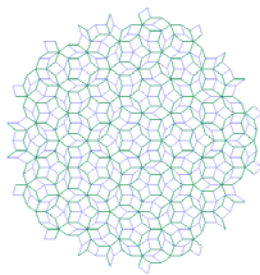


HOUSE OF ARTS AND CULTURE, BEIRUT.

The House of Arts and Culture should be a place for creation, production and exchange. It should be a place for people to come together, a space that adds dynamism to the city of Beirut - a specific territorial context charged with historical significance.

Beirut is a troubled city with its own complex realities; the social, political and economic situation in the city has fostered the development of experimental cultural practices not witnessed elsewhere, which view contemporary reality from a critical perspective.

That is why the project we propose is so unequivocally contemporary. It constructs a flexible space in which these new, experimental practices can unfold, without losing sight of the specific context engendering them – a creative space that generates new spaces, new images, new stories for the culture of Lebanon.

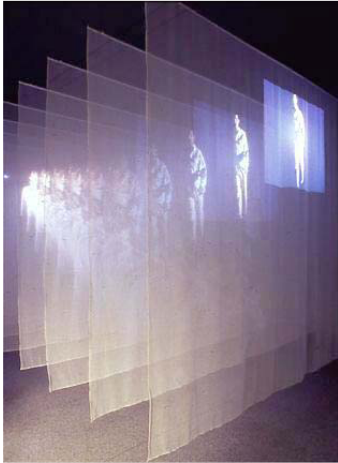


Penrose Pattern

On the one hand, we employed the concept of interlacing geometrical **tracery** as a support structure or open pattern for the flexible organization of the building's space. The circulation routes and some of the service elements that facilitate the use of the main open spaces are simply a vertical extension of this two-dimensional design.

The **dance** of this three-dimensional interlacing embodies the dynamic aspect of the circulation routes that run along the perimeters of the open spaces employed for the specific functions of the House of Arts and Culture.

On the other hand, we incorporated the concept of the **veil** as an interpretation of the Arabic term *hijab* - one of the uses of this term in the Koran being that of a curtain that divides a space. We used the idea of the veil as a sheer, light or suspended object that more or less hides something from sight, as a mechanism for defining the relationship between the interior and exterior of the building, or the interior and exterior of a particular use. In this way, curtains and screens - both mobile and fixed, representing the full range of translucency from see-through to completely opaque and including every shade in between - were employed as forms of relating.



Bill Viola: The Veiling



Beirut

Well beyond the visual impact of a press image showing a building in ruins, destroyed by bombings, the idea of the project is to attempt a reinterpretation of this dramatic reality, *interiors as urban exteriors of buildings without façades*, revealing to the urban space what used to be kept concealed and belonged to the interior, private sphere.

The project proposes a positive reinterpretation of the concept of *unveiling*, of the uncovering of an inner reality that has been kept concealed, of *culture* as the body of knowledge that allows us to take a critical view of reality. The House of Culture is portrayed as a room open to the city, to the citizen.

The building's relation with its urban surroundings.

The building's large porch, which faces onto Rue Ghalghoul, draws in the space from the adjacent square and extends it all the way through to Avenue Du General Fouad Chehad, by means of a continuous pedestrian walkway that offers both a physical and visual link between the two spaces. The system of open spaces comprising the grand hall is thus converted into a public space that prolongs the city's urban space, and onto which all the functional areas of the building open. From the square outside, we can see into the large performance hall, thereby converting it into part of the backdrop of this urban space.

The building is meant to be a place for city-dwellers to meet, as well as an urban point of reference in the linear landscape running along Avenue Du General Fouad Chehad as it cuts across the city.

The building and its uses. Description of the building.

Level 0, which enjoys direct access from the square and Rue Ghalghoul, holds the main entrance, located under a large, covered porch. The other levels are reached via the

building's atrium, a continuous open space measuring four stories high from which all the main functional areas of the building can be seen and accessed.

