the city traveler
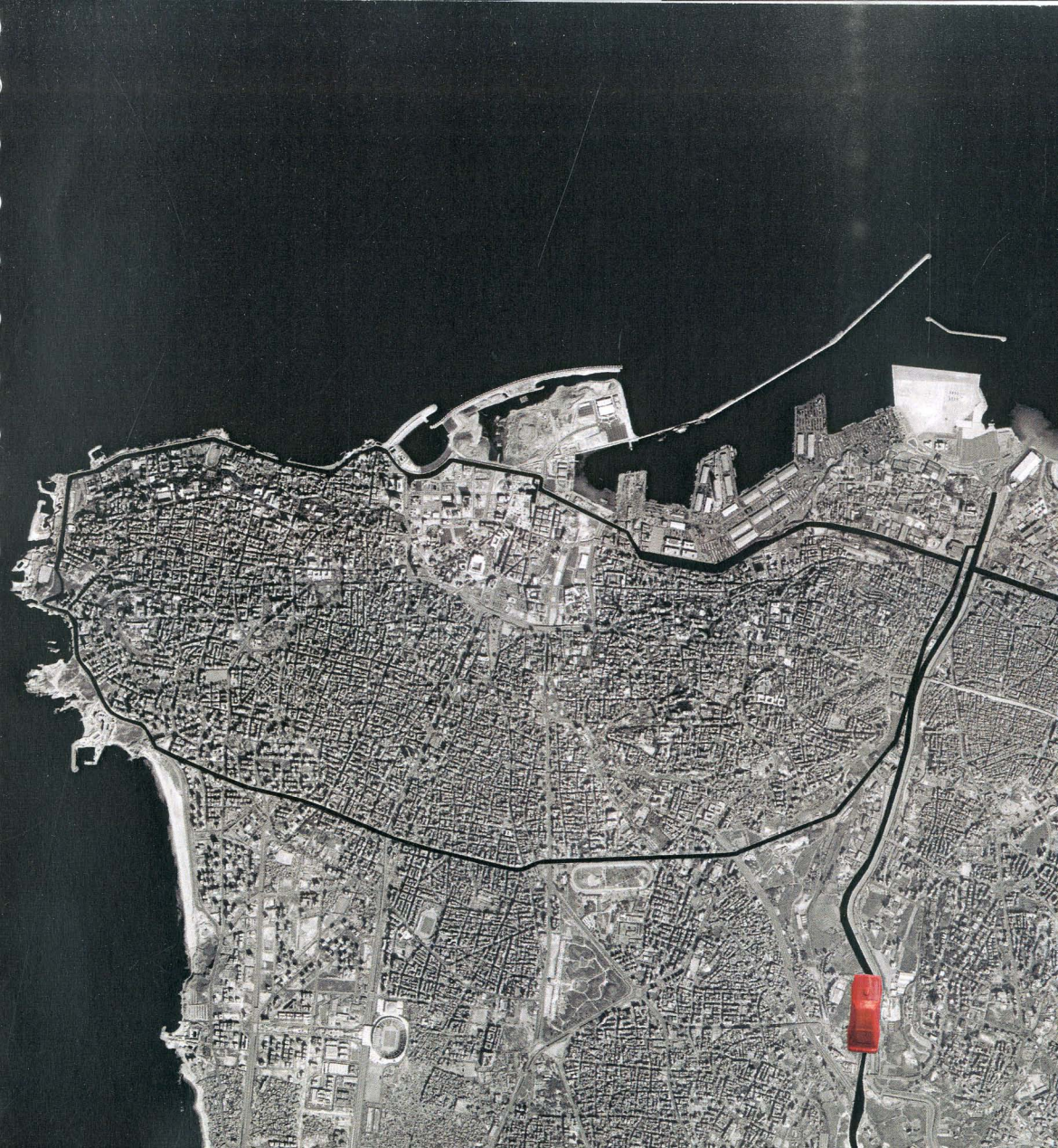
a travelogue by Maissa Naïm | Fall

"Wandering the streets of Beirut, the city traveler goes on
collecting images..."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Beirut.

Speed, lights, a never-ending spectacle.
A fleeting image, a constant feeling, a vibrant journey.
I am in my car - speed, lights - images accumulate as I pass-by.
I am driving back home. I can look at Beirut from a distance.
It's here, it changes, moves, follows me.
It's always here.
I can see it get assembled in a chaotic mixture of
buildings/houses, tall/short, old/new,
coming together, creating an illuminated background to my movement.
But then again I can see it blur in horizontal lines, disperse in
a million particles of light.
I know the road by heart, the streets guide me unconsciously.
Thoughts are wandering in my mind, while the succession of the
scenery slowly gets engraved. But it is not the same as yesterday,
and tomorrow will be different too.
However, the feeling is the same, it is always here.
I am driving - speed, lights, buildings - the street is empty;
there is no one on the sidewalk. But the city is alive. It gets
created as I pass-by. It is unconscious, but it is real, it is
here, it is always here.
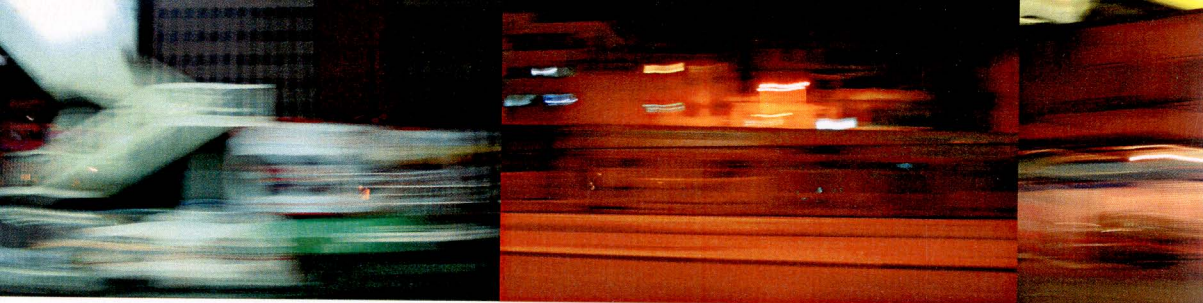
I am on the highway. I am driving alongside the Beirut River. It's
the end of the day. There is nothing to think about, I am relieved,
I am free. But I am stuck with the images following me in the
background. Beirut never leaves me. It is here, always here.

It's an endless journey. An endless journey in Beirut.
But Beirut is the journey.
Beirut is a feeling, a sensation I get while driving on the highway.
It's from a distance that I can best experience Beirut.
I walk in its streets, enter its buildings, talk with its people but
it is only when I get detached and see it from a distance that I
know it is here. That I am conscious it is here.
Speed, lights, outlines, I enjoy see it all blur, become a whole
that surrounds me and carry me. It's like passing through a movie,
the movie of my memory. Each day that I pass by I accumulate series
of images that overwrite the ones preceding it. It gets stacked; it
creates my own database of Beirut. Beirut as I see it. Beirut as
bundles of buildings. Beirut as a cityscape that gets altered each
time I see it, each time I pass by, each time I pass through.
Beirut is a journey, an endless journey.
I need to get detached, to take some distance. It's like a pause,
an intermission, a void where only imagination can flow. It's a
detachment from reality, from the little things that make Beirut,
the real Beirut. Here I can see it differently, I can reshuffle the
images, recreate it. A new Beirut.
Speed, motion, movement, lights, buildings, outlines, lines, Beirut.
It's here I can always see it.
It's here in the background of my movement.

2
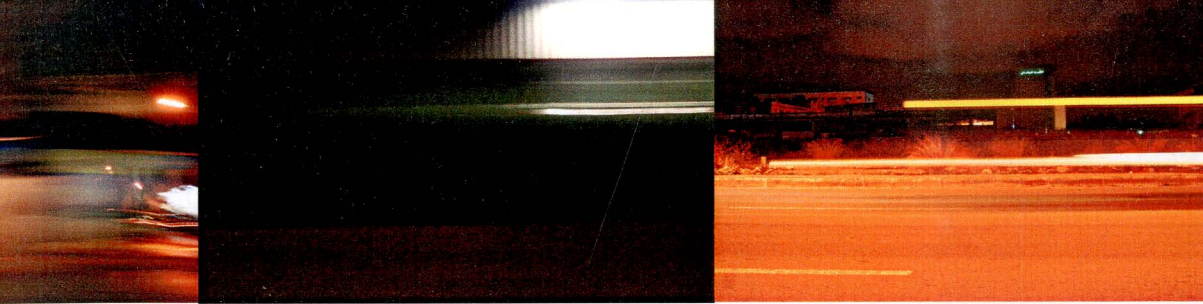
snapshots from a car's window

Speed, motion, movement, lights, buildings, outlines, **Beirut**

"In societies where modern conditions of production
prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense
accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was
directly lived has moved away into a representation."

Guy Debord - The Society of the Spectacle

INTRODUCTION

Society of media and movement

Our world is an accumulation of images; Images that are thousands
of instances forming up our journey through life. Each image is an
immobilization of time and space.
All what we see, live, experience, directly transforms itself into
an image: a visual representation, mental or produced on a surface.

**"Today, for buildings or cityscapes to be noticed, they must be
viewed in states of mediated perception. Architecture must merge
into the flow of information, into the spectacle of media."**

Schwarzer - Zoomscapes

Media and motion are affecting our way of life and therefore the
city of today. We live in constant movement and the city passes by
as an accumulation of images. More complex perceptions are created
and new relations shape our interaction with the city, resulting in
the blurring of the boundary between real and artificial.

In his book Zoomscapes, Zhwarzer analyses the effect of media and
motion on our perception. While vehicles zoom our sight across
large distances when driving at tremendous velocities, cameras al-
lows new perceptions by zooming beyond the capacity of our bodies
and rupturing the continuum of space and time.

The increasing importance of the visual sense in technological perception has however engendered a flattening of the perception. All layers are condensed in one surface, images superimpose upon each other to create one flat surface perceived by the viewer. This flattening of the perception created a horizontal boundary between the viewer and the image.

With this new era dominated by rapid movement and mediated perception, the city is seen and experienced differently.
Seen in relation to each other we can therefore redefine the city and the notion of image.

CITY

a body always in change,
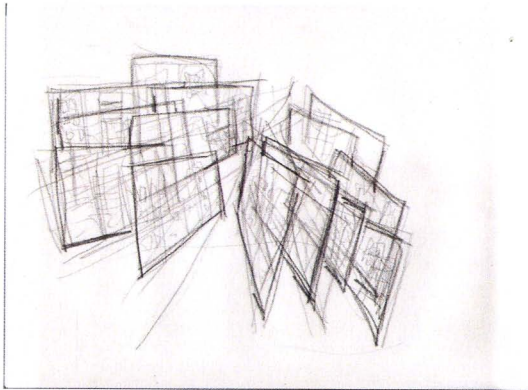adapts to flux and movement

IMAGE

a layered reality that
processes the environment
from a distance

CITY

When in movement we perceive the city as an accumulation of images. This stacking of

superposition of layers of images
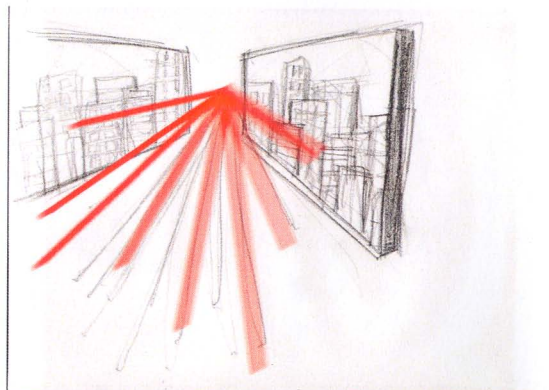
all layers condensed in one surface

constitutes a layered reality processed from a distance that alter/our perception.

Un Chien Andalou - Luis Buñuel

1

THE CITY TRAVELER

1.   strengthened visual stimulation

The contemporary city is very much influenced by the rising
importance of technology and information that is characterized
by constant movement and change, and the rapidity and facility
of information exchange.
Mechanized transportation along with the proliferation of the
media world has endowed the viewer with a stronger and more
complex visual sense. Since mechanized transportation does not
require the physical effort needed for walking, all the attention
is shifted to seeing and perceiving and absorbing the images that
flows in front of the car driver or passenger.

