Architecture, the city and its scale: Oscar Niemeyer in Tripoli, Lebanon

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Drawing on a theoretical concept of scalar individuation in which the genesis of scale is understood according to ontological, epistemic and discursive registers, this paper deploys the notion of scale as a problematic in order to open a new space for critical insight into a little-known project by Oscar Niemeyer, the Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site in Tripoli, Lebanon. It argues against the idea of unity, in terms of authorship and reception, put forward by proponents and critics of modernism. It demonstrates the way different and often paradoxical forms of scalar rationality can co-exist within a single project. Moreover, the individuation of specific scalar problems within the project are located within an historical context that reveals the inherently contingent nature of architectural claims with respect to the political.

Introduction: a new synthesis

Measuring over 600,000 square metres, Oscar Niemeyer's Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site was conceived as more than just a recreational or commercial space for the city of Tripoli in Lebanon.[1] Looking at Tripoli from the air today the elliptical area of the project recalls a petri dish. Stamped into the urban tissue, a 1.1 km long ellipse is filled with prototypical architectural forms, such as parabolic arches and faceted cones, with a vast plane of concrete seemingly afloat in its amniotic landscape. Intended programmes for the buildings were to include an exhibition hall, national pavilion, outdoor concert stage and a helipad. Attempting to present a new idea of the city, the project set out to structure a synthesis of work, life and culture, functioning together in an open civic landscape. With construction interrupted by the Lebanese civil war, all the primary structures were completed, yet none were fitted out. Therefore, what remains is a bare, unadorned yet almost complete representation of all the main elements of the original Niemeyer plan.

Entrance to the Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition project occurs at the southern end of the site through a trapezoidal concrete plane that funnels visitors away from its elliptical edge toward the entry pavilion that marks the beginning of the main axis. Flagless poles stand neatly to one side, pointing at the sky. The initial impression is of a vast grey datum and a grid of straw-coloured weeds vainly working their way through the concrete. The scale of the entry plaza is overwhelming. At the far end the datum is broken by a ramp where visitors can ascend to enter the site. Occasionally the obscure profile of beguiling shapes will come into view, but from a distance there are very few clues as to the contents of the project. Ascending the ramp, the interior of the project comes into focus: a panorama of isolated concrete figures in a landscape, and, to the left, an impossibly long plane forming the expo hall sweeps across in a broad arc.

810

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

The sense that this project constituted a type of urban laboratory is far from metaphorical.[2] Niemeyer envisioned these parts growing, becoming populated and informing the surrounding city. The project should have taken its place alongside a broader, well-documented history of high modernist work in Africa and Asia, including Le Corbusier's work in Chandigarh, India, Kahn's work in Bangladesh and Niemeyer's later campus project in North Africa, except that unlike the former examples, little is known about the project in Lebanon.[3] Niemeyer's own references to the project are scant: a two-page report in the journal *Modulo* that he established to document Brazilian architecture and a passing reference to it in his autobiographical notes.[4] The reasons for this may well be due to his dissatisfaction with the procurement process, which he decried for being rushed and excessively beholden to commercial interests, with little in the way of research into the historical urbanisation of the city. Furthermore, Niemeyer was unhappy with the choice of site, preferring one closer to the coastline.[5]

Dissatisfied architect aside, the lack of scholarly attention for the project can also be explained by the dangers, either perceived or inherent, within Tripoli itself. This seems particularly relevant given the inaccessibility of the site during the years of the civil war between 1975 and 1990, when it was often used as a barracks for the Syrian military. Moreover, for a long period of time after the war the site remained inaccessible to the public, recently being re-opened for regular access, only to become somewhat inaccessible again due to the expansion of the Syrian civil war into the North of Lebanon.[6]

Still, it is interesting that in the major surveys of Niemeyer's work the project is mentioned twice and only to recount a few well-known details such as the extent of its commission.[7] A few articles have appeared in the popular press and online around 2010, since the formal cessation of hostilities in Lebanon in 1990, but these are mainly in response to a proposal for turning the site into a theme park. Only one English-language article directly addressing the project has appeared in the academic press. In comparison to the work Niemeyer completed during his years of exile from Brazil, such as the University of Constantine project in Algeria, the Rachid Karame Exposition Site is something of a forgotten project. Drawings exist in the Niemeyer archive but all other documentation, including the drawings of the project's structural engineering, has since been lost (figs 2, 3, 4, 5).[8]

The geopolitical scale

In 1962 architecture was called into geopolitical service in Lebanon when Bolivar de Freitas, the Brazilian Ambassador to Lebanon, wrote a letter to the architect of Brasilia on behalf of the Lebanese government, inviting Oscar Niemeyer to propose what would become the Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site. By this stage Niemeyer had become well known, both through the commission for Brasilia and his collaboration with Le Corbusier on the UN Headquarters in New York.[9] Neither this, nor the long-standing migration to Brazil by the Lebanese diaspora, sufficiently explains his selection as project architect. In order to account for this choice, the decision must be put in the context of the formation of the Lebanese state in

Figure 1. Northern
edge of the entry plaza
showing rows of
unadorned flagpoles.
The plaza datum directs
visitors toward an
inclined ramp and the
entry pavilion
(photograph by David
Burns).

the post-independence period and the country's brief embrace of a social-welfare state.[10] The selection of a Brazilian architect—and an avowed communist—can further be understood within the history of the Non-aligned Movement that played an important role in the geopolitics of the Middle East, Latin America, Asia and Africa during this period.[11] A Brazilian architect would be compatible with the post-independence ethos characterised by the National Pact (*al Mithaq al Watani*) of 1943, an unwritten power-sharing agreement formed between Maronite and Sunni leaders.[12] Further,

this would allow the project to benefit from an important symbol and convention of modernity: modern architecture, albeit without the overt colonial associations it might otherwise carry had a European architect been selected.

In the decades leading up to the commission, the Lebanese President Camile Chamoun initiated a process of institution building, modernising the bureaucracy and establishing a ministry of planning. This era—from the mid-1950s through to the early 1970s—was characterised by several attempts at nation building through the renovation of the civil

812

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

Figure 2.
Administration hall
(photograph by David
Burns).

service, large-scale projects and electoral reform.[13] For example, in 1958 a 5-year spatial planning report was published. This represented the first attempt to conceive of national territory according to a Westphalian model in which sovereignty and territory coincided.[14] The problem that began to form was how to conceive the state according to the model of a unified national territory. Endeavours by the Lebanese government at the time, such as the reports, plans and proposals for infrastructure, were manifestations of a geopolitical calculus which aimed to quell the intermittent instability of the previous decade, such as the 6 months of fighting in 1958 and the attempted coup d'état by the SSNP (Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party) in 1961, but also to form a bulwark against broader regional tensions expressed in the rise of Nasserism in Egypt or the transformations that would take place within the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) after 1967 and the subsequent impact on Lebanese stability.[15] These initiatives and others like them instrumentalised infrastructure in order literally to bind together a disparate political landscape. Farid El-Khazen writes:

In the mid-1960's, Lebanon was certainly a more reformed, united and stable country than at any

Figure 3. Concert Hall shell. Exemplifying the virtuosity of the engineering and construction in many of the pavilions, the in-situ concrete construction of the shelter covering the concert stage narrows to an impossibly thin 50 mm in its centre (photograph by David Burns).

other time since independence. Furthermore, in comparison with other Third World countries, Lebanon scored better on almost all the indicators of modernization. But again one question remains: how could the 'loads' on the system be prevented from increasing faster than its 'capabilities'.[16]

