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Beirut Modernism:
Theoretical Framework and Case Study

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of
the requirements for the Degree of

PhD in Architecture

Department of Architecture,
The University of Sydney

2015
Statement of Originality

I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Maroun G. Kassab

Signed: _________________
Date: March 14, 2015
Abstract

The main question that this research poses is: Where does Lebanese modernist architecture stand in terms of modernist architecture in general terms? The proliferation of modern architecture in Lebanon between the 1940s and the 1970s has been significantly neglected as a subject of research, documentation, analysis and criticism. This research attempts to fill a gap in the theoretical framework of understanding modern architecture in Lebanon.

The research first establishes a rudimentary understanding of modernism in general terms, then explores the various theoretical approaches that the architectural discourse utilizes to address modernism in locales such as Beirut, namely “Orientalism”, “Critical Regionalism” and “Third World Modernism”. The research then explores the history of the development of architecture in Lebanon in three phases from 1860 till 1920, when Lebanon was under Ottoman rule; then from 1920 till 1943 when Lebanon was under the French Mandate, and then from 1943 till 1975 which are the modernist years after independence. The research will then focus of the modernist architecture of Beirut in a broad sense, then on Hamra District in a more specific venue, and then at the architecture of Hamra Street to get a more intimate picture of the development of modern architecture in the city of Beirut.

In light of this investigation, a phase of reassessment of modernism itself is attempted, as well as a reassessment of the three modes of understanding, i.e. orientalism, critical regionalism and third world modernism. The findings of this reassessment are then considered in an attempt to establish a preliminary theoretical framework for understanding the development of modern architecture in Beirut.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction
1.1: Background Reference Perspective:

The architecture of the city of Beirut has a long and varied history. Its roots extend into ancient antiquity when the city was first founded by the Phoenicians. The city passed through Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Crusader and Ottoman eras, as well as through French mandate before the independence of Lebanon in 1943. The varied architectural history is still preserved throughout the city as a mosaic of cultural dialogue through time.

One of the first examples of modernist architecture in Beirut is the Saint George Hotel. The conflict over the relevance and importance of modernist architecture in Lebanon is in a way best represented by this hotel in the post–war era and the reconstruction of downtown Beirut. Solidere, the Lebanese holding company responsible for the reconstruction of downtown Beirut managed to acquire the real estate and the damaged buildings of the central district. Its attempts to annex Hotel Saint George within its holdings have been met with great public resistance. This is where the debate over the importance of modernist architecture in Lebanon takes a political and social aspect. Solidere, which was formed by the prime minister Rafic Hariri, assassinated in 2005 in front of the Saint George Hotel, has been trying to acquire of the hotel prime property which sits directly on the Mediterranean Sea.¹ The current owner claims that Solidere, with its political leverage, has prevented the reconstruction on the hotel since its formation.² This battle has caught the public eye and is still ongoing at the time of this dissertation. A large billboard displayed on the façade of this hotel reads “Stop Solidere” in bold letters.

The conflict between architectural heritage and land speculation as well as property acquisitions rages with full force in Lebanon today. A recent article by Elie Haddad, a Lebanese architectural researcher and the dean of the school of architecture at the Lebanese American University, discusses specifically this aspect of recent urbanization in Beirut:

All the warnings to stop the concentrated attack on the city to prevent its destruction did not do any good. No, even the destruction process has reached thousands of years old traditions as well as the most recent tradition that constituted the neighborhoods of the capital during the fourties and the sixties of the last century, in addition to green spaces. All this is done in the name of "urban development", which is nothing more than a byproduct of the capitalist system which perceives every plot of land as a possible space to take advantage of.³

The importance of the modernist heritage is being felt on a social level especially after the economic boom that Lebanon has witnessed since 2001. In a span of three years after 2001, Solidere made a profit of over 1.2 billion dollars in the Marina area alone.⁴

---

³ HADDAD, E. 2013. المعلّقة المعلّقة. جريدة النهار. الملاحق.
In 2004, Solidere finished the first phase of reconstruction and land reclamation. As the company moved into the second phase of construction and reconstruction, the effects caused a surge in property prices in the city of Beirut, and consequently the property prices of all densely built districts around it.\(^5\)

The scarcity of available property in the capital caused a surge in real estate prices, and drove most of the middle class out of the city to its immediate peripheries.\(^6\) In turn, the need for housing tailored to the needs of this section of the population caused a price rise in the secondary districts and pushed the lower middle class out of these districts. As a result, the real estate market became saturated, and much of the properties in and around Beirut were captured by Arab investors, International companies, and by capital coming from the ‘well-to-do’ section of the Lebanese Diaspora.\(^7\) This caused a rise in the land prices of suburban areas in the close vicinity of almost all main coastal cities in Lebanon. The towns of Khaldeh and Dawhet Aramoun near Beirut, Blat and Aainat next to Byblos, Haret Saida and Majdelyoun next to Saida are only some of the few examples of the ongoing development pressures.

The second condition that generated further development was driven by the success of the Cedar Revolution that occurred after the assassination of prime minister Rafic Hariri in 2005. According to Lebanon’s central bank Governor Riad Salameh, the aftermath of this movement, which drove the Syrian army (that was stationed in Lebanon since 1975) outside the borders of the Lebanese State, provided a sense of

\(^5\) SAWALHA, A. 2010. *Reconstructing Beirut: memory and space in a postwar Arab city*, University of Texas Press. PP. 60  
\(^7\) MAHAJAN, V. 2012. *The Arab World Unbound: Tapping into the Power of 350 Million Consumers*, Wiley. PP. 309
liberation, and opened up further possibilities for investments. The consequence was a flow of Lebanese foreign capital that flooded in from the Lebanese Diaspora, especially when the political and military situation stabilized after the Israeli June war on Lebanon of 2006. According to a paper published by BLOM bank in 2010:

Lebanese Diaspora is a major support to the real estate sector in Lebanon as it accounts for more than 40% of the demand of real estate. The flow of expatriates’ remittances is about $7 billion annually, and has been rising by an average 18% since the start of the decade.

In addition, this political condition unleashed international investment possibilities, and attracted heightened tourism from neighboring Arab States, who have been feeling a certain unease touring the Western World after the events of 9/11 in 2001.

The third factor is the influx of Iranian economic support that was invested in Lebanon after the Israeli June war of 2006. The rebuilding of the western district of Beirut, or what is called the “Dahiya”, which was heavily damaged by the Israeli assault, contributed to the stabilization, and even to the ascent of the Lebanese economic situation. 100 Million Dollars of the Iranian economic support (which was estimated at 1 Billion Dollars), meant to assist displaced families and to rebuild damaged homes and infrastructure, made its way into the Lebanese market within days after the cessation of hostilities. The flood of Iranian capital stimulated the economy and mobilized the construction industry. It also made its way to the villages of South Lebanon severely damaged by the war.