Antfarm

**"Visual stimulation becomes proportionally more important than
the bodily stimulation in these relatively passive types of
locomotion."**

Schwarzer-Zoomscape

## 2.   Detachment of the modern spectator

The modern spectator is detached from the object viewed.
He perceives his environment from a distance as if everything
was condensed in one layer. A virtual boundary is created between
the viewer and the surroundings. No interaction is allowed, just
an intense visual journey. The viewer is not bounded to what he
sees, he can manipulate it and edit it in any way he likes,
it becomes an entity of his mind, where it can be subject to
any transformation and alteration. The viewer is dominant in
the relation spectator/spectacle. The spectacle is submissive
to the spectator's imagination.
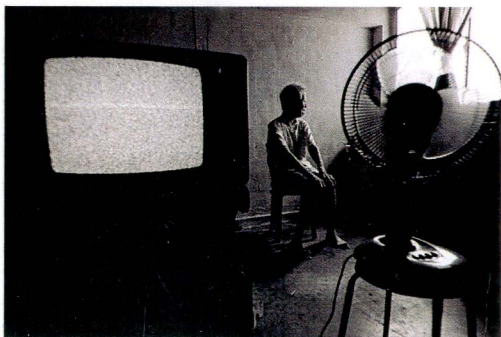
Old Man by Bob Lee

**"While machine affirm the power of the individuals to see strikingly
new visual terrains, they also calibrate vision into technological
measures and separate the viewer from the space of the object.
Modern spectators become disconnected. The visual field acquired
unprecedented autonomy and flexibility."**

Schwarzer-Zoomscape

3. The virtual boundary

–   The speed factor

The speed factor enters the equation as part of the virtual
boundary separating the 2 parties. It contributes to enriching the
visual experience and facilitate its manipulation by the
imagination. It transforms the city, reorganizes it at each
 passage. It interferes between the spectator and the spectacle
making the distinction between the real and the artificial harder.
Speed makes the surrounding blur in a huge mix of colors and form,
liquefying the scenery. Moreover, speed accentuates the gap between
the viewer and the scene. The interaction is even less, it is like
the view is being projected as a real-life movie. The spectator is
passing through this projection without being able to grab anything
but snapshots that get accumulated in the back of his mind.

–   The light factor

The medium of light also belongs to the immaterial dimension of
this visual boundary. The combination and alternation between
natural and artificial light, adds to the manipulative power of the
spectator. This added factor allows for the transformation of the
scene by adding to it texture, shadows, depth, as well as the
transformation of the perception by inflicting glare, emphasizing
on some elements rather than others, reflecting and diffusing.

-   The frame factor

The most obvious example would be the frame of the window in the
car. Without him realizing it, the window conditions the driver's/
passenger's perception of the scenery. The different angles leave
space for transformation while the different framings generate new
contexts. Like the other factors acting in this intermediate
boundary, the frame enhances the relationship of viewer/view by
allowing for this manipulation and this play in the perception
to happen.
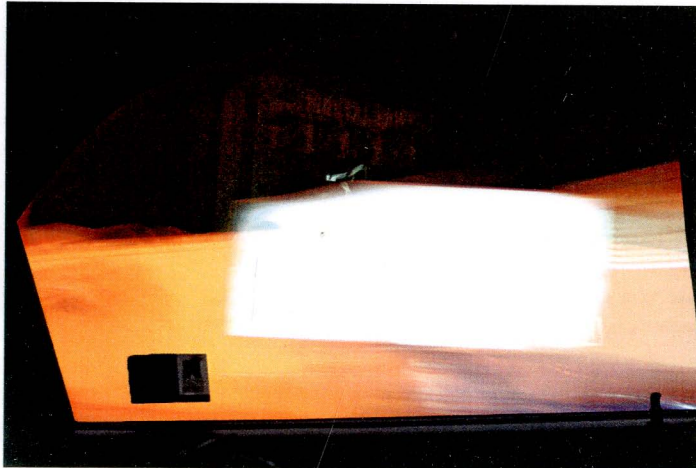
Speed, Light and Frame - View from a car

PROBLEMATIQUE

The background, which in fact is immobile and unalterable, is viewed as a constantly changing spectacle. This virtual boundary separating the spectator from the surrounding is actually creating the spectacle. The different factors intervening between the two entities allow for the magic to take place, for the imagination to play, for the eyes to absorb, for the mind to be amazed.

This horizontal boundary created between the viewer and the scenery he traverses, merges with the superimposed layers of the background and all condense in one flat surface. This visual spectacle that is created while driving on a highway flattens the perception of the traveler creating a gap between the two entities. The experience here is purely visual, but it is a passive relation. The interaction happens just on the level of the mind and the imagination, engendered by the different factors of the virtual boundary.

→ **How can architecture intervene in the depth of this virtual boundary in order to allow for this imaginary visual world to take place; while generating a more interactive relation between the viewer and the environment?**

How to create an architecture that can adapt to the enhanced visual experience of the society of information and technology, by breaking the boundary standing between the spectator and the spectacle?
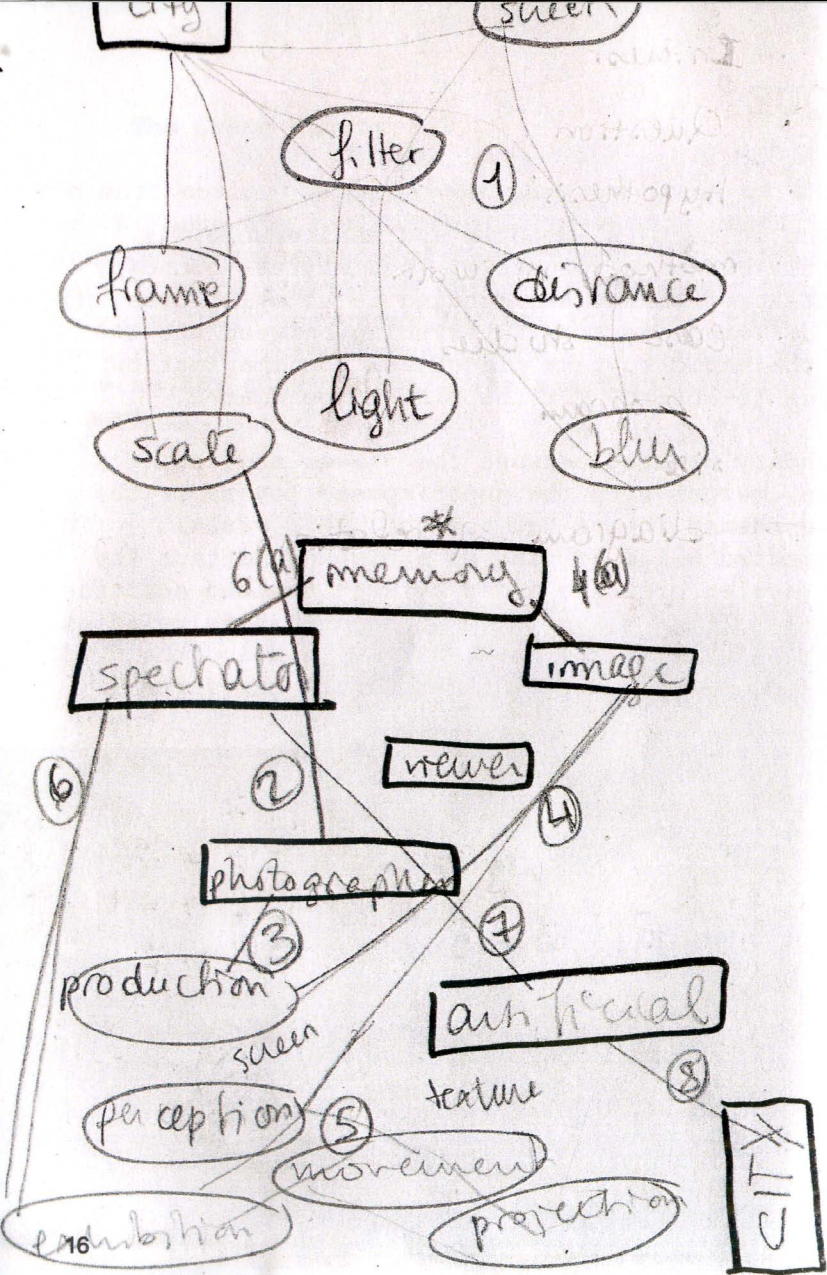
Diagram of relations

HYPOTHESIS

In order to respond to the world of today, architecture must
adapt to a mobile, media-oriented society.
Therefore the notion of movement and of a journey or itinerary
is important while allowing for total freedom and flexibility of
the imagination.
The relations between the different spectators and the city
should be studied and developed in order to be restructured and
reorganized. Once established, these relations will articulate
and punctuate the journey of the city traveler.

real/artificial
in/out
public/private
production/display
spectacle/spectator
pedestrian/cars
instance/sequence
motion/still
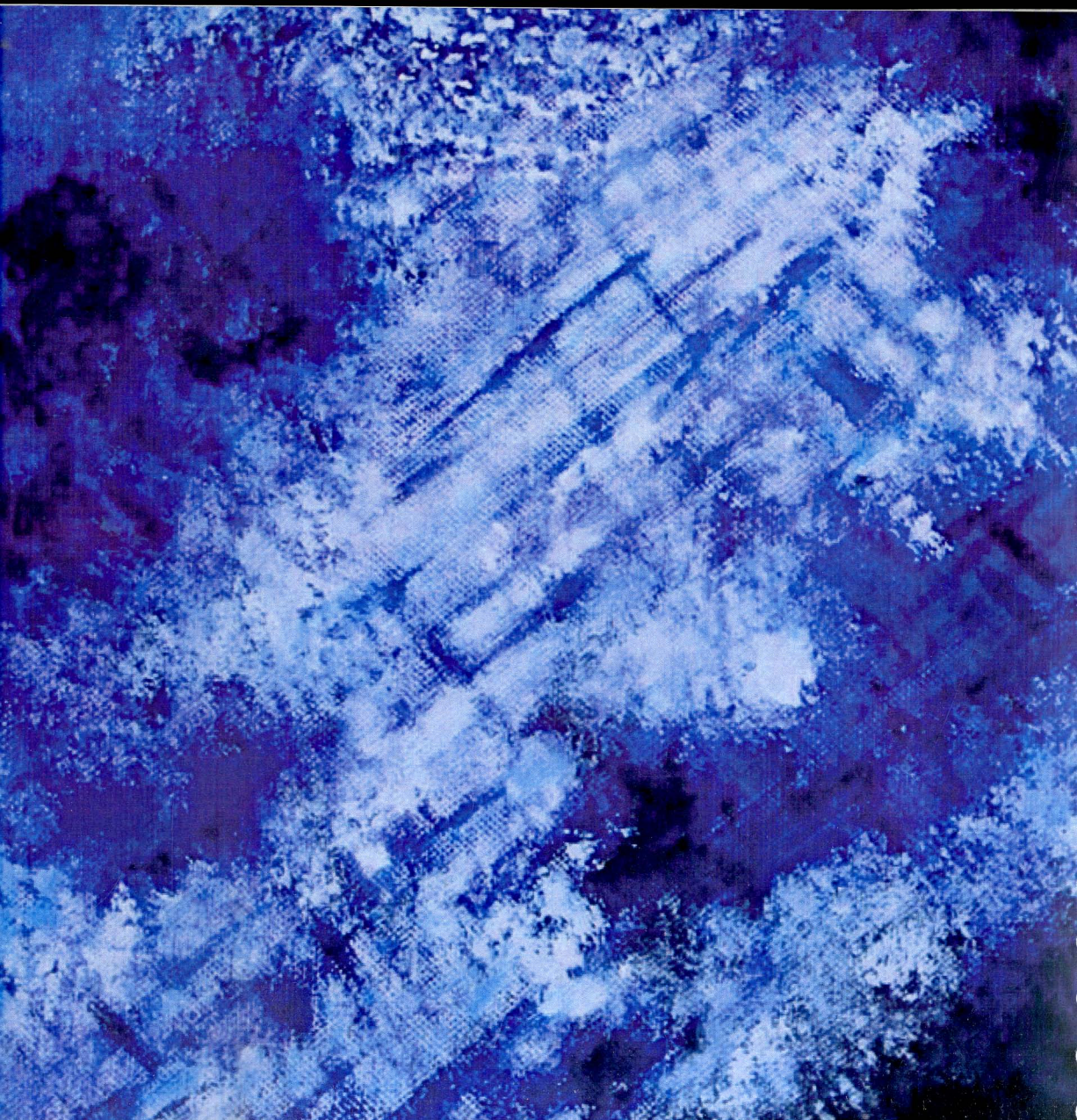
"Architecture is the simplest means of articulating time and space, of modulating reality, of engendering dreams."

