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# Pilgrimage

Experience nature's AWE!



Thesis 1 - 2008  
Sarah Rita Kattan



# Transcending

EXPERIENCE NATURE'S AWE!

## THESIS QUESTION

The area of Nahr el Kalb encompasses spiritual and agricultural layers that have existed over the millennia to the present day. Those links vary in intensity from near non-existent to strong. This thesis studies how architecture can form a link between the two layers where it has ceased to exist and how it can reinforce the weaker links.

Nahr el Kalb is an agricultural valley overlooked by many hills which are mostly topped by monasteries. The lands in the valley are, in the main, a property of the monasteries who work the land, rent it out to farmers or leave it intact of any development.

The monks, as a rule, are active during the day, especially in agriculture. Working the land is essential as it is the basic way of survival. They eat what they produce from their hard-work and sell what they do not consume to bring in cash to buy other necessities.

In addition, the various monastic orders have discovered that physical activity is necessary for the well-being of the soul that in turn brings them closer to god. Agriculture forms the link between Earth – created by God – and Heaven.

Each monastery has a parcel of land next to it where the priests and monks work all day long, relating to the power of nature and its many elements, ensuring their survival, glorifying God in the process.

*The thesis investigates how an architectural intervention can bring to light this spiritual-agricultural link that is in the shade, but that is a characteristic of the valley.*





# Transcending

EXPERIENCE NATURE'S AWE!

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# Thesis objectives

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- Understanding the site and revitalizing the fading spiritual and agricultural aspect of it
- The relation of architecture and nature
- The relation of spirituality and architecture: the gradual discovery, the procession, the ritual architecture, the pilgrimage
- The relation between nature and spirituality
- How transcendence and passage is expressed in architecture of the spiritual
- Reconnecting the people to their roots through the integration of nature in architecture, through a program that would relate to the land and the activities in it, as well as provide them with work opportunities that make them value their land.
- Going back to the essentials of life
- Integration of agriculture in architecture to transcend from earth to heaven
- The reemergence of the spiritual in nature
- Reinterpret the essence of the spiritual



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# Introduction

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**Nature in Nahr el Kalb is dominant.**

The promontory and the mountains defining the valley of Nahr el Kalb, with their steep slopes, have always been a fearful component that created feelings of awe and admiration in the people that passed through the region. The promontory itself was an impregnable boundary separating the south from the north in history. Nature has created a spiritual dimension which was later reinforced by the establishment of monasteries on each of the hills overlooking the valley.

**This spiritual character** coexists with the very basic way of survival: agriculture. Moving from the transitory passage of the promontory, the visitor goes through the agricultural lands of Mokhada, grasping how human settlement began with the cultivation of lands, and continues his journey to the urban industrial city of Zakrit an epitome of the current age.

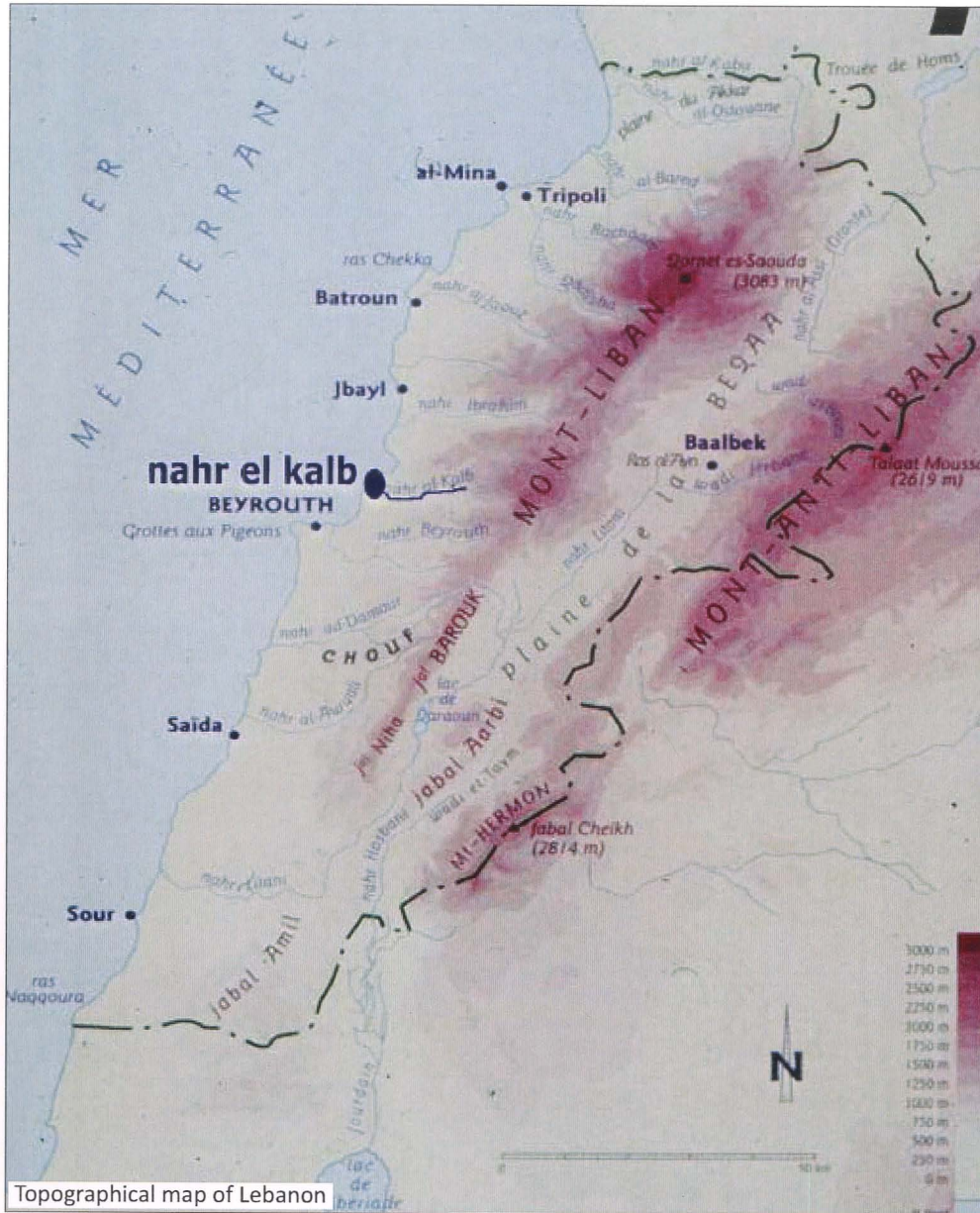


# A temporary passage

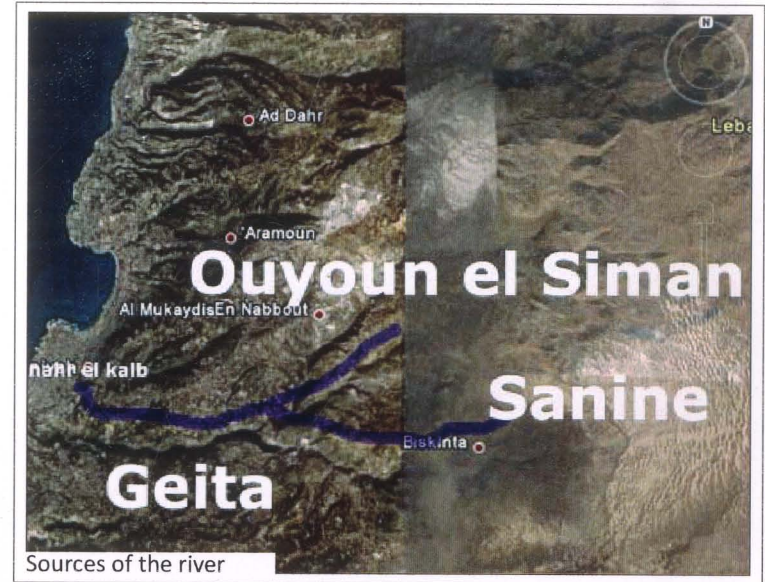
EXPERIENCE NATURE'S AWE!

*Nahr el Kalb... from a temporary passage marked by eternal traces, to a sedentary agricultural village that forms a midpoint stop before reaching the industrial city of Zakrit.*

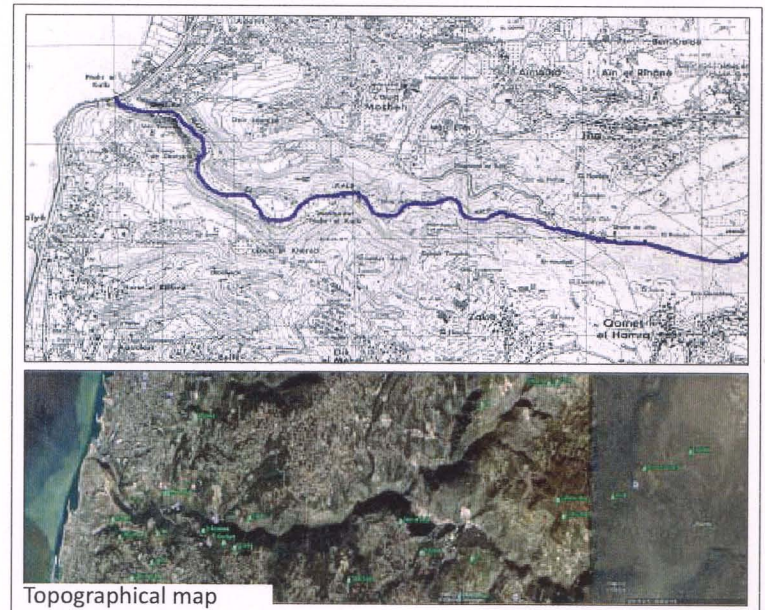




Topographical map of Lebanon



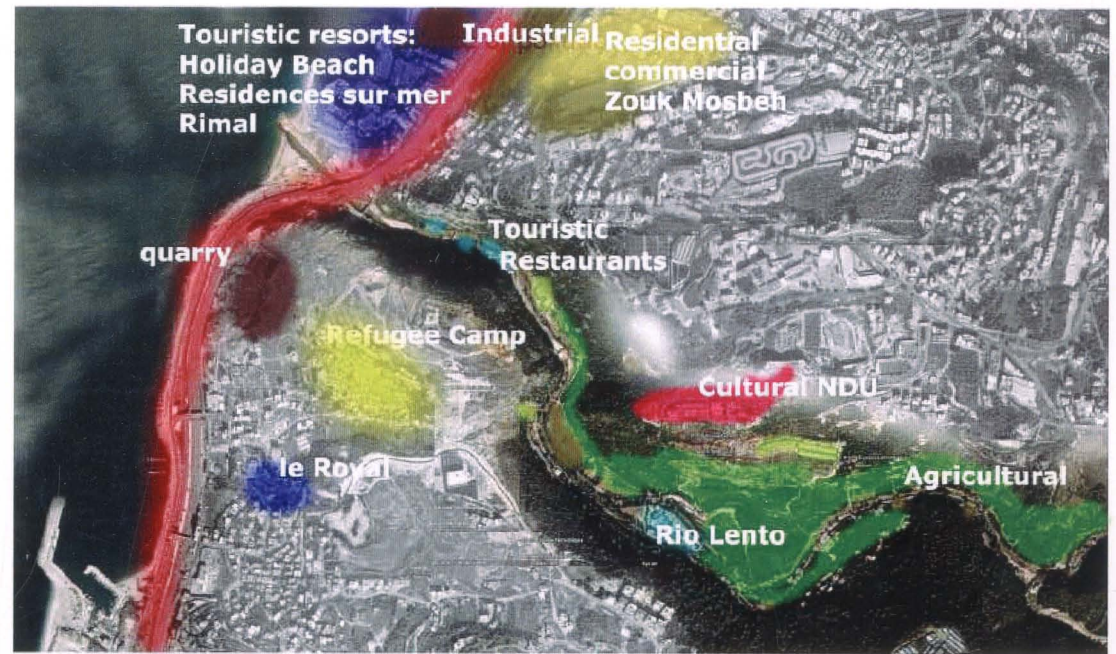
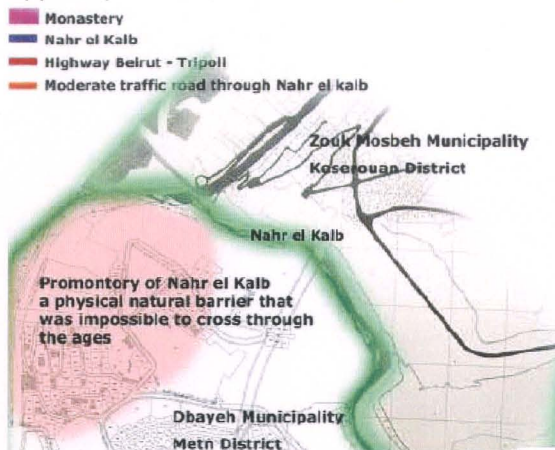
Sources of the river