---

The fourth factor that contributed to financing development in the suburbs is the seemingly unaffected economic situation in Lebanon after the financial crisis in 2007/2008, which left an economic strain on the East and West. The Lebanese economy seemed to be almost impervious to the global crisis, and consequently projected an image of a solid economic foundation.\(^{11}\) This image further attracted capital, which further saturated the real estate market. The progression of these events caused a boom in Lebanese real estate, and all existing urban vacancies were captured by wealthy investors.

This exponential rise in real estate prices in the past twelve years caused a major rift between the economic reality of the Lebanese people and the economically surreal condition produced by the successive events. In a newspaper article recently by the Lebanese journalist Mouhamad Wehbe, he quotes former minister Charbel Nahas stating that:

> Trade in property and real estate speculation raised the prices artificially until it became almost impossible for people working in this country to live in it.\(^{12}\)

This statement reflects the staggering cost of living in Beirut. Wehbe cites a study by the real estate advisory agency, RAMCO, where the prices of apartments alone in the city of Beirut reflect the strange disparity:

> The average price of an apartment in downtown Beirut is around $2.634 million, compared to $1.042 million in Achrafieh and $994,000 in west


Beirut. This means the cost of an apartment in Solidere is 2.6 times that in the west of the city and 2.5 times that in Achrafieh.\textsuperscript{13}

With the limited availability of real estate within the city of Beirut, the amount of empty lots for development is extremely limited, and an acquisition war has been raging to capture developed lots with potential for redevelopment.

The architecture of Beirut, with its rich and varied heritage, made this process tricky. Traditional Lebanese houses threatened by development found several governmental and social groups to guard their heritage. Ottoman architecture, to a certain extent has also found a vocation in the process of preservation. Ancient architecture has always been a disputed matter, but still it is protected under Lebanese law. A recent project in the center of Beirut designed by the renowned French architect Jean Nouvel was stopped when the excavations yielded an ancient underground part of the city.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} May 21, 2013. Archaeological Ruins Halt $149M Landmark Project. The Daily Star, p.3.
Fig. 1.2: The site of “Landmark of Beirut” Building by Jean Nouvel. Credit: Author

Fig. 1.3: The archeological site at ‘Landmark of Beirut”. Credit: Habib Battah
The easiest target for developers so far has been modernist style buildings. The demolition of these buildings and their relative short history compared to previous architecture in the city of Beirut such as stone and pitched roof buildings does not yet garner public protest on a large scale. Colonial style buildings have also been a target for redevelopment, but under public pressure, many developers have opted for designs that maintain the exterior aesthetics of the building while the rest of the building is redeveloped. Examples include developments carried out by Solidere in downtown Beirut.\textsuperscript{15} As many modernist buildings are being demolished, some objections are beginning to be heard. Jad Tabet, George Arbid, Elie Haddad, and many others are beginning to voice their concern from within the educational field, and students and community groups are starting to rally in order to save this rich heritage. Yet the historical and theoretical framework for the preservation of this heritage is in the process of being formulated. In a sense, this dissertation is a contribution to this process of understanding and assessment.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{a_building_facade_that_has Been_retained_in_Achrafieh.jpg}
\caption{A building façade that has been retained in Achrafieh. Credit: Hibr}
\end{figure}

1.2: Introduction to the research:

The proliferation of modern architecture in Lebanon between 1943 and 1975 has been significantly neglected as a subject of research, documentation, analysis and criticism. Only few researchers in Lebanon have touched upon this subject. Dr. George Arbid, whose PhD thesis of 2002 aimed to document the architectural productions between 1940 and 1975, has ongoing research on Lebanese modernism and has several publications pertaining to the modernist movement in Lebanon. Another researcher, Dr. Robert Saliba, focused on the transitional period in his book *Beirut 1920-1940*, which were the two decades directly before the emergence of the modernist period in Lebanon. His research also includes post-war reconstruction efforts. These two phases (Pre-1940 and Post-war) frame the modernist period and his research is valuable in situating the architectural productions between 1940 and 1975. A third researcher, Jad Tabet who is a Lebanese architect, focuses primarily on the modernist period in Lebanon, and on contributions to conferences on modern and post-war Lebanese architecture.

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17 Arbid recently published a book *Karol Schayer, Architect (1900-1971): A Pole in Beirut*, in 2012, which chronicles the life and work of Schayer, a polish modernist who spent most of his career in Beirut. He also contributed to the formation of the Arab Center of Architecture in 2008 with several other activists to preserve and document modernist architecture in Beirut as well as 19th century architecture.


The shortage of research could be attributed to several factors, one of which is the Lebanese civil war that spanned from 1975 till 1990, and which hindered any serious efforts for academic and theoretical research into this subject. The decade following the war involved a resurgence of some research effort that was however, for the most part, focused on the reconstruction of the city of Beirut and how to deal with the aftermath of the war. It is only in the past decade or so that we have started to see the reinvigoration of academic research and a growing interest in the modernist period in Lebanon. Overall, however, there remains an academic and theoretical scarcity of discourse of the modern period of architecture in Lebanon.

Finding research material on the subject of Lebanese modern architecture is not the crucial part of this dissertation. This research on modern Lebanese architecture between independence till the beginning of the civil war has two aspects. The first is a theoretical aspect, and the second is an investigative aspect. Therefore, this dissertation will address these two aspects respectively. Only then would we be able to construct the parameters of a theory of Lebanese modernist architecture within the framework of the modernist movement.

The theoretical aspect of this dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part requires the construction of a theoretical framework of modern architecture in general terms, and the second part requires investigating the various methods of interpretation and assessment that have been generally employed in addressing modern architecture outside the west. Similarly, the investigative aspect requires an understanding of the history of development of modern architecture in Lebanon on the one hand, and the exploration of architectural works in Lebanon that belong to the modernist period on the other. This investigative aspect will take shape in the form of a case study looking at the district of Hamra in Beirut in broad terms, and then focusing on the architecture
of Hamra Street specifically. This investigation is not intended to be an investigation that focuses on floor plans, elevations, sections and so on. It is rather an exploration of a representative section of the city that can aid aesthetically and theoretically in establishing the theoretical framework.

When these two frameworks of understanding are established, a process of criticism would then be possible, first of the framework of modern architecture in general, and then of the methods of interpretation that deal with modernism outside the “west”. This process of criticism will prompt a reassessment of the position of Lebanese modern architecture and to situate these modernist productions in terms of the modern movement.

1.3: Aim of the Dissertation

The aim of this dissertation is to attempt a theorization of Lebanese modernist architecture within the framework of the modernist movement. In order to do so, certain elements have to be constructed. The first is a framework of modernism itself. The second is the manner by which theories of modern architecture have been approached in cities like Beirut, which is considered to be an “extra-western” locale. And the third is a case study to provide a visual, aesthetic and historical exploration to ground the research.

