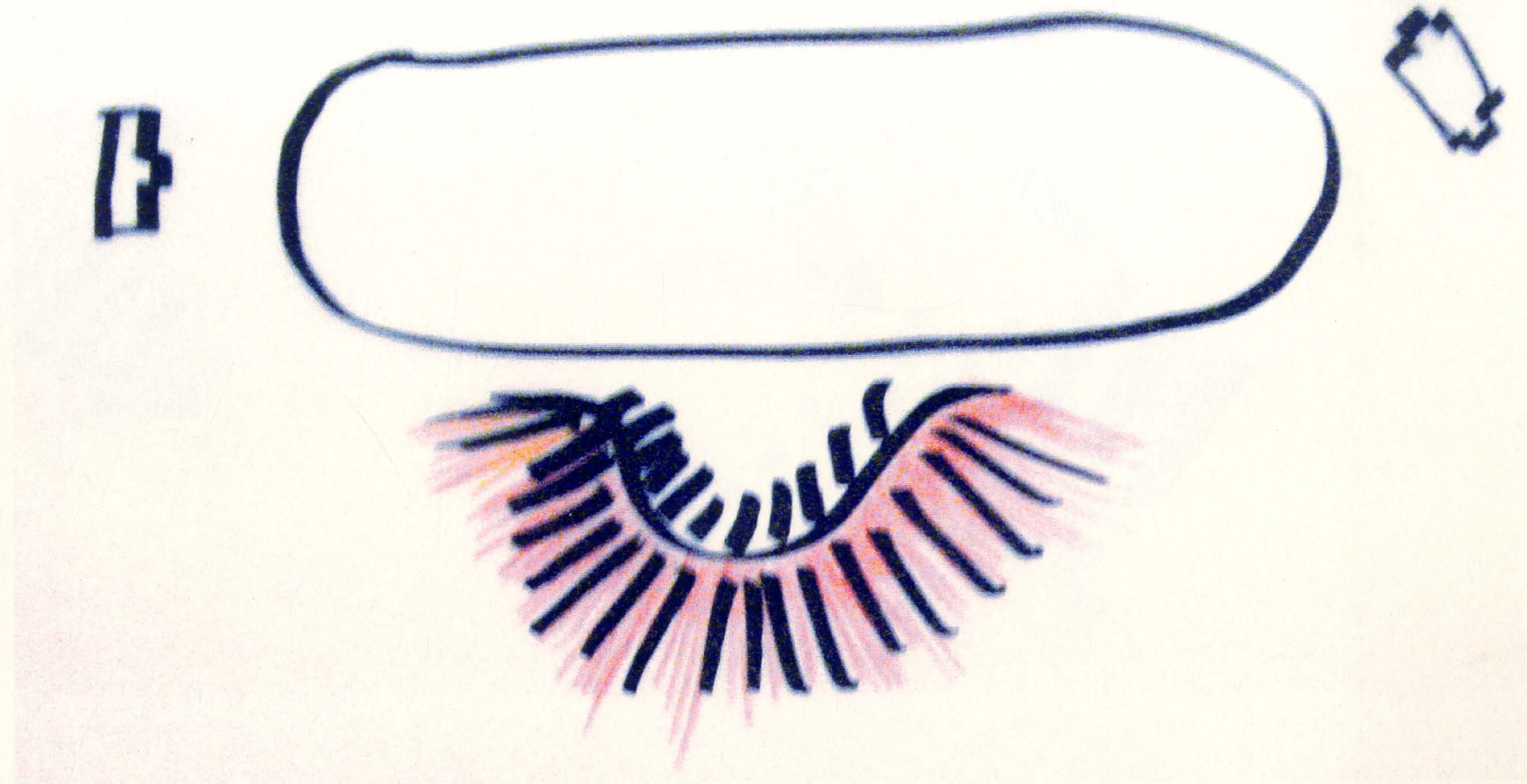
(1). <http://www.tschumi.com/home.asp>

Program Definition through Design Exercises

The cult of programmatic diversity in a public park, whether totally architecturally articulated, as is the case of park de la Villette, or landscaped green ones such as Central Park and Union Park in New York, is a strong position, claiming social equality, and reads as a clear manifestation of a democratic feel, in the appropriation of a public space: "Parks play many non-obvious roles in constructing a society. One of them is to make cities more egalitarian" (1), this said, a different design experimentation was undertaken on the site of the hippodrome of Beirut. Taking into consideration the presence of two important landmarks within its vicinities, them being the pine residence and the national museum of Lebanon, the following scenario was created, as a future intervention on the site. The pine residence is to no longer exist on the site as the residence of the French ambassador, who will be relocated somewhere else in the city, the residence and its immediate small park, being reclaimed by the Lebanese government as part of the municipality of Beirut.