Khazen points to an important factor in this process where integration or state formation does not simply proceed from one stage to the next in a step-by-step progression. Rather, at each stage a field of instabilities needs to be managed; coalitions need to be held in balance and tensions allowed a certain elas-

ticity, even though they perpetually threaten to break. On a geopolitical scale, the Tripoli commission would not have existed without this impetus for nation building and the central importance it would accord to large-scale projects. Nor would it have emerged without the desire to contain, stabilise and unify the fragile state of the nation in a turbulent and antagonised region.[17] The problem Chehab faced was how to give shape to and fasten this newly emerging, and somewhat precarious situation. Opposing forces, both internal and external, needed to be balanced; at the same time, this balance needed to acquire a shape that could

814

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

Figure 4. Theatre for experimental performance and music. From the outside, the dome gives little away: a squat, partially curved shell with straight sides broken by short doorways. Made entirely of concrete, the structure is little more than a curiosity to residents who stroll through the area. Entering at ground level, visitors gradually descend toward the centre with the floor terracing to a sunken orchestra pit. Much is unknown about this structure, except for its startling acoustic behaviour in which sounds ricochet wildly across the room (photograph by Jack Dunbar).

signal the entrance of a newly independent nation attempting to leave behind a colonial identity. The need to find a language or grammar to communicate the universality of this ambition, together with the practical requirements of an exposition site, had to take form within the barely formulated outline of a national imagination. This problem was further exacerbated in a state with only a nominal form of representative democracy and nascent public institutions, both with very little in the way of public legitimacy.[18]

An important point to draw from this is that the geopolitical problem to which this project responded had no specific dimension. It was an intensive problem before it received extensive articulation, taking in a wide spectrum of political disputes, drawing together global ambitions for recognition and economic stimulus, regional fears
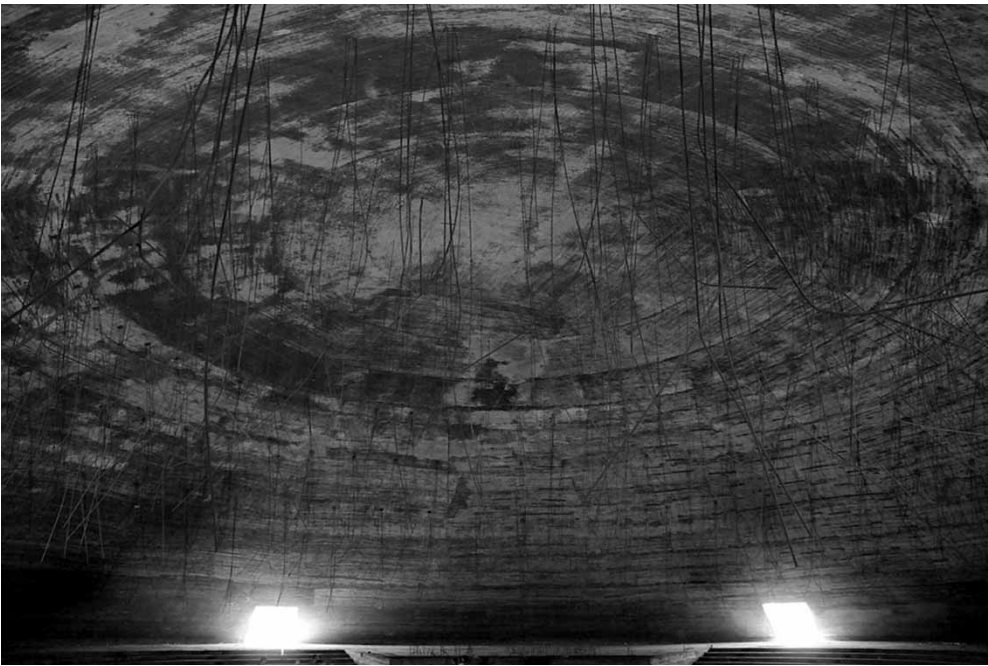
Figure 5. Interior of the Theatre for experimental performance and music. Although it is possible to see the dome as a platonic element afloat in the green datum constructed for it, the experience of the room challenges this reading. Niemeyer's attempt to enrol architecture in the project of building a new state was directed to an imagined humanist, secular subject. In the typological displacement of the dome, from its religious or sacred context into a secular and cultural one, it is possible to see exactly how far Niemeyer's ambition for the project stretched. In the distance between the sectarian context of today and the secular one within which it was conceived, one can measure the precise distance between the time of its commission and the present (photograph by David Burns).

about the ascendancy of competition in the gulf states and, closer to home, the perpetual instability of the Levantine context.[19] Thus, the very idea of 'geopolitical scale' is not tied by necessity to a specific measure: for example, it makes no sense to say that it is larger than the urban scale. Although the era of geopolitics was inaugurated with the treaty of Westphalia and the territorial state form, it has always involved the imbrication of elements large and small, tangible and intangible. This heterogeneous set of elements is produced and held together through a specific model, of which the nation state is the political exemplar.

Nonetheless, a great variety of practices take place within this geopolitical space and each will redraw the geopolitical problem in its own way. Beyond the selection of Niemeyer and the general impetus for large-scale infrastructure, one is left with the question of how to account for the specificity of the project itself. After all, it is not immediately obvious why Lebanon's geopolitical burden would be posed in way that leads to a project such the Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site. In order to

816

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

answer this question, the following section turns to
another Niemeyer project, one that can be under-
stood as much more than a precedent to repeat,
but rather as the very epistemic frame through
which Herculean task of national stability would be
posed. Only eight years before de Freitas delivered
his commissioning letter for Tripoli to Niemeyer, an
experimental idea of the city was emerging in the
new Latin capital of Brasilia.

'It is strange how the power of beauty makes us forget so much injustice.'[20]

Brasilia was an attempt by the President, Juscelino
Kubitschek, to construct a new and geopolitically
integrated Brazil, to 'reverse Brazil's colonial orien-
tation toward Europe and inaugurate a permanent
pattern of modern settlement in the vast hinter-
land.'[21] Like the later project in Tripoli, which was
meant to create a new locus of activity away from
Beirut, Brasilia was planned, in part, to shift the
economic focus away from Brazil's major coastal
cities, creating a new vector of development. Fur-
thermore, beyond practical concerns, both projects
trade in symbolism: Tripoli as a commercial and cul-
tural hub; Brasilia as a new centre of political and
administrative power. In this case, the urban plan
operates as an epistemic model by laying a grid of
intelligibility over the problem, posing the nascent
geopolitical ambition in terms of a symbolic
expression, infrastructure and a common formal
grammar. The model reflects back an image of the
problem formed in its own liking; according to an
idea of unity which, it was hoped, would help bind
a disputed and disparate entity.

Both Costa's pilot plan and Niemeyer's architec-
ture along the capital's primary axis attempt to for-
malise and unify, through spatial and material
means, a complex and often paradoxical national
ambition. The project is at once grounded in the
colonial past and renaissance ideals expressed
through clear geometries, monumentality and a
baroque orchestration of perspective, yet it is also
distinctly forward looking, gazing ahead to a newly
modernised and independent nation embarking on
a process of industrialisation and reform. Despite
its declared emancipatory ambitions, in retrospect,
Brasilia would seem to confirm Manfredo Tafuri's
oft repeated paraphrase of Marx that 'just as there
can be no such thing as a political economics of
class, but only a class critique of political economics,
likewise there can never be an aesthetics, art or
architecture of class, but only a class critique of aes-
thetics, art, architecture and the city.'[22] In other
words, Brasilia would never be able to transform
the class disparity in Brazil, only further actualise
and exemplify the paradoxical and contradictory
forces within Brazilian society. Writing about the
project, David Underwood suggests that:

Brasilia's development reflects the dichotomies of
the larger Brazilian dilemma, primary among them
the modernist utopian ideal that a new society
could be created through a new architecture pro-
moted by the country's governing and artistic
elite … … The city thus expresses the contradic-
tions between a political reality of absolute auth-
ority and a dream of democratic freedom … …
The city thus reflects Brazil's endemic double stan-
dard. While seeking to architecturally neutralize
class distinctions in the housing blocks of the

superquadras (large blocks of apartments), Nie-meyer actually reinforced the social hierarchies of the new city through a deliberate play of oppo-sitions that privileges a clear architectural and social elite.[23]

These comments are illustrative of many of the cri-tiques leveled at Brasilia, critiques that began even prior to its construction. All seem united by a single point: the impossibility of the symbolic register coinciding with the practical one. Brasilia functioned as an idea of unity—but harmony in an aesthetic and formal register could only but spatialise the social distinctions present in its development. Addressing these critiques directly with regards to Brasilia would be beyond the scope of the present paper, but in so far as they are representative of a general critique of modern architecture and therefore imma-nent to a certain discursive field, some precautionary comments should be made. First: to critique the sim-plistic attribution of either success or failure, whereby either becomes a kind of absolute measure grounded in the purported unity of the project; second: to underscore the historically con-tingent field from which each scale of reasoning must draw its sense.