After these three elements are in place, the dissertation will proceed to reassess the history of modernism in light of the readings in the first part. Then, the dissertation will proceed to reassess the various interpretive approaches that are commonly utilized to understand modernism outside the “west”. After both of these parts, the dissertation will attempt to situate the modern architecture of Beirut in light of this reassessment.
There are several considerations that are also necessary in this respect. The first consideration is in regards to the theoretical approaches of modernism in contexts similar to Beirut (assuming that there are similar contexts). That is, how is modernism approached in Turkey or India for example. Are there any similarities, or is every situation particularly different? A second consideration addresses the emergence of modern architecture in Beirut. Was it an abrupt transformation, or was it a gradual transformation? A third consideration addresses the canonical view of modernism. Does the modern architecture of Beirut, Hamra, and Hamra Street fit within the canonical view of modernism or does it pose a challenge to that view? And finally, is another understanding of the modernist movement altogether necessary to understand modernist developments in Beirut?

It is not only through architecture that architectural movements are understood. Architecture is not autonomous, because it is in a constant flux with the social and political milieu in which it brews. The lack of a social and economic ideology other than the free market system and the “laissez fair” policy in Lebanon during that “golden age” period poses an important question in turn: If an ideological framework for building production in the modernist era was lacking in Lebanon, how can we classify and critique this body of modern architectural production? K. Michael Hays asks in his article “Modern Beirut” of 1998:

Beirut Modernism seems never to have shared either a productivist desire for proletarianization or Western Europe’s utopia of the new, receiving as it did a modern ‘language’ fully formed, as a limiting condition, or at the very least as a legacy on which to elaborate more than a goal to be won. What are the
new interpretive apparatuses, then, that will have to be invented to expand our conception of modernism so as to include modern Beirut? 21

The answers to this question and the remaining questions above are paramount towards understanding and framing a period in Lebanese architecture that remains ambiguous and un-situated within the productions of the modernist movement at large. This study partially fills a gap in the discourse of Lebanese modernist architecture, and it is an important building block in understanding a historical period in Lebanese architecture that may remain otherwise unexplored. It is also an important study in helping to develop a new perspective on the modernist movement from looking closely at the development of Lebanese modernist architecture.

1.4: Methodology

The dissertation follows a certain sequence. The first part looks into modernism, the second part looks into interpretive methods of modernism outside the “west”, and the third part looks into modernism in Beirut, Hamra and Hamra Street. The dissertation has therefore three different frameworks that constitute its logical structure. The first is the historical framework, the second is the interpretive framework and the third is the investigative framework. Though these three frameworks operate as in a sequence they are nevertheless inter-related and inform each other across the dissertation.

1.41: The historical framework of this dissertation

The historical framework involves an exploration of the history of the modernist movement from three key sources: Peter Collins, Joseph Rykwert and Kenneth Frampton. It also explores the developmental history of architecture in Lebanon from

1860 till 1975. These two histories are essential to our understanding of the correlation of architectural events nationally and internationally.

The modern movement in architecture is a widely researched subject, and at the same time, a highly controversial subject. Most of the first generation of historians that dealt with the modern movement presented modernism in architecture as a well defined body of work, homogeneous and recognizable.\(^{22}\) As time progressed, this homogeneity was challenged and it is more acceptable today to view modernism from a more complex lens. Manfredo Tafuri, for example, considers the very concept of a modern movement to be a “fable”.\(^{23}\) Therefore, in order to posit Lebanese modernist productions in respect to the modern movement in the west, it is necessary to be able to define a particular understanding of what the constituent parts of the modern movement are. This necessitates a review of some of the most prominent theories of modernism in an attempt to extract a set of definitions against which modern Lebanese architecture could be posited. This will be done by way of looking at three of the most prominent theoretical works on modernism. The first is a review of Collins’ *Changing Ideals In Modern Architecture* (1965); the second is a review of Rykwert’s *The First Moderns* (1980), and; the third is a review of Frampton’s *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (1980).\(^{24}\) These publications are some of the major canonic works that serve to define modernist ideas and ideals and their historical origins within its current theoretical framework. These reviews will be supplemented where necessary by other major works on modernist architectural theory. Once these

\(^{22}\) The works of Nikolaus Pevsner, Reyner Banham, Rudolph Wittkower, Sigfried Gidion and many others attest to a well defined understanding of the modern movement.


reviews are established the next step will be to assess the interpretive methods traditionally utilized to understand modernism outside the ‘west’.

The assessment of modernism in Lebanon necessitates a proper understanding of the historical forces and events that shaped the formation of Lebanon as an independent state after the Second World War. A brief review of Lebanese history from 1860 till 1920 is crucial for understanding the weave of events that accompanied the rise of modernism in the west. These formative years hold many clues to the formation of a modern Lebanese society and culture and consequently, the proliferation of modernist architecture in Beirut.

The second historical phase that is of importance to this dissertation is the years where Lebanon was still under the French mandate, that is, from 1920 till 1945. These years represent the colonial history of Lebanon and are of great importance because of its relation to Said’s concepts of Orientalism and Colonialism, and to modernism. The third phase addresses the years of independence from 1945 till 1975, up until the spark of the civil war in Lebanon.

The construction of the history of Lebanon in relationship to architecture is of great importance especially as such a historical account has not yet been presented. There are many books about the political and social history of Lebanon during these years, but very few architectural books and publications that deal with this evolution. In regards to the history of modern architecture in Lebanon, the key significant resource is that of Arbid.
1.42: The Interpretive framework of this dissertation

One objective of this dissertation, then, is to explore the place of Lebanese modernist architecture in terms of the western modernist movement in architecture. Theoretical links connecting the development of modern architecture in Lebanon with the modernist movement in the west have to be put into perspective, analyzed and critiqued. There are primarily three theoretical approaches that are habitually utilized to explain the modernist phenomena in cities like Beirut. The first is the ‘orientalist approach’ first formulated by Edward Said.25 This orientalist view appears as the primary example in Said’s opus *Orientalism*, and coincidentally, the opening statement in his introduction is situated in Beirut in the period following the full blossoming of modernist architecture in the city:

> On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975—1976 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that "it had once seemed to belong to ... the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval." He was right about the place, of course, especially so far as a European was concerned. The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.26

Arbid, in his 2002 thesis questions: How seriously can architectural studies conducted on modernity in the Middle East fend off the orientalism described by Edward Said some twenty years ago?27

This orientalist approach is a powerful critique that has had a major influence on post colonial studies, modernism, as well as many other fields of research, particularly in the areas of political science and sociology.

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26 Ibid. PP. 1
The second approach falls within the domain of ‘Critical Regionalism,’ first introduced by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre and further advanced by Kenneth Frampton. This approach of course is supported by some, and criticized by others. K. Michael Hays suggests in his text of 1998 in ‘Projecting Beirut’ about the interpretive methods necessary to situate modern Beirut:

The dialectic of a globalized modernism and local “regional”, or Arabic particularities – along the lines of Kenneth Frampton’s critical regionalism - seems to be the only model we have for the moment.

But Hays also suggests that:

Critical regionalism was devised as a strategy of resistance to a modernization regarded as one sided[...] What must be recognized is that this strategy is also driven by Frampton’s extreme distaste for today’s global techno-scientific and media culture that tendentiously obliterates all local particularities.