Chtcheglov

2

The City Traveler collage

THE URBAN ITINERARY

MOVEMENT AND SURFACE

The 2 main elements that are going to define the architecture of this urban itinerary are movement and surface, and their relation with each other and with the city traveler.

1. MOVEMENT from passage, to journey, to itinerary

New means of transportation and communication are invading our space, traversing it dynamically and engendering new visual opportunities shattered in a succession of visual planes.

The perceptual field changed to become disjointed, split, fragmented, multiplied, mobile, transient and unstable.
Movement reshaped the modern space. It created new relations and new rules. Movement is becoming faster as we travel through the city; we perceive the landscape at the same level all along, seeing it melt in a horizontal rhythm, shattered by random elements, destabilized by obstacles.

Architecture always involves movement; spaces are linked to each other by the movement of the user. He creates architectural paths, linking different scenes and moments to create his own itinerary. Similarly, the notion of architectural paths gave birth to the moving image or film, by changing the relation between spatial perception and motion. In a way the city spectator is identical to the film spectator since they both create a path, traversing multiple spaces and moments, collecting sequences of images.

Like architecture and the urban promenades influenced the basis of the filmic journey, the latter influenced in its turn the enhanced development of an architectural itinerary. This notion has mostly influenced the understanding of the museum and exhibition space as places of passage, collection and recollection. The exhibition space can be paralleled to a film, where the spectator would traverse this sequence of images while following a precise path.

These new requirements of the modern spectator, introduced the notion of liminal navigation, linking therefore to the factor of surface, of separation, of transition, of contact, between inside and outside, real and artificial.

In the 220 minutes project, the museum space has been conceived as a response to the visitor's movement and gaze. The whole space becomes an imprint of the visitor's itinerary. In order to achieve that, the analysis of the visitor's gaze has been translated into spatial flux.

220 Minute Museum at Storefront for Art and Architecture

Architect: Palimpsest
Client: -
Location: New York, NY + web traces
Status: Preliminary Design, 1998
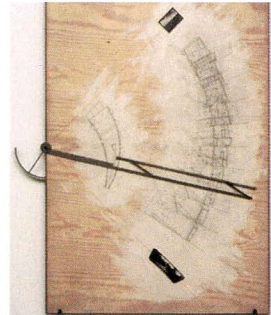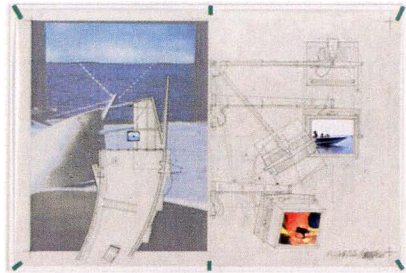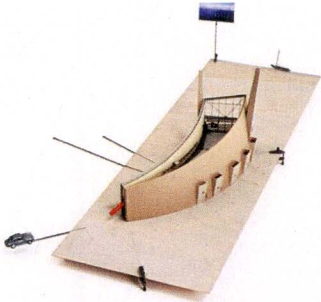**Critic: Hani Rashid**

The Slow House

Architect: Diller + Scofidio
Client: Koji Itakura
Location: Long Island, New York
Status: Unbuilt, 1990

The essence of this house is based on movement. It is about the journey from the city in the car to the door, then from the door through a corridor to a window. Here the procession is important and is emphasized in the design of the house. The house arcs from the entry facade, which is just wider than the front door, to the double-height picture window framing the view. The horizontal curve of the passage, and the torqued outer wall of the house prevent direct visual access to this view, slowing the visitor's approach to it.
Moreover the other interesting aspect is this framing of the view. This view constitutes the end-point of the itinerary and therefore the main element of the design. Therefore the house has been designed to "capture" the view both in the real and virtual sense. Technology plays an important role in order to allow for this manipulation. The view can be recorded and deferred and then played back at another moment in time (day view during night, summer view during winter…) and adjusted to the scale and frame that suits the viewer.

"conceived as a passage, a door that leads to a window . . .
a physical entry to an optical departure."

Diller +Scofidio - Slow House

Beirut, Avenue Fouad Chehab highway collage

With speed, light expand into a surface, creating a thin boundary

2. **SURFACE** from wall, to screen, to interface

New means of transportation and communication are invading our space, traversing it dynamically and engendering new visual opportunities shattered in a succession of visual planes.

The notion of the wall as a defined mass is replaced by a more flexible concept of a lighter boundary dematerializing in a superposition of screens and surfaces. The delimitation between outside and inside happens progressively through a layered boundary. It is a transition rather than a separation.
The traditional façade is replaced by an interchangeable, sophisticatedly layered and screened façade.

The façade usually a demarcation between inside and outside, between public and private becomes a skin, a sensitive interface between viewer and view, spectacle and spectator, walker and driver.

This moment of separation becomes a set of hybrid surfaces, sensitively reacting to the rhymes and the rhythms of the city travelers.

Paul Virilio, chief theorician of speed, propagated the trend towards dematerialization to the point of immateriality, to the "disappearance of reality".
Reality is recreated through these superposition and reorganization of screens and filters.

It is a surface of exchange where information is absorbed and diffused, where information is created in a set of scenes and moments. It is a light surface, a mobile surface. One that can adapt to movement and view, to change and creation.

Fondation Cartier
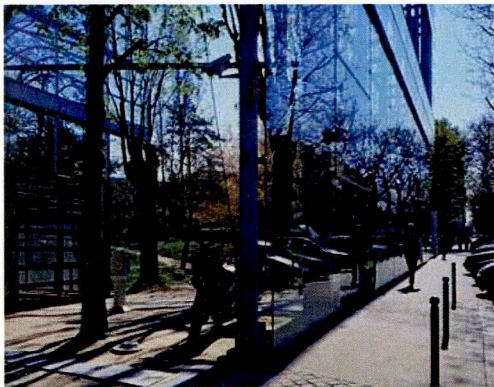
Architect: Jean Nouvel
Client: Gan Vie
Location: boulevard Raspail, Paris
Status: completed 1994

The superposition of the glass planes in the architecture of the
Fondation Cartier, dematerializes the notion wall and boundary,
by creating a succession from outside to inside without clear
delineation. This way of scattering the surface, and this play with
glass creates two different experiences of the space. From one hand,
the cars passing by on this busy boulevard, experience a horizontal
reflection to their movement, a play of light and reflection
punctuating the flow. From the other hand the people in the space,
experience a set of scattered images, blurring the boundaries of the
space creating a new links with the exterior, incorporating the city
in the background within the space.

Weather, time of day, angle of view, relative levels of interior
and exterior lighting; all conspire to create new images and
patterns. The successive layers of glass, and frames, and the
different degrees of transparency and reflection, blur the boundaries
between outside and inside between what is in the background,
what is created by the surface and what is inside.

Galeries Lafayette

Architect: Jean Nouvel
Client: Euro Projekt Entwicklungs
Location: Friedrichstrasse, Berlin
Status: built 1996

What is interesting in Nouvel's familiar explorations of transparent and translucent surfaces in this case is the combination between artificial and natural light in giving life to these surfaces. Natural light enters the cones and reflects on the glass surfaces in an uncontrolled manner, and combine with the predefined projections appearing on these surfaces.

From the street, pedestrians can perceive the flashing rays of colors extending from the cones of light, in a vibrating rhythm.

The screen-printed façade in progressive mirrored grids allows signs to appear through triangular halos (resonating with the cones) or rectangular halos (formatted to the screen).
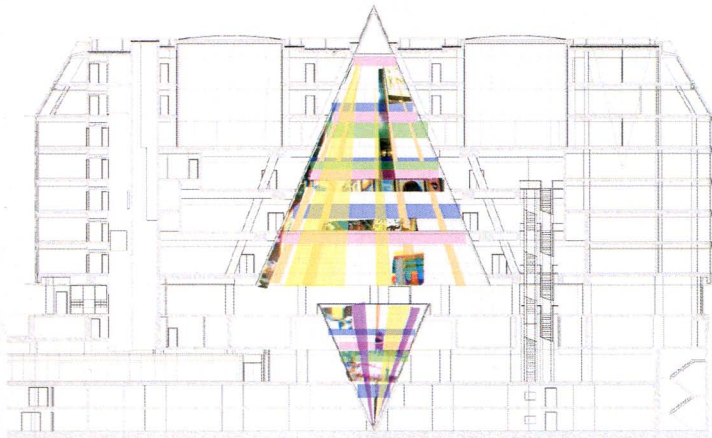

COUPE 44

IMAGE / SCREEN / SPECTATOR

To conclude, movement and surface play an important role in the
making of modern space.
The importance of movement and mobility and the creation of an
itinerary which combines this movement with a sequence of images,
create a close parallelism between CINEMA, DRIVEWAY, and EXHIBITION.

"What turned into cinema was an imaginative trajectory that required
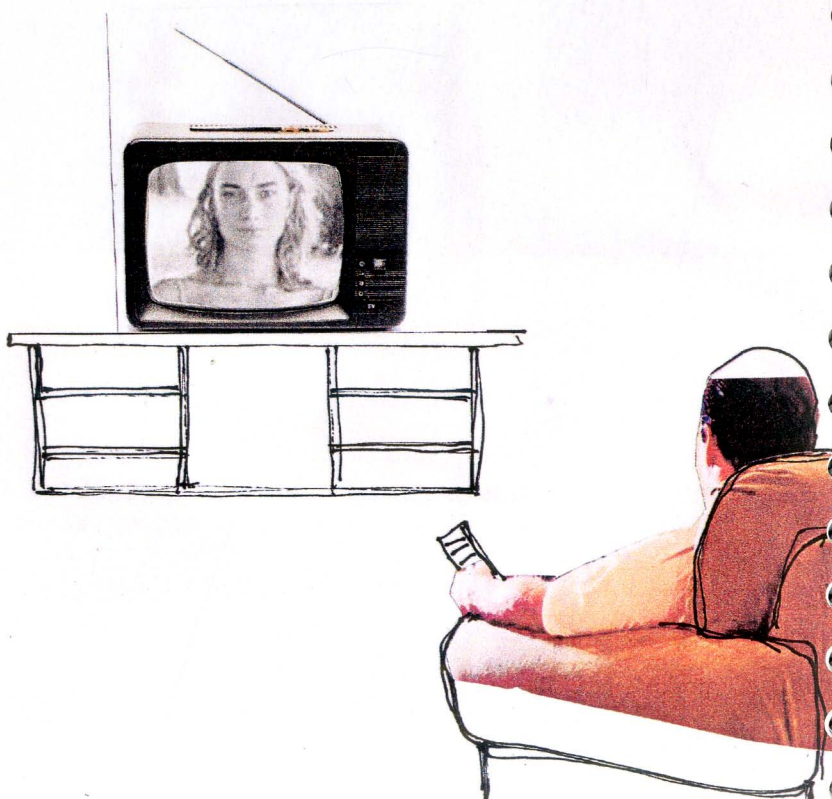physical habitation and liminal traversal of the sites of display."