Topographical map



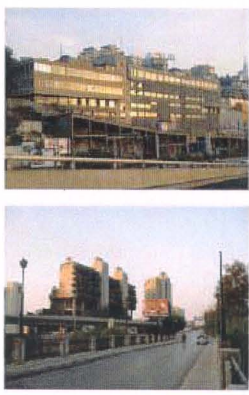
The road along the river of Nahr el Kalb connects the highway of Beirut - Tripoli at the mid point between Jounieh and Beirut, to the Metn and more precisely Dick el Mehdi and Mazraat Yehoh, going up to Bekfaya. The hills surrounding the valley are almost all topped by monasteries or churches.



### Land use diagram

the coast : tourism and industry  
 the highway: commercial, residential industrial  
 the foothill: industrial, residential and mixed use

The region of Zouk Mosbeh, contrary to Zouk el Khrab and the Mokhada, is a mixed use area where residential, commercial, industrial and touristic land uses are present. The area along the river is mainly agricultural where oranges, avocados and ashta trees are cultivated. There are farms for chicken, dogs, cows present in the region also. Many stone factories and a steel factory are established on the riverbanks. The only quarry in the area was used for the Waqf project and is now stopped.



## NARRATIVE

### **Nahr el Kalb... the tunnel. Just a tunnel.**

I go through it to get to my house every day, through that dark, unlit tunnel where everybody used to blow the horn.

There is nothing more I can tell about it except that as I pass through it, I feel that I've crossed the boundary between what is close to my home and the city of Beirut. It is a demarcation line. I am now in the area of Jounieh. I have crossed the border.

I can peek through the tunnel and see a gigantic statue... Christ le Roi. The imposing statue dominates the whole hill overlooking the whole bay of Jounieh and the beach... opening up his arms to bless the region. I can't but feel small in front of this spirituality emanating from this person, a person seeing everything from Jounieh to Nahr el Kalb, the edge of the valley, the tunnel.

Yes, actually he can't see further than the tunnel, this demarcation line. It sounds now as a very imposing barrier, a whole mountain challenging the statue, with all its spiritual domination. What allows it to do so? What right does it have to challenge the Christ le Roi – God?

What does it hold in its rocks to defeat Christ le Roi?

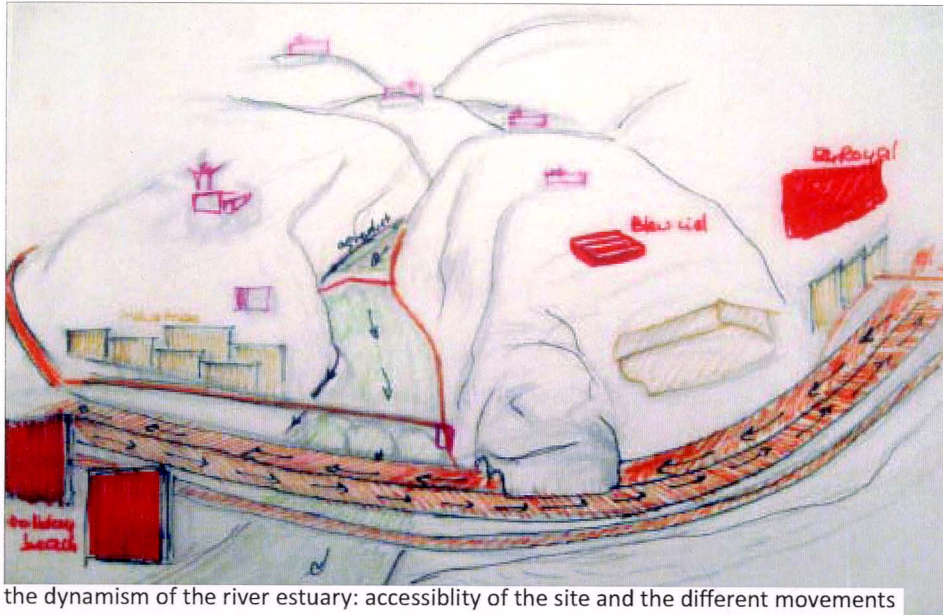
I am now looking back at it. For the first time, I am observing it. It's not just a tunnel, it couldn't be. A tunnel, carrying a hill, a huge hill full of rocks, so abrupt, so rigid...

The highway is going around the hill nowadays. Before it wasn't! I remember how it used to be. The hill reached the sea and was immersed in it.

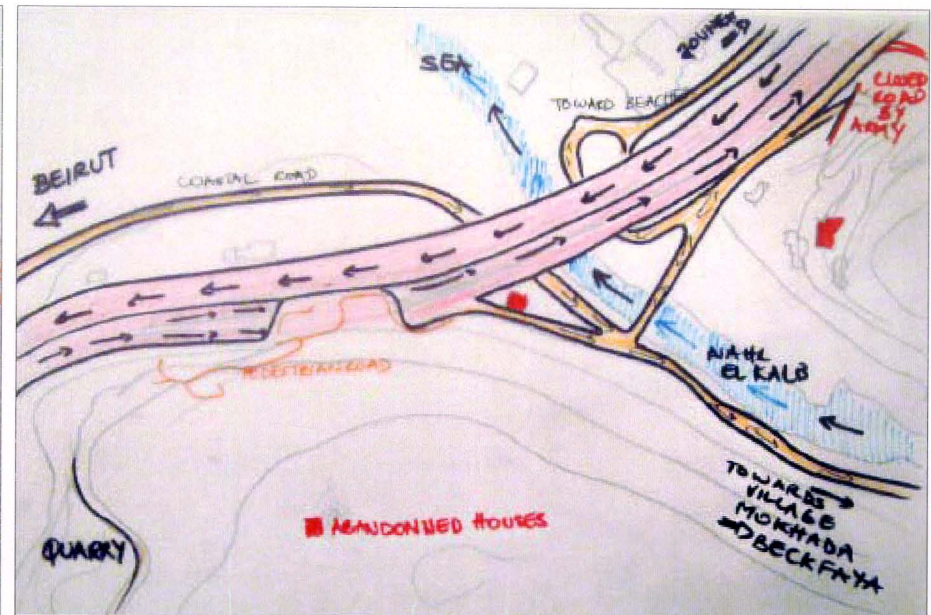
The tunnel was the only way to get to the other side. That idea of barrier is being clarified in my head. The new highway added on top of the landfill changed the whole configuration of the site. A layer of movement is added around the rigid hill rising up there, impregnable.

What a landmark! A point of anchorage of the land in the sea on the Lebanese coast, a point in space, a point in time.





the dynamism of the river estuary: accessibility of the site and the different movements



Again looking back at Nahr el Kalb...

That tunnel ends up on a valley... a deserted dark valley... a course of water reaches the highway and goes under it... It's almost dry. But I can follow that water going in the deep valley, going through the hills, reaching somewhere, probably Geita, the famous natural grotto, and going up to the high mountains.

On that first hill on the highway, I notice a staircase. A broken fence. A staircase to climb the mountain, to go above the tunnel. And to see eventually what this hill contains to defy Christ le Roi.

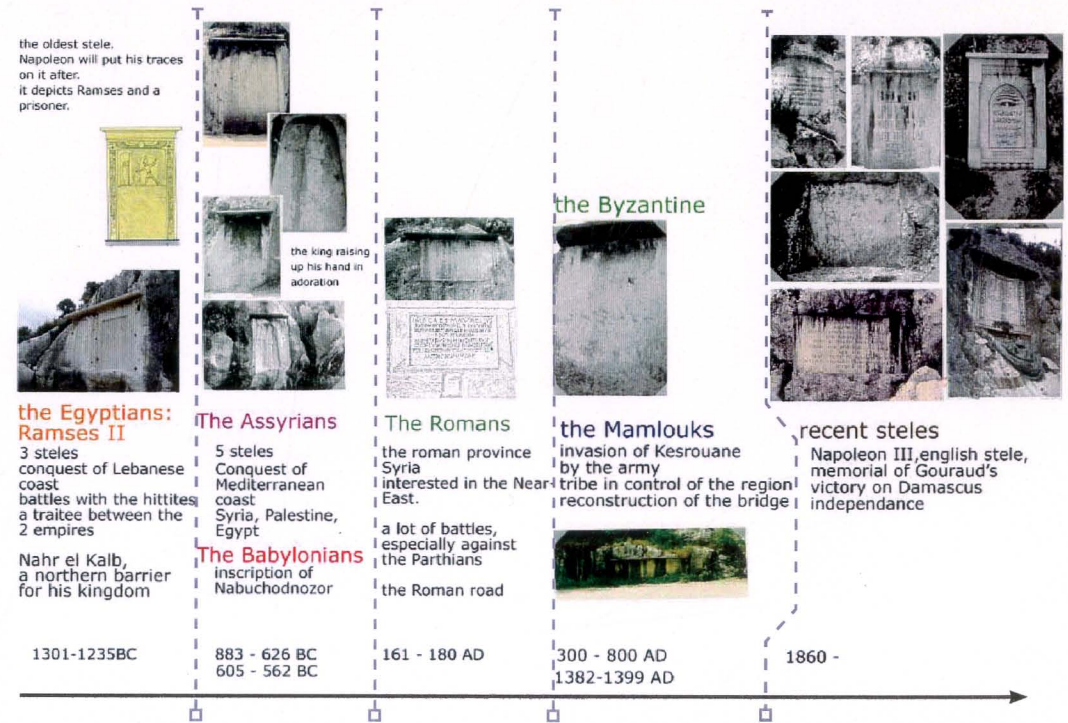
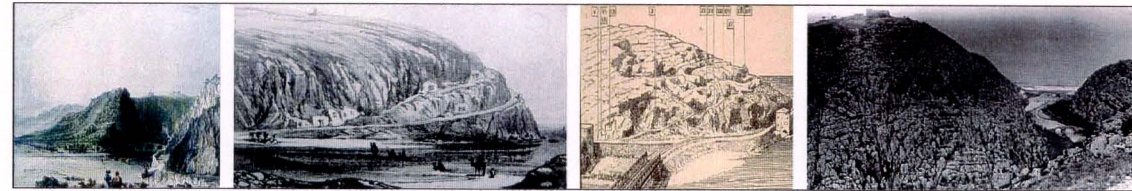
Carved in the rocks, white plates of stone are imbedded in the landscape. These white platforms depict some shapes, some characters from the past... characters that disappeared, that are no longer there, characters that are decaying with time, and being eaten up by the growing grass around them. What kind of sculpture is that? Along my way to the top of the hill, I can see those depictions and I can pass next to them but they are still imposing, bigger than me. I look upwards to see them. They are reclaiming the territory. I am passing through their own private space, a reclaimed property. Again this feeling of me as a small person looking up to those depictions. Who are they? What are they? Why are they here? Invading this intact hill and leaving their traces in its natural rocks...