The third approach situates the modernist phase within the domain of Third World Modernism. This theoretical conglomeration is recently emerging as a new way of looking at the modernist movement outside Europe and the United States. It argues that modernism has been in many cases, successfully implemented. Jad Tabet argues for the case of Lebanese Modernism as having successfully assimilated the modernist movement:

Although local architects’ approach to Western modernity was admittedly and [sic] in most cases superficial, lacking any deep knowledge of the socio-economic processes and cultural background that gave rise to modern forms,
some architectural experiences in Third World countries suggest the possibility of successfully domesticating modernism.\textsuperscript{32}

If any critical assessment of Lebanese modern architecture has to occur, it would have to address these three theoretical approaches.

\textbf{1.43: The Investigative Framework: Modernist Productions in Beirut}

The research about the built heritage of the modernist movement in Lebanon will take several routes. The first is to investigate the physical manifestation of this phenomenon, that is, to look briefly into the building productions that occurred during the modernist period in Beirut, specifically between 1940 and 1975. The examination of the building productions that occurred in Beirut during the modernist era will have three different intertwining layers of research. The first is to look at some prominent architectural works within the setting of the city of Beirut in general. The second is to take a sector of the city of Beirut, since Beirut is the condensation of modernist development in Lebanon, and study its developmental process. The third is to explore a particular section of that sector in a little more detail.

So the first step is to decide on which section of the city to explore. After much deliberation, the district of Hamra in Beirut seemed the most appropriate section that could be used as a yardstick for understanding the development that occurred in Beirut during that period. The selection of the district of Hamra is not arbitrary but made for several reasons. Firstly, this district almost entirely developed urbanely and architecturally during the period that spanned from the 1920s till the early 1970s. Therefore, its urban development occurred during the era of development of the modernist movement in Lebanon. This of course coincides with the advent of the

modernism in the west. Secondly, this district does not sit directly on the coastline, and as such, did not attract capital aimed at tourism, but rather, owed much of its development to the formation of the American University of Beirut in 1920 (that sprung out of the former institution of the Syrian Protestant College). The growth of the Hamra district was despite this a natural development propelled by its inhabitants. This district eventually became one of the most prominent centers in Beirut, and became a tourist destination famous for its shops and nightlife. Thirdly, and unlike other districts in Beirut, the area was not composed of a uniform secular or social homogeneity, but rather had a mixed communal environment, that is, a “heterogeneous ethnic and religious composition”. This characteristic sets it apart from many other districts in Beirut, where religious communities tend to gather in quantities, and affect the development of such districts through mono-secular investments. Finally, amongst the scant available information on Beirut districts before the civil war, there exists sociological and urban information on the district of Hamra that sheds much light on its development up until 1975. Therefore (and because of this amalgamation of a mixed society), Hamra is key to understanding developments in other Beiruti districts, and possibly developments in Lebanon as a whole. In addition to the above reasons, the architectural variety of the district of Hamra provides a good picture of the sequence of development within the city of Beirut since the 1920s, where you can find building types from almost each phase of development. All this development happened during the period commonly referred to as the “Golden Age” in Lebanon which also witnessed regional and national political unrest that affected the cityscape.

The first step of the research will include collecting detailed information about Hamra street. The second step will focus on the more prominent buildings within the Hamra district, and the third will focus additionally on prominent buildings within the boundary of the city of Beirut. The collection of information, as much as it is a crucial phase in the dissertation, does not provide a critical view on the development of the modernist movement in Lebanon. Several questions have to be identified, especially pertaining to the practice of architecture in a country like Lebanon, where the modernist movement was seen by some as a western import; by others as a natural development within the modernist movement globally; and by others as a tool for profit.

1.5: Research Attitudes in Lebanon Towards Modernist Architecture

There have been several reactions in regards to the scarcity of research and criticism, ranging from the dismissal of all modernist architectural productions as mere imitations of the west, and thus unworthy of academic research; to more pragmatic stands on this subject, considering the social, economic and political circumstances, and even to the possibility of more sinister motives behind this lack.

Arbid critiques the absurdity of the “imitation of the architecture of the west” theory, and states at one point that it is as if “the lack of consideration of the modern period, the scarcity of discourse about modern architecture in the 1950s and 1960s suggests that the architectural production occurred in an intellectual vacuum.”

Jad Tabet goes further than Arbid in stating that the neglect of this period is somewhat deliberate:

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The post-World War II period, during which most of the present urban environment in Lebanon was built remains mostly unexplored, if not deliberately neglected, and subjected to prejudiced interpretations.\textsuperscript{35}

Tabet’s statement is an indication that an emphasis on modernist architecture and its importance could have severe effects on the process of reconstruction, and therefore it is downplayed by affected political and commercial parties. Yet, this shortage in intellectual production could be attributed in addition to the political and economic circumstances in Lebanon during the past three decades, to a shortage in the available data for producing any substantial theoretical work on this subject. Arbid’s thesis in 2002, though valuable, did not elaborate on any theoretical understanding or formulate a connection with the modernist movement in the west. The task of collecting the material alone was surely an enormous undertaking. In his own words:

\begin{quote}
The object of this research into modern architecture is not an exhaustive analytical and theoretical construct, as much as it is a first inquiry, as meaningful as can be, of the actors, the buildings, and the institutions and structures that bound them in the practice.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

Gebran Yacoub, in compiling his \textit{Dictionary of 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Architecture in Lebanon} which was published in 2003, says that the rarity of resources on this subject made him “aware of the need to create – for both laymen and professionals – a reliable reference book, which would shed light on the different aspects of architecture during the past century.”\textsuperscript{37} As resources begin to accumulate, the atmosphere for theoretical production finds a growing field of data to dip into.

\textsuperscript{37} YACOUB, G. 2003. معجم الهندسة المعمارية في لبنان في القرن العشرين. Alphamedia. p. VIII.
1.6: Boundaries and Definitions:

This dissertation is about exploring the theoretical framework of modernism in respect to Beirut. This exploration is not intended to arrive at a definition of modernism in Beirut, but rather to delineate the major theoretical approaches to modernism that have been generally applied to developments outside the "west". This dissertation is reliant upon a specific understanding of modernism that is explored herein. The other key element in this dissertation is to use the theoretical exploration of modern architecture in Beirut to assess the efficacy and to challenge the traditional discourses on modernism.

There are some elements in this dissertation that seem at the first glance to possess an element of arbitrariness, and certain aspects of them possibly do. But to be able to limit the scope and reach of the dissertation and focus on the main aim, it was necessary to make some decisions that would include and exclude certain elements. For instance, the modernist account that is utilized in this dissertation is based on a thorough engagement with the three main texts mentioned earlier, which are those of Collins, Rykwert and Frampton. The review of these three texts is not intended to construct a definitive theory or history of modernism by any means, but rather to articulate a well-established position on modernism as a starting point. Given the constraints of this dissertation, it would have been worthwhile for the purposes of future research to consider other versions of modernism well beyond the three accounts that have been explored here. Therefore, the intent of these modernist accounts within this dissertation is to present a construct of modernism within which we can operate.
One objective of this dissertation is to present an account of modernism as it is intended by the author of the text, and later on in the dissertation to provide a critique or an assessment of this account with the case of Beirut in mind. This dissertation also recognizes that there is no single coherent theory of modernism. The accounts of the aforementioned historians are by no means a coherent narrative. In addition, the selection of these three texts does not mean that other approaches to modernism have been totally disregarded. On the contrary, the dissertation makes continuous reference to other accounts of modernism. The three main texts therefore could be considered as the three primary building blocks that help us construct a perspective of modernism which fosters a theoretical exploration of Lebanese modernism. The selection of these three texts is not arbitrary. The reasons for their selection are dependent on certain factors that could be extremely helpful to our intent, and will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter.