Giuliana Bruno - Public Intimacy

Television

IMAGE: moving

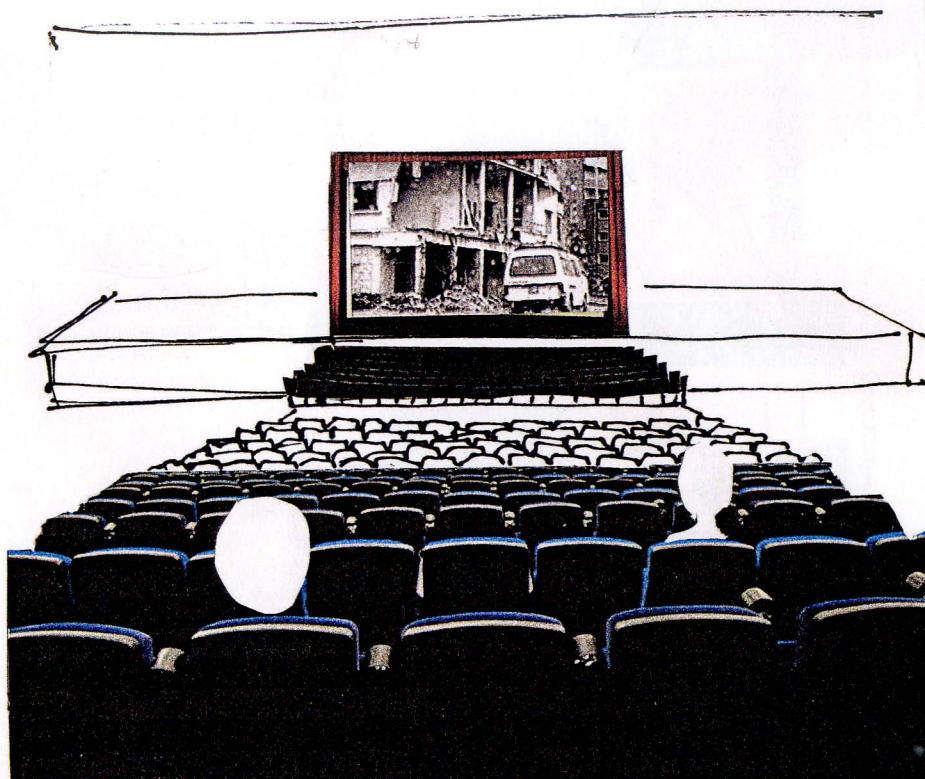SCREEN: fixed

AUDIENCE: fixed (private context)

Movie Theater

IMAGE: moving

SCREEN: fixed

AUDIENCE: fixed (public context)

Driveway

IMAGE: fixed
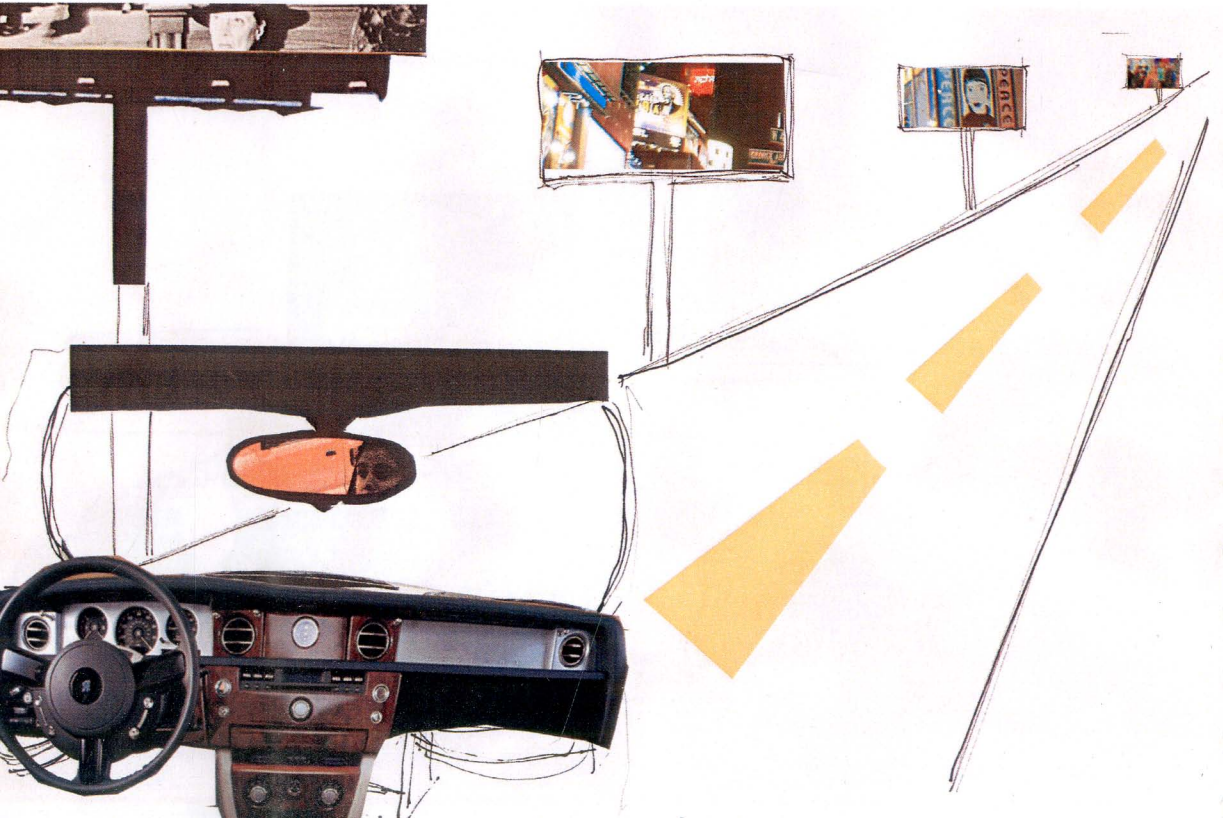
SCREEN: fixed

AUDIENCE: moving (private context)

Exhibition

IMAGE: **fixed / moving**

SCREEN: **fixed**
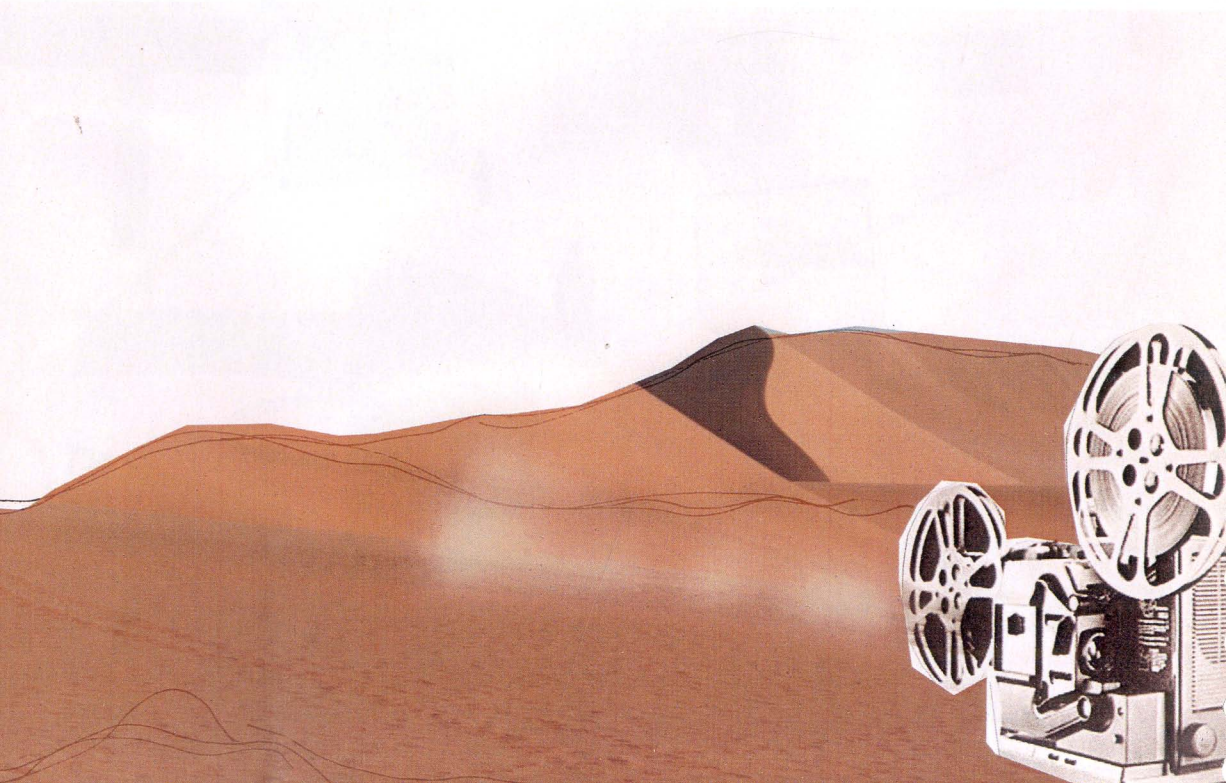
AUDIENCE: **moving (public context)**

The Invisible Film - Melik Ohanian

IMAGE: moving

SCREEN: ?

AUDIENCE: ?

In order to understand the relation IMAGE / SCREEN / SPECTATOR, different contexts are taken in consideration and the factor of comparison is the mobility of each of the elements.

In the first and most basic context of the television, the spectator is in a fixed position viewing moving images on the fixed screen of the television. In the second case of the movie theater, the situation is the same but in a public context; rather than each viewer being in a room in a different location, the spectators are gathered in one space, sharing one screen. In the case of the driveway the situation is opposite, the images are fixed on fixed panels and the spectator is moving through them. Even though the elements in this case differ from the movie theater, the experience can be comparable. Instead of the images moving in front of the spectator, it is the latter who moves through the succession of image, making the experience more spatial. The exhibition case is practically similar concerning the mobility of the elements. The difference here is that the images displayed can be fixed or moving and the other important distinction is the movement of the spectator. The movement of the spectator plays a very important role in the experience of the space, allowing for different perceptions and relations. In the case of the driveway, the spectator moves at a constant speed relatively high whereas in the case of the exhibition the movement is more scattered and discontinuous and at a lower pace, creating therefore different moments and instants.

In the last case, artist Melik Ohanian questions these relations through an installation. The installation consists of screening a movie in the desert on an inexistent surface. Here we can consider that there is no screen or that the background (here the desert) is itself the screen, and who is the spectator in this case? Is he the one watching the machine at work or the one walking in the distance? Requestioning the nature of each element opens to new situations and experiences, reshuffling the rules and reestablishing the relationships. Moreover, Peter Greenway proposes another manipulation by suggesting the mobility of the three elements.

Pierre Gemyel Street, Beirut

3

linearity of movement
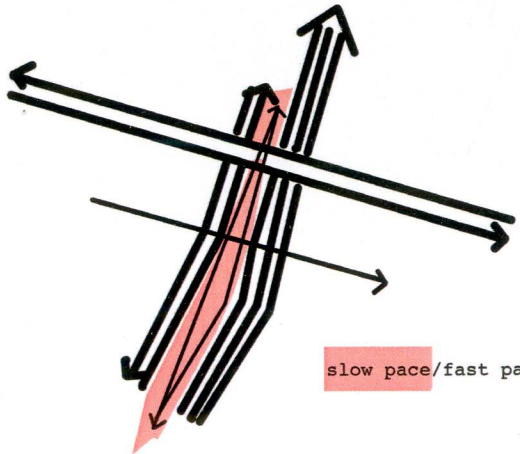
slow pace/fast pace

THE SITE

HORIZONTALITY AND MOVEMENT ALONG THE BEIRUT RIVER

LOCATION

More than being located at the intersection of the main arteries of
circulation of peripheral Beirut, and more than being exposed to a
linear continuous movement along the Beirut river axis, the site
also responds to an important characteristic. This criterion is
relevant to a specific visual experience that allows for this
cinematic traversal of space. It is the fact that it overlooks the
city from a certain distance rather than crossing directly in its
fabric. It gives the viewer the adequate detachment needed to be
able to have a holistic view of the surroundings.

The site is located at the North/East periphery of Beirut at The
intersection of the two main arteries disserving the city: The
Charles Helou highway running parallel to the seashore exiting
Beirut towards Dora and linking towards Tripoli; The Emile Lahoud
highway running perpendicularly from the Charles Helou axis parallel
to the Beirut River towards Baabda and linking to the Damascus Road.

Location Map

SITE MORPHOLOGY

The site consists of two parts of very different morphologies.

1. Big rectangular parking lot

Now empty and used as parking, this land is exposed to vehicular
circulation on its four sides but relates differently to each one.
From the South/West, it comes as the continuation of the Badawi
neighborhood, being exposed to the very busy intersection Armenia
Street and Pierre Gemayel Street. Running parallel to Charles Helou
highway, Armenia Street serves the entire Rmeil and Medawar
areas, linking it to Gemmayze on the West and to Bourj Hammoud on
the East. The land is linked to the urban fabric on the West
connected to its inner circulation that serves the residential
blocks. From the North The Charles Helou highway overlooks the land,
passing at a 5m difference in height. The plot's longer and most
exposed side is the East, facing the Pierre Gemmayel Street that
links both to the Charles Helou on the higher level and Emile Lahoud
street underneath it.
The land slopes 1.5m upwards, towards the North/West corner of the
rectangular plot.

2. Linear corridor

This parcel is an accumulation of different plots extending
horizontally parallel to the Beirut River, bordered by two highways
on both sides. It starts with an empty land facing the Forum de
Beyrouth and is followed by the plots delineated by the Charles
Helou Bridge and the Armenia Street Bridge. This land holds some
existent construction on most of its length. They consist of one
low industrial building and one temporary metal construction.
The northern part of the land is used by a car parts company, which
uses an open outdoors space just next to the Charles Helou highway,
and a small one-storey metal construction. Next to it is a
two-stories elongated concrete building also serving a car parts
company for most of its length, and a small art institution serving
as exhibition space as well as lounge in the evening, usually holds
artistic events; as well as some more workshops for steel works.
This longitudinal strip acts as an enclosed detached island. From
one hand, the two bridges delineating the length makes it appear
as an isolated hole, and from the other hand, the rapid movement
happening parallel to it creates a boundary that separates this
land and makes it almost inaccessible to users. Because of the
narrow elongated shape of the land and because of the direction of
the movement and the space occupied by the highways, the different
flows of movement coexist tangentially next to each other but never
meet. There is no contact surface between the different flows.