A temporary passage, an eternal trace. Along the river, along the staircase and the walkway, I found many steles... steles representing the kings and emperors that passed by here thousands of years ago, and with difficulty reached the other side, or had battles there and came out victorious....



The promontory of Nahr el Kalb was an impregnable mountain that no one could cross. Many battles happened there, the defenders were able to hold off a big army with a small number of militia because of the strategic location of the hill, uncovering the whole surroundings. The victorious armies who were able to cross that cliff emerging from the sea, very proud of their deeds, left traces, carved out of the rock, marking their passage, traces that are still there today, testifying to a moment in time.

These facts enhance the divine character of nature in that site. The latter witnessed a lot of battles, and events happening through time. This leads to a ritual architecture that would enhance the temporary passage of any visitor through this eternal nature.



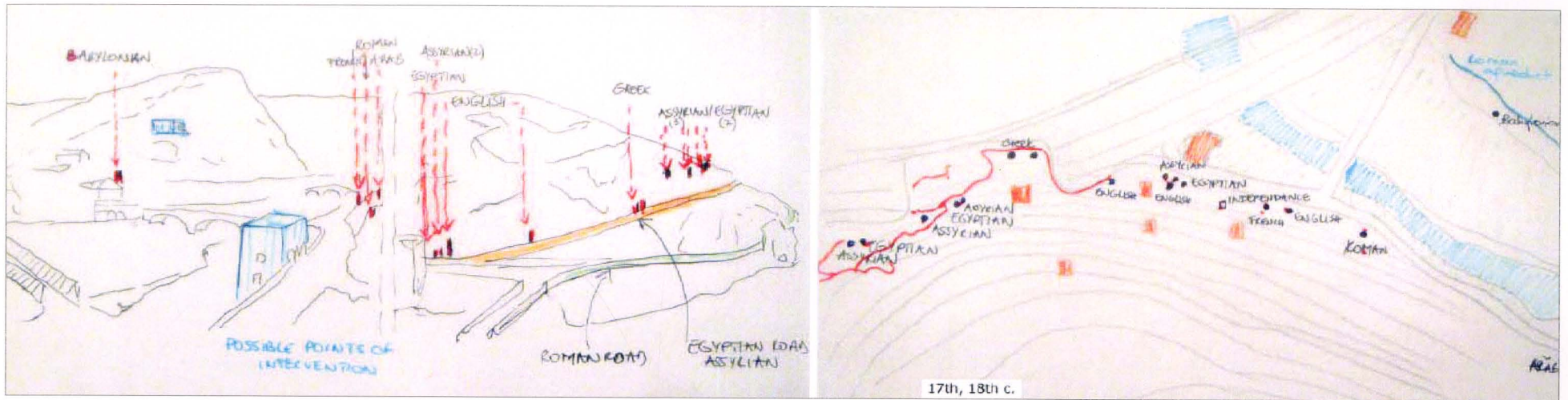
2nd millenium BC -> 2000 AD  
22 stelae marking the passage of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Neo- Babylonians.

1821, the Ottoman period  
taxations  
a military area  
the base was located at the current Christ le roi convent

Cultivation of lands began  
churches were built - the waqef was being formed

the economy of the area was based on the silk industry and agriculture  
Zouk Mosbeh was becoming an attractive village for commerce because of its proximity to Beirut  
access was done through pedestrian routes





Through architecture, the relation of man to the earth will have a spiritual aspect where he could be praising the awe of the land. The scale of the human being in that landscape is minimal. The architecture is reflective of that relationship where it is embedded in nature in most of its functions. Some sculptural elements would punctuate the place enhancing the path and procession through nature instead of trying to overcome nature.

1st and 2nd World Wars  
Zouk Mosbeh became again an inaccessible village where people died of hunger and sickness

1950  
water network in houses

1951  
Christ le roi Convent

1955  
Electrical power plant  
electricity network

1956  
industrial area  
wood factory in Adonis

1957  
main road to connect  
Jelita to Nahr el Kalb

1959  
Beirut Tripoli Highway

1960 - 1961  
a residential project in  
Adonis

Ecochard master plan  
1964  
from 10 factories to 50 in 4 years

1970 - now  
new zoning  
an urban mixed use city  
summer resorts

# An overriding nature impregnated with awe

*Nahr el Kalb... from a temporary passage marked  
by eternal traces, to a sedentary agricultural vil-  
lage that constitutes a midpoint stop before reach-  
ing the industrial city of Zakrit.*



This dynamism through the site contrasts with the imposing hills protecting the valley by their awe inspiring presence while inciting passersby to discover what mysteries the valley holds. The mystery of the mountains is reinforced by the existence of monasteries on top of each one of those hills, overlooking the land – mainly agricultural – while trying to reach the sky.

Going through the mysterious valley impregnated by mythology and ruins testifying to a histrionic past, a ritual like experience happens, echoing with architecture of ritual. The enlargement of the fertile land, partly through the use of terraces, on the edges of the river is at the origin of the creation of the village called Mokhada. Agriculture being the main element in this village, reachable within 10 minutes from the highway, adds to the disconnectedness of the area from the urban area of Zouk Mosbeh as it grounds the village in its earthly roots.

Agriculture, spirituality and a moving perception of the landscape are omnipresent in the valley of Nahr el Kalb. Architecture is then the dynamic link that could join the living nature and its use in Mokhada to the spirituality and awe of Nahr el Kalb, through a series of spaces with specific experiences related to the views of the site. The spirituality of Nahr el Kalb is then recaptured. The commercial aspect of the valley is getting stronger these days, ignoring the spiritual aspect.



# Architecture, a link between nature and spirituality



## METHODOLOGY

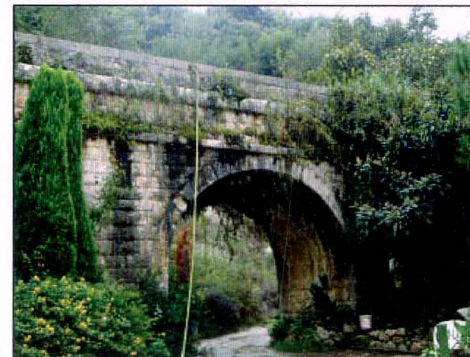
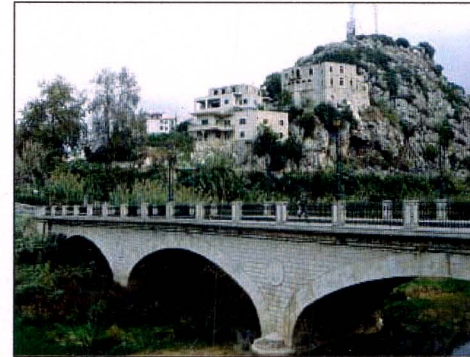
Nahr el Kalb is a fascinating site in terms of mythology and archaeological evidence. The valley is mainly a green untouched part of land which was not affected by the growing urbanism of Zouk Mosbeh. This contrast made me choose the site. While understanding more deeply the site, I discovered a village hidden in the valley. The mode of living there is – or was – based on agriculture, which is an interesting point where at 10 minutes from the highway, one can find a rural village. The spiritual character being the second layer involved in this thesis, a theoretical approach with many case studies will address the way architecture should join these two layers, reinforcing one by the other. The site is almost a natural reserve. This leads me to conduct further research about ecological architecture for the future.



How can architecture be the link between nature, more specifically agriculture, and spirituality where spirituality is reached by going back to the essentials, going back to the roots, to the attachment to the land, giving to the spiritual a dimension that is not reachable through religion? Based on research about the monasteries and their relationship with the land and agriculture as their basis for survival, agriculture is used to transcend from earth to heaven through an architecture specific of the natural setting.

This activity will revitalize the village and its inhabitants through their original activity which is agriculture, letting them connect again to the land and to their roots instead of migrating to urbanized poles of attraction like Jounieh and Zakrit or Bekfaya.

Ecological architecture should be used as the site, being an almost natural reserve, requires and demands it. Through the introduction of naturally imbedded pilgrimage architecture, minimal adverse impact on the site will be achieved. Certain structures will be used as landmarks for the pilgrimage route.















# Back to the essentials

NATURE, AGRICULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY



## THE CULT OF THE GODDESS OF AGRICULTURE

Demeter was the representational goddess of agriculture in the Greek culture. Her sanctuary in Eleusis was made of a set of processional events. The path people took was from Athens to Eleusis ending in a serpentine path merging in the Telestrion, a colonnaded hall where rituals were practiced in community.

The cult of nature, prevalent in man's early settlements, through gods that represented its different elements (sun, wind, rain, fertility...) kept this dimension of transcendental power in nature. That's why ecological experience relates to a connection with nature and to the cosmic forces.

## THE LIFE IN MONASTERIES, AN ACTIVE SPIRITUALITY

Nature can be considered either as the protector of the human being or his enemy. Man's first shelters were natural caves and his presence did not disturb the eco-system. Then at some point, man began trying to defy the natural disasters that befell him and started protecting himself from the dangers of wild life by eliminating what he believed are threats. Man went against nature instead of cooperating with it to survive.

Considering nature's blessings, what does the notion of sustainability have to do with the soul and its relationship to a spiritual eternity?

Construction technologies were developed out of regionally accessible materials which satisfied the demands of climate and topography and with agriculture comprised the principal means of survival. The concept of eternal soul was thought of by offering provisional housing en route to paradise and the construction of awesome monumental sanctuaries to symbolize the mission.

In the ancient world, nature was regarded with awe and fear, an evident characteristic in Nahr el Kalb. People were considered helpless in the face of Nature. Agriculture was the first attempt to control nature and make it respond to human needs. The continuous availability of food incited man to build a permanent shelter that became the early settlements.



From the cosmic forces and their effect on nature, we imply a relation between spirituality and nature, especially controlled nature such as agriculture.

**Life in monasteries and the connection between agriculture and spirituality – being active spiritually.**

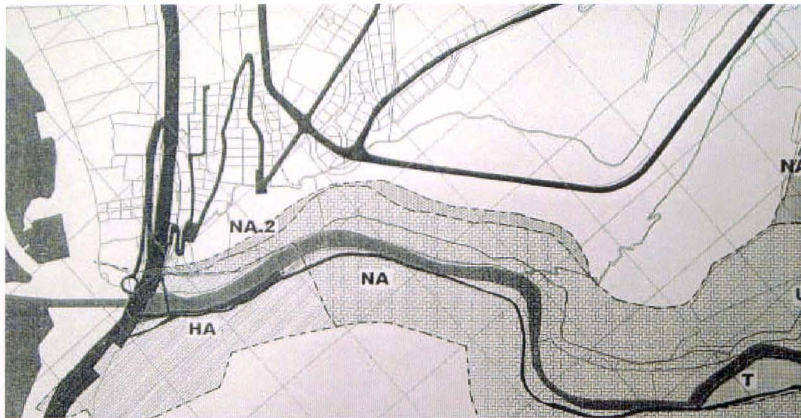
The spiritual life in the monasteries is based on contemplation and physical activity, cultivating the land or manual works.

We notice that most of the convents in the mountains have agriculture as an essential activity of the day. The monks work the land to eat from their own hard-work, agriculture being the essential and often the only way to survive. Handcrafting is necessary for the relaxation of the spirit as well as the submission of the body to the common human law, preserving the unique taste of spiritual activities. Reading, writing, praying, meditation, contemplation and working are part of the daily life of the monk.

By working, the monk goes through humility and servitude, so that he could reach his interior stability. Useful handicrafts are necessary both for the relaxation of the spirit as well as satisfying the need of the community for items that help them in daily life. The submission of the body to the common human law, preserves the unique taste or spiritual activities.