The ambition behind these two points is to make contingent the simplistic objections that the urban plan simply 'failed' in Tripoli or Brasilia and, by impli-cation, within modern architecture in general. This should not imply the automatic adoption of the con-trary position that the plan succeeded since the aim here is neither to bury nor to exonerate the archi-tect's legacy or that of the modern project. Rather, it is to problematise the very idea of success or failure by showing it to be wholly contingent on

scale and its history. The argument being made here is that design projects, especially urban design projects, are composites in which contradictory and often paradoxical forms of rationality sit side-by-side. Dis-entangling the various scales of reason-ing and locating them against an historical back-ground must be a first step beyond coarse judgements of success or failure.

Of more direct interest here in regards to the later project in Tripoli is the way Brasilia functioned as both an urban idea of the city and therefore also as an epistemic model, and the way in which this idea and model could be detached from one context and its attendant set of cultural, economic and functional requirements, and re-oriented forward to act in another. By the 1970s the idea of pan-Arabism, which first came to prominence with Nasser's regime in Egypt and Gadhafi's proposal for a Federation of Arab Republics, was a project on the decline. This was indicative of a shift in the regional context away from secular and socialist principles. Military defeats and economic stagnation contributed to a widespread sense of malaise in the Arabic-speaking world.[24] In Lebanon the contrac-tion of the state, the withdrawal of government from social services, its inability to implement elec-toral reforms or build stable institutions coincided with the extreme regional destabilisations occurring as a result of the conflict between Israel and the PLO, which was operating from Lebanese bases.[25]

Lebanon after the Second World War was marked by the conviction that government should intervene in the national economy. Although articulated dif-ferently in developed and developing countries, internationally, this period was characterised by

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

state ownership and intervention, strategically using policy and finances to stimulate the economy, promote growth and generate employment. The shift in this period, from ambitions for social welfare and a strong state, to one in which the state has almost disappeared, provides an important context for understanding both the initial optimism of the Niemeyer commission, as well as its perceived failure. The national imagination went from being something that could be consciously shaped by political and popular will, to one that would be abandoned to the 'free and natural' expression of the market and fractious groups of political actors. While Lebanon is perhaps the purest example of a laissez-faire market economy, the period from the 1950s to the 1970s represents an attempt to institute a more structured plan for economic management based on an idea, however partial, of the redistribution of social goods.[26] The ferocious return to an unfettered laissez-faire system, with its privileging of the individual as the basic social unit, occurs less out of political or ideological conviction and more out of a kind of strategic incompetence: a withdrawal from government that characterises the Lebanese state to this day. Toufic Gaspard writes:

> Laissez-faire is a moral program, and the market is its instrument. A product of the Enlightenment, it was conceived as the way to unleash human potential through the restoration of a natural system, a system unhindered by the restrictions of government.[27]

In this context of a laissez-faire economic model, the infrastructural spending and governmental intervention required for a project such as the Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site becomes increasingly unlikely because a project on this scale would represent a disturbance of the 'natural' state of the market. That the subsequent abandonment of the site is intrinsically linked to the economic stagnation of the city of Tripoli is undeniable. More interesting, perhaps, is the question this decline poses for the idea of the city proposed by Niemeyer for Tripoli. On a national scale and within a larger geopolitical context, to what extent is a project like this dependent on a specific model of the state, not just for its procurement but also for its continued survival?[28] The geopolitical project of modernisation within the East and the South, and the centrality of architecture to it, remains important, not only because it points to a moment of optimism precious for having been so short lived, but because it continues today along increasingly privatised lines.

The geopolitical scale that finally emerges with this impetus to modernise comes into existence through a specific problem: the formation of the modern nation state. The Tripoli project both redraws and responds to this problem, existing within a scale of action only newly conceived and soon to be abandoned. As with Brasilia, what this project embodies is a specific scalar diagram in which a strongly interventionist state is coupled with a bureaucratic and technocratic form of rationality. The stability of this diagram guarantees the spatiality of the urban plan; it does so by continually reserving the right and the means to intervene spatially at geopolitical scale.[29] In this regard, this specific manifestation of the geopolitical scale can be understood as a phenomenon that emerges with, belongs to, and finally depends upon a particu-

lar kind of state apparatus, one that conceives of the national space and its geopolitical context as plastic, one ready to identify itself as the architect of this plasticity, and able to redistribute social goods and aggressively intervene in the spatial articulation of the national imaginary. When this condition changed, when the nascent ambition for one model of statehood was aborted in the name of an even more aggressive return to laissez-faire, what takes place is not just a shift in political orientation, but also the death of a specific scale of intervention within the territory. In this regard, the geopolitical scale that the Niemeyer project embodies was born with this state form and was wholly contingent on it for support. When the civil war began and this life-support apparatus was removed, the project was abandoned.

The economic scale

The city of Tripoli dates back to the twelfth century BC, with a history of settlement that includes the Assyrian, Phoenician, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Caliphate, Crusader, Mamluk, Ottoman and French Empires.[30] As the major seaport to Damascus until Lebanese independence, the city was a vital trade artery to the Mediterranean for centuries. The development of the city proceeded according to two poles, a port on the small headland and a fortification further inland. This typical spatial pattern reconciled the need for trade with the need for security. The street pattern around the El Mina port area and the fortification are based on a mediaeval street pattern. The main axis linking port to fortification orients a grid that forms the basis of much of the development in the city in the post-indepen-

dence period.[31] The Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site is located to the south of the main axis linking the fort to El-Mina. A four-lane motorway that circles the site, reinforcing its separation from the city and turning the project into a vast roundabout, defines its elliptical form.

In the individuation of this scale of economic problem, a shift in historical attitudes toward the idea of continuity within the historical city can be found, especially the way ideas relating to circulation would come to figure so prominently in the project. Residing here are two potentially irreconcilable spatial problems or scales, the economic potential of the nation vis-a-vis the social potential of the neighbourhood. What scale does the project address? In order to answer this question, a small piece of evidence in Niemeyer's sketch plan of the project is suggestive.