The pine residence is to be turned into a private collections exposition house, displaying the residence itself, and its history as well as private collections owned by any person who wishes to display them. An addition is to be added to the museum, thus allowing access to it from the site itself. As to the hippodrome itself, it will cease to exist as a gambling racing facility in the site. This degenerating elitist activity is to be removed or relocated, because the practice of gambling needs very high security measures to prevent from cheating, which will automatically dictate a physical containment of the site, the premise against which this whole approach was constructed,

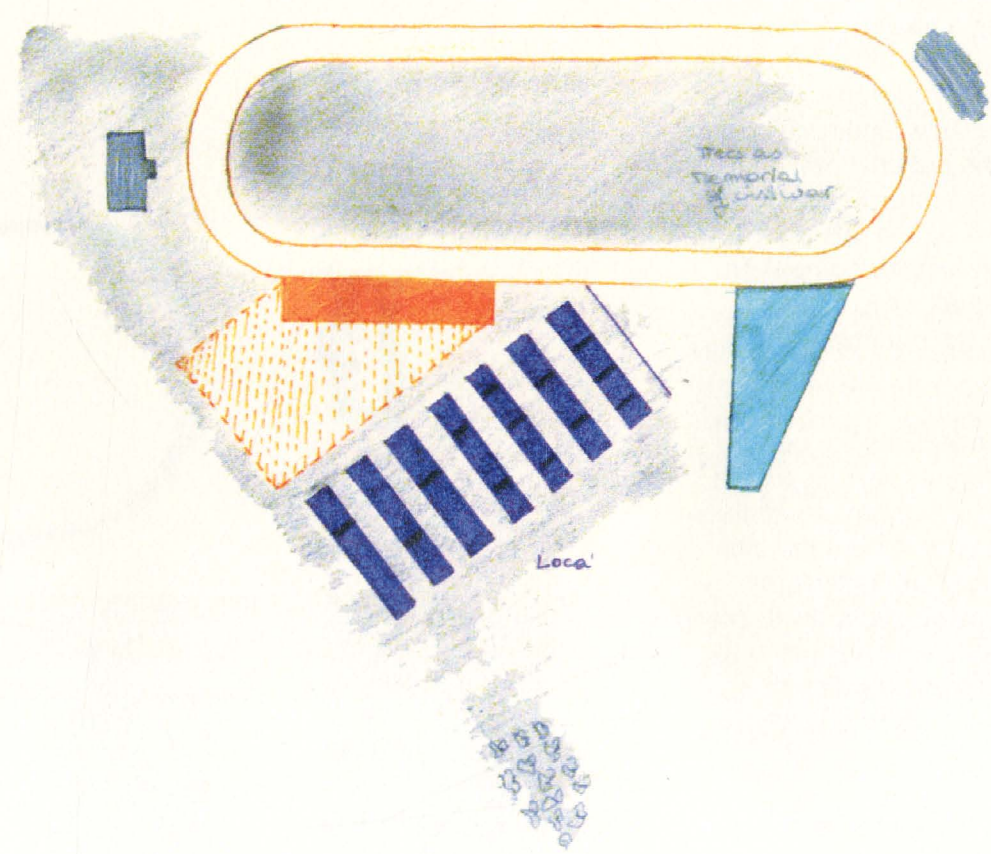
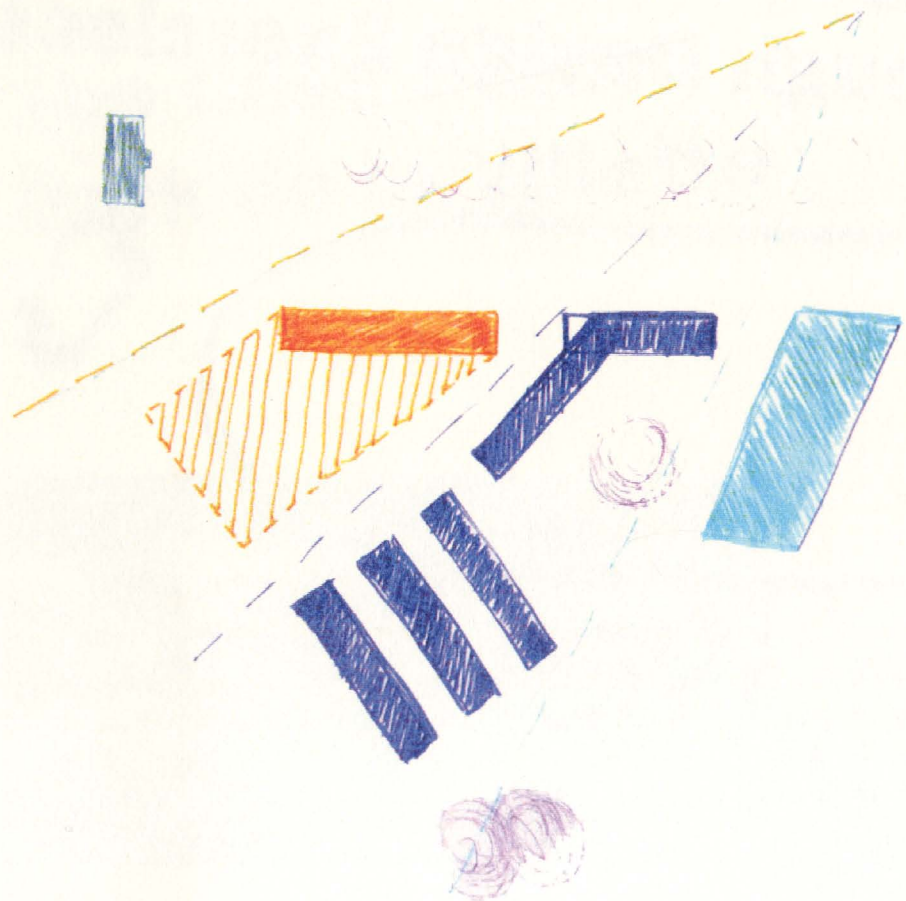
Secondly, if the horse racing is to be kept, without the gambling activity, the function itself will lose its competitive edge, since an already established cult and clientele is present in the surrounding Arab countries, such as in Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This gesture being backed by the Lynchian theory dictating that: "To pretend to preserve everything from the past would be life denying" (2) However, taking that into account and considering the fact that: "It is the familiar connections, not all the old physical things themselves that people want to retain" (3) The element of the horse and that of the tracks are to be kept on site, yet while modifying the nature of their presence.