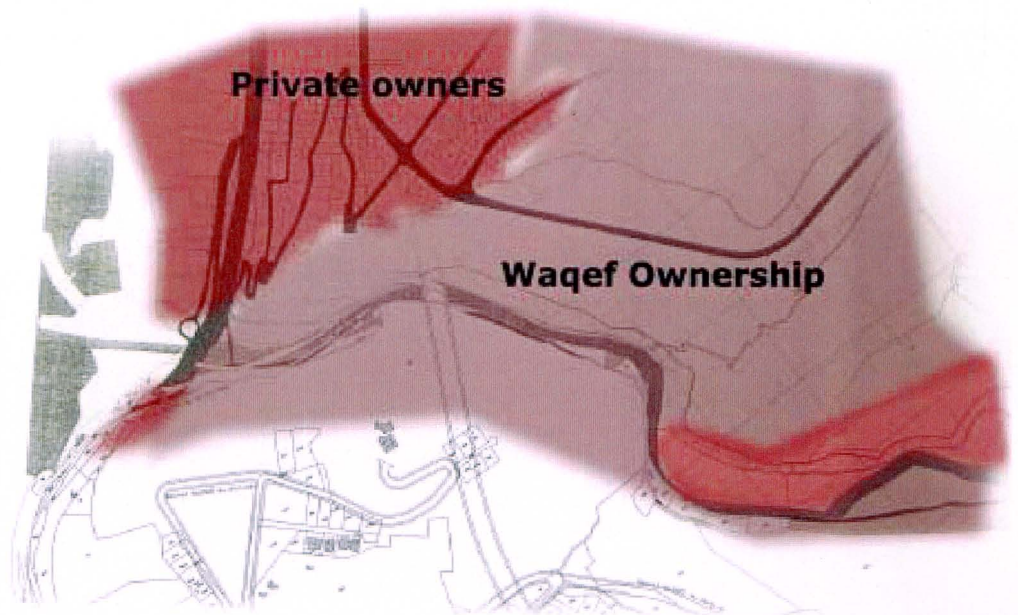
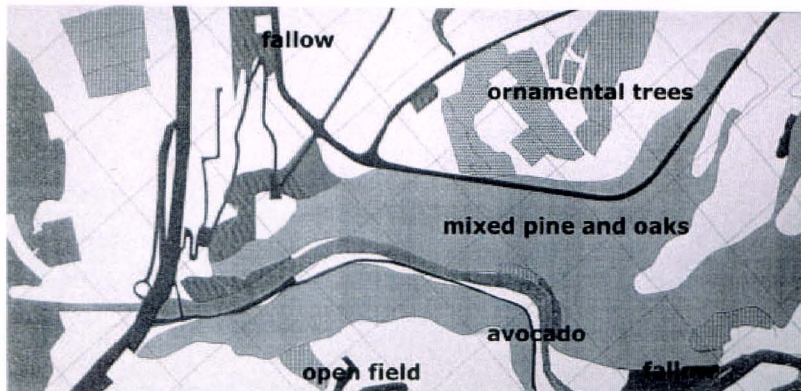
Working and labor is a service that gets the monks closer to Christ who came to serve not to be served. The pain arising out of labor corresponds to carrying a part of Christ's cross, and thus becoming part of the new land and paradise. The heavy work load keeps away impure and unhealthy stressful thoughts and allows the heart to be fixated on god, without any tension of the spirit. The divine law of work applies to all the monks, whereas laziness is the enemy of the soul. With humility, they accept all the tasks that a poor and solitary life requires, offering everything for the contemplation of god, and religious studies.





**New Zoning (1997)**

	surface exploitation	total exploitation	
NA: 15m away from the river	5%	10%	The river was classified as a touristic area which changed the exploitation factors.
HA: Archeological tell	1.5%	1.5%	
NA.2: 315m from the river	20%	40%	
T: Touristic, on the river, temporary structures	10%	20%	
UR.1: 365m from the river	25%	50%	



Any work required of a monk is for the common good but it should not add tensions in his life as it should not become a preoccupation for him, or serve his own glory and satisfaction. Working, in the monastic tradition, is one of the most efficient means of gaining the equilibrium between the exterior man and the interior man, enhancing the benefits of his solitude.

After working all day long, the monk is solitary in his cell, reflecting about the day and spiritual subjects.

Hours of working and reading spread during the days at the monastery in the law of St. Benoit.

They do the harvest themselves, and they live from their own hard work, they work to survive, which explains the importance of cultivating the land.

In cultivating the land, the monks are in direct contact with nature and its elements: water, wind, earth and sun, so the veneration of these natural elements is related to God's worship, the Creator.

**The union of work with prayer**

By improving their patience and perseverance, the monk's work is "transformed from a source of fatigue, a burden into an expression of unceasing praise of God and love for the brethren.

Thus the practical things of life become, for the monk, an indispensable means of learning, progressing, putting into practice the spiritual principles he has learned, becoming aware of his failings and correcting them. Labour, often even very hard labour, is a means the spiritual father chooses to detect spiritual weaknesses and correct them psychologically and spiritually, but we have come to understand that work itself and its success or failure are of no consequence to the spiritual father; his interest is always in the integrity, growth and maturity of the spirit.

The unity between the material and the spiritual in the lives of the monks is important. That's why there are separate times for work and prayer. Work unites the monks in an intimacy full of love and real humility".







# Architecture and spirituality

A TRANSITION BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH



## SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

The spiritual character of the site is to be enhanced not the religious character. A larger definition of spirituality would be conveyed to the people participating in the program, sharing and uniting the different points of views of the religious stands.

## SPIRITUAL ARCHITECTURE

Sacred architecture symbolizes the spiritual path and its goal, the physical goal as well as the spiritual development: the way, the spiritual path, the sacred journey. Any spiritual path implies a spiritual practice and then the physical setting.

## SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Architecture as a provider of security

“Religion and mythology and ritual were established to explain the world and humans’ place within it. The beliefs answer the questions of existence and provide a degree of security in this insecure world.” Architecture provides the shelter thus providing security in an inner world contingent to the human being and expresses many meanings about the human existence.

Architecture is a built myth as it facilitates the enactment of shared rituals, joining the psyche to its need for spiritual orientation, wholeness and transcendence. In architecture, the symbol is representational, spatial and temporal because of the dynamic experience of architecture by the participant. (*spiritual path, sacred place*)



## TIMELESS ARCHITECTURE

Architecture when carved out of the land, being embedded in it, looks like it is standing for eternity and since eternity.

The land itself will create the architecture of the space, a shelter. The caves before were completely imbedded in nature, the shelter was created by nature itself.

The meaning of the space is altered by "the presence of light, the sound of water, the manipulation of perspective, and the humane use of space in a way that would engender feelings of reassurance and hope."

There is a quest in architecture for the essential, the emotional and the passionate. (*Inventions*)



## DEFINITION OF SACRED SPACE

The feeling of sanctity is not common for everyone as every person understands differently how the procession in a spiritual space happens.

"In general, sacred was associated with a religious practice and spiritual with a feeling of transcendence or awe of a power greater than the self that may or may not be associated with formal religious practice.

A sacred space can be defined as a place in which a religious import has been assigned. A spiritual space can be defined as any place (including sacred spaces) that evokes special transcendent feelings, or connection with something larger and deeper than oneself."

"What we seek to understand is, in part, the sense of awe or emotion that one is filled with upon entering a space that causes one to go quiet.

The "hush" that falls in sacred or spiritual settings."

The principles of spiritual space are:

The elicitation of wonder

The imperative of stillness

The benevolent connotation of forces that nurture, gentle and release

In nature, meditative walks, pathways, urban design can lead to a spiritual journey, from the physical component transcending to the dimension of spirituality.

Civic communion is important in spiritual architecture, joining the different religions in one spiritual dimension where diversity is praised and the personal search happens in each person differently. The place provides the conditions for this meditation, and where nature and the cosmic dimension of spirituality are addressed.



### **Architecture of the sublime**

The geometry of the space adds to the spiritual layer of architecture.

Symmetrical and bisymmetrical plans, linear and axial organization, radial and centralized organization, repeating modules, cluster plans, gridded plans, free plans are all elements that could either enhance or diminish the spiritual awe of a space. These should be designed to facilitate the progression of the procession or ritual.

The 4th dimension of perception is done through movement in the architectural space. The dynamic movement along a path, an extension of the promenade architectural, is punctuated by a rhythm of flanking elements. The colonnades – vertical moments in time specifically defined spatially – on both sides of a corridor or aisle increase the rapidity of movement according to the passer.

### **The unknown timeless**

When we move from a space to another, we go from what we know to what we don't know, from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Varied and rich new environments, a lot of stimuli happening there, make time pass slowly. When the space is uncomfortable, one is in a similar frame of mind.

*(spiritual places)*

“According to Eliade the sacred place was an interruption of the infinite and formless immensity that surrounded it; detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different”.

Often, the sacred place has a center where everyone is oriented, a place for the first creation, where the underworld, earth, and heaven are connected. The creation of a sacred place has principally provided the existential means for people to establish a center and thus define their place in the world.

That's why the spiritual in Nahr el Kalb is to be integrated in the land, to enhance the belonging of the people to this land.



“The sacred place is an earthly reproduction of a transcendent model”. Sacred geometry is used to reveal the divine sources. The form is associated with its use and content; it is a dynamic place, charged with emotional energy and experienced spatially and temporally as its users move through its spaces and enter its sacred enclosures.

The built form symbolizes the rite of passage and spiritual transformation.

The path to the sacred place can represent the myth as a ritual where the participant goes through preparation, separation and return. The entry point should be clearly delineated so that the person feels that he is starting a journey, taking the decision of going in or not.

The transitional space is represented in the religions as an ablution place. The mosques for instance have a fountain in the middle of the outdoor courtyard where ablution happens, as water purifies.

The procession after that transitional space between the profane and sacred is created through a series of spaces where specific events happen, increasing the sacredness of the space until the end is reached.

The boundary separates the profane from the sacred. The inscribed space as opposed to the circumscribed space is to be considered, the inscribed suggests the enclosure whereas the circumscribed separates completely the inside from the outside by the demarcation of the sacred ground.

At Zen Buddhist temples, the temple is surrounded by gardens. The space is reached by a bridge-like structure. A small building which serves as a bridge relatively to its proportion connects the real world to the sacred space, much more monumental.

The idea of bridging from one world – earth – to another – heaven – happens through these transitory spaces.

The Couvent de Ste. Marie de la Tourette designed by Le Corbusier built on the side of a cliff is raised on pilotis and a single bridge acts as the main entrance.

The Eero Saarinen’s chapel at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts is a cylindrical structure surrounded by a cylindrical pool of water. The entrance is a rectangular space bridging over the pool to reach the sanctuary. The use of water and the reflection of light on it add to the spirituality of the space. A lot of monasteries and sacred places are built in mountainous areas for isolation purposes as well as to allow nature to provide a spiritual aspect to the place.



The verticality in spiritual architecture has been explored since millennia as temples were built on ziggurats and artificial mounds. The temples would overlook the whole region, linking the sky to the earth. They are perceived from any point in the city. The permanency of temples was associated with their elevation from the earth level that is often flooded by water.

Whereas the centrality and symmetry was the perfect proportion for sanctuaries and sacred places, the spiritual place can be perceived differently.

"A ritual is an enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth." (Joseph Campbell).

"Through ritual, one is able to approach and commune with the divine."

"Public architecture at best aspires to be just this: a setting for the ritual that makes of each user, for a brief moment, a larger person than he or she is in daily life, filling each one with the pride of belonging." (Spiro Kostof)

Rituals have always been symbols of timelessness and continuity.

Purification happens at the beginning of the ritual.