A comparison of the satellite photograph of the project in its current state (Fig.6) with the sketch design published by Niemeyer (Fig.7) reveals a significant detail that has passed without comment. The sketch plan clearly shows an intended road artery passing through the centre of the elliptical site, penetrating under the boundary at the southern end and passing over the boundary at the northern end. Furthermore, two roads extend from the street grid planned between the coast and the project in the proposed residential district, puncturing the edge with two intersections. Significantly, this new urban district was to contain the collective housing that was never completed and most likely never seriously considered. These small details in the sketch plan indicate an attempt by Niemeyer to mediate the different regimes of speed announced

820

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

Figure 6. Satellite image redrawn: Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition, Tripoli, Lebanon. The elliptical form of the site as well as the placement of the primary forms, such as the trapezoidal entrance plaza, the elbow-shaped expo hall and parking in the north eastern corner, bear little relationship to the pattern of settlement in the surrounding city (redrawn by Sakiko Gato).

by the context and its transformation: the mediaeval street pattern of El Mina and the Port, the 1950s development grid stretching between the two and the high-speed motorway model accommodated by Niemeyer's curving motorways. The existing limit of the site, both in its articulation as a multi-lane road and its shape as a vast ellipse—surely the most foreign geometry that might be imposed on this site—was always intended to be punctured by two further access points.

The scalar analysis of the Niemeyer project's relationship to the city hinges on these details, and

whether they are understood in the context of the polemic against congestion that characterised the formative moments of modern planning or the later critique of the road and its annihilation of street life that emerged in response to it. Is it possible to read the puncturing of the limit as a concession to the context and its pre-existing circulation patterns? To what degree is the re-appropriation of the polemic on speed, not just in Tripoli but also in other Niemeyer projects, indicative not so much of a specific artistic attitude but a broader, discursive shift that would come to pose the problem of the city in terms of movement? In order to understand the epistemic model that Niemeyer draws on to re-organise movement around (or through) the Tripoli project, it is important briefly to contextualise this disposition in the changing attitude toward movement in the mid-nineteenth century.

Ildefons Cerda's 1859 Plan for Barcelona's *Eixample* is notable for its assertion that a city should be based on the efficient circulation of vehicles, pedestrians, goods as well as emphasising ventilation and access to sunlight.[32] This project proposes, in the form of a grid layout and building typology, a maximally efficient arrangement of parts in which the basic unit of the block is able to be repeated, allowing for maximum flexibility in the growth of the city. This geometric consistency also marks a profound philosophical reorientation in the conceptualisation of the city, no longer to be understood as a centralised seat of symbolic power and civic space but as a flexible spatial module whose logic is drawn from an empirical problem: circulation.[33] Both in terms of its ability to unlock stagnant economic forces and to improve the health and vitality
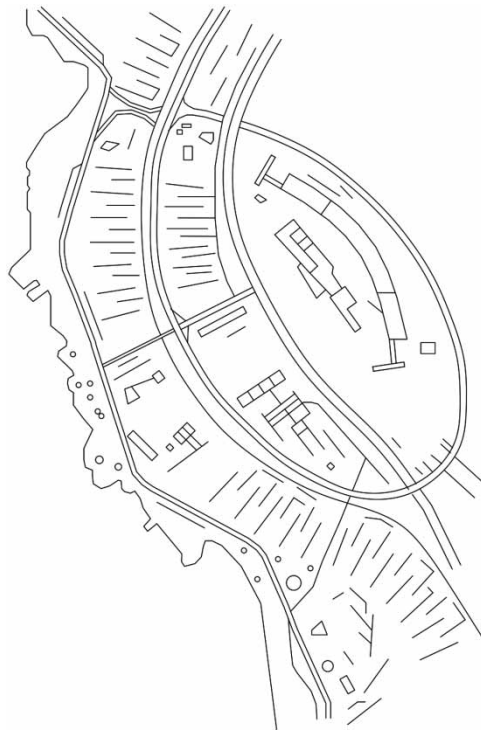

Figure 7. Original sketch plan, Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition, Tripoli, Lebanon (Oscar Niemeyer; redrawn by Sakiko Gato).

of the inhabitants, the questions of efficiency and circulation take on a primary importance in the formulation of modern planning, finding in the question of circulation its raison d'être.

By the time the International Conference on Traffic was held in 1923 in Seville, Spain, M. Massard can suggest that 'speed is the very epitome of modern society', the smooth flow of vehicle circulation taken as the sine qua non of the soon-to-be-modern city.[34] By the time Niemeyer

822

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

was be commissioned in Tripoli, the economic and
social rationality of speed had acquired the status
of dogma by the proponents of modern planning.[35]
Reading the infrastructural dimension of the Rachid
Karame Fair and Exposition site against this history
makes two things apparent. First, in line with the
ascendant principles of planning at the time, the
integration with the existing built fabric is premised
on major arterial roads, thus privileging vehicular
traffic over pedestrian traffic. More interestingly,
the original plan shows the motorway from the
south entering the middle of the site, thus connect-
ing it directly to Beirut. This infrastructural umbilical
clearly links the commercial viability of the exposition
site to its capacity to maintain a healthy (high-speed)
link to the rest of the country.

The concession to the original plan and its some-
what vague attempt to negotiate the scale of
block and street patterns within the surrounding
neighbourhood was not carried out. The failure of
this strategy, its attempt to make an argument at
the scale of the nation and not at the scale of the
neighbourhoods immediately adjoining the site is
undisputed, but it is undisputed from the perspective
of subsequent critiques of modern planning and
their willingness to sacrifice pedestrian amenity
and the virtues of 'street life'. As with the aforemen-
tioned geopolitical scale—which received both its
orientation and impetus from the project of nation
building until the withdrawal of the state led to its
radical contraction and the eventual replacement
of the state as the nation's primary territorial agent
with a mixture of private actors—so too with the
economic scale which found its original genesis in
the relationship between infrastructure and territor-

ial productivity only also to contract in response to a
new problem that began to emphasise the impor-
tance of locality.

A year prior to Niemeyer's commissioned work in
the Lebanon, Jane Jacobs, writing in *The Death and
Life of Great American Cities* (1961), lamented the
wholesale erasure of urban fabric as part of what
she took to be an ideological marriage between
the principles of modernism and the private interests
of developers, primarily in New York.[36] She took aim
at the modernist tower block typology, especially the
empty datum that characterises the ground plane,
suggesting that much of the vibrancy and activity
of the city was nullified by drawing people away
from an active participation with the street. The
success of her critique is evident; town planning
has, since the period of the 1970s, incorporated
into its basic presuppositions this expanded view of
the street as not just a vector of movement but
more importantly as a locus for interaction.

The question here is to what extent the idea of
'street life' in the terms Jacobs conceives of it can
be said to have existed prior to its nullification? Did
street life exist before 1961? Or, is street life a retro-
active projection of something that only became
visible at the moment of its potential disappearance?
Certainly there was already a tradition of literary and
artistic reflection on the delirium of the new metro-
polis in Zola, Baudelaire, Kracauer and Benjamin.
However, Jacobs' critique is entirely different, unin-
terested in the alienation, disinterest and delirium
of the crowds or the inexorability of industrialisation.
Instead, she turns to the spatial dependency of small
interactions and weak social bonds that glue
together communities in an urban space. The

solvent applied to these bonds—the modernist tower type—should be understood to have made these bonds visible, precisely because it threatened to dissolve them.

Architecture's rationality is a critical one in that critique binds a problem to a proposition through a spatialised form of argument. If the scalar problem of circulation was immanent to the rise of modern planning, the scalar problem of street life was similarly immanent to its period of critique. Both problems evolve in response to different perceptions of the city, the squalor of the nineteenth-century city in one case, the sterilisation of the twentieth-century city in the other. Furthermore, both arguments take different scales of economic activity as their object: the nation state or region in the first case, the neighbourhood and its community in the second.[37] In this regard the motorway encircling the Tripoli project and severing it from its adjoining neighbourhoods is ideologically motivated, as Jacobs would suggest.