(1). <http://www.pps.org>

(2). Lynch, K. *The Image of the City*. p 36.

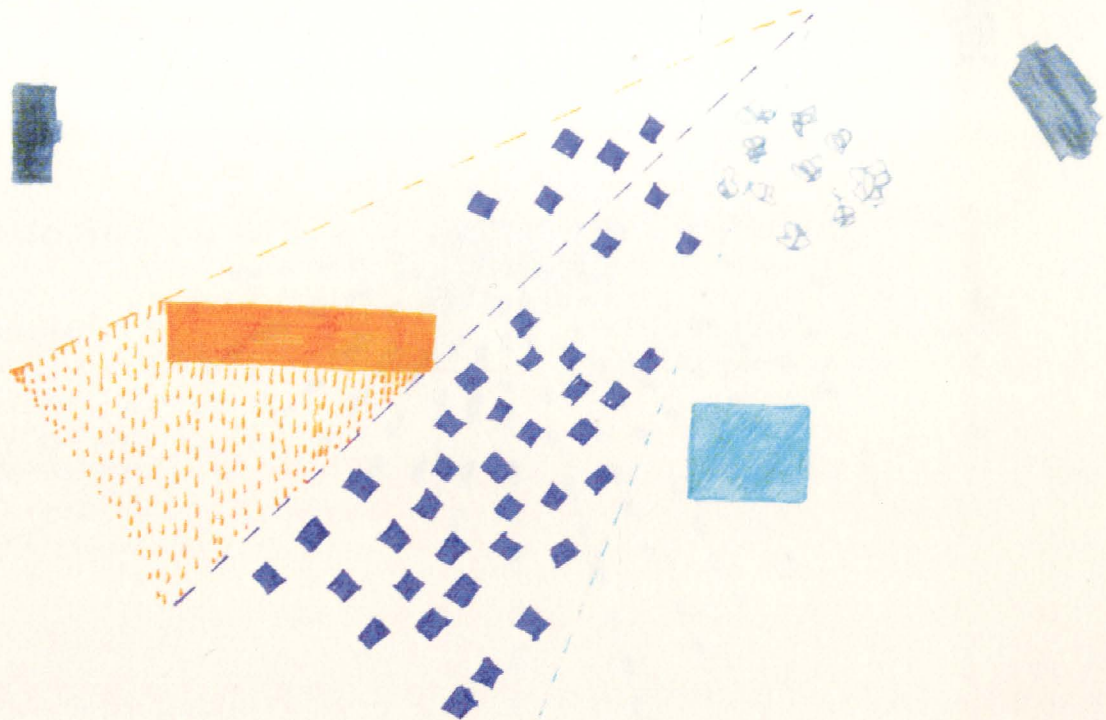
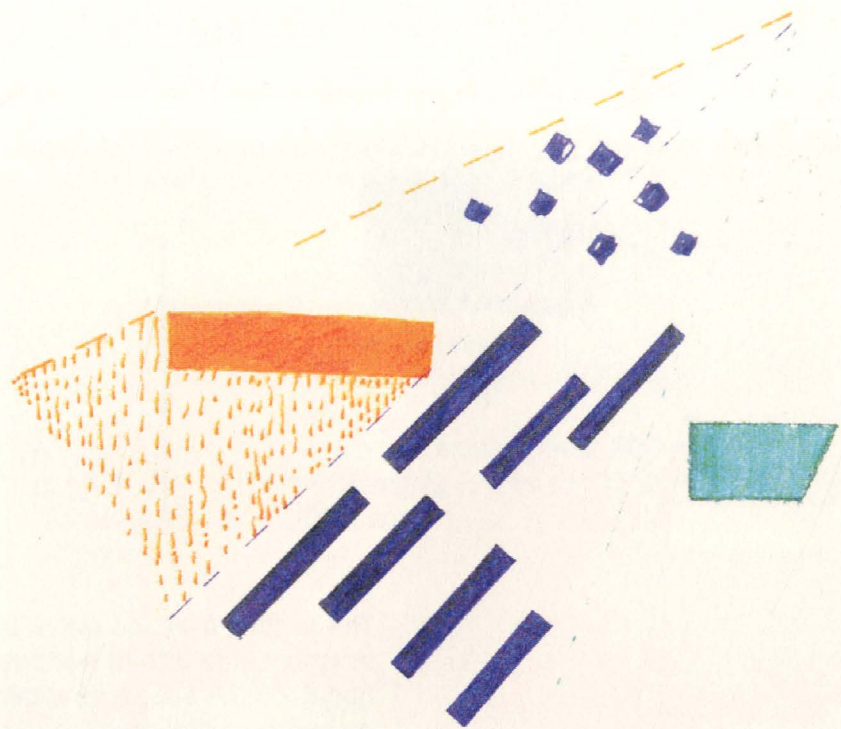
(3). Lynch, K. *The Image of the City*. p 39.