## GRADUAL DISCOVERY ARCHITECTURE

If spirituality is about disconnecting from the actual reality of life and a move to another reality, then an architecture of discovery, through the element of surprise, would render a person incapable of thinking of anything related to their life outside this context. The mystery and surprise of arrival evokes a spiritual feel. While moving through the architectural space, the rhythm of feelings should be paired with the procession leading to transcendence: familiarity, comfort, surprise or awe.

Sometimes the procession happens through a labyrinth.

The architectural elements that should be taken into consideration:

- Vision: visual elements of the worship space, lights, colors, symbolic and artistic elements.
- Acoustic environment: process of listening and hearing, relaxing sounds that influence the mood of the worshipper.
- Senses: comfort of sitting, standing.
- Movement: perception of movement through space, through the procession.
- Orientation of space: belonging to the space, harmony, unity of form, scale, proportion, entry, spatial navigation.
- Individual experience and communal experience.
- Feeling of respect, reflection, awe, spiritual, sacred.



# Transcending EXPERIENCE NATURE'S AWE!

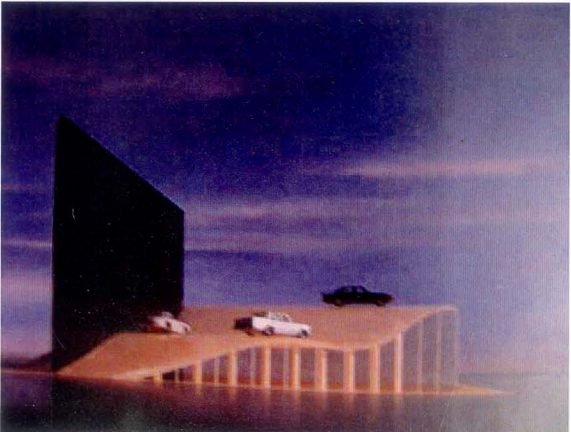
The Ritual in Schlumberger Research Laboratories,  
Emilio Ambasz



Leo Castelli's house, Emilio Ambasz



the Mercedes Benz showrrom, by Emilio Ambasz,  
a contrast between the verticality and the wavy  
horizontality



## PATH AND RITUAL ARCHITECTURE

The work of Emilio Ambasz is a relevant example of that kind of architecture. Ambasz creates an enchanted man-made environment, conveying the awe of nature and its supremacy of the human being. A richly varied, multi-sensual stimuli experience that changes as one moves into the project. Processional routes are indicative of a certain dramatic sequence narrating a story that the visitor experiences from the edge to the center. Myths unfold in a gradual narrative along the ritualistic route where they are experienced and felt. When talking about the myth, the ritual component essential in the spiritual architecture is meant.

Touching the soul and making people more receptive to fresh and awed perception are constants in Ambasz work.

In Leo Castelli's house project, the time dimension is expressed through the processional routes. The panoramic wide views suspend time in slow motion. The top of the mound reveals the anticipated panorama and the unannounced sunken courtyard.

The built form is defined by the negative spaces carved out of nature.

The horizontality of the landscape contrasts with the verticality of the relationship between earth and sky through the sunken courtyards that define the edge of the shelter.

The verticality in architecture is expressed by walls and columns, exaggerated in their proportion. The horizontal dimension shows in the beams, slabs... As dominant as it could be, it doesn't contradict the vertical dimension that affects the perception of the visitor; the latter feels small, weak and powerless in front of this inaccessible space rising up to the sky.

These punctuations would enhance the intervention of the spiritual in the human dimension – the horizontal, eventually accessible, as impressive as it is.



The approach is based on rituals, events along the route. A certain stability is felt when the shelter and court are reached. That ritualistic experience began with the promenade architecture of Le Corbusier.

The pool is a reflection of the sky on earth. "The house is treated as a temple, a subterranean structure revealing the sacred family life and elevating its daily routines to epics played out in the backdrop of the changing cycles of day and season." While reconnecting to the land and oneself, through the play between the scale of the architectural intervention – the human being – and the immense landscape, one connects to the cosmos.

Reconnection to the self and cosmos

"Patio, channel of the sky.

The patio is the window

Through which god watches souls.

The patio is the slope

Down which the sly flows into the house.

Serene.

Eternity waits at the crossroads of stars.

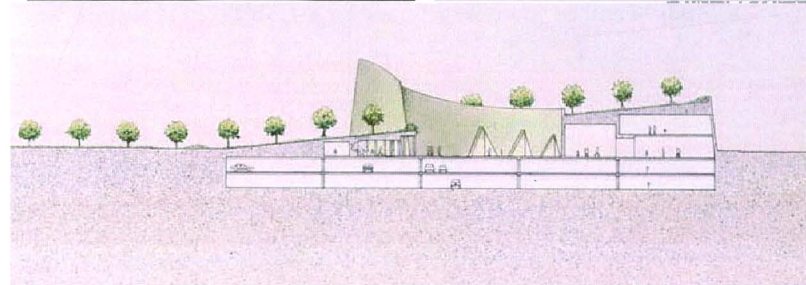
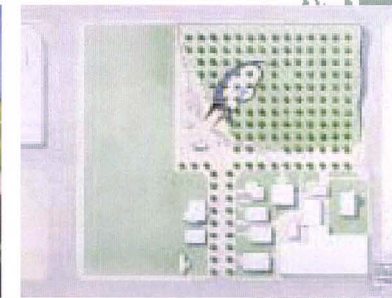
How beautiful to live in friendships with the shade

Of a porch, eaves and a well."

The powerful project stills the soul and evokes awe, as we can see in the Phoenix Museum of History. Here the mode of living of man in society is reconsidered. "Alienated to the society, we distract ourselves from our feelings of dissatisfaction and insubstantiality by compulsive overindulgence in work and entertainment, drink and drugs, sex and food.

People long to a sort of world where they can open up to its splendors and satisfactions, and experience again a deep connection between themselves and their settings. Myth is a means to reinstate meaning, direction and a sense of connection at both cultural and personal level."

The phoenix Museum of history, by Emilio Ambasz



The connection between the physical environment and ourselves is reconsidered.

Architecture is reestablishing the mystery of the cosmos and nature through the ritual – myth – and the representation – the monuments that punctuate the landscape and the places where functions happen.

The isolated elements or separated functions, are linked through a ritualistic connection, a re-creation of ourselves happens through the ritual, connecting the cosmos and deeper levels of psyche (psyche is present in the complexity of the building and the separation of functions in it). Indeed, architecture should link the concrete aspects of daily life, nature and climate with the abstract forms and expressions.

#### **Tension in the universe**

To reflect the tension between the forces of the universe and the cosmos, vertical elements are opposed to horizontal ones; a black static wall, imposing and rigid, is transpierced by a white wavy floor going up, which creates a microcosm. That is applied in the Mercedes Benz showroom of Ambasz.

Forms are sometimes trying to reach heaven and sometimes buried in the ground.

#### **Architecture and myth-making**

While Wright tends to see trees and plants as compositional accents in or around his buildings and habitat as an extension of its adjacent terrain, Ambasz sees landscape as a ritual experience.

“I have always believed that architecture, as well as design, are myth-making acts. I believe that the real task of architecture and design begins once functional and behavioral needs have been satisfied. It is not hunger – but love and fear – and sometimes wonder – which make us create. The task is to give poetic form to the pragmatic.

There is in all of us a deep need for ritual, for ceremony, procession, magical garments, and gestures. I believe it is an archetypal search in which we all partake.”

Ambasz is addressing the daily rituals: like the ritual of sitting in the courtyard slightly protected from both the view of your neighbors and the wind – looking up at the stars.

The minimal geometry of architecture is used as “coded directionals to frame the presence of the landscape”. (*Green architecture*)



The Lucille Halsell conservatory simulates a "Babylonian garden and space age celebration. Necessity for greenhouses to shelter botanical displays, features assertive, pyramidal forms embraced by ground surface incisions and sculptural mounds. The conservatory produces the effect of a living monument that pays homage to both the visible manifestations of plant life and their invisible sources of nourishment from the sky and the earth." (*Green architecture*)

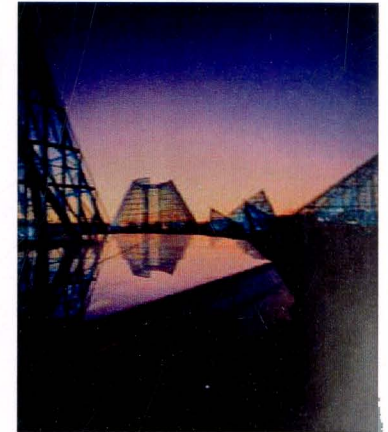
Architecture is then a man made nature instead of separating between the architecture and nature.

The fusion of architecture in landscape is at the origin of: either integrating nature in the man-made built form or integrating the built form in nature.

In architecture, two approaches were adopted; the Greeks adopted the geometry of structures as an indication of man's superiority over nature while in the Far East, emphasis was made that man should be living in perfect harmony with nature.

The blending of the inside and the outside through the concept of borrowed scenery in Japanese culture establishes the relationship of the building with the site. Walls are "tissue-like membranes separating but informing the two domains. As the interior was a garden, the exterior was like a living room". (*Green architecture*)

the Botanical garden, the conservatory  
Emilio Ambasz



"A ritual is an enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth." (Joseph Campbell).

"Through ritual, one is able to approach and commune with the divine."

"Public architecture at best aspires to be just this: a setting for the ritual that makes of each user, for a brief moment, a larger person than he or she is in daily life, filling each one with the pride of belonging." (Spiro Kostof)

Rituals have always been symbols of timelessness and continuity. Purification happens in the first rituals.

As a spiritual program, architectural setting affects a lot the people experiencing that journey.

Norman Koonce says that when we enter an inspiring space "something inside us says God is here".

**How the power of architecture can elevate and enrich the human experience?**

A certain tension is present in a place of worship. People feel it emotionally as they relate it to their memories and experiences.

**The example of the Church of light**

The attributes of space, shapes, color, thermal conditions, light (natural and artificial) and sound, all affect the human senses.

"The environment must express, define, accommodate, enrich and enhance the worship practices".



The pilgrimage: the concept of the path or the architectural promenade.

There are two types of paths: the linear path and the segmented path.

The linear paths include axial paths, bifurcated paths, radiating paths, grid path systems, and circumambulating paths.

The segmented paths include connected path series and labyrinths.

## THE LINEAR PATH

### The axial path

“The sequence of the axial path creates a series of thresholds and spaces that are increasingly sacred. The sacred place at the end of the path is the home of the gods, reserved solely for the deities and the priests.” (spiritual place)

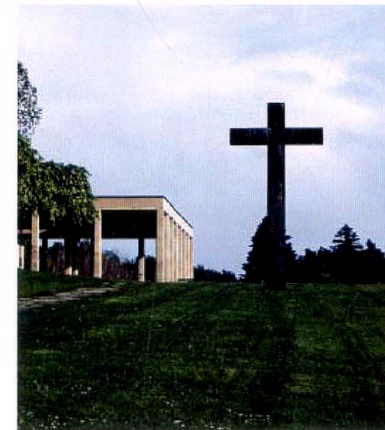
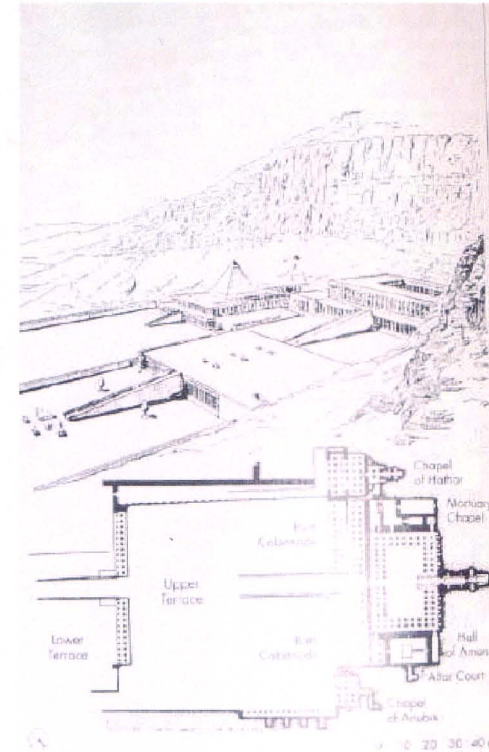
Egyptian architecture of temples was based on axial path. We notice that in the temple of Queen Hatshepsut, the path begins at the Nile and passes through courtyards enclosed by walls and colonnades alternatively. The last space, the most divine, is carved into the surrounding cliffs. The mountain is then the sacred place.