AREA

The first part is a rectangle of 160mx85m , with a total surface area of 13600sqm.

The second part is constitueted of 2 parts. The first empty fragment in front of Forum de Beyrouth measures 115mx46m, with a total surface area of 5200sqm.

The secnd fragment measures 162mx35m, with a ttal surface area of 5600sqm. However this part has constructions occupying 80% of its area, therefore the unbuilt area is around 1200sqm.
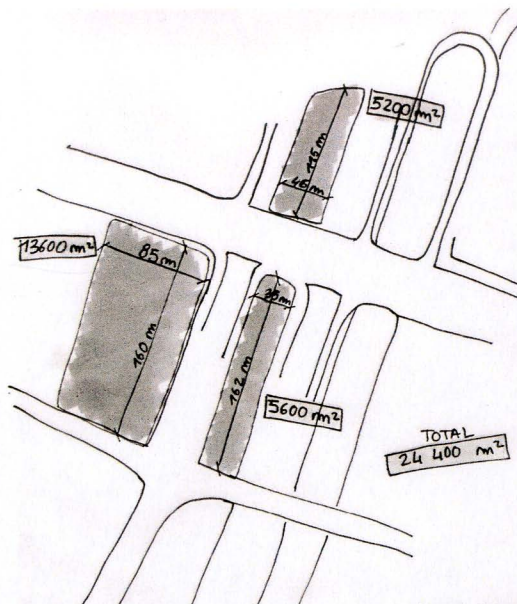
**Area Map**
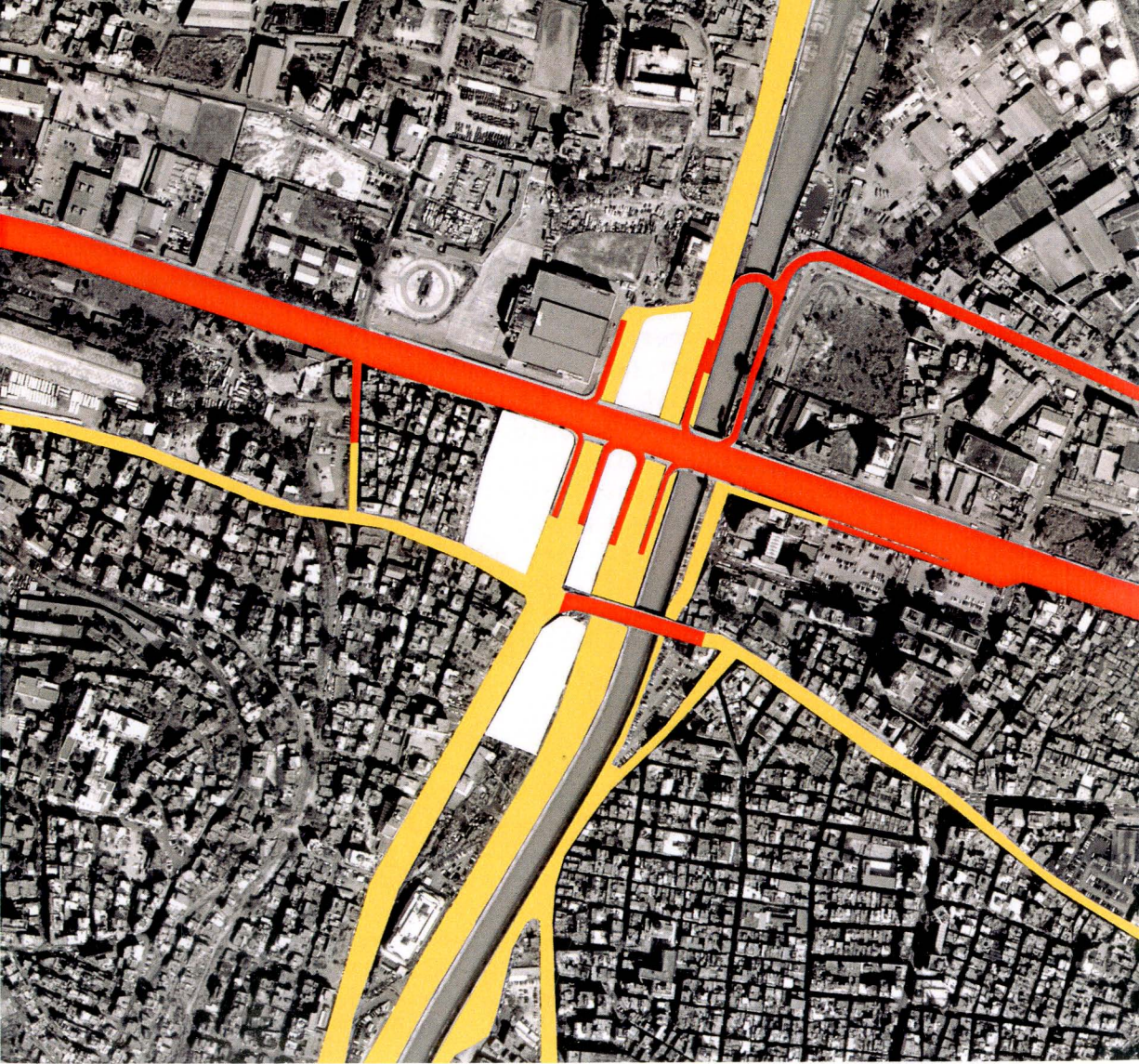
1. STREET NETWORK

upper level
ground level

2. RELATION WITH SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS

residential
neighborhood

3. PROGRAMMATIC RELATIONS

industrial   commercial

entertainement   public   residential

4.SPATIAL RELATIONS

unrban connection

boundary

STREET NETWORK

The street network is organized on two layers: one on the level of the land, and one on a higher level. On the ground level of land, the movement is all parallel to the Beirut River while the higher level runs perpendicularly and is articulated by 2 bridges interrupting the linearity at two points, delineating therefore an isolated land in the middle. The articulation of the network on two levels creates a dynamic of movement to the site, engendering more intricate relations.

LIGHT

SPEED

TRAFFIC

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23
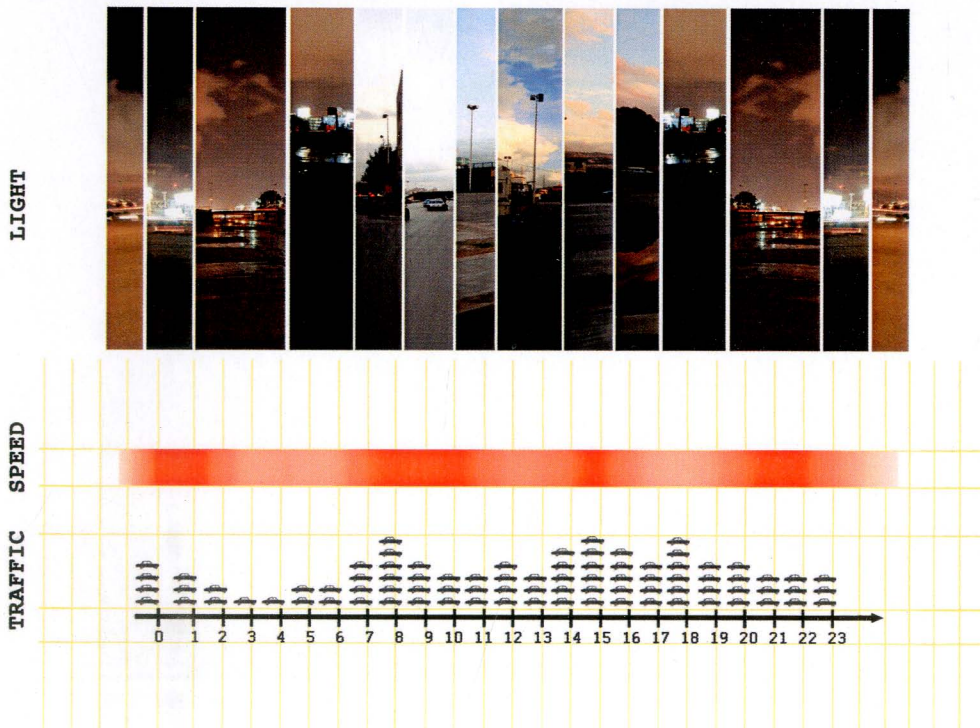
VISUAL RELATIONS
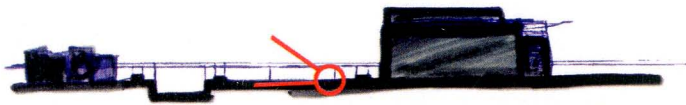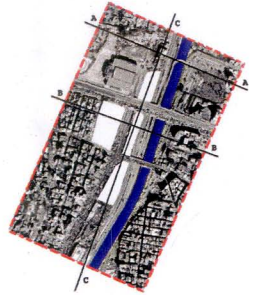
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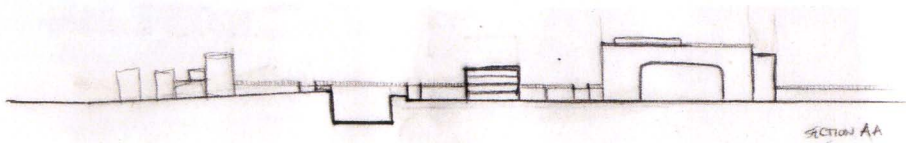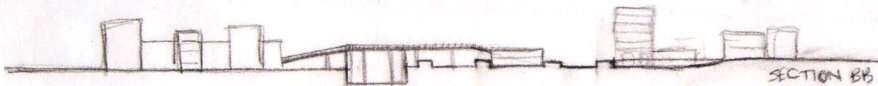
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Mass Plan

PROGRAMMATIC RELATIONS

The site is located between an industrial and a residential area.
To the North, the industrial area of Karantina and to the South the
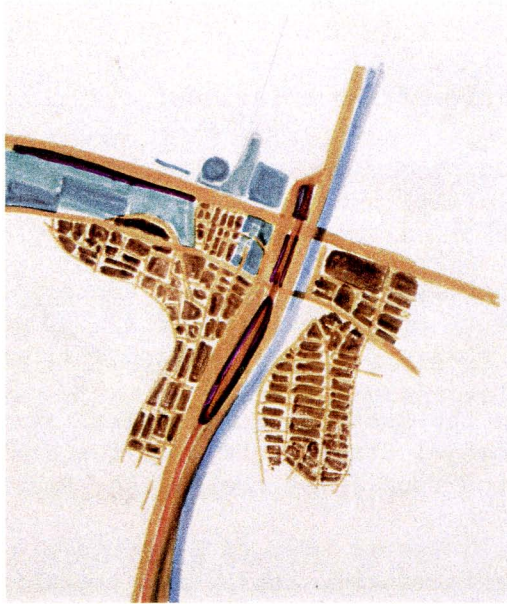residential neighborhoods of Rmeil on the West, and Bourj Hammoud
on the East. The first parcel of land connects directly to the Rmeil
fabric but the connection to Bourj Hammoud is through the bridge
crossing the Beirut River.

There are mainly 3 interesting relations:

-   **Forum de Beyrouth**

One of the largest permanent multipurpose centers in the Middle
East, Forum de Beyrouth covers an area of 47,000 m2, of which 10,500 *sqm*
are indoors space. It also provides parking for over 2000 cars.

sqm

The Forum faces from the East the longitudinal strip separated from
it by the Pierre Gemmayel Street, and from the South the rectangular
Badawi plot, separated from it by the Charles Helou Highway.