A second element that, at first glance, seems to have an element of arbitrariness is the selection of the case study of Hamra, and Hamra Street specifically. Though the reasons for selecting this specific district and this specific street will be explained in more detail in a following chapter, it is necessary to point out that this selection is not to suggest that Hamra district and Hamra Street are the only vehicle through which Lebanese modernism could be understood. It is again a means to an end. The primary objective here is to present a slice of the city of Beirut as a visual and historical aid to help us understand the developing architectural atmosphere within a specific rather than a general account. The exploration of the development of Hamra and the architecture of Hamra Street is not an end in itself, but rather a supplement to the main aim of the dissertation, which is, to explore a theoretical framework of modernism that could be applicable to Beirut.
The dissertation also makes use of the historical account of the development of Lebanese architecture since the nineteenth century, in order to tie the theoretical framework within an historical development specific to the Lebanese case. This historical account is not intended to be a detailed account, but rather a supplementary account necessary to the objective of the dissertation. It is a selective account that is tailored around the development of modernism, rather than being a comprehensive account of Lebanese history.

**Definitions:**

It is necessary here to provide a set of definitions for some terms that are used in this dissertation, so as to clarify any confusion that could arise from their utilization.

**Architecture:** This term herein refers to the set of buildings that are built, without any predetermined connection of whatever historical or theoretical framework that is or could be attached to these buildings. It basically denotes that architectural work itself.

**Architectural production:** This term also denotes the architectural works that are produced and existing.

**Critical Regionalism:** This term is used in the same manner that has been delineated by Frampton in his article ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance’. In Frampton’s words, critical regionalism is intended “to identify those recent regional "schools" whose aim has been to represent and serve, in a critical sense, the limited constituencies in which they are grounded.”

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**Lebanese:** Denotes the people who have historically resided on the land of modern day Lebanon.

**Lebanese architecture:** Denotes the architecture that is built upon the land of Lebanon, whether by Lebanese or by foreigners who have designed in Lebanon.

**Lebanese architects:** Denotes the architects that are Lebanese or of Lebanese origins.

**Lebanese modernism:** Denotes the architecture of Lebanon that could be identified stylistically with modernism, and which started to emerge in Lebanese from the 1930s till the late 1970s.

**Lebanon:** Lebanon is a term that is used to denote the geographical area of modern day Lebanon.

**Modern architecture:** Modern architecture, modernism in architecture, modern movement, are terms that are used interchangeably and which refer to that type of architecture that became predominant around the world from the beginning of the twentieth century till the middle of the 1970’s. Though the complexities of defining “modern architecture” are recognized in this dissertation, and in a sense are one of the objectives of the dissertation.

**Modernist Historiography:** The literature that has addressed the history and theory of modern architecture.

**Orientalism:** This term is used in the manner that it was defined by Said in his book under the same title. In Said’s terms, it is “the system of European or Western
knowledge about the Orient”, which in turn “becomes synonymous with European domination over the Orient.”

**Third World Modernism:** This term is used in the manner that it was defined by Duanfang Lu in her book of the same title. Lu defines ‘Third World Modernism’ as being “concerned with issues related to the development of modernist architecture in developing societies from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to the late 1970s.”

**“West” or “Western”:** These terms are often used within brackets and denote European countries, Russia, and the United States of America. The reason for the use of this term within brackets always suggests that this dissertation has a certain reservation when it comes to deterministic divisions between the “West” and the rest of the world.

**1.7: Structure of the Dissertation:**

Chapter 1 sets out the boundaries and the scope of the dissertation, its aim, logic, and framework. In the second chapter, ‘Modernism’, the dissertation sets out to establish the framework by which modernism in architecture is to be understood throughout the research. In order to do so, this chapter is broken into three main sections. The first relates to the work of Collins the second relates to the work of and the third relates to that of Frampton. These three texts provide us with a structure of modernism with which we can work throughout the dissertation in terms of theorizing a position for Beirut’s modernism.

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Chapter 3 of this dissertation is a consideration of the extant theories which are specifically helpful in interpreting the framework of modernism in a context such as Beirut. This chapter is also broken down into three different sections. The first deals with the orientalist approach as first introduced by Said in his book *Orientalism*. The second deals with Critical Regionalism, focusing specifically of Frampton’s approach, and the third explores the most recent approaches to theoretical investigation subsumed under the titles ‘Third World Modernism’ and ‘Non West Modernist Past’. These three approaches are key factors in establishing a theoretical framework for modernism in Beirut.

Chapter 4 explores the history of modernism in Beirut. This chapter again is divided into three sections. The first explores the historical and architectural developments from 1860 till 1920, focusing on the development of what are considered the traditional Lebanese types. The second section focuses on developments from 1920 till 1940, which is considered a transitional phase that overlapped traditional architecture with modernist developments. The third section focuses on the modernist phase from 1940 till 1975. This historical overview is necessary to form the theoretical framework, because it becomes possible to relate the historical architectural atmosphere in Lebanon with the developments occurring elsewhere around the world during the modernist period.

Some of the elements that seem tangential to the dissertation in this chapter, such as the development of social modernism in Lebanon, are important to the architectural intent of the dissertation. Such exploration is crucial to the understanding of the modernist phenomenon in Lebanon as a whole. The period of social modernization in Lebanon for example pins architectural developments in Lebanon in a transformative historical context already giving shape to a modern society. In this respect, modern
architecture was not a foreign object that was enforced on the Lebanese landscape, or an element that was haphazardly imported, but was rather an integral element in a transformative process that encompassed many other contributing factors. In this respect, the various parts that have been selected as lines of inquiry were carefully selected because they do provide insights into the proliferation of modern architecture in Lebanon, while still recognizing that they might not be the only possible avenues that could be theoretically explored.

Chapter 5 focuses on the investigative framework of the dissertation. It is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the importance of the modernist heritage of Beirut, and the necessity for understanding its international position. The second section focuses on the urbanization and modernization of the city of Beirut, and the third section on the urbanization and modernization of the Hamra district. This phase of the research is particularly important because it explains the extents and the limits of private and public developments in generating the modernist image of the city of Beirut.