Furthermore, the ideology of speed and efficiency works both at the level of declared rhetoric and implicit content, but this content is no less present in Jacobs' critique than in Niemeyer's proposal, only that each conceives of critique with regards to a different problem. The problem that is so powerfully individuated during the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries occurs at an historically specific and contingent scale: the vitality of the entire urban population. What takes place with the critique of modern planning, of which Jacobs is but one example, is that this distribution of problems begins to shift toward another scale—the neighbourhood. With this new

scale comes a new distribution of relevant and irrelevant questions, such as the emphasis on 'character' and heterogeneity, the importance of the street frontage and its activity, or the importance of ameliorating traffic on residential streets: each new proposition is retroactively declared a failure in response to a problem only made retroactively visible.

Within modernism, universality of scope and unity of expression formed mutually symbiotic virtues.[38] In line with the way these virtues of modernism are expressed within his body of work, Niemeyer attempts to orchestrate the parts of the Tripoli project into a coherent and unified ensemble. But this coherence extends only as far as the elliptical boundary of the site, which marks a line of difference between his proposal and the existing city of Tripoli. This discontinuity between the project and context marks the fundamental incision on which the unity of Niemeyer's project rests, constituting a new internal unity dependent on a *tabula rasa* and the positioning of the historical city as a clear and distinct outside. Both the critics and the defenders of modern architecture have emphasised the importance of this issue, seeing in this moment of discontinuity not only another part within a larger ensemble of parts, but instead, a paradigmatic break that 'reveals the intelligibility of the set to which it belongs', that is, a caesura with one kind of history: an effacement that is only revealed in the name of another.[39] The announcement of this break has over-determined the assessment of modern architecture. This view depends on treating the project as a consistent whole. If the unity of the project is based on a consistent synthesis of parts both large and small, is it any surprise that either

824

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

critic or advocate need only point to a few elements, either large or small, since each part can speak on behalf of the entire whole?[40]

According to this view, modern architecture and the project of modernisation that it symbolised, was guilty of perpetrating numerous crimes. To name but two of the most common accusations: as a continuation of a colonial project, modern architecture—in both its high-modern and regionally inflected phases—serves to reinforce the subaltern status of the population, annihilating local difference in the name of a homogenised, euro-global identity. Secondly, as an instrumental intervention within the urban territory, it appears under the guise of progressive social reform but only manages to perpetuate further the uneven development of the city. This line of critique doubles, but this time in the register of identity politics and economics, with the architectural critique of modernism and its incompatibility with an historical model of the city that was already beginning in the 1960s. The unity of the post-colonial critique all too often reproduces a unity in the object of critique, such that the failure of the modern project applies comprehensively. This appears to occur even if the demands of serious scholarship insist on certain qualifications and prevent the failure from being framed as such. Not that this should be taken as an attack on the critical tools of architectural theory or criticism alone, since the idea of 'unity' is the self-declared principle *par excellence* of modern architecture and justifiably invites precisely this kind of criticism.

In any case, it is dangerous to reduce the question of locality within the Lebanese context to discursive arguments within architecture and urban planning,

not only because it is uncertain to what extent these issues made their way to a Levantine context or because questions of economic productivity at the scale of the nation state barely had time to form, but much more importantly because the process of identity formation and its territorialisation within the city has always been articulated along sectarian lines. The creation of the idea of the neighbourhood as something secured through street life and town hall meetings explains only a small part of the story here. After all, the Lebanese civil war was at one stage described as the 'war of the neighbourhoods'; the neighbourhood was, and indeed still is, something that is savagely defended not only by community activists but also by heavily armed militias. In order to explicate this phenomenon more clearly in a Lebanese context the process of Lebanese urbanisation must be set out in its own terms.

The scale of the subject

The need which consumption feels for the object is created by the perception of it. The object of art—like every other product—creates a public, which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object.[41]

The following section turns to another scale of problem in the Tripoli project: the kind of political subject implied by its architecture. This argument will be made through a reading of the internal planning, organisation and orchestration of movement through the project. It is a narrative that will be told against the movement from secular to sectarian politics in Lebanon, one that reached its apogee with

the civil war, since this shift signalled the major break with the way a political subject is conceived and formed. In a Lebanese context, the question of identity must be situated in relation to the tension between urban and rural centres, the tradition of rural power being inseparable from its feudal structure and history of *asabiyah*, or group feeling.[42] The dominance of communal, familial and sectarian bonds as the fundamental coupler of the social system underwent a significant transformation with the urbanisation of the rural population that began to take place as early as the eighteenth century, articulated initially through a series of peasant protests and reaching a turning point in the early twentieth century with the perceived threat posed by the state.[43]

As Michael Johnson has argued, the retreat into communal affiliation must be understood as a reaction to the erosion of secure social structures brought about by an increasingly urbanised and capitalist economy.[44] Sectarian tensions existed from the first wave of urbanised migrants arriving from rural areas into the cities. Communal politics, insofar as they continued to reside in the city, can be understood as a response to a newly urbanised context and the inability to gain access to networks of patronage that characterised Lebanese society.[45] Samir Khalaf and Guilain Denoeux put the issue in the following terms:

> When the cruelties of the public world become more menacing, threatened and traumatized groups seek refuge in their tested and secure primordial ties and affiliations. Hence the family, locality, and confessional communities allay some of their vulnerabilities and provide needed

psychic, social and economic supports and cushions. They do so however only by eroding civility, increasing distance between groups, and sharpening further the segmented character of society. In short, what enables at one level disables at another.[46]

For Khalaf and Denoeux, urbanisation in Lebanon has always been marked by a disparity; the physical fact of increased metropolitan populations, density and activity was never accompanied by 'urbanism' as a way of life.[47] By this the authors refer to the stubborn persistence of feudal organisation and communal bonds that translate onto a neighbourhood scale, and where urbanism as a practice would signify the anonymous social contract of civil society in a city.

It would be tempting to dismiss the Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site in the light of the preceding argument, for appearing hopelessly optimistic in its invocation of a neutral, urban subject. Paradoxically, its commission by Rachid Karame, the *za'im* of Tripoli, can be understood as an example of the clientism and patronage that —as Khalaf and Denoeux argue—undermines the legitimacy of public institutions, those same institutions that the project would aim to symbolise.[48] It is also worth questioning to what degree Khalaf and Denoeux bring a Eurocentric concept of public space to bear on a condition of spatial alterity. For example, it is doubtful to what extent the function of public space as a kind of factory for constructing anonymous citizens can be extended into such a domestically oriented society. While hindsight provides a certain critical reassurance, an analysis of how the Tripoli project was organised reveals an

826

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

ambition that, even if flawed, attempts to assert a model of spatial co-existence on which it is worth reflecting.

Looking at the project in more detail, especially its programme and orchestration of pedestrian movement, reveals an attempt to forge a new political subject in which Niemeyer inventively redeploys historical ideas around the expo type. The 750 m-long elbow form of the expo hall is made of two long, straight sections connected in the middle by a curve which orients the arms at around 140 degrees. This is a Niemeyer trope, one deployed in previous projects such as the University of Brasilia (1960), the University of Constantine in Algeria (1969–1972) and the Pavilion of Creativity in the Memorial to Latin America in Sao Paulo (1986–1988). Niemeyer typically uses this figure in larger urban plans in order to produce an asymmetry in the axial organisation of the site and to act as a frame for free-standing pavilions, which typically sit on the concave side (with the exception of the project in Algeria in which they sit on the convex side). The effect of this is a curving accompaniment to the promenade, so that attention is gradually redirected across the site while also functioning as a continuous form able to structure very large sites.

According to Niemeyer, the expo hall was intended to 'discipline' the 'disagreeable confusion' typical of exposition sites in which a large number of unique pavilions jostle. In response, Niemeyer's proposal generates a simple concrete shelter open to the Mediterranean breeze arriving from the west. To the east of the expo canopy is a series of pavilions carefully sequenced to produce an ordered perspectival framing as one moves through the site (Fig. 8).