The architecture of the Hellenistic temple of Asklepios, the healing god, consists also of axially oriented terraces. The temple is constructed on the last terrace.

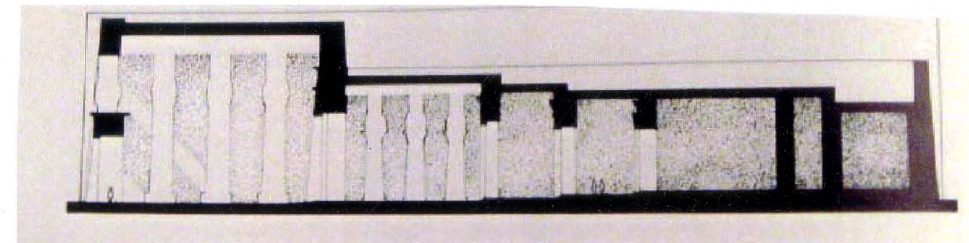
A dramatic effect is created by sequentially aligned, small and dark spaces like the temple of Hathor in Egypt.

The Woodland Cemetery, near Stockholm, by Gunar Asplund and Sugurd Lwerentz is an example of a modern axial path in nature. The main entrance is an axial path, called the Way of the Cross that does not have a punctuated end. It has on one side buildings and on the other landscape. The way to the cross is a slightly sloped path that reinforces the idea of

Hatshepsut's temple

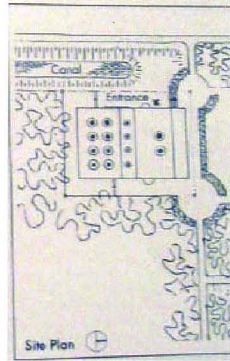
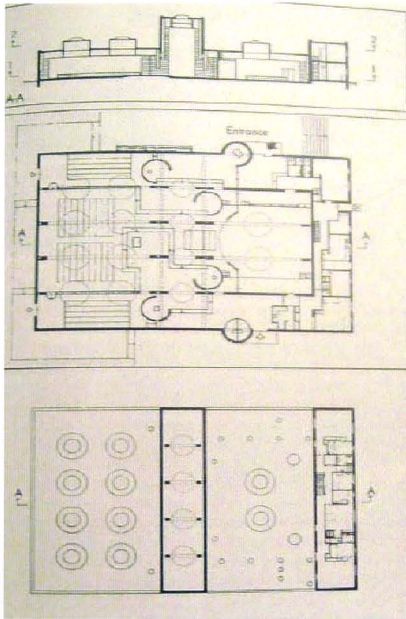


the Woodland cemetery



the progression of spaces in the temple of Hathor, Egypt





Eyck's church

ascension to heaven. The cross seen from the entrance is the last step. The square opening of the roof of the chapel's entry portico marks the passage to the inner world.

The pure geometry of interlocked squares contrasts in its whiteness with the dark forest. The chapel is distinguished from the other buildings with its hemispherical dome. There is a complex interplay between the landscape, path, and architecture. The volumes of architecture and landscape frame the views along the journey through the site. The volumes are slanted upwards, seeking to reach the sky. The Roman Catholic church of Pastoor van Ars-Kerk in the Hague, by Aldo van Eyck's built in 1969 is another example. The architect reconsidered the interior path of the western Christian church.

Eyck shows a dimension where spirituality can be expressed without following the basic principles of the Church and ritual procession. The main axis is East – West direction. But instead of having the nave there, it goes through a series of chapels on both sides, separating the public space of the Church from the more private quarters. "a tall space – neither narthex nor nave but something of both", according to Eyck. The entrance door is narrow, whereas the exit door, next to it, is wider. Limitation is necessary for the people entering the space.

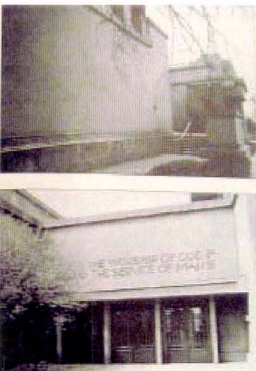
Concrete block piers and semicircular chapels mark the path along with round skylights, allowing people to filter through them. "The path is passing by the destinations instead of leading toward them. There is a distinction between "places for movement and places for repose, creating a dynamic interplay between the path and the sanctuary."

### The split path

The pilgrimage church of St. James at Santiago de Compostela is on a platform reachable through two paths. At the end, the sanctuary is reached.

The Unity Temple of Frank Lloyd Wright, in Oak Park, Illinois (1906) is built for the Unitarian faith. Two paths lead to a series of sequential experiences that lead to a centralized space. The building is "a series of architectural events" rather than an object.

The space inside narrows down and then opens up creating a place to rest along the path. The path is a series of spatial experiences of compression followed by expansion.



Frank Lloyd Wright Unity temple

The chapel is non-directional contradicting the common processional path of the religious structures. The entrance of the space is from behind the sanctuary. The split path incites the participant to take decisions and be more involved in his spiritual quest.

### The grid path

A grid arrangement of paths decentralizes the sanctuary or suggests a number of centers. God is considered omnipresent everywhere, not in a specific place.

## THE SEGMENTED PATH

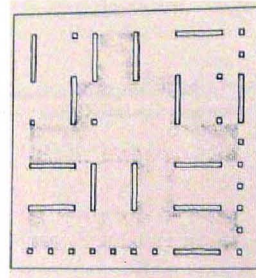
A segmented path is a multidirectional connected series of paths that lead to the sacred place. Some turns or even a labyrinth can do the effect of a segmented path. Each segment has a specific view and orientation. The acropolis of Athens is organized as a segmented path going around the sanctuaries.

The Koto is a Zen temple and monastery. It is an example of a segmented path, where there is a connected series of paths that include passage through the monastery itself. The path contains a sequence of paths, gateways, spaces of richness and complexity.

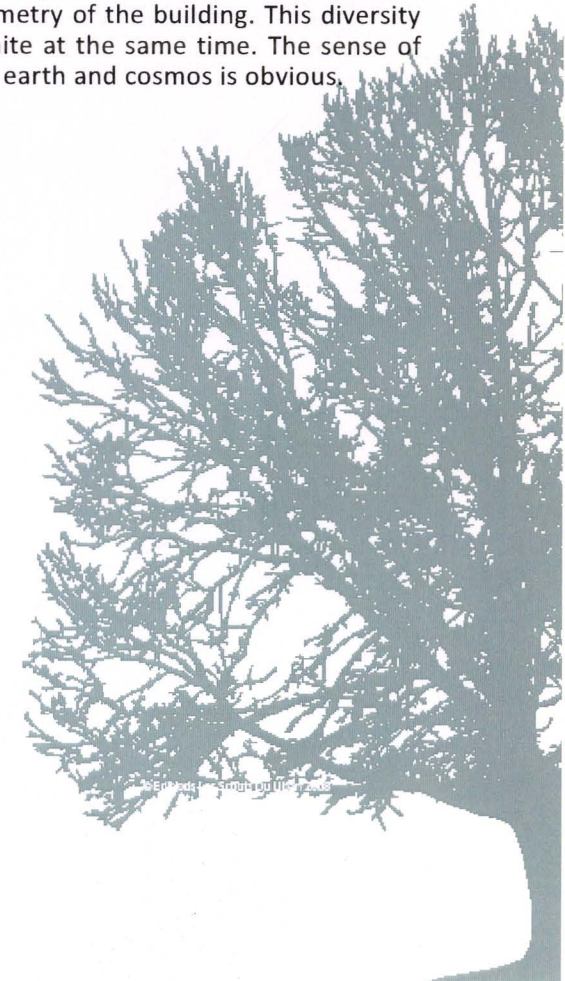
The monastery contains living places for the monks where they can meet with their teacher.

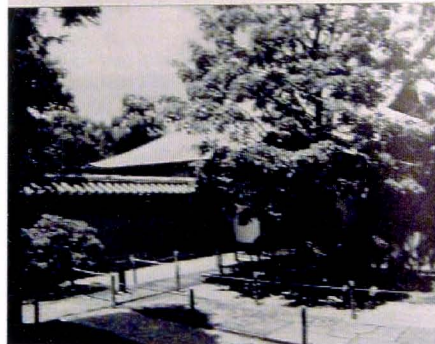
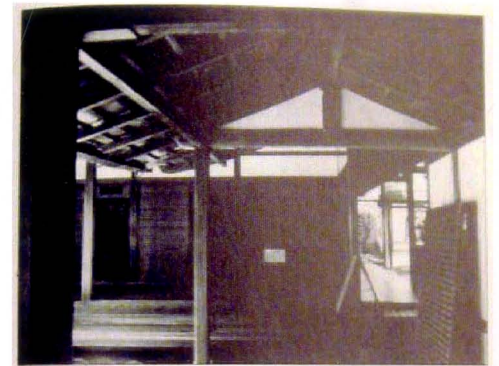
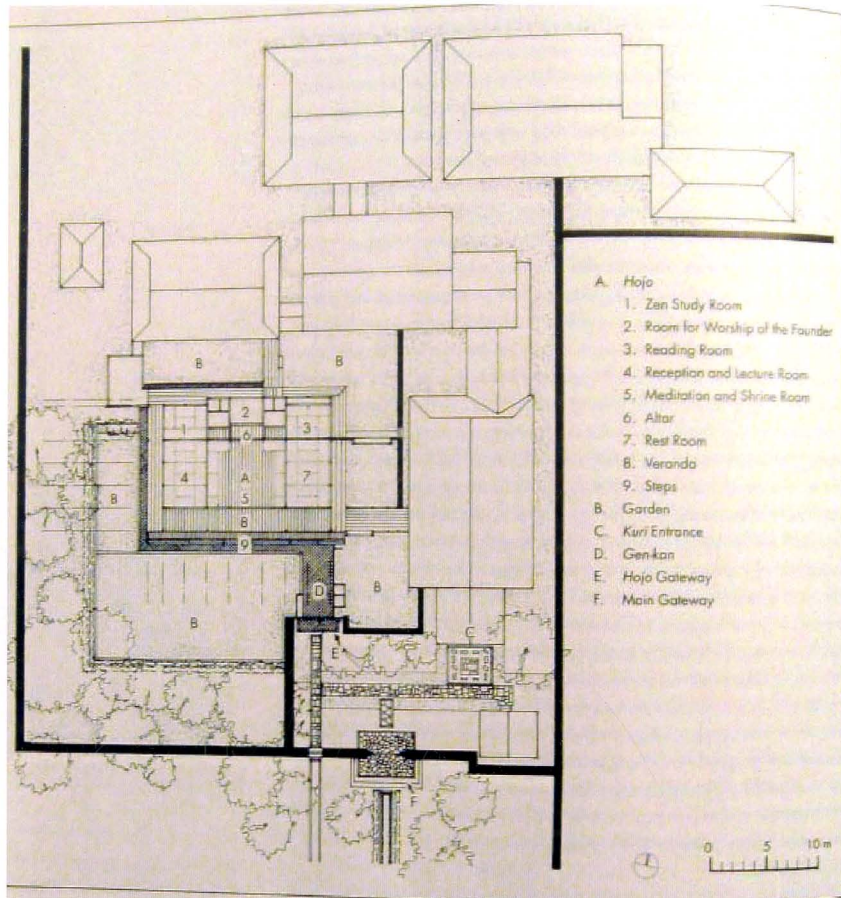
Passing through planted gardens, one arrives at the end to the gateways and thresholds. The 4 volumes punctuate the walk, a level of inscribed spaces is present. Courtyards play the role of negative space between the volumes. There is an interplay between positive and negative spaces.