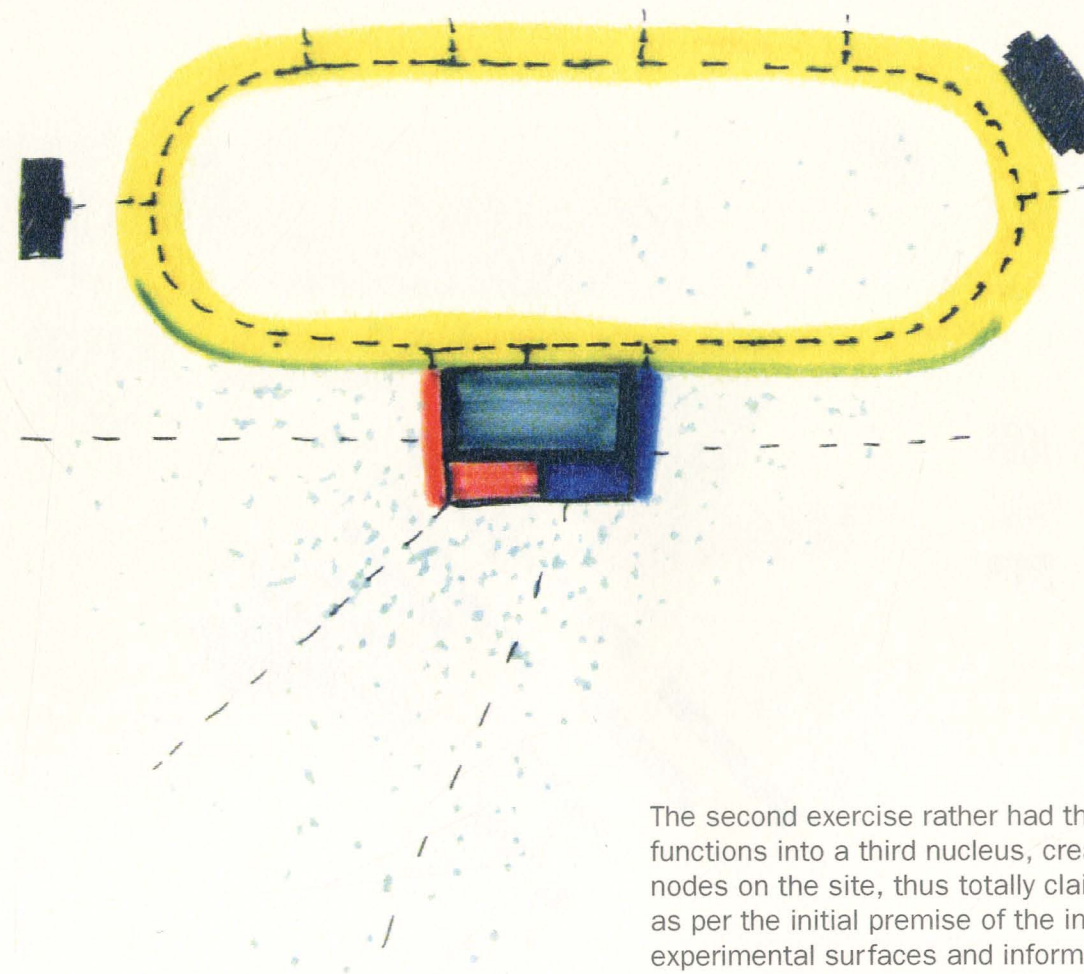
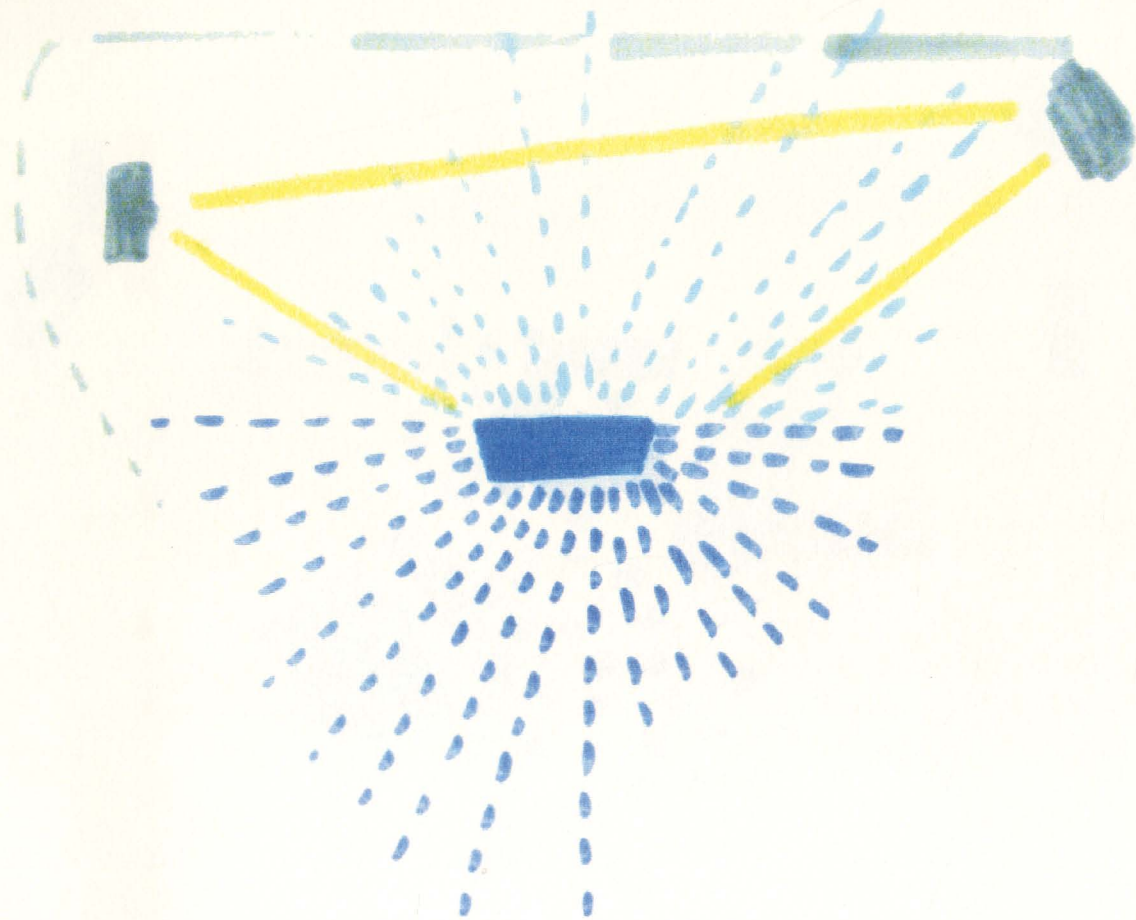