Referring to the project, Niemeyer suggests the pavilions were intended to display 'the great themes that impassion the contemporary world: spatial experience imbued with beauty and mystery; the evolution of nature and its perspectives; theatre, music, cinema etc.'[49] The first of these pavilions is the Lebanese National Pavilion, a square plan surrounded by a colonnade of subtly faceted arches that recall the Ottoman architecture of the region. To the right is a dome for experimental performance and music; after that a restaurant, a tower and an open-air theatre capped by a parabolic arch. Interestingly, at the conclusion of this promenade, Niemeyer proposes two housing typologies: a freestanding, detached dwelling and a collective housing unit loosely based on a repetition of the typology of Le Corbusier's *Pavilion de l'Esprit Nouveau*. These types are complemented by a museum of housing in which a series of experimental approaches to modern dwellings were to be displayed.

There are two critical points that the project makes at this scale. The first is the organisation of separate elements united by a ground plane datum and set in a park-like landscape, the primary element being the exposition hall. Niemeyer's idea of the ensemble attempts to deploy a number of different, though simple forms to produce an emergent spatial complexity. This ensemble form of organisation freed the individual buildings from the burdens of expressing needless differentiation, allowing Niemeyer to reconcile spatial richness at the scale of the site with simplicity at the scale of the pavilions. The second critical point is Niemeyer's decision to conclude the axis through the site on a pedagogical note, in which housing comes to

Figure 8. View from left to right of the entrance kiosk, dome for experimental theatre and music and Lebanese National Pavilion. Note the scale of post-Second World War housing development along the periphery which now forms an enclosure for the site at the scale of the city with the peaks of the Mt Lebanon ranges visible dimly in the distance forming another scale of limit, suggesting that the entire project can be read in terms of a large urban courtyard at a geographic scale (photograph by Adrian Lahoud).

occupy the prominent and symbolic role. These forms of organisation invert Costa's pilot plan for Brasilia, where the main axis terminates in a munici-pal plaza and is accompanied on either side by public service buildings, entertainment, banking and com-mercial sectors, with the residential zones relegated to the cross-axis or wings. Here the market place or exhibition hall accompanies a curving promenade on one side as a continuous plastic form with unique pavilions on the other, the axis terminating with the proposed collective housing. The decision to conclude the ceremonial axis through the site with a row of typologically identical flats based on a Cor-busian model is a relatively unambiguous statement about the centrality of the dwelling and importance of domestic space within the modern city, but it is

equally important to ask what sort of subject was being called into existence by this proposal.

The elements, programmes and organisation of the Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site should be located in the context of the history of the national fair and exhibition projects, a history that is intimately linked to an attempt by the state to marshal culture in the effort of producing a public. Beginning with the 1851 Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace, London, such projects set out to shape, reform and regulate a large, undifferentiated, newly urban population. This new subject had to be made governable, taught how to dress and act appropriately in public, to appreciate culture and location within a new kind of national identity. As Uslenghi suggests, these exhibitions and the

828

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

national pavilions they contained formed a 'technology of nationhood' in which culture and consumerism were instrumentalised.[50] Being shaped here was not just architecture but an audience that could, in the vastness of its own spectacle, become self-aware. In the mass orchestration of this public spectacle, the crowds would see themselves seeing and see themselves being seen. This self-reflectivity, in line with the anthropological and ethnographic artefacts housed in the national pavilions, would form one of the primary pedagogical ambitions behind such projects.[51]

The Rachid Karame Fair and Exposition site carries with it the civilising burden of the expo type's history. At the scale of the interior and its elements, this project was, finally, an aborted attempt to enlist the public into the project of its own reform. What sets this project apart from its historical predecessors was an emphasis not just on exhibition, but also on cultural production and performance. In the plastic, concrete forms of the pavilions and theatre there is a concerted attempt to produce a surplus of cultural and symbolic capital that cannot be simply explained through recourse to historical precedent. In the prominent location of the collective housing unit and museum at the end of the primary axis, but more so in the theatre for experimental performance, Niemeyer exemplifies a specifically humanist attitude towards the imagined subject. On the one hand, the symbol of collectivity and on the other, a space reserved for the artistic free expression of the individual—a tension that struggles to reconcile technocratic rationality with individual freedoms—constitute the marker *par excellence* of the modern project.[52]

This civic ideal would find another kind of conclusion some 70 km to the south in the Lebanese capital of Beirut in which a wholly corporate and privatised conception of the city would emerge from the aftermath of the civil war. The expropriation of the 'Burj', once the pre-eminent symbolic space in the city, by the private development corporation Solidere, excises the capital city from its citizens and reproduces it as a commodity to be consumed by tourists. Rather than pose the problem of the city in terms of mutually re-enforcing ideas of cultural productivity and consumption as in Niemeyer's plan for Tripoli, the historical core of Beirut exemplifies an idea that has now become common place in cities around the world. In a condition in which a certain form of economic rationality dominates so completely, the city can only assume the form of an extended shopping arcade. Paradoxically, the Ecochard plan for Beirut which was admittedly only ever partially completed, exemplifies a French European conception of the city with its radial axis and baroque orchestration of perspective, and yet in its reconstructed form–if not in its original intention—it reproduces a rigorous socio-economic exclusivity, compared to which Niemeyer's high level of abstraction and open datum appears intensely egalitarian.

Conclusion

The individuation of the three problems considered so far—the geopolitical problem of nation building, the actualisation of economic potential within the region and finally the constitution of a new public—cannot be considered to form a single, coherent impetus behind the parts of the project. Each scale places paradoxical demands on the project, which

the form and organisation of Niemeyer's proposal attempts to mediate and hold in a stable state. In the genesis of the plan, the project attempts to mould the image of an embryonic state and in the same gesture ties itself to the viability of that state for its survival. As long as the state apparatus adopted this composition, it was able to marshal together and hold in place the necessary forces required to maintain this scale of intervention. In this regard, first, there is a specific problem being posed: how is an emerging nation given shape? Second, how is this problem posed through a specific epistemic frame? Third, what historical transformations occur such that the project's original discursive background becomes replaced by another?

The chain of immanence that correlates each one of these distinct individuations (ontological, epistemological, discursive) forms a scale; in this case a geopolitical one. Similarly, in the motorway that tethers the site to the productive capacity of the nation, the project severs itself from the city that surrounds it, while in the formation of a blank ground plane and elevated ramps, the project attempts to form a limited, though open and neutral stage for a civic promenade. In the very same gesture it establishes a dependence on a specific model of citizenship and belonging whose premise becomes increasingly tenuous. In each case, the elements of the project emerge out of a problem, carrying it forth, giving it shape, and stabilising it—if only momentarily—before being plunged back into a new set of conditions.

The account given of Tripoli in this case study could have been expressed in a number of different ways, perhaps the most conventional of which would be to narrate the itineraries of different actors and the unfolding experience of their unique perspectives on the project: each monad-like citizen existing within a partial if overlapping image of the whole. In departing from it here, there is a desire to move away from an anthropomorphic depiction of architecture and its implicit phenomenological framework. The 'geopolitical', the 'city' and even the 'subject' scales are riven by an anonymous play of forces in which an idea, a planning charter, a road or a construction technique are just as likely to be protagonists as the architect or the citizen, all of them—both installed within and adrift upon—problems over which they have limited agency. Although all of these scales deal in some way with issues of nationhood, each problem unfolds according to a separate rationality. The geopolitical, the economic, the urban and the architectural problems posed to the work need not be flattened into a unity since they only materialise in specific elements of the project, its commission, infrastructure, programme, choreography and architecture.