The volumes decrease in size as one moves towards the sanctuary.



The glimpses of the temple and the gardens one has while going through the monastery enhance the experience of passage, anticipating the attainment of the spiritual space. The buildings float in a sea of gardens. The spaces inside are dark and introverted but the view they have of the outside engage the monk with nature. Compression and expansiveness of the temple gardens and inside are elements that add to the spirit of the space. The gardens are meditative elements. The interplay of opposites is interesting, the horizontal orientation of the main building enhances the horizontality of the asymmetrical gardens as opposed to the symmetry of the building. This diversity makes the elements unite at the same time. The sense of belonging to the space, earth and cosmos is obvious.





# Eradicated villagers



## ERADICATED VILLAGERS

Originally Mokhada was a series of agricultural lands owned by the residents of Zakrit, a village situated at a higher altitude in the mountains. The residents of Zakrit built small houses in the valley where they could rest while cultivating the land.

The number of houses increased and as the road was constructed, the villagers came and settled in Mokhada during the winter and moved to Zakrit in Summer.

Mokhada is an accessible village only 10 minutes from the highway. The road passing through the village connects Zouk Mosbeh to Bekfaya, so the people living there settled next to their lands. Their children were educated in schools like Champville and Apotres. The lands were rented to migrant workers who take care of the agricultural activity there.

The attachment of the villagers to the land is disintegrating as they are migrating out, detaching themselves from nature and the lands, their roots.

Reestablishing the value of the land and the mentality of these villagers is my aim. The project relates then to the agriculture, providing the villagers the opportunity to work in this field linking the agriculture facility of NDU to the practical side of agriculture in the village. The villagers themselves will be involved in this activity which has a spiritual aspect as it is related to the spiritual state of the mind, as proved before.

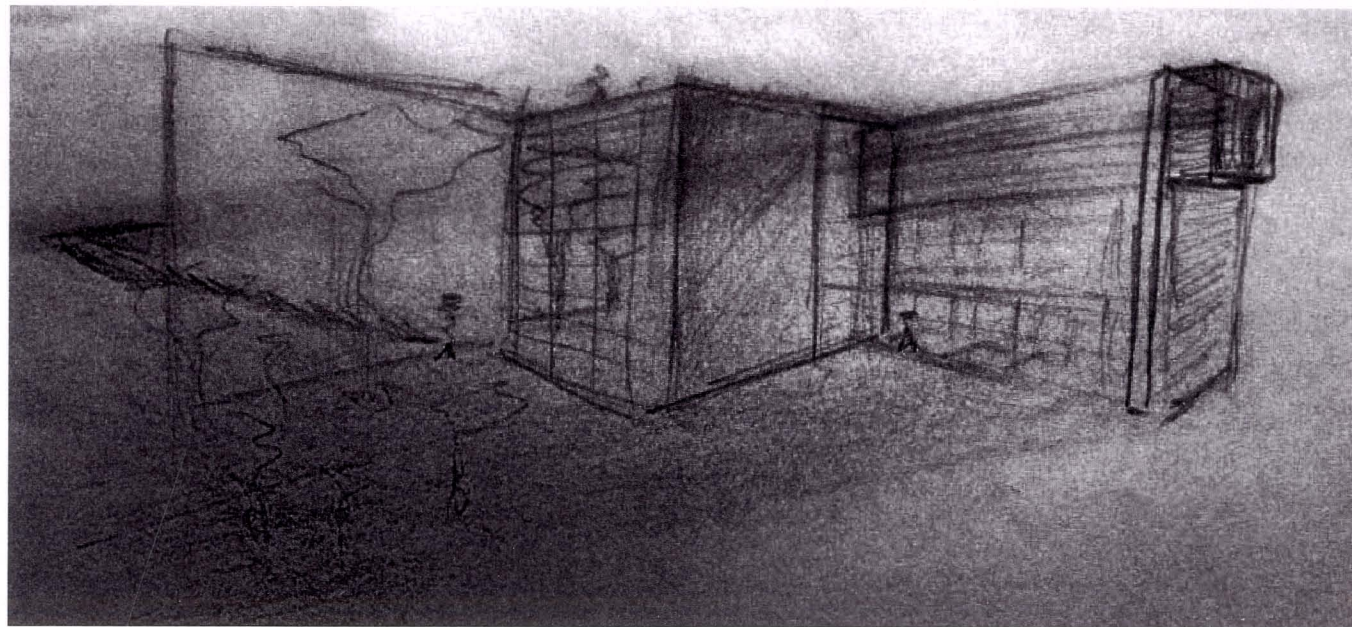
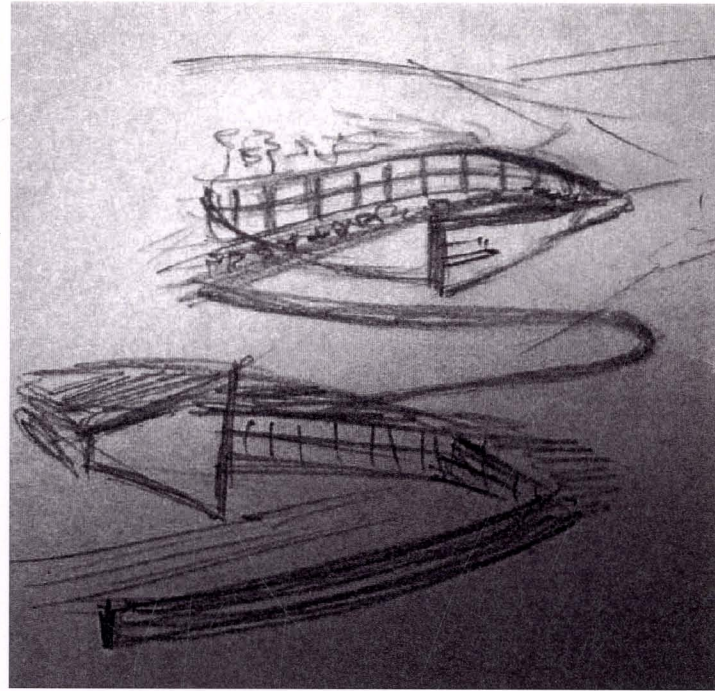
The villagers will be employees receiving and teaching the visitors from the outside about the skills of agriculture and cultivation of the lands. People that need a certain retreat are invited to come and rest a few days, undergoing a pilgrimage program where they alternate hours of walking, meditating, contemplating nature, praying each one according to his own beliefs and working in agriculture.

The monastery is here reinvented in a spiritual aspect that cures the body, mind and soul. The spiritual dimension is studied by the visitors as they get diversified opinions and understandings of many religions.



# The Retreat

PROGRAM AND VISION



## PROGRAM

individual activities

pilgrimage route - walking through nature

platforms for contemplation of nature

meditation pavillions

communal activities

research center and studies about spirituality

conference room

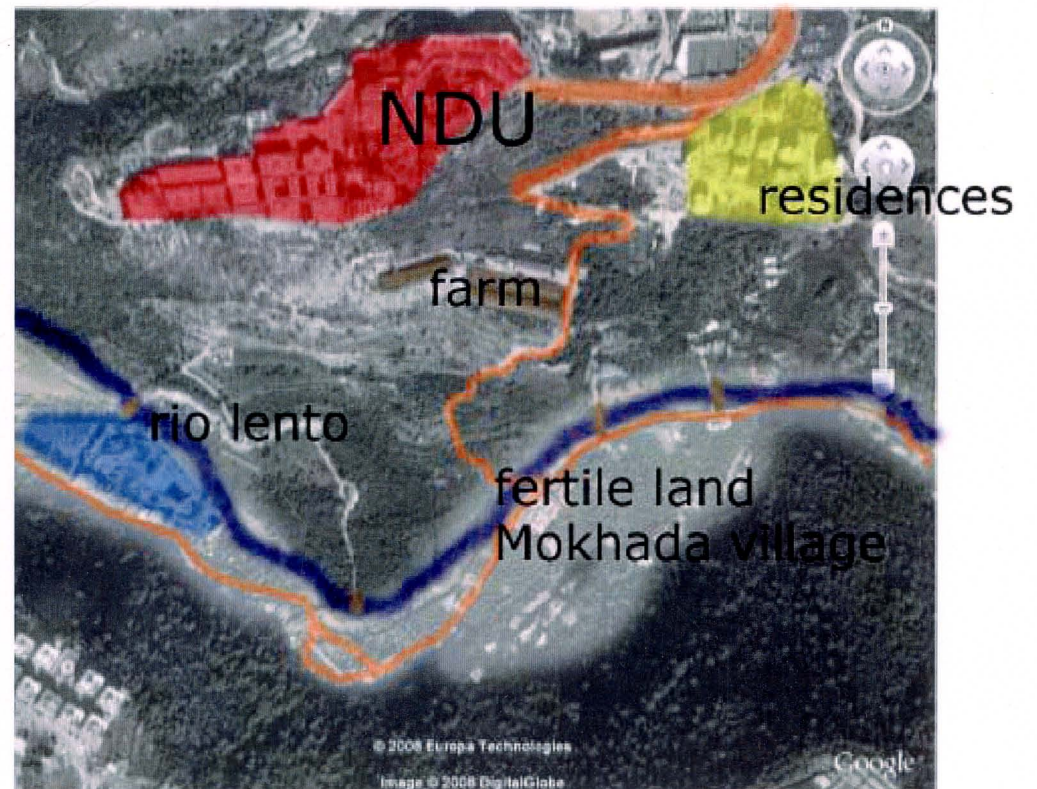
amphitheater

library

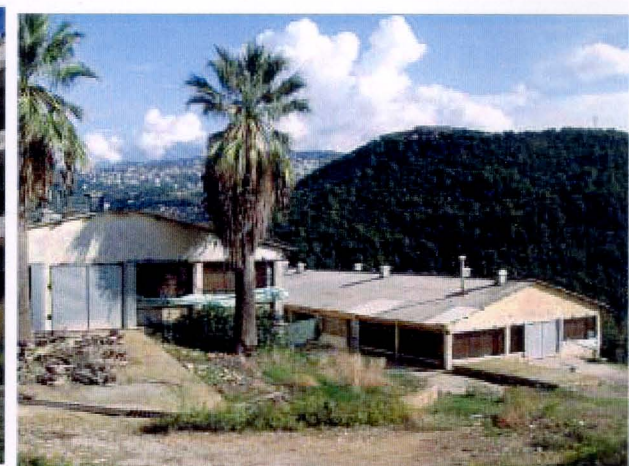
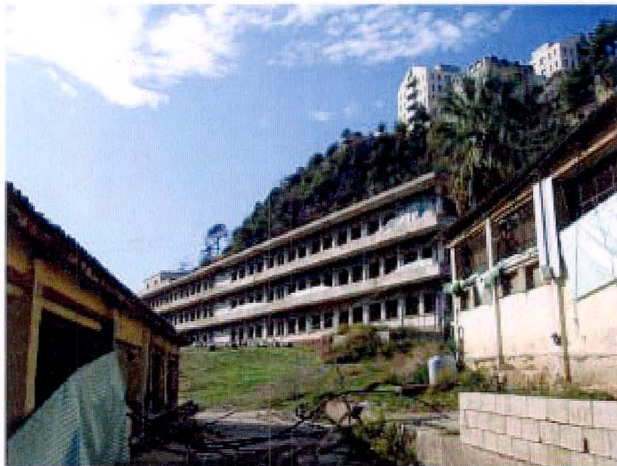
sleeping rooms - cells (the essential for living)