This multipurpose hall serves most of Beirut's big events, such as
live concerts and performances, therefore attracting big crowds on
specific dates and usually at night (7 pm - 2 am). The space
mainly functions as an occasional venue hosting relatively big
scale events, receiving a varied public depending on the type of
event taking place. The rest of the time the place is closed to
the public, having no permanent activities. Being very flexible,
the space can also be rented by private companies to be used as
recording and broadcast studios for TV shows. Different spaces
can be rented for 1 to few days or on a monthly basis, depending
on each company. During such events, the place is open to be used
by the crew but doesn't allow access for general public.
(fig.1)

STUDIO VISION ?

to

- B018

Located next to the forum, B018 established itself through the years in the Lebanese nightlife. Being buried underground, it creates a void in the urban fabric. B018 attracts crowds of people at night (9 pm – 5 am) mainly youth and sometimes infiltrated by middle age people.
Similarly to the Forum de Beyrouth, B018 acts as a leisure place at night but on a much smaller scale. The crowd of this nightclub is more concise but more regular, since it works on a daily basis every night with some events taking place on occasional days.
(fig.2)

- Mar Mikhael abandoned train station

The huge area of the old train station of Mar Mikhael is now closed to the public and is occupied by few offices of the Ministry of transportation. If revived, this place could offer huge opportunities for public use, and would link the whole Rmeil neighborhood. The place could hold different activities from public to private, serving the Rmeil and Medawar neighborhood, as well as Beirut as a whole.
(fig.3)

(2)

(3)
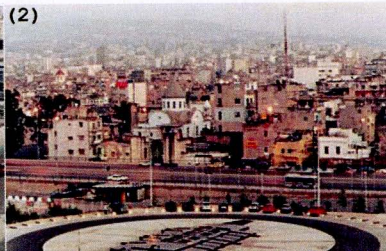
The Steel Cloud

Architect: Asymptote
Client: Neth. West Coast Gateway competition
Location: Los Angeles, California
Status: design 1988, 1st prize

Designed to occupy the zone above the median strip of the highway, the project follows the linearity of the movement. The movement of the freeway below is translated into various linear structures extending into the distance at different angles, creating a dynamic structural response to the site. The project is based both the inherent movement and the importance of technology in creating links. The different functions that appear on the longitudinal surfaces act as billboards for the drivers below.
Instances of structure rise from in-between and expand above the different levels of flow. These different volumes and structures are punctuated by the fluid and transient spaces of the city creating a dialogue between the traveler and the city.
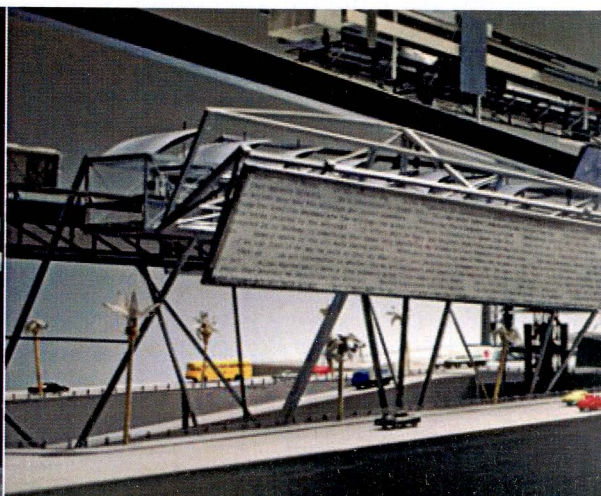
"This is an architecture for the territories devoid of perspective, depth, frames, or enclosure."

Hani Rashid and Lisa Ann Couture
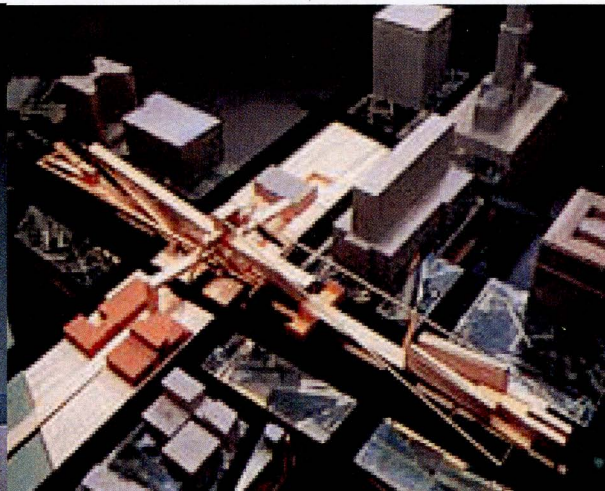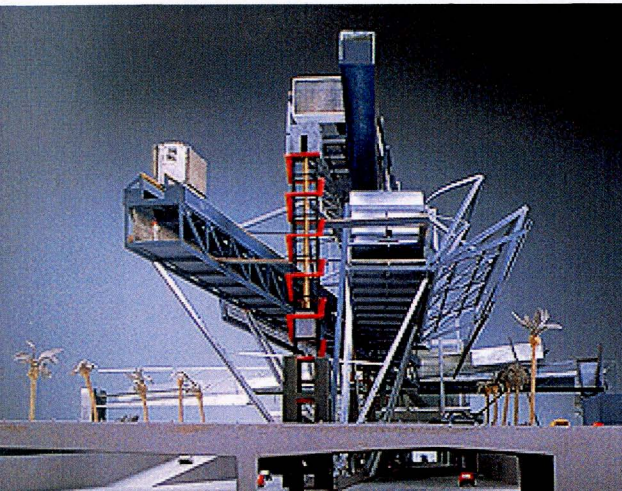
Views of movement aroud site at night

USER GROUPS

Forum de Beyrouth, B018 and the Mar mikhael abandoned train station create the beginning of a network of social, artistic activities that can also expand on the West towards Gemmayze and its nightlife and the huge amount of people it gathers. And if e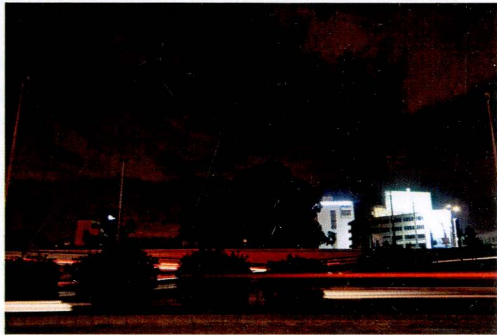xtended to the East, it can also link to the Abro Abroyan factory in Bourj Hammoud, that is abandoned and since offering a wide interesting space, often used to hold artistic events such as exhibitions or projections or even concerts.
Moreover on the Perpendicular axis of the Beirut River, this network can also link to the Galerie Sfeir-Semler next to the Forum de Beirut in an industrial building, a modern art gallery that holds local and international temporary exhibitions all year long. On the opposite direction, the newly opened Beirut Art Center is situated right off the Corniche el Nahr Street, in Jisr el Wate. The center acts as a permanent space and platform dedicated to contemporary art in Lebanon.

Altogether, these different places create a network of social, cultural, artistic, leisure network that is already established in this part of peripheral Beirut.
The people they attract are a mix of the art public and the more general youth entertainment crowd.

Moreover, the inhabitants of the direct surroundings of Rmeil and Bourj Hammoud would benefit from a cultural/artistic gathering space where they could learn about, and contribute to the artistic heritage of the city.

Being at a major crossroad, The site would be easily accessible for any visitor coming from inside or outside Beirut.

4.

city → research → production → display →
artificial(private) → natural (public) → city*
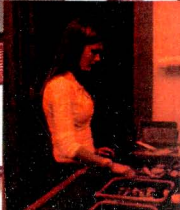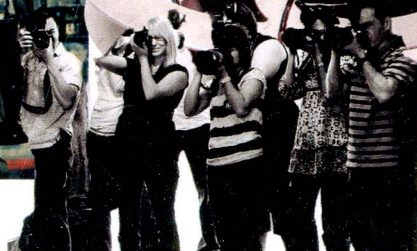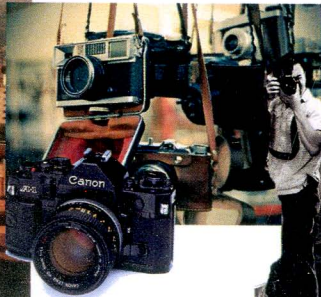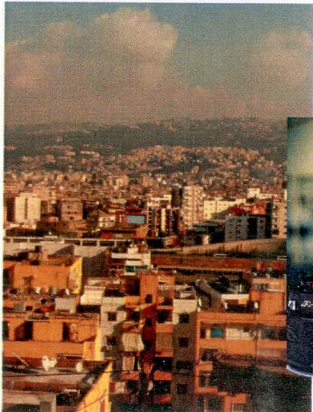
THE PROGRAM

THE ITINERARY OF THE IMAGINATION, THE PLACE OF COLLECTION, THE JOURNEY OF RECOLLECTION

The city traveler accumulates images while driving across the streets from place to place. These images get stocked in his mind and reshuffled to create his own memory of the city.

The program is based on this itinerary: create the memory, stack it, and recreate it.

Following this logic the space is divided in 3 parts:

-Producing the image
-Storing the image
-Displaying the image
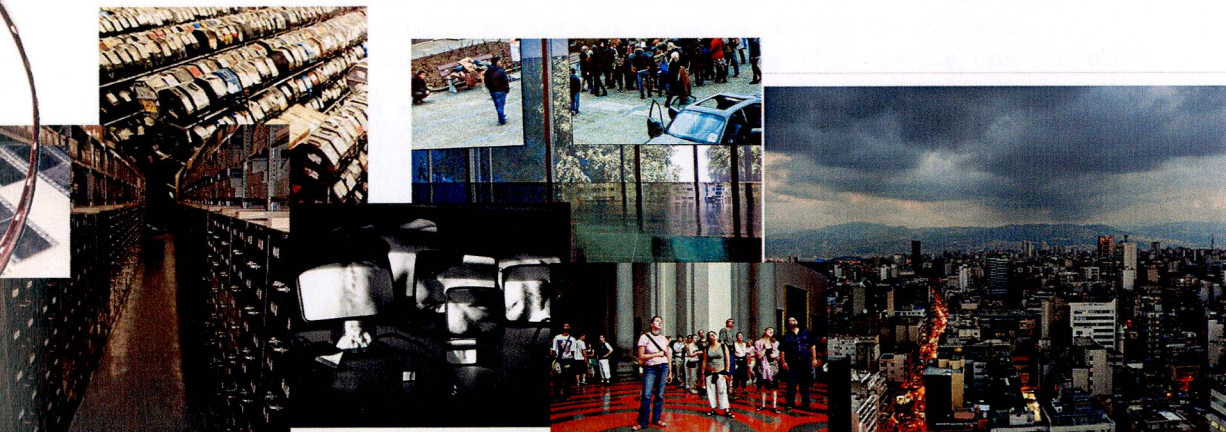
BACKGROUND ON SIMILAR ACTIVITIES IN BEIRUT

In Lebanon, art has never been part of the state's infrastructure.
It is an entity of its own that struggles to exist within different
organizations, dismantling itself into small groups of individuals,
dispersed throughout the city.
Given the country's eventful history of war, violence and
political instability, the Lebanese government has somewhat erased
art and cultural activities from its list of priorities, forcing the
art scene to establish new dynamics and sets of relations.
In this way, Beirut has become an example of its own, in the way it
managed to carry on a very active and dynamic art scene, adapted to
an non existent system.
The system has been created spontaneously, step-by-step, throughout
time, connecting different events, people and places.
The fact that artistic practices aren't accounted for in the
Lebanese infrastructure, lead to the formation of self-organizing
group of artists' collectives and independent, non-profit
associations that have, over the past decade, constructed an
alternative infrastructure for the making and exhibiting, as well as
the documenting and archiving, of contemporary art practices.

98 Weeks   **Beirut Street Festival 08**

Beirut as a stage for the alternative art scene

Having emerged simultaneously with the appearance
of alternative scenes in the surrounding regions (such as Cairo,
Alexandria, Istanbul and Amman), it remains difficult to pinpoint
the physical sites where these artistic activities take place,
contrarily to the established spaces available in these other
cities.
For Beirut the case is different, the art scene is the city itself.
It acts as a stage for art performances and exhibitions.
This alternative art scene allows for more flexibility and freedom,
since it doesn't follow any established system. It is as divisive
and plural as the sociopolitical situation of Lebanon. It is this
diversity allowed by this informal system that gives Beirut's art
scene its richness and innovation. But this system also finds a lot
of boundaries, since it is limited in many ways. First, these
organizations depend on foreign aids (USaids) and investments and
are therefore very limited financially, since they are not granted
any amount from the government. This financial limit has prevented
these organizations to have their own exhibition spaces. Instead
they just have small office spaces for administration purposes, but
when it comes to hosting an event or presenting some works, these
organizations have to rent spaces or appropriate public spaces.
The venues most often used include Masrah al-Madina (an old,
derelict cinema converted into a theatre on Hamra Street),
Metrpolis centre Sofil (a functional cinema that lends one or both
of its screens for local film festivals), Galerie Sfeir-Semler (a
1,000-square-metre commercial gallery that opened in 2005), the
Dome City Center (a blob-shaped building on Martyrs Square in
Downtown Beirut), and Zico House (an arstist's residence in Spears),
among others.
Therefore the fact that there are no permanent spaces for the
presentation of art creates another boundary, since the aimed
public is limited. Each of the organizations has its own public, but
the absence of permanent gathering space, prevents the growth of the
crowds to include a bigger and less specific audience.