Chapter 6 involves a reassessment of the modernist literature that was developed in chapter 2 in light of the outcomes of the historical and the investigative research that has been compiled in chapters 4 and 5. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section revisits Collins’ prerogative and compares historical and modernist architectural developments in Beirut to the ideals that Collins theorized in his text. The second section revisits Rykwert’s work in terms of the concept of origin that is central to his thesis. The third section revisits Frampton’s account of modernism in an attempt to situate the modernist productions in Beirut. The three reassessments expand, critique and analyze the underlying concepts of modernism presented by the
three historians in an attempt to synthesize a modernist framework relevant to the case of Beirut.

Chapter 7 involves a reassessment of the three interpretive methods elaborated upon in chapter 3 in light of the outcomes of the historical and the investigative research that has been compiled in chapters 4 and 5, and also in light of the reassessment of modernist history and theory in chapter 6. This chapter again is divided into three sections, the first dealing with Orientalism, the second with Critical Regionalism and the third with Third World Modernism.

The final Chapter synthesizes all previous chapters in an attempt to position the modernism of Beirut within historical, theoretical and interpretive frameworks. It is divided into four main sections. The first explores the boundaries of the modern movement and the applicability of such boundaries to the case of Beirut. The second considers modernist historiography and the manner by which modernism in Beirut operates within such a historiography. The third part explores the difference between national and international classifications of modernism, and the position of Lebanese modernism within such classifications. The final part explores impact of two different approaches to understanding modernism and how these two different paths affect our understanding of modernism in Beirut.
Chapter 2

Modernism
2.1: Introduction

The following two chapters are in adherently linked in that they provide the theoretical exploratory spectrum of the dissertation. In essence, there appears to be a dichotomy between modernism in the "west", and modernism outside the "west". Therefore, each of these polarized positions must be investigated separately. This chapter is intended to look at one theoretical framework of modernism in the west, which will be put under scrutiny in chapter 6, and the next chapter will attempt to look at the theoretical framework of modernism outside the west, which will also be put under scrutiny in chapter 7. The two chapters in between, 4 and 5, will provide relevant information particular to architecture in Lebanon, elucidating on the various factors that eventually lead to the embrace of modern architecture in the decades following the independence.

And though chapters 6 and 7 are tightly related to chapters 2 and 3 respectively, they make use of the intermediate information provided in chapters 4 and 5 to critically assess and critique the theories of modernism provided in chapters 2 and 3.

In this chapter I will proceed to discuss three key manifestations of modernism which are those of Collins’, Rykwert's and Frampton's.

The objective of this chapter is to establish a preliminary understanding of modernism. Such an understanding is intended to allow an exploration of a theory of modern Lebanese architecture. It is necessary here to point that this dissertation does not necessarily subscribe to the view of modernism that is presented by these three accounts. As mentioned, the selection of the three main texts is not aimed towards establishing a definite narrative on modernism. Furthermore, it is clear that this selection does not account for other approaches towards understanding modernism.
outside the architectural realm such as a feminist reading of modernism or a structuralist approach towards analyzing modernism. The objective here is to establish a stepping stone towards articulating a position later in the dissertation that utilizes the parameters that are set in this chapter. There are primarily three main reasons or advantages for the selection of these specific authors and these specific texts. The first lies in their influence on the academic canon of modernist perspective. These three texts have been considered for decades as some of the essential texts on understanding modernism and how it manifested in the west. Their influence on the academic milieu is quite visible, as these texts have been standard academic texts in many universities around the world. The second advantage lies in the usefulness of these three accounts as they provide different approaches to modernism, and though they may contain some common elements, they seem to cover a wide spectrum of perspectives on the subject predominant in the architectural field. In briefest summary, Collins explores the ideals of modernism, Rykwert explores its roots, and Frampton explores its manifestation in the twentieth century. These accounts are also not restrictive and will be supplemented throughout the dissertation with other perspectives on modernism.

The third advantage that these texts provide, is in the fact that much of the later critiques of modernist ideology were in response to the ideas that were formulated early in these texts, and this factor provides in a sense a bridge that connects the earliest ideas of modernism as expressed by the pioneering architects of modernism, with the subsequent critiques of modernist ideologies.

Setting up a theoretical framework for modernism in Beirut cannot be properly formulated unless a specific framework for understanding modernism proper is
established. But, constructing a coherent theory of modernism seems to be a complicated task in itself. The accounts of the earliest historians of the modern movement, as well as the pioneering architects who wrote about modernism, there seems to have been a divergence on what constitutes the elements of modernism, and where its origins lie. According to Anthony Vidler:

[T]he modernism conceived by Kaufmann was, like the late Enlightenment projects he selected, one of pure, geometrical forms and elemental composition; that of Rowe saw mannerist ambiguity and complexity in both spatial and surface conformations; that of Banham took its cue from the technological aspirations of the futurists, but with the added demand of successful realization; that of Tafuri found its source in the apparently fatal division between technical experiment and cultural nostalgia represented respectively by Brunelleschi and Alberti.41

Furthermore, the next generation of architectural historians were either affected by their mentors or divided over the presentation of the modern movement in a unified manner. Rykwert and Colin Rowe for example were Wittkower’s students,42,43 Pevsner was Banham’s teacher44 and Max Weber was Tafuri’s “intellectual” mentor.45 Each one of these historians had a different approach to the history of modernism. Therefore, the idea of a unified model of modernism is in itself an arguable criterion. To be able to explore the architectural production of Lebanese architects during the modernist phase in respect to western modernism poses a problem. Which model to use? The choice of the line of proposed development to follow forces us to reassess our understanding of modernism in general terms.

43 FRANK, S. 2010. Iaus: An Insider’s Memoir, AuthorHouse. PP. 23
The end of the modernist period in itself poses another problem. In his book, *The Language of Post Modernism* first published in 1977, Charles Jencks happily declared that “it is possible to date the death of Modern Architecture to a precise moment in time” expiring completely in 1972, ushering the emergence of the “post-modernist” era. Following this declaration, and in the short span of about 40 years, we have witnessed the rise and diffusion of so many architectural theories and approaches that attempted to fill the void that the “death” of modernism left behind. Post-modernism, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and other approaches to understand architecture have subsequently attempted to formulate a way of looking at the discipline.

Yet, and with a growing amount of architectural theories since that date, history seems to be “quickly consumed and forgotten”, and architecture seems to be in search of a new identity in the era of globalization. Other theorists however, have even argued that “modernism is not dead”, and not only in the area of architecture, but in many other fields as well. These declarations pose another problem in terms of situating the end of the modernist era in Lebanon. Does it coincide with the declared end of the modernist era in the west? In addition, Jencks’ declaration would group all the various approaches that define “modernism” in architecture under a unified body, and deliver the coup de grâce on this body.

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49 See for example: MICHENER, R. T. 2007. *Engaging Deconstructive Theology*, Ashgate. PP. 25,
Another element that is thrown into the mix of is the question about the relationship between theory and design. This contention has often been framed in terms of the history of architectural theory versus the history of architecture. Each of these domains follows a divergent path and some seem to see them converge in specific moments in time. For example, Harry Mallgrave suggests that the “Louvre design and the translation of Vitruvius together represent one of those rare moments in architecture when revolutions in practice and theory perfectly coincide”. The staggering theoretical body of work that accompanied the modern movement in architecture, fueled by the proliferation of an expanding communications network in radio, TV, printing press, and the beginning of the era of globalization, was unprecedented in the history of development of architectural theory. It surpassed all theoretical production in the history of architecture preceding, and in one way, it defined the following era of architectural theoretical production. We are in a way within the legacy of the modernist era.