agricultural lands









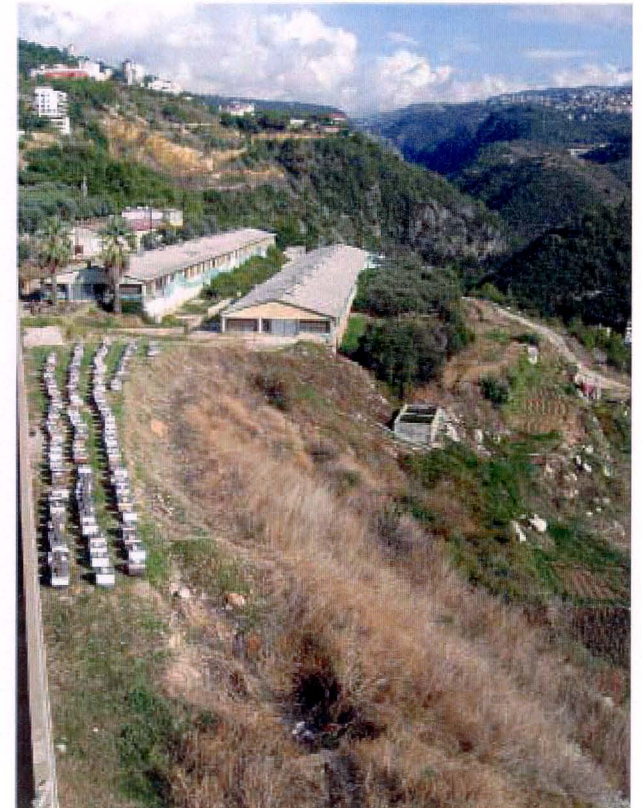
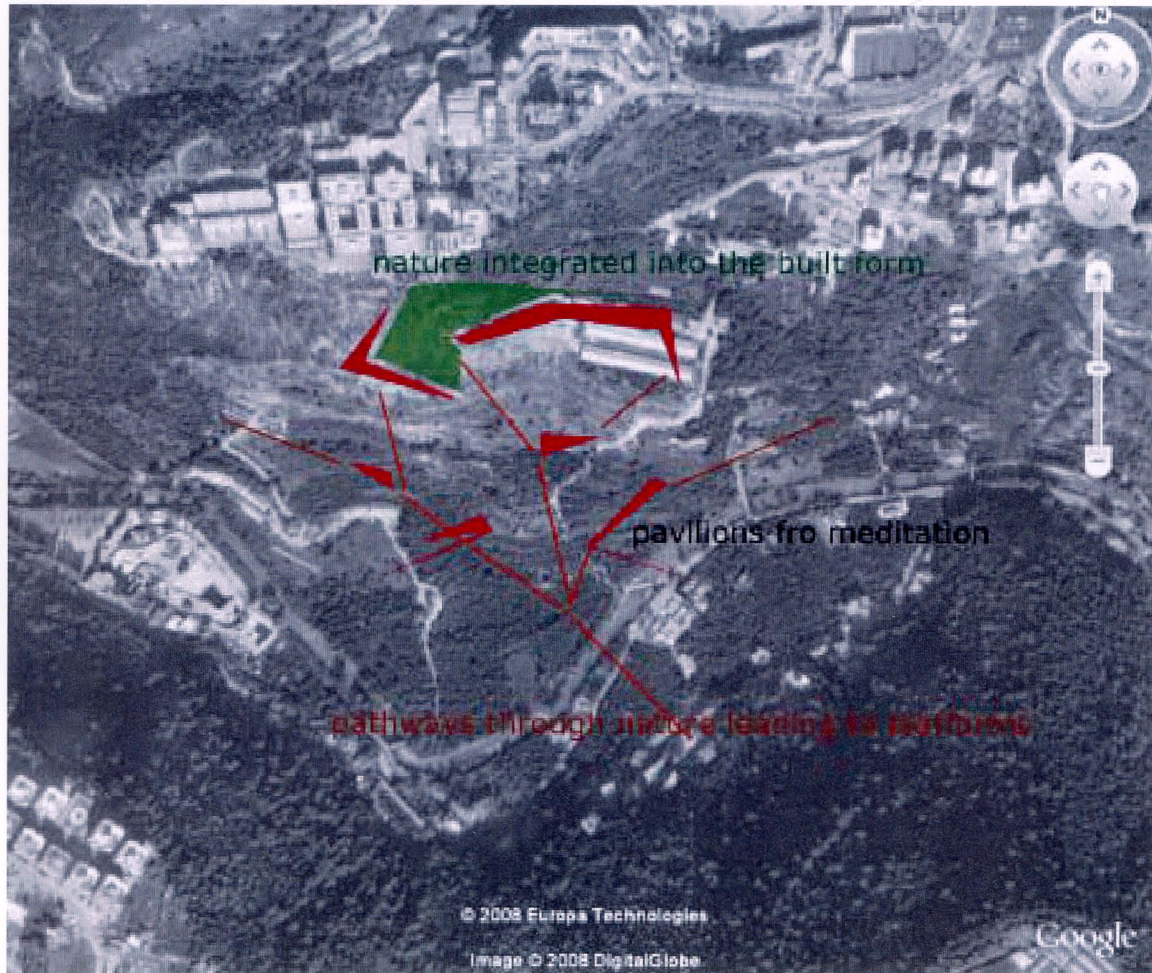
The chicken farm present here is a very dominant structure seen from the valley. It is located at mid distance between the bottom of the valley and the NDU, on top of the hill.

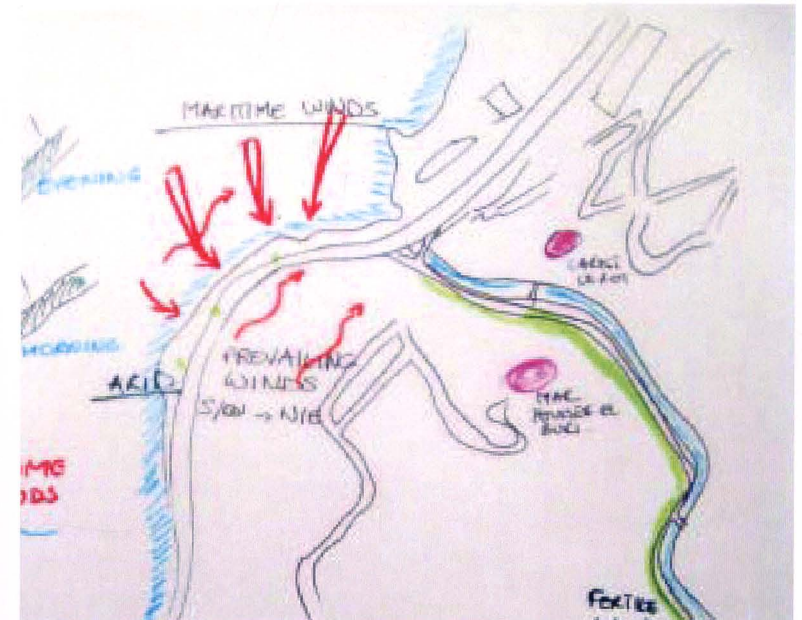
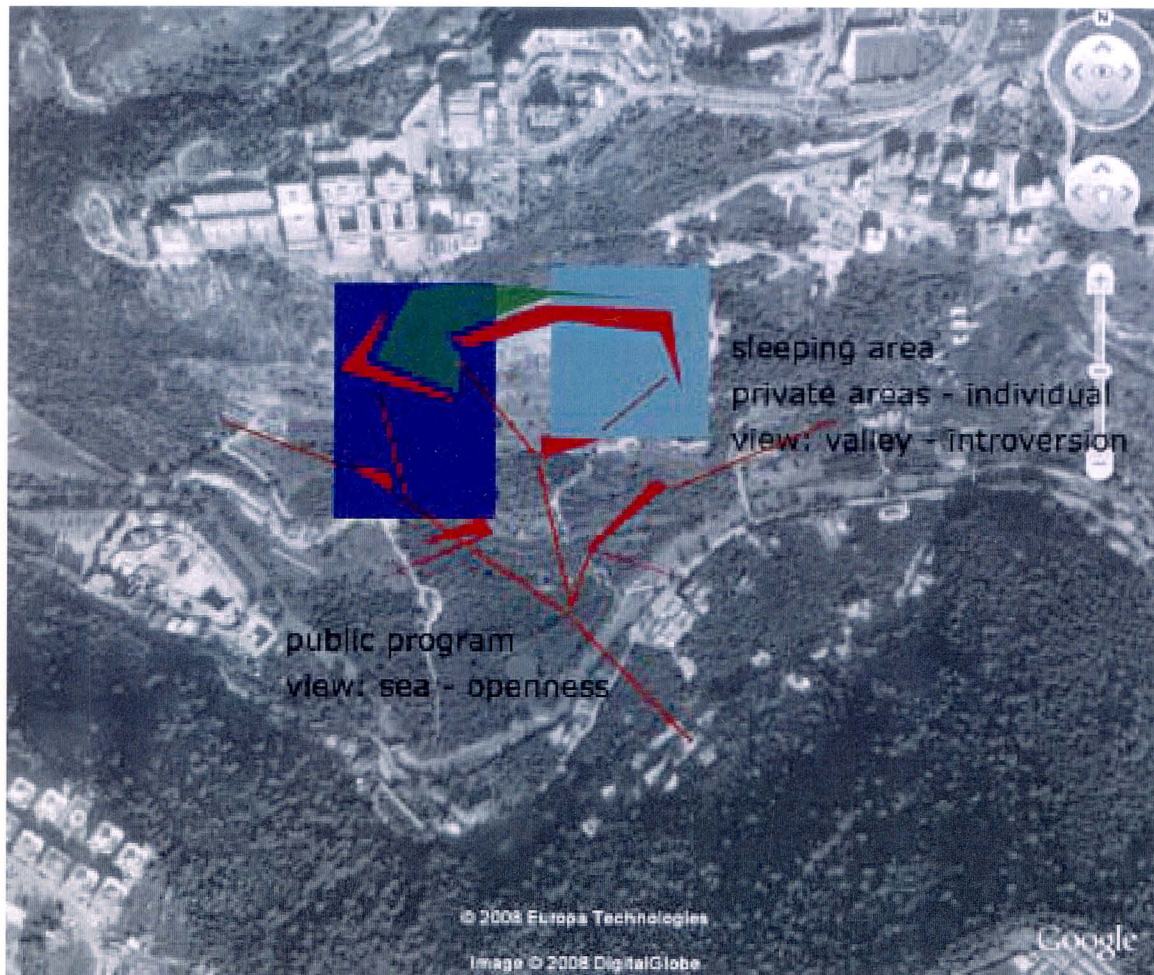
My intervention on this particular site is to demolish this building and construct the main public communal spaces on the same land, as it has already destroyed the nature under it.

An architecture imbedded in the land, covered by the agricultural is the appropriate approach for this site. The connection with the land is then the most tactile, whereas the vertical elements protruding to the sky will constitute the vertical ascension to the spiritual spaces.

The integration of nature in architecture is sometimes reversed as it is the built form that is imbedded in nature sometimes, and sometimes nature is going inside the man made built form.

the opposition between the horizontal and the vertical are elements that will allow the transcendence from earth to heaven.





the climate in the valley of Nahr el Kalb

the use of skylights will punctuate nature when integrated in the building. the framing view is the one enabling at some point nature to come in, light to penetrate inside the built form.



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