But on another hand it is this underground, almost illegal system
that has created this romanticized aspect to the Lebanese art scene
and made it so interesting for artists from all over the world.
Beirut has become the stage to an intricate network that has blurred
the boundaries between the work exhibited and space of exhibition.
It has become part of the presentation of the work and it revived
icons of the city, such as the Dome City Center in Down Town and the
Abro Abroyan factory in Bourj Hammoud. These abandoned spaces of
interesting architecture have been of great interest for the artists
in the history they carry and the spaces they offer. Moreover Ashkal
Alwan's HOMEWORKS and the other street festivals engaged the artists
and the audience with public spaces such as the corniche in Manara
and the Hamra street.
In this way the system created has reestablished the city not only
as a background, but as a stage and even an actor, allowing a more
interactive experience.

**How to create a permanent space that would bring
together a large public as well as professionals and
amateurs in the visual field, without jeopardizing the
interactions happening with the city?**

PROFILE OF THE ARAB IMAGE FOUNDATION

The Arab Image Foundation is a non-profit organization established in Beirut in 1997. The Foundation's mission is to collect, preserve and study photographs from the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora.
The Foundation's expanding collection is generated through artist and scholar-led projects.
The Foundation makes its collection accessible to the public through a wide spectrum of activities, including exhibitions, publications, videos, a website and an online image database.
The ongoing research and acquisition of photographs include so far Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Iran, Mexico, Argentina and Senegal. To date, the collection holds more than 300,000 photographs.
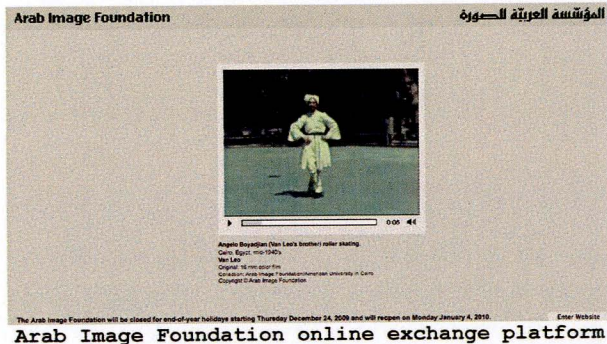
Arab Image Foundation online exchange platform

FOUNDATION OBJECTIVES

- Locate and negotiate access to public and private photographic collections. Acquire, restore and carry out an inventory of all types of photographs produced by residents of the Middle East and North Africa from the 19th century until the present.

- Collect information on photographers, carry out research as to their biographies and photographic practices, and promote their associated visual material.

- Preserve and restore collected material.

- Promote the collection and photographers through a diverse set of activities.

- Provide access to the photographic collections to artists, curators, scholars and researchers.

- Support contemporary visual production by photographers and video artists in the Arab world, organize conferences and workshops and encourage research based on the Foundation's archive.

FOUNDATION PROGRAM

Photographic research and acquisition

Preservation and collection management

Digitization and documentation of photographs

Diffusion of the photographic collection

1. Image infrastructure

   Producing the image

   -workshops for photography,
    video and cinema
   -darkrooms
   -shooting studios
   -montage studios
   -equipment rooms

   Storing the image

   -archive rooms
   -research facilities
   -media library

2. Image recreation

   Displaying the image

   -exhibition spaces
   -projection spaces
   -interactive galleries

The Sound and Vision Institute

Architect: Neutelings Riedijk Architects
Client: Neth. Inst. for Sound and Vision
Location: Hilversum, the Netherlands
Status: design 1999, completion 2006

PROGRAM

-Storage and archive space for the collection and preservation of visual material, preserved at adequate conditions of temperature and humidity.
-Customer service providing visitors with information and research material.
-The media experience consisting of gallery spaces and projection spaces and a huge exhibition space filled by 15 pavilions.
-Office spaces housing around 200 employees from librarians to customer service employees, others for the conservation and management, educational and exhibition employees…

ACTIVITY	AREA
STORAGE / ARCHIVE	6100 m²
OFFICES (200 EMPLOYEES)	3000 m²
CUSTOMER SERVICE	484 m²
PUBLIC MEDIA GALLERIES	3300 m²
TEMPORARY EXHIBITION	1000 m²
LARGE THEATER ROOM	200 SEATS
SMALL // //	90 SEATS
UNDERGROUND PARKING	175 SPOTS
WORSHOP SPACE WITH MULTEMEDIA FACILITIES	30 WORKSPACES
	50 SEATS
SCHOOL BAR	

SHOP
RESTAURANT
TERRACE
ATRIUM

BUILDING SCOPE : 54 m x 54 m in square
        total altitude : 42 m (of which 16 sunk)

Relation of program to architecture

An interesting progression is made clear in the architecture as well
as in the program. The archive being the base of the organization is
sunken underground but made visible to the visitor when he enters.
It appears as a slit in the ground with superposed layers of infor-
mation being the different levels of storage. It gives the visitor
the impression he is looking down into the core of organization in a
dramatized slit separating the archive spaces in two, and linked by
bridges for the visitors to cross from one part to the other. More-
over the orange color given to this underground part adds to the
overwhelming feeling of looking into the core of the earth with the
warm color glowing from the slit. The progression then continues
vertically with the public media galleries and temporary exhibition
spaces and ends with the private spaces of offices. The sequence of
the program is made clear in the understanding of the space allowing
for a more comprehensive experience.

A journey through the memory of the city.

RELATION TO THE SITE

Since the program is divided following a specific chronology and itinerary, it has an exclusive relation to the site at each moment as well as different actors and user groups for each step.

The site, consisting of two types of land and urban situations, responds clearly to each situation by integrating it accordingly to the itinerary, to create one whole consistent procession.

A space to create, a space to see, a space to imagine: from the image factory/machine to the image temple.

The first part of the program consisting of the creation and collection of the image, is closely related to the surroundings, the city and the citizens. This part is profoundly anchored in the roots of the city in order to extract the memories from all of the actors and spectators of the city. This is the base of the whole space, the information infrastructure. This part needs the close contribution of the citizens for the collection of the images and of more specialized people for the creation of new images. The collection and creation parts are happening continuously with the contributions of all the citizens, and professionals in the field. After the collaboration with the people of the city, an archive can be created, taking care of organizing and preserving the memory of the city. This database in construction will then be used for visitors and spectators to experience while recreating their own memory, their own sequence of image. This part therefore happens in the isolated island bounded by fast movement, in the depth of the virtual boundary.

Once the memories are sucked from the roots of the city's visual memory they have a life of their own, isolated in order to allow for the creation of new relationships. Here comes it is the turn of the spectator to appropriate his journey through the memory of the city and recreate a new image of his city*.

Berlin City Edge

Architect: Daniel Libeskind
Client: I.B.A. Building Competition
**Location: Berlin**
Status: design 1987, 1st prize

In this project, Libeskind tries to stitch back the two edges of the city by imbuing his architecture with the city's memory. The architecture follows an itinerary passing from the past leading to the structure of tomorrow, providing a transformation of the experience. It is a voyage into the substance of the city, with the architecture creating new relationships and connections between different moments, places, instances along this path.
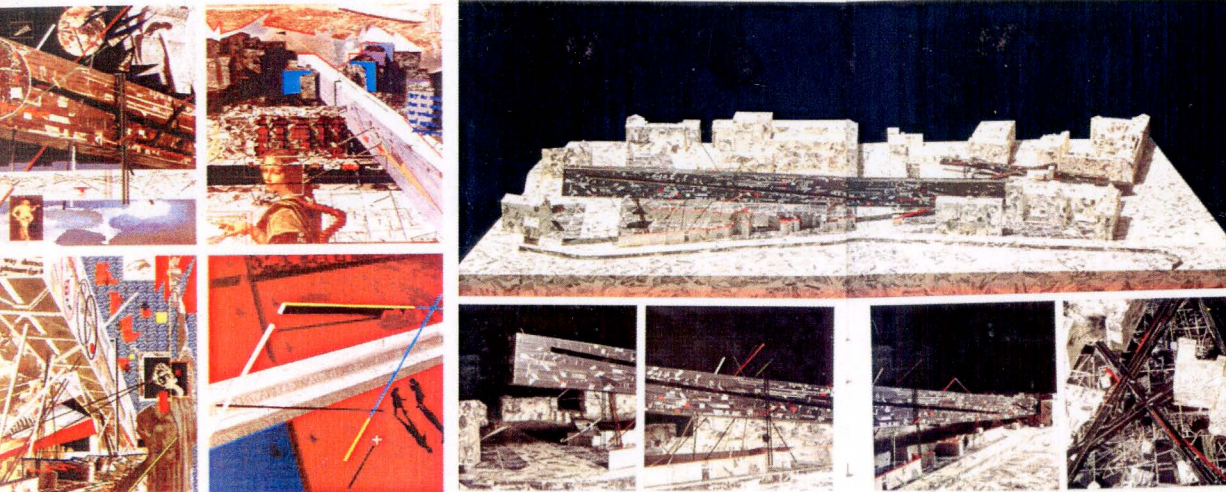
Pedestrian Bridge, Nahr el Mot

5
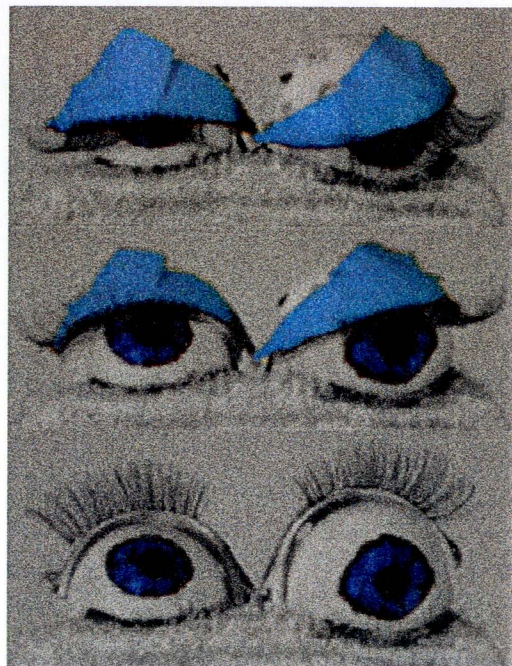
DESIGN PROPOSALS

The main aim is to respond to a virtual boundary engendered by linear movement and speed. The islands that are created in these urban sites of continuous circulation have become detached lands unable to create relations.
Through the explorations, two main elements were highlighted, the movement and the surface, that are going to instigate new interactions.

Speed creates surfaces out of the environment it traverses. In this sense the surface of the building transcends the massiveness and opaqueness of a boundary to become more like an interface allowing for different elements from the surrounding to intervene; allowing it to change in response to these interventions.