In each case the idea of success or failure of any one of these scales is contingent upon a set of meanings, references and supports outside of the work itself, and so one should be cautious in applying judgement in a manner that suggests either a unity behind the project or an ahistorical frame of criticality. Although the project emerges in response to one set of problems, relatively soon these problems are replaced by others. The elements of the project can only make sense by reading them against this mobile and insecure history, extracting them from

830

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

this context, attempting to secure their meaning or assessing them according to contemporary criteria of judgement, eviscerates the project of meaning and misses the unexhausted potential of its instrumentality. The various elements of the Niemeyer plan are evidence of difference *despite* the apparent unity of their formal expression. What is distinct here is not the shape of the element as such, but the rationality that guides the element into being. If there is to be a debate over the importance of difference in the city today, it must be understood in terms of alternate rationalities rather than diversity of forms, since apparent diversity can often conceal a widely held commitment to common political rationalities, something that today's cities seem to bear out.[53]

Notes and references

1. Originally named the *Tripoli International Fair and Exposition* project, it was later changed in honour of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Rachid Karame, who originated from Tripoli and in many ways was the patron of the project.

2. For a critical discussion of the 'laboratory' as a colonial model for spatial experimentation in the developing world see: T. Avermaete, S. Karakayali, M. von Osten, *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past Rebeliions for the Future* (London, Black Dog; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2010).

3. J. M. Botey, *Oscar Niemeyer* (Barcelona, Gustavo Gill, 1996).

4. 'Modulo was released quarterly and published continuously until 1965, when it was closed down by members of the military dictatorship for its presumed opposition to the government. It returned to circulation in 1975, when censorship laws began to relax, and ceased publication in 1989.' O. Niemeyer, 'Feira Internationale e Permanente do Líbano em Trípoli', *Módulo*, 7 (1962a), pp. 4–5; A. Le Blanc, 'Palmeiras and Pilotis', *Third Text,* 26 (2012), pp. 103–116; O. Niemeyer, *Niemeyer, Oscar* (New York, London, Thames and Hudson, 1971; Masters of Modern Architecture series).

5. O. Niemeyer, 'Feira Internationale e Permanente do Líbano em Trípoli', *op. cit.*

6. The situation in Tripoli continues to lack stability; this recent report points to further tensions in the city: B. Dehghanpisheh, 'Lebanon's divisions are mirrored in responses to Damascus bomb attack', *Washington Post* newspaper (2012).

7. D. K. Underwood, *Oscar Niemeyer and Brazilian freeform modernism* (New York, George Brazillier, 1994).

8. In order to address this deficit of information, the spatial-analytic dimension of the following research is drawn from a detailed 3D digital reconstruction of the site and the surrounding city completed over the course of four years by the Author and assistants. This material was based on site visits, photographs, archival drawings and satellite imagery.

9. G. Balcombe, 'Brasilia; Architects: Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa', *Architect and Building News,* 224/15 (1963), pp. 40–45. See also: N. Evenson, 'The architecture of Brasilia', *Canadian Architect,* 18 (1974), pp. 50–56; A. Gorelik, 'Brasilia 1956–2006, *Casabella,* 71 (2007), pp. 4–29; A. Hugs, 'Brasilia revisited', *Sites,* 26 (1995), pp. 112–114; W. Mcquade, 'Brasilia's beginning; Architects: Oscar Niemeyer', *Architectural Forum*, 110 (February, 1959); R. J. Williams, 'Oscar Niemeyer: Brasilia', *Blueprint,* 263 (2008), pp. 34–38; C. L. Wright, B. Turkienicz, 'Brasilia and the ageing of modernism; Architect: Oscar Niemeyer', *Cities,* 5 (1988), pp. 347–364.

10. For a comprehensive account of this period, see D. Gilmour, *Lebanon The Fractured Country* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983).

11. The Non-Aligned Movement was formally established in 1961 by Tito, Nehru, Nasser and Sukarno in opposition to the American and Soviet power blocs.

12. Under the National Pact, Lebanon gained independence from France, the Maronites gave up on the West and Europe and the Sunnis gave up on greater Syria. Thus the Pact established a sectarian structure in government based on the latest census in 1932 and a formalisation of the power-sharing established during the French Mandate.

13. D. Gilmour, *Lebanon The Fractured Country, op. cit.*

14. For a detailed account of the pre-war political economy, see S. A. Makdisi, *The Lessons of Lebanon the Economics of War and Development* (London, I.B. Tauris, (2004), pp. 12–30.

15. In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, eight Arab heads of state gathering in Khartoum, Sudan, adopted a resolution with regards to Israel; it amounted to 'no peace, no recognition, no negotiations'. Two months later the United Nations General Assembly ratified Resolution 242 demanding Israeli withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territory. Two years later, Yasser Arafat assumed control of the Palestine Liberation organisation. See K. S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1965).

16. F. El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967–1976* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 12.

17. F. Ṭarābulsī, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London, Pluto, 2007).

18. L. Fawaz, F. Nasrallah, N. Shehadi, *State and society in Lebanon* (Oxford, Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1991); R. Ṣulḥ, *Lebanon and Arabism national identity and state formation* (London, I.B Tauris, 2004).

19. T. Hanf , *Coexistence in wartime Lebanon : decline of a state and rise of a nation* (London, I.B Tauris, 1993).

20. Niemeyer's deliberately ambiguous statement regarding 'beauty and injustice', two concepts he seemed dedicated to—at least on the level of formal pronouncement in the case of the latter—is indicative here, suggesting beauty might not be so easily detached from an instrumental use of reason but instead seen as a kind of rhetorical strategy that makes reason visible and intelligible. Architecture's role here is not simply didactic. O. Niemeyer, 'A Ciadade Contemporanea', *Módulo,* 11, 5 (1958).

21. D. K. Underwood, *Oscar Niemeyer and Brazilian free-form modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

22. M. Tafuri, 'Per una critica dell'ideologia archittonica' (Towards a Critique of Architectural Ideology), *Contrapiano* (1968; reprinted in *Architectural Theory*, 2000), p. 2.

23. D. K. Underwood, *Oscar Niemeyer and Brazilian free-form modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

24. The exemplary account of this period and its regional effect is provided in S. Kassir, *Being Arab* (London, Verso, 2006).

25. R. Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (London, Andre Deutsch, 1990).

26. Although still operating wholly within the channels of familial links and clientism: see S. A. Makdisi, *The Lessons of Lebanon the Economics of War and Development, op. cit.*

27. T. K. Gaspard, *A political economy of Lebanon, 1948–2002 the limits of laissez-faire* (Boston, Leideb, 2004), p. 2.

28. In the background of the problem of how to construct a new and unified national imaginary is a geopolitical ideal: this ideal forms the context in which the later failure of the project must be understood. Looking back through the lens of subsequent regional shifts, like the decline of pan-Arabism and the move away from secular to sectarian politics, this project's progressive geopolitical impulse cannot but be coloured by a perception of naivety, optimism, or worse, nostalgia. When it is considered that the next major architec-

832

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

tural project of this scale in the Lebanon was the colos-
sal mosque built in Beirut's Central District (a mosque
that was named after the developer and former
Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri), the distance between
the two periods seems far greater than the thirty
years between them would suggest. This is not to
state that it is possible to set up a binary reading
with utopian modernism on one side and regressive
sectarian backlash on the other, nor can modernity
be understood as a distinctly European phenomenon.
As Samir Kassir points out, Arab modernity is exempli-
fied by the Nahda in the nineteenth and twentieth cen-
turies, an organic regional phenomenon; so too with
the political re–orientation towards confessionalism
which was in many ways also a modern phenomenon,
bound up in the problem of capitalism and its concomi-
tant process of urbanisation, especially in the move-
ment of peoples from rural areas into expanding
cities. S. Kassir, *Being Arab, op. cit.*

29. 'For some, therefore, Rowe's ahistorical analysis
suggested that there was a deep structure, or deep
principles that all architecture adhered to as a semiotic
system. For others, this syntax of lines, grids and points
and grammatical rules of combination now were
abstract and relative, and thus became mobile and pro-
ductive of other architectures. This use of diagrams
suggested the generation of an architecture iso-
morphic to its analytical tools, suggesting new pro-
cesses of design and pedagogy that allowed the
architect to consciously access and manipulate in
new architecture the same level of abstract order
such diagrams were said to reveal in historical architec-
ture The diagram could become a the locus of architec-
tural order, even more real, or at least pure, than a built
artefact and its inevitable contingencies and compro-
mises. Methods of analysis used by the text of the
critic, historian and theorist had become generative
of new objects produced by the designer.' C. Hight,

Architectural Principles in the age of Cybernetics
(New York, Routledge, 2007), p. 84.