Yet, the division of the two paths; theory and practice; presents a dilemma and poses a defining question: Would the integration of architectural development with a corresponding architectural theory be a prerequisite for classifying any architectural production under the nomenclature of “modernist”? Would that be a criterion for its inclusion in the canon of modernist architectural production around the world, or is architectural production that speaks a modernist vocabulary enough to do so?

As discussed, in the following chapters, an attempt will be made to define the parameters of modern architecture through the work of three architectural historians

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and their three seminal works on modern architecture, namely, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* by Collins *The First Moderns* by Rykwert, and *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* by Frampton. The choice of these three books is largely due to their impact. This impact is felt on the field of architectural education on one hand, and, on the other hand, because of their broader impact on architectural theory, since these texts are cited consistently. This is not to disregard other works by other important architectural historians. Nor does the fixation on these three texts hinder this dissertation from critiquing these works. In addition to these works several prominent historians’ writing about the modernist movement while it was still at its zenith, such as Kaufmann, Hitchcock, Benevolo and Gidion will be cited.

As suggested, constructing a coherent theory of modernism is a complicated task. Many architectural historians have tried to give meaning to modernism by suggesting a certain origin for the movement, whether it started in the French courts, in the Baroque castles, or even in the Arts and Crafts movement of the earlier century. This search for an origin in a way seems to stand in direct opposition to a movement whose proponents tried to disengage themselves as much as possible from historical reference, a movement with some figures who even tried to erase history and establish a new beginning for architecture. Here, we will start by exploring a view of modernist architecture first by looking at the ideals that shaped it.

It is necessary to recognize that modernism did not originally develop in Lebanon. Modernist ideas and ideals were established in the west and are related to western

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52 Collins text is cited hundreds of times alone in Google Scholar alone and so is Rykwert’s. Frampton’s text is cited over a thousand times in Google Scholar.
developments both on a theoretical and technological level. Yet, it seems that these ideas and ideals found a fertile soil in the case of Lebanon very early on. And even before the technology was available, the understanding of a building as an assembly of materials that did not necessarily rise from the immediate environment was already evident in the construction of Lebanese “traditional” style houses from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. Therefore, it becomes necessary to explore modernist ideas, ideals and history in the west, as these elements become necessary to the understanding of Lebanese modernism.

Finally, the following accounts are not intended to establish a specific understanding of modernism at this point, but rather to merely present the aspects of modernism that are being discussed by each of these authors according to the logic of the author. In a sense then, the following chapter is partly a summary of these books without attempting any pre-judgment or even critique. They are merely summarized from an observer’s point of view, yet with the objective in mind of asking what relevancy they could provide in a later stage to the understanding of modernism in Beirut. This chapter therefore will read as more of a summery or a book review than a critical assessment of the key texts, and will refer to these texts in an attempt to preserve the writers’ own internal logic. The reassessment phase will take shape in chapter 6 after more relevant and specific elements are brought into perspective.
2.2: Peter Collins: Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture

Before we examine the ideals and characteristics of modern architecture that Collins elucidates in his book, we have to understand Collins’ position in the matrix of modernist architectural theory. Collins is to be considered a second generation historian of the modernist movement. The earliest historians were contemporaries to this movement. In his book *The historiography of modern architecture*, Panayotis Tournikiotis frames the theoretical era preceding Collins:

> During the thirties, Pevsner, Kaufmann, and Gidion laid the historical foundations of the modern movement by constructing genealogies suggesting that the movement was a radical, though justified, revolution that kept pace with the upward course of history. Despite their differences, these genealogies made it possible to comprehend modern architecture as a form of revitalizing rift within an overall theory of historical evolution.\(^{55}\)

It is true that these first historians were not all “innocent” in their respective agendas regarding the modern movement and where, in their opinions, it should be heading. And though contradictory at times, and widely divergent at others, they are unified by at least recognizing the buildings that belonged to its productions as well as its “stars” such as Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, etc... Collins first published his book in 1965, almost at what was considered to be the apex of modernism in the west. His approach was fundamentally different. Collins attempted to remove the architectural forms and specific projects as well as the names of the players during that period from most of his analysis and, rather, reconstruct an un-chronological context of eclectic development that extended back to the year 1750. This approach went against all that had been attempted by the previous generation of architectural historians. In a way, it was an attempted destruction of the established historiography that prevailed during

the 1920s and the 1930s in the architectural theory circles. This destruction was an attempt to reconstitute a more coherent history of architectural theory that links the ideals of the modern movement to an architectural past and to reconcile the movement with the preceding eras, thus, establishing a line of continuity within practice. Collins stands at a critical junction, in opposition to Hitchcock for example, who considered that in architecture there was “no such transitional movement as those in building and engineering”, 56 or Reyner Banham who does not venture in his history of modernism beyond the second half of the nineteenth century, 57 (Nor does Nikolaus Pevsner for that matter,⁵⁸). Leonardo Benevolo on the other hand while agreeing with Collins that the “modern movement was deeply rooted in the European tradition” maintained that the field from which they emerged was completely different in scope.⁵⁹

On the one hand, Collins’ attempt could be viewed as a revolution against the established architectural discourse on modernism, but on the other hand, it was also grounding the roots of modernism, or at least of modern architectural theory, in western soil. It is here that Collins’ discourse becomes relevant to the case of Beirut. His text was a re-affirmation of the primacy of western civilization and the development of its architectural tradition that gave rise to modern architectural thinking. Collins’ approach to modernism does not follow a linear chronology. And this is where the concept of “ideals” comes into play. Frampton, in his introduction to the book points out to the line of reasoning that Collins follows:

*Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* took its cue from Leonardo Benevolo’s *Storia della architettura moderna* (1960) in that it pushed the frontier of the new back into the middle of the eighteenth century, as opposed

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to Nikolaus Pevsner’s *Pioneers of Modern Design* (1936) which located the emergence of the new with the birth of the English Free Style and the realization of Philip’s Webb’s house for William Morris in 1859.\(^{60}\)

The construction of these *ideals*, and the attempt to categorize them under new headings was an effort to free the theoretical and historical process from a rigid chronological methodology. Therefore, these *ideals* can only be discussed in parallel with what Collins relies on as staple characteristics of the modern movement.

In the first section of his book, Collins identifies the works of John Soane, Étienne-Louis Boullée, Claude Nicolas Ledoux and Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand as “revolutionary”, in a sense that their architecture was based on “new interpretations given to the notion of architectural beauty”.\(^{61}\) These early projects displayed a break with historically established forms and articulated a new architectural vocabulary of forms. This historical disengagement according to Collins is to be considered one of the first ideals that transcended into modern architecture.\(^{62}\) Different elements in the work of each of these four pioneers contributed to the ideals of modern architecture.