Moreover the architecture responds to an experience of travel and itinerary, by following the longitudinal continuous flows of the travelers.
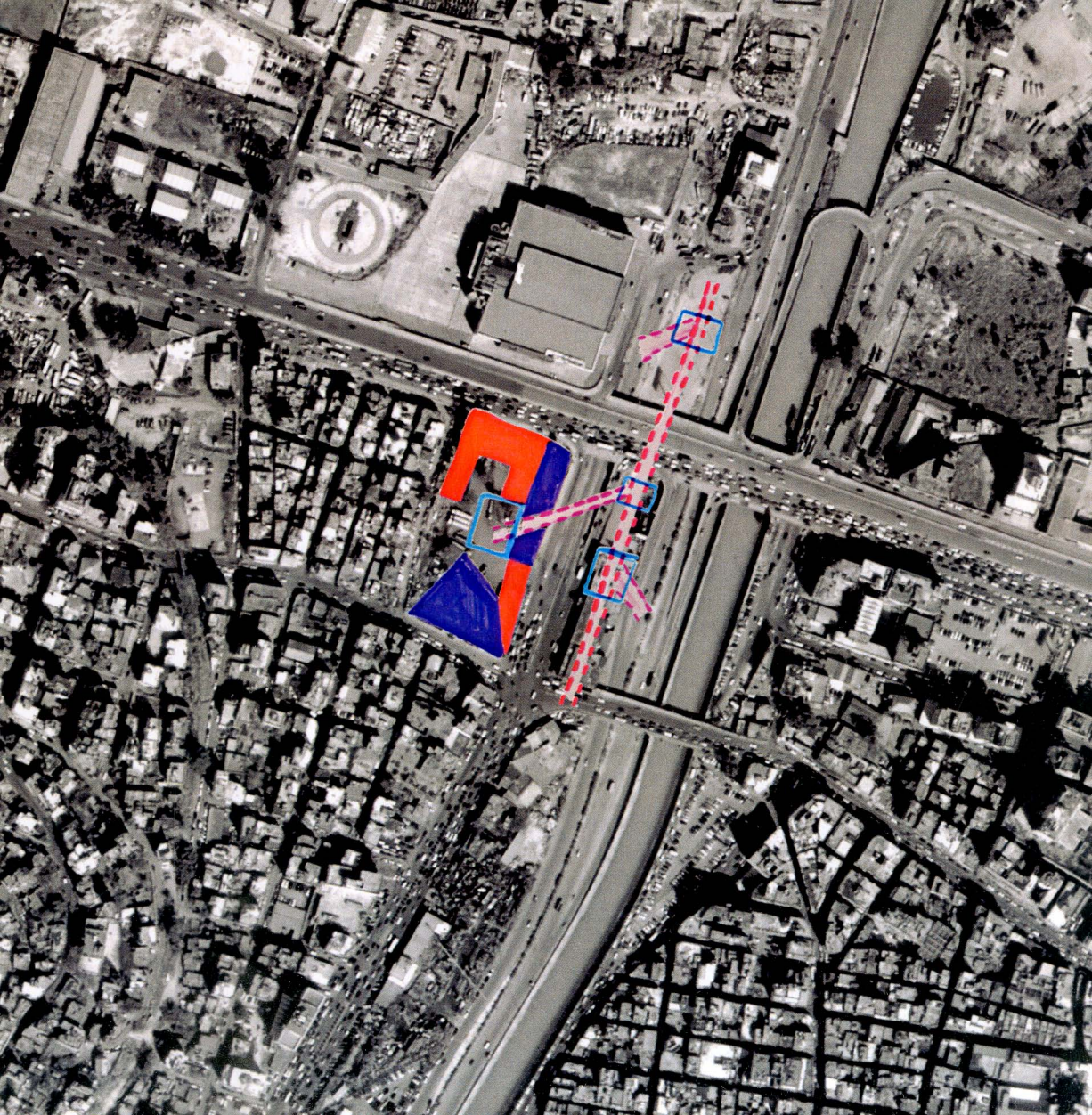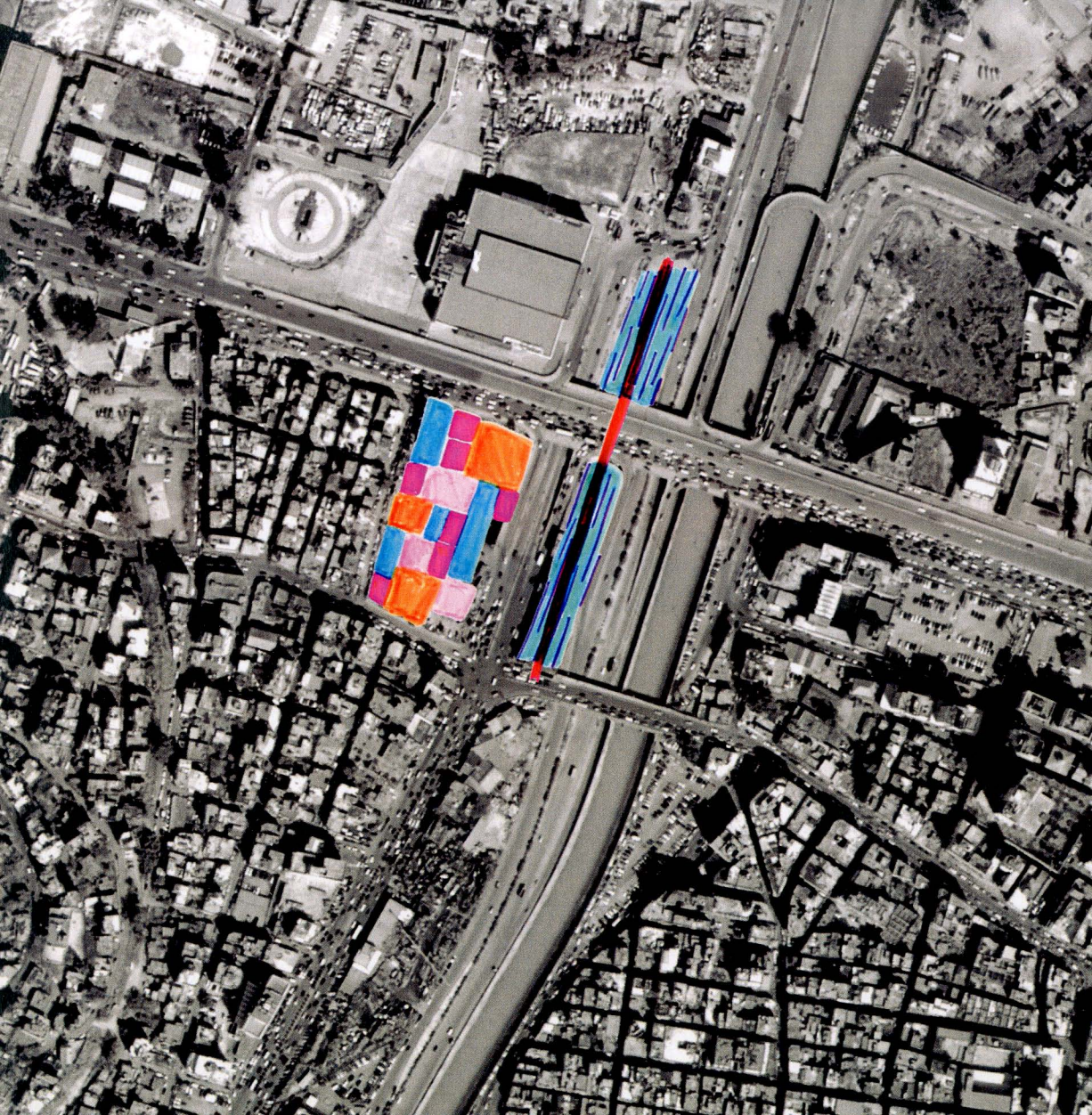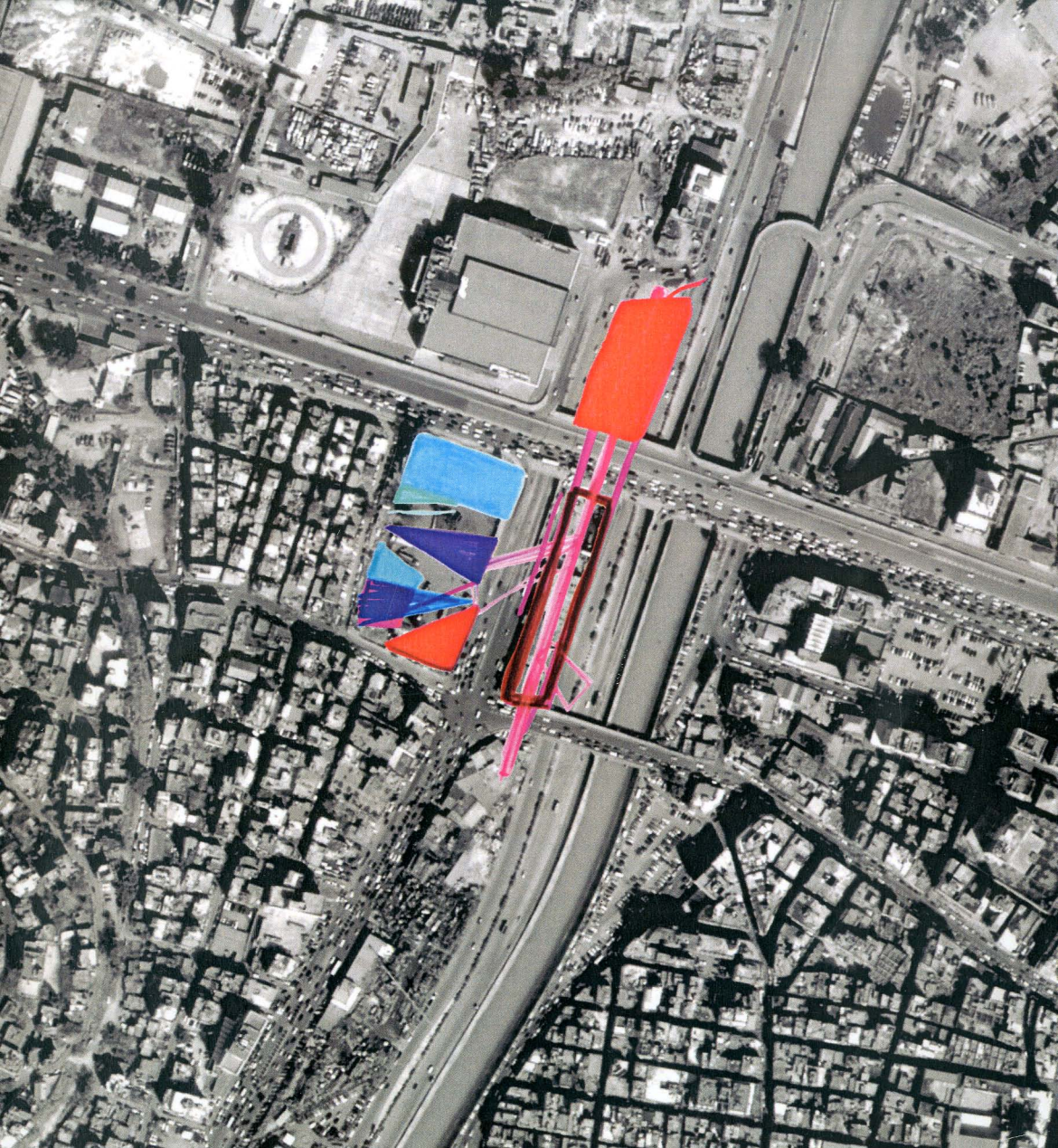
In order to create interactions, different attitudes can be adopted.

1.   Freeing the ground floor to escape the detachment created by the tangential movement and intervening above it. In this case the "sidewalk" of the pedestrian is elevated on top of the fast movement of the cars and acts on another layer.

2.   Shattering the boundary parallel to the movement, accentuating the direction of the journey and creating indirect relations between inside and outside as if fragmenting the different layers otherwise condensed.

3.   Shattering the movement perpendicularly to the longitudinal flow, punctuating it and creating a rhythm to the continuous direction, engendering different moments of intersection.

4.   Accentuating the effected created by the alignment of movement by completely isolating it with a continuous façade determining a clear break between the inside and the outside, the inner pedestrian traveler and the outer car traveler.
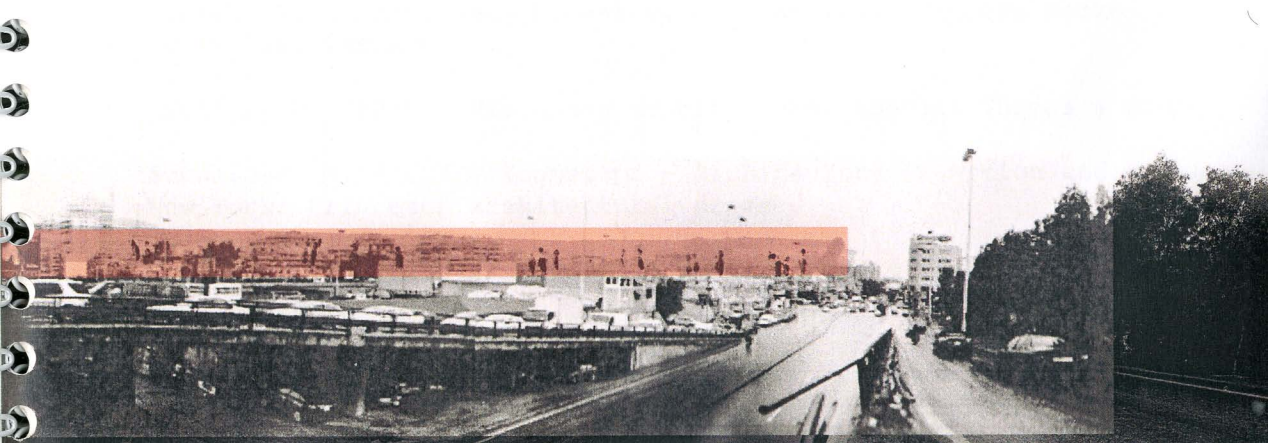
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Karim Ghorayeb

Bassem Chahwan

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