30. J. Gulick, *Tripoli, a modern Arab city* (Cambridge,
Mass., Harvard University Press, 1967); H. Salem-
Liebich, *The architecture of the Mamluk city of Tripoli*
(Cambridge, Mass., Aga Kahn Program for Islamic
Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachu-
setts Institute of Technology, 1983).

31. This later development was characterised by a number
of blocks of flats designed by a generation of architects
working in France who had returned to Lebanon,
bringing back a highly principled approach to
modern housing. The final phase of development in
the city occurred in the post-civil war period: the archi-
tecture of this period is of a similar density and yet, in
the war interim, the entire aesthetic and spatial voca-
bulary had changed, at this time drawing on the
tropes of post-modern architecture in an ahistorical
pastiche.

32. I. Cerda, *General Theory of Urbanization* (Barcelona,
Sociedad Editorial Electa Espana, 1861).

33. See the Introduction to P. V. Aurelli, *The Possibility of
an Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT
Press, 2011).

34. As referred to in Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow
and its Planning* (New York, Dover, 1929).

35. The Athens Charter states: '(79). The speeds of
mechanized transportation have disrupted the urban
setting, presenting an ever-present danger, obstruct-
ing or paralyzing communications and endangering
health; (80). The principle of urban and suburban circu-
lation must be revised. A classification of acceptable
speeds must be established. A reformed type of
zoning must be set up that can bring the key functions
of the city into a harmonious relationship and develop
connections between them. These connections can
then be developed into a rational network of major
highways.'Architecture, I. I. C. O. M.: La Charte

d'Athènes ('The Athens Charter') (Athens, *Congress Internationaux d'Architecture moderne (CIAM),* 1933; The Library of the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University).

36. J. Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, Vintage, 1961).

37. There is no ultimate synthesis at the end of this dialectical shift; the success of Jacobs' argument has arguably led to a paralysis of planning in many developed cities, where large-scale questions regarding the redistribution of resources and the construction of infrastructure are hamstrung by local disputes.

38. The reasons for this selection are two-fold. First, if the critique of unity is taken to be a generalised feature of architecture and urbanism, it should stand that it applies to all projects, including those that declare their own unity in supposedly certain terms. Secondly, the context of the Lebanon provides a particularly unstable background, lending the present critiques a forceful example of the vulnerability of architecture within its context.

39. G. Agamben, *What is a Paradigm?* (Leuk-Stadt, European Graduate School, 2010).

40. See also T. Avermaete, S. Karakayali, M. Von Osten, *Colonial Modern, op. cit.*

41. K. Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London, Penguin, 1858). See also the Introduction, p.4, to K. M.Hays, *Modernism and the Post-humanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1992): 'Modernism, whatever else we may mean with that term, has something to do with the emergence of new kinds of objects and events and, at the same time, new conceptualizations of their appearance, of the changed event structures and relationships between objects, their producers their audiences, and consumers. A history of modern-

ism then, must involve the concept of the producing, using, perceiving subject as well as the object. The subject is a signifying complex, constituted in the ideological space and categories of possible experience, formed through the very object of the world it would organize and explain.'

42. The closest translation would be the French 'esprit de corps': the term *asabiyah* is first used in a systematic way by the scholar Ibn Khaldun writing in the fourteenth century to describe the different forms of social organisation among sedentary and nomadic peoples in the Arabian peninsula, a reading that would later prove influential for Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their conception of 'smooth and striated space'. See I. Khaldun, مقدّمة ابن خلدون, (1377); *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (New York, Princeton University Press, 1989).

43. For an account of this period see E. Burke III, 'Rural Collective Action', in, N. Shehadi, D. Haffar Mills, eds, *Lebanon: A History of Consensus and Conflict* (London, I.B. Tauris, 1988).

44. M. Johnson, *All Honourable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon* (London, London Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I. B. Tauris, 2001).

45. Nonetheless, it would also be incorrect to project today's sectarian matrix backwards, the ferocity of which was yet to be articulated in the character of the later stages of the civil war.

46. S. Khalaf, G. Denoeux, (1988) 'Urban networks and political conflict in Lebanon', in, N. Shehadi, D. Haffar Mills, eds, *Lebanon: A History of Conflict and Consensus, op. cit.*, p. 148.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

48. See also: A. Hottinger, 'Zu'uma in Historical Perspective', in L. Binder, ed., *Politics in Lebanon* (London, John Wiley & Sons, 1966).

49. O. Niemeyer, 'Feira Internationale e Permanente do Líbano em Trípoli', *op. cit.*

834

Architecture, the city and its
scale: Oscar Niemeyer in
Tripoli, Lebanon
Adrian Lahoud

50. See also: 'The arcades and the department stores of Paris, like the great expositions, were certainly the places in which the crowd, itself become a spectacle, found the spatial and visual means for a self-education from the point of view of capital. But throughout the nineteenth century this recreational-pedagogical experience, precisely in being concentrated in exceptional architectural types, still dangerously revealed its restricted scope. The ideology of the public is not in fact, an end in itself. It is only a moment of the ideology of the city as a productive unity in the proper sense of the term and simultaneously, as an instrument of coordination of the production-distribution-consumption cycle.' M. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1979), p. 83.

51. 'Exhibitions thus located their preferred audiences at the very pinnacle of the exhibitionary order of things they constructed. They also installed them at the threshold of greater things to come. Here, too, the Great Exhibition led the way in sponsoring a display of architectural projects for the amelioration of working- class housing conditions. This principle was to be developed, in subsequent exhibitions, into displays of elaborate projects for the improvement of social conditions in the areas of health, sanitation, education, and welfare—promissory notes that the engines of progress would be harnessed for the general good. Indeed, exhibitions came to function as promissory notes in their totalities, embodying, if just for a season, Utopian principles of social organiz-ation which, when the time came for the notes to be redeemed, would eventually be realized in perpetuity.' T. Bennet, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', *New Formations,* 4 (1988), pp. 73–102; 95.

52. 'In their radical vocation and in their conception of architecture as a form of critique, the architects of the modern movement ultimately had origins in the revolutionary thought of the enlightenment. But it was their inability to carry out this vocation—less through error than being forced to make an impossible choice between humanism and technocracy—that now produced this sense of crisis. This negative experienced explained, in Argan's view, why post war architecture had become so evasive with respect to politics.' J. Ockman, Introduction to G. C. Argan, 'Architecture and Ideology' (1957), in, J. Ockman, ed., *Architecture Culture 1943–1968* (New York, Rizzoli, 1993).

53. There is probably something perverse in using an architect like Niemeyer to make this kind of point. It is unlikely, after all, that he would have been conscious of the various instrumentalities being claimed for the project here. After all, he was an architect who typically described his buildings in analogy with the female form. In many ways, however, this is precisely the point, in drawing on and transforming many of the ready-to-hand conventions within modern architecture and planning, Niemeyer deploys elements and concepts riddled with latent, implicit socio-political effects, effects that are often undeclared—even to the architect themself.