- HORSE ACTIVITY
- CIVIC FUNCTION
- SEASONAL ACTIVITY

Investigating Different Layouts

This is where two experimental exercises took place, the first aiming at spreading the various programs around the site, which translated into the total invasion of the site as shown by the series of experiments presented hereby.





The second exercise rather had the reverse impact, concentrating those functions into a third nucleus, creating a polarity between three civic nodes on the site, thus totally claiming the site as a civic property, as per the initial premise of the intervention, while allowing for open experimental surfaces and informal activities to happen in the open spaces around those three nodes, as depicted by the second series of experimental diagrams. Note that the third node created here is a civic center, housing a horse riding school, a music school, a dance school, as well as an outdoor performance stage, which would house for major public events.

A detailed programmatic description will presented here after

Horse Riding School

- Horse stables and stalls: 5500 sqm
- Storage: 300 sqm
- Show jumping Arena: 5 000 sqm
- Stadium: 850 sqm
- Major tracks: 36 400 sqm

Dancing School

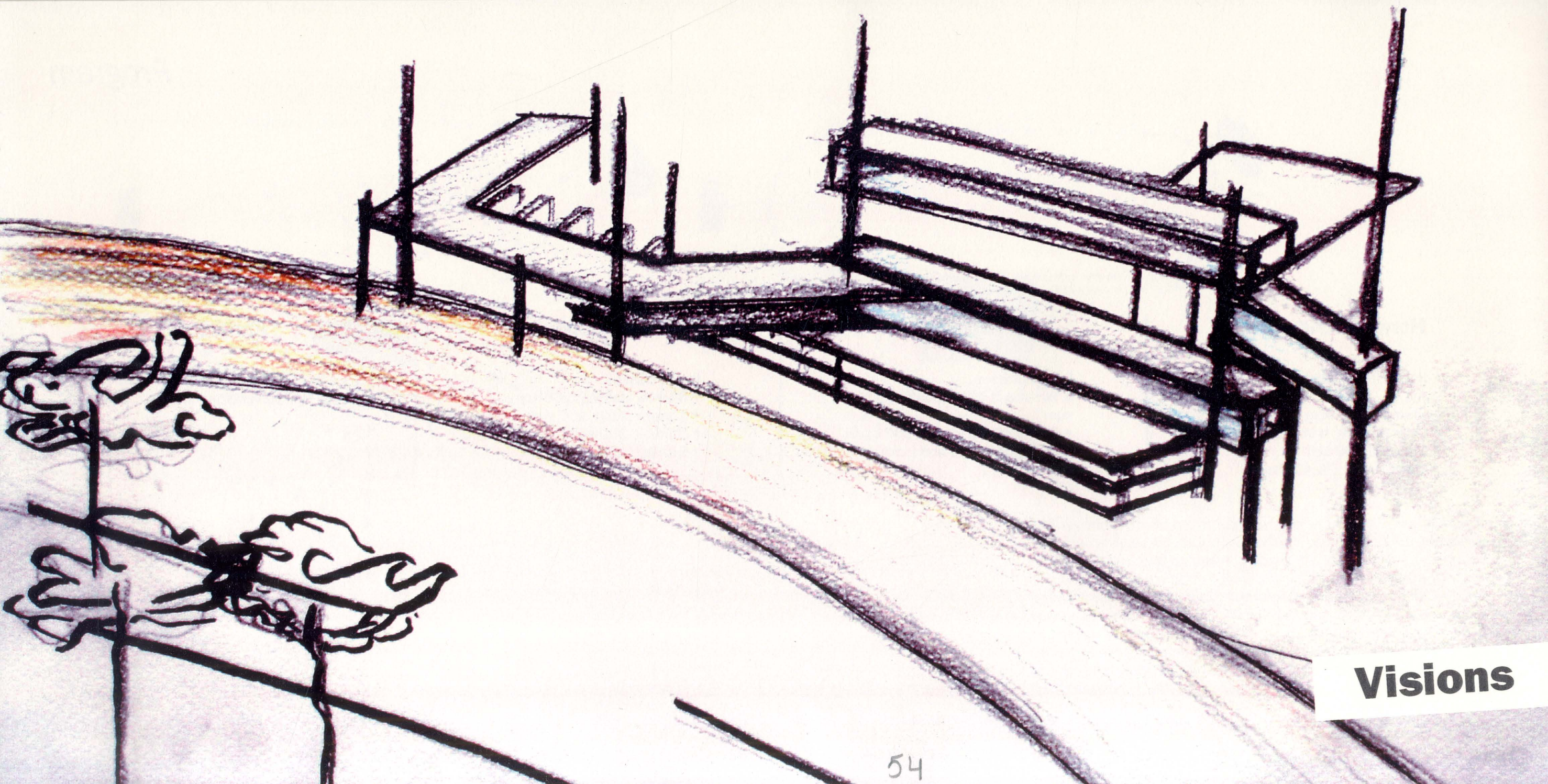
- Dance classes:
- Two major class rooms: 500 sqm
 - 2 small class rooms: 200 sqm
 - Changing rooms and lockers: 200 sqm