Descending to the lower level (Level -1), we come to the theatre space and the movie theatre. Adjacent to the backstage area for both theatres is a separate artists' entrance, the dressing rooms, and the artists' foyer, as well as the delivery area for the sets for both theatres. On Level 1, in a continuation of the atrium, we find the entrance from Avenue Du General Fouad Chehad. From this entrance, one can descend to the performance halls or ascend to the exhibition spaces on Level 3 by means of a semi-public pedestrian circuit that runs through the building as if it were part of the city. On Level 2, halfway along the route to the exhibition spaces, is the main library, which faces onto the main square. On Level 3 we find the exhibition spaces, which can be completely opened up to the hall. The cinematheque, also faces onto the hall. On Level 4, interspersed between the skylights of the exhibition space, and providing light and ventilation to the patios, are the workshops and the administrative offices, which can be equipped with a separate street entrance.

Some Reflections on the Concepts of Transparency and Flexibility.

-Exhibition Room.- The exhibition space located on Level 3 is organized around two stationary cores containing the vertical communication and evacuation elements. A system of overhead rails allows for complete **flexibility** in organizing the exhibition space through the placement of curtains, screens and mobile partition walls, which are stored in the stationary zones. These mobile elements can be used to create different configurations, ranging from a single space extending over 1,000 m² and linked to the grand hall to a subdivided space with an infinite number of possible distributions and routes. The skylights can be covered over, thereby allowing one to decide if natural lighting is desired or not, and further amplifying the possible uses of this exhibition space.

-Performance Hall.- The horizontal configuration of the performance hall and the use of mobile furnishings allows for different stage and seating arrangements to be used, or for the removal of the furnishings entirely. This means that we can build an Italian-style theatre, with the orchestra pit and all, or choose to construct more flexible, open stage configurations. The main area is closed off using double-glazed partitions with a large insulation chamber to eliminate outside noise.

Rails have been placed both inside and outside this chamber so that screens, curtains etc., can be moved into place, and in some cases even form part of the set. When they are concealed, **visual continuity** is ensured between the outside and the inside.

Sustainability parameters included in the proposal and how they are reflected in the planned construction methods.

Given the considerations of Beirut's Mediterranean climate, with hot summers and mild winters, and significant parameters including the strong sunlight and the influence of the nearby sea, the building's configuration responds by using a succession of veils - lightweight enclosures of differing physical characteristics (transparency, flexibility, permeability, density, etc.), which can be freely combined - ensures a protected interior environment able to adapt to outside weather conditions.

The intermediate spaces, which may be of varying breadth depending on how they are being used, and which succeed each other between the layers of veils, serve as **filters** that also protect the inner spaces from the prevailing winds, cast shade on the façades of the functional areas, block direct sunlight and maintain a pleasant, stable temperature in the rooms; they can even act as specialized sound insulation chambers to ensure silence in the performance halls.

Different materials have been used to make these veils, ensuring the best possible combination of their specific properties in each case. Thus, in the areas where a hermetic enclosure is required, and where there is exposure to direct sunlight, we used **photovoltaic glass**, which can either be opaque or semi-transparent. Glass/glass photovoltaic modules offer the benefit of transparency provided by the spaces between the solar cells, while the position of the cells in the module can be modified to control the amount of sunlight passing through.

A cloth interior veil that can alternate between high and low **reflection** coefficients and with slats that can be easily adjusted at different angles allows for a graduated **filtration** of light, to adapt it to whatever activity is taking place inside the workspace.

For the service areas and installations along the western façade, instead of the photovoltaic glass, we used conventional glass, so that the strong late-afternoon sunlight coming from the west could be used to heat the chamber in the dividing walls between the glass and the public areas. This creates a mechanism, which uses **convection** to cool the inner rooms through the forced movement of cool air away from the shaded north-facing areas on the building's main floor and the transfer of warm air to these same areas in winter, thereby improving the energy **efficiency** of the entire building complex. The same cloth veil that alternates between high and low reflection coefficients depending on the position of its slats can be used to reduce heat loss at night in winter or prevent overheating of the chamber in summer.