

## **Through the White Cube**

"An image comes to mind of a white, ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of twentieth century art; it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains."

Brian O'Doherty, "Notes on the Gallery Space", 1976

"L'architecture d'un théâtre a la tâche de créer un instrument scénique si impersonnel, si sensible et variable qu'aucun metteur en scène ne soit jamais paralysé pour y développer toutes ses conceptions scéniques. C'est la grande machine à spectacle avec laquelle le directeur du jeu peut travailler en pleine personnification de ses propres forces créatrices".

Walter Gropius, "Sur la construction des théâtres modernes", 1931.

## **Outside the White Cube**

From the outside, three volumes can be seen.

Each one of them has six sides. The variations that single them out are more like geometric declinations of the same object than the expression of a multiplicity of objects.

Three configurations of the same object can be seen.

The geometric modulation produces a certain monumentality.

The monumentality is reinforced by the geometric composition of the various elements.

The three cubes gradually rise towards the North.

The first is large, extending across the site's width and rising to an average height.

The second, smaller, occupies a corner of the site and is slightly higher than the first.

The third occupies another corner of the site, rising to a great height.

Each volume corresponds to a character.

Two out of the three volumes intersect with one another.

The three volumes are white.

Onto each volume the shadow of the other two is projected.

A path leading to the heart of the composition is traced in between the three volumes.

The heart of the composition is defined by an empty volume, as if carved in the first volume.

The composition has a minimal character.

The materialization of the three volumes - the painted brick wall - reinforces the mineral character of the composition.

In some places, a perforated white metal grid allows for the passage of light through the wall.

The three volumes come into view in the site, making their presence be felt in the surrounding landscape.

*If High Modernism reflected about the art gallery space in terms of a neutral “White Cube”, facilitating the contact with the object, the 1990s constitute a major turn, as the question of the presentation of works of art was displaced from the art gallery’s interior to its exterior. Art “places” are now as much put in display in cities as works of art are exhibited in art galleries and museum rooms. The ambiguity that defined the relationship between the works of art and the space of the cube finds itself symmetrically reversed. The context-content of the modernist box becomes the content-context of cities in construction. Cities are defined from their cultural infrastructures, being sometimes rebuilt around these. It’s this major turn in urban culture that the project aims to expose.*

*The use of an elementary geometry and of a traditional materialization (the fired clay bricks) should be understood as the manifestation of the desire to create an object at once simple and unique, an object that is easily identifiable and far from any excessive spectacularization. In other words, an object that is simultaneously context – capable of conveying a new image of the city of Beirut, and content, designed for the city inhabitants.*

### **Inside the White Cube**

Brick walls, 50 cm thick, separate the building’s exterior from its interior.

The entrance hall occupies the high volume’s ground floor.

The outlying walls are white, revealing the brick that constitutes them.

In the space of the hall stands a large monolithic construction.

This white metal and glass structure multiplies the effects of transparency and opacity.

Light is filtered into the hall by three of its four sides.

All areas of the center are organized from the hall: theater rooms, exhibition spaces, cinemas, the library, the restaurant ...

The library and the administration rooms can be found in the upper levels.

Under the exterior stairs a path connects the hall to the intermediate level: the cinema and the film archive.

The restaurant and the shops are housed in the intersection of the high volume with the southern volume.

The restaurant and the shops provide a transition between the hall and the exterior courtyard.

The auditoria and the museum rooms occupy the ground floor of the southern volume.

The auditoria and the museum rooms share the same surface.

This is a modular space, entirely adjustable through a system of platform jacks and frame structures.

This organization makes the multiplication of the rooms' configurations possible. Spaces dedicated to creation are structured around the central courtyard.

*The lightness of the building's interior responds to the apparent solidity and strength of its exterior. Driven by a desire that is both aesthetic and functional, this apparent fragility effaces the monumental image of the exterior volumes. In contrast to the museum space of the White Cube, neutrality is not here the support of a totalitarian ideology that prevents any form of alternative expression. The auditoria and the museum are not defined as monolithic spaces, becoming instead a way of exploring spatial possibilities. Both the auditoria and the museum can only exist and come to life through the desire of the stage director, stage designer or exhibition curator. The neutrality of the space is here genuine and real in as much as it makes possible an infinite number of expressions. The conceptual and authoritarian modernist grid, which simulates its own neutrality, is replaced by a pragmatic grid, allowing and advocating for deviation.*