Music School

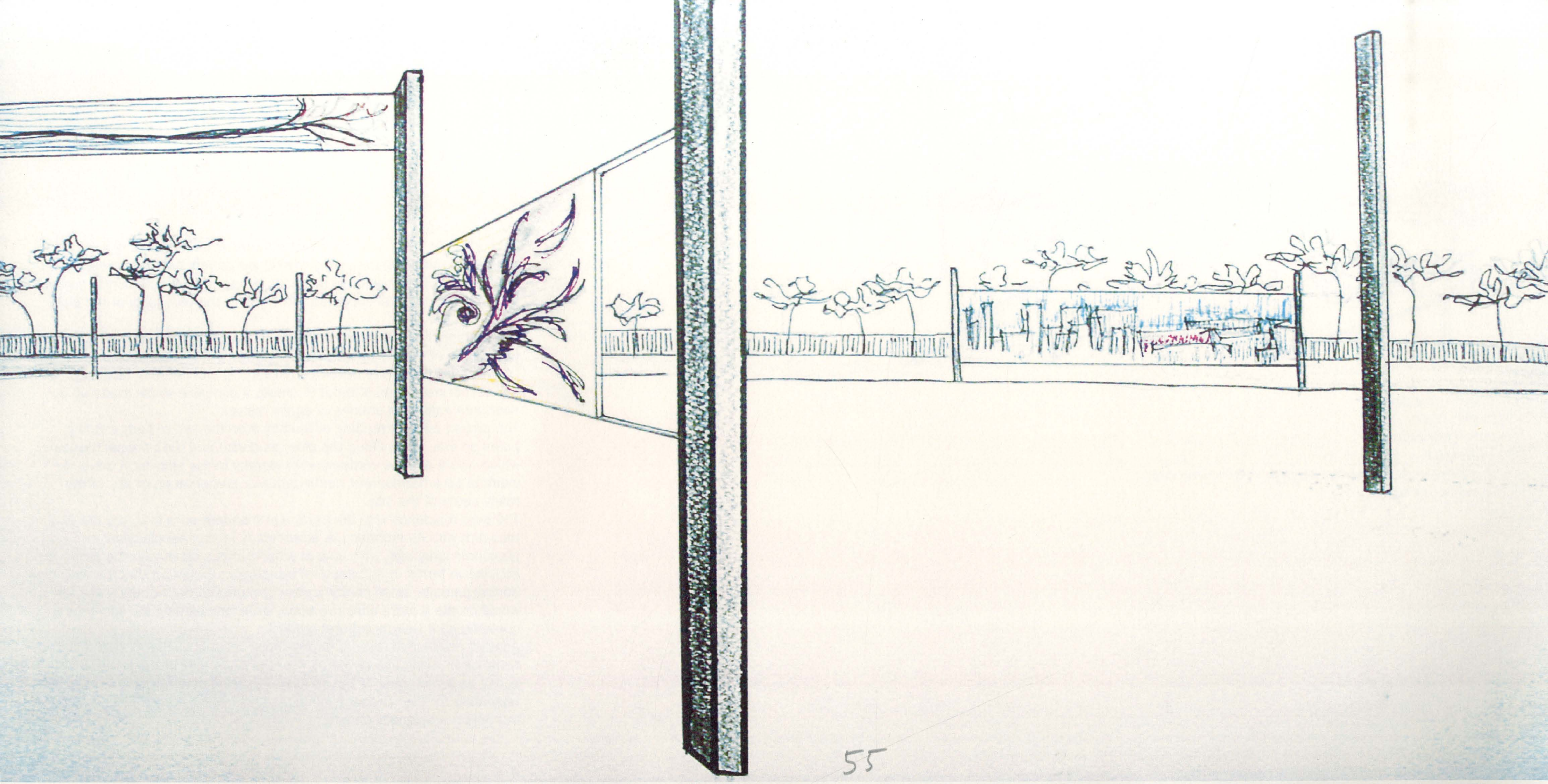
- Music classes:
- 3 small classes: 200 sqm
 - 1 major class: 150 sqm
 - Studios: 300 sqm
 - Storage: 100 sqm

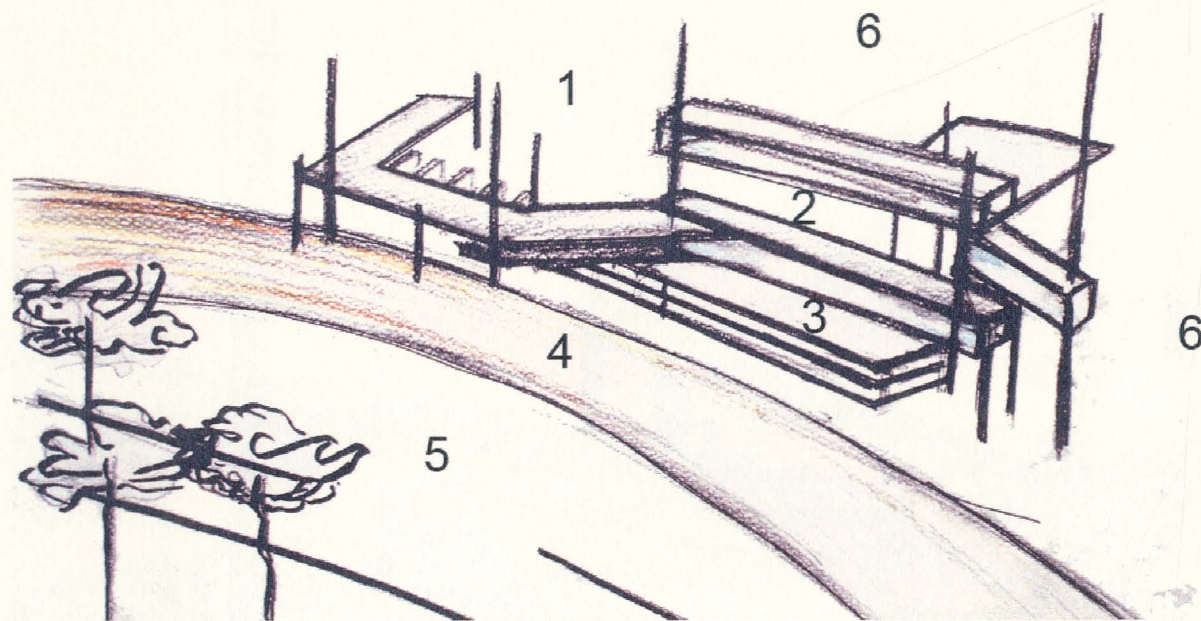
Parking

- 200250- cars accommodation for public events on site



Visions





- 1: horse riding school
- 2: the schools
- 3: the stadium
- 4: the tracks
- 5: out door arena, this can be turned into a performance stage
- 6: out door exhibition

This adjacent vision depicts a first attempt at understanding the volumetric relationships of the envisioned project on site, in relation to one another. The developed language is one of loose elements, tied up together with vertical elements which mimic the verticality of the pine trees on site.

The metaphor of the loose elements, serving different functions is a translation of the historical different selves of the site, this variation of "selves" will be further developed in varying architectural languages in the next phase, in an attempt to create a cohesive whole made up of scattered individual entities or again "selves".

The project aims at reading differently than the two already existing poles on site, them being the pine residence and the national museum, which would add the contemporary identity to the site, for it does not claim to be a harmonious continuation or preservation of any of the many pasts of the site.

The pine residence with the particular mandate aura to it, the national museum with its architecture eclecticism, joining neoclassical to pharaonic language, will come in a harmonious clash with the proposed scheme in terms of architectural translation. Based on that the idea of adding parasite small contemporary gestures to both of the buildings, would create a more cohesive bond, while proclaiming the whole as a contemporary Beirut cultural product.

Another envisioned layer is having those vertical elements of the project continue in a grid like layout all over the open part of the site, both acting as a metaphor of the no longer existing pine forest and as space regulators for the outdoor exhibitions and market places that are aimed to happen seasonally on site.

Yet another aspect needs to be investigated, it being the notion of the degree perception, and the play on mystery and anticipation, which was one of the main causes of the aura created around the site. This is why the study of the edges of the intervention is very important, as an added dimension to the new image of the site.

Projected Narrative



Farah, age:22

imaginative

So I've heard it reopened, but like reopened for good now. It's no longer a hippodrome. I don't know if I am sad about this or not. But then again why would I be, it's not like I used to go gamble there every Sunday anyway. Actually no one I know even seemed to be concerned by the fact that the hippodrome was no longer there, since they never gambled anyway, actually very few of us were even conscious of the fact that it was there to begin with. Though based on what I've heard it angered a bunch of important state people, removing the hippodrome that is, they used to make benefit from abusing the site, and rendering a lot of poor people even more poor, after each one of their races. But why should I care, as long as I am the greater benefiter from all of this war generated by the media, between those economic lords and the intellectual strata of the city. And trust me when I say I benefited the most, I as a member of the society, I as a resident in Beirut.

So I guess we should go there sometime soon, me and my friends that is, maybe we get to hangout a bit, walk around, enjoy the breath out, maybe visit the pine residence, I wonder if they still call it residence anyway. But I have to admit, I sort of always was curious of seeing how lavishly that French ambassador lived, I mean do you believe the guy, taking up this entire national heritage for his own exclusive benefit and pleasure.

Its Bon Jovi in concert at the park, I got tickets as soon as I heard of it. My friends and I go early to try and get good places. While entering the park that has now become so familiar to me, I realize quite a few changes already. The first thing I realized was that my bench had disappeared. That bench which I have developed the habit of sitting on almost everyday, right next to the

music booth playing classic Abdel Halim and Oum Koulthoum songs was now gone. The whole colonnaded space has been invaded by small booths selling snacks, meals, Bon Jovi T-shirts, CDs, posters, any thing you can imagine. My god was I struck by this colorful fiesta. You know Bon Jovi has fans from all ages, he has been a star for so long. So the place is buzzing with forty year old business men who have given up their suits for one day, to stupid "cow licked" teenagers. I never could understand what pleasure did they take from shaping their hair like that, honestly, it looked like they had been run over by some truck or something.

The concert is about to begin, visual projections start appearing on the fragmented wall in the background, the pine trees, to the for ground are light up in quite a funky way, diffusing all sorts of phosphoric colors, ha ha so much for reinterpreting the two hundred and eighty year old majestic trees. Its funny somehow, a rock concert, with the pine "residence" and the national museum in the background.

Boy did I grow fond of this place, ever since I visited it for the first time, two years ago, I am super glad they kept the garden show happening every year, and the horse racing school, turned the elite exclusive, snob horse, which inhabited the site previously, into a gentle animal loved by all. It's funny the amount of friends I have who started taking lessons at the center there, some of them felt self important, riding a horse there, just like all those elite back in the days, others were just too happy they got to finally try it, which was something they never have, considering that such a school did not exist in Beirut to begin with.

All in all, I have to admit, the park has become part of our lives, it gave us new things to experience other than shopping, clubbing, going to an underground gym, or eating at restaurants, it gave me a new scope of experiencing my city, simply...

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Appendix