Soane’s contribution could be summed up in his “reversal of the ordinary” through “novelty”;\(^{63}\) Boullée’s contribution would be through his utilization of “symmetrical solids” as the basis of architectural design;\(^{64}\) Ledoux’s contribution through his use of blank walls, devoid of ornamentation, and his approach to architecture as something symbolic.\(^{65}\) Finally, Durand’s contribution was through his emphasis on utility and cost as the guiding criteria in the design process.\(^{66}\) Therefore, eclecticism, pure


\(^{61}\) Ibid. PP. 22

\(^{62}\) Ibid. PP. 21

\(^{63}\) Ibid. PP. 23

\(^{64}\) Ibid. PP. 24

\(^{65}\) Ibid. PP. 25

\(^{66}\) Ibid.
geometry, lack of ornamentation, utility and cost become defining elements of modernism inherited from these architects. These new characteristics become integral to modern architectural thinking. It is worth noting here that Emil Kaufmann had already discussed the works of three revolutionary architects who strayed from the classical tradition, two of which of course are common with Collins: Boullée and Ledoux. Yet Kaufmann did not claim any modern attributes for any of these architects.

The concept of architectural space, on the other hand, is one of the characteristics that Collins disputes. He argues against theorists who “contend that this new attitude towards space constitutes the basic principal which distinguishes the style of the modern age”. Collins finds that such an attitude could already be found in the Rococo style, which attempted to establish a new approach to space by the use of large mirrors to inflate and transform the interior space in buildings, something that had never been attempted in the past. Therefore, the distinguishing characteristics of modern architecture are not merely spatial. This differentiation is a very interesting point in Collins’ theory. It somehow stands against what many still consider a staple characteristic of modern architecture, and it further reinforces the dichotomy on finding a coherent set of characteristics that could be uniquely called “modernist”.

Another defining ideal of the modern age is the historical events that preceded the emergence of modernism, which, in Collins’ opinion, were the first catalysts that

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produced a theory of modern architecture.\textsuperscript{70} The spirit of detachment with history on the theoretical level was well established by the end of the eighteenth century. The validity of historical prototypes and rules came under severe scrutiny during that period and eventually shook the entire architectural establishment. Voltaire’s critique of history caused a shift in thinking in many fields, architecture included.\textsuperscript{71} These critiques in turn lead architects to question the validity of Vitruvius’ laws of architecture and their mythical origins.\textsuperscript{72} In short, the disengagement from history becomes one of the basic concepts of the modern movement. What is of interest here is that Collins’ first challenges to traditional thought did not come specifically from within the architectural milieu, but rather from the domain of literature. This is an indication that architecture should not be viewed as autonomous, but rather as a field that is in constant flux with the historical and social milieu of its times. As we shall see later, the domain of architectural criticism in Lebanon finds a certain parallel, where the first critics were primarily from within the literary sphere.

Another characteristic that Collins points out as an essential part of modern architecture is the primacy of function over form.\textsuperscript{73} This came about in the analogies between architecture and military engineering in the mid eighteenth century by Samuel Johnson.\textsuperscript{74} The tendency to strip form to its basic function, devoid of any additional ornamentation, testifies to the utilitarian characteristics of modernist architecture, and foreshadows the path that eventually refused ornament as a constituent part of architecture in modernism.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Ibid. PP. 31-32
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid. PP. 37
\item \textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
The relativity of aesthetic judgment becomes another building block in the construct
of ideals that Collins uses to define the theory of modern architecture.\textsuperscript{75} The manner
in which history is viewed, that is, as historical periods and as a sequential pattern of
events, meant that the architecture of each period could only be judged according to
its historical context. In addition, the concept of morality, one of the “most
characteristic features of the theory of modern architecture”\textsuperscript{76} becomes evident.
Relativity, coupled with a disengagement with history triggers a necessity of moral
judgment in the design process. Since historical prototypes lost their authority, the
question of formal and aesthetic decision becomes necessary. Modernism, in seeking
out honesty in the design process, was, according to Collins, building on an ideal that
was over two centuries in the making.\textsuperscript{77}

Another characteristic of the modern age was to stem from the plethora of building
types that suddenly became numerous. Collins though signals one specific type that
actually would become a force of change in modern architectural design. In his
opinion, that type is the villa.\textsuperscript{78} These early villas, as crude as they were, embodied
the concept of “free planning”,\textsuperscript{79} an integral characteristic of modern architecture
according to Collins:

> Yet, in these structures, originated the notion of free planning, and although
> the numerous projections, recessions, oriel s, and turrets were often designed
> purely for effect, and frequently produced extremely awkward if not useless
> spaces inside, the more perspicacious theorists were not slow to realize the
> potential advantages stemming from such freely designed shapes.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. PP. 38
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. PP. 40
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. PP. 42
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. PP. 58
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
In the second section of Collins’ book, the concept of revivalism is introduced as an active element that gives rise to many ideals and characteristics of modern architecture. The various possibilities that presented themselves during the revivalist period, and which were sought by various architects, highly influenced the shape and help usher the transformations that took place during the early modernist years.

Collins presents the revivalisms in this way: First, the Roman revival exerted a powerful influence on the architects of that age in the display of their tendency towards “formalism”, which he considers to be a staple characteristic of modern architecture. Second, the Greek revival caused, on the one hand, the “destruction of traditional fenestration patterns”, which became “one of the most persistent characteristics of the whole modern age”, and yet caused a shift that made architects regard public buildings “as potentially objects in space rather than objects enclosing space.” Third, the Renaissance revival allowed the architect the freedom to manipulate classical architectural elements with unrestricted creativity. This characteristic would become prominent during modernism in that the rules that governed Renaissance and Baroque architects would become obsolete, and form becomes an end in itself. Fourth, the Gothic nationalism negatively influenced modern architecture in that modern architects still insist on achieving modernity and show an unwillingness to expand historical edifices according to their original styles. Fifth, Gothic ecclesiology gave rise to the idea that architecture is an ethical art “which is primarily concerned with the expression of truth” and consequently

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81 Ibid. PP. 42  
82 Ibid. PP. 61  
83 Ibid. PP. 78  
84 Ibid. PP. 91  
85 Ibid. PP. 93  
86 Ibid. PP. 99  
87 Ibid. PP. 104
architecture becomes a tool of social reform. Sixth, polychromy and eclecticism brought about the debate over ornament and honesty of material expression in construction, eventually transforming architecture into “a form of abstract sculpture”. Lastly, the demand for a new architecture was initiated. Coupled with an awareness of architectural styles, the dissatisfaction with architecture during the nineteenth century to produce a distinctive style of its own produced an attitude that prompted the deliberate search for a new architecture rather than just waiting for it to happen on its own. According to Collins “once architects became aware of the historical process by which evolution took place, their architecture was as incapable of evolving naturally”.

How could revivalism be relevant to a city such as Beirut or to Lebanon in general terms? In a sense, it could be relevant through the exploration of certain revivalist architecture on the Lebanese scene before the emergence of the modernist era. If any form of revivalism was possible in a context such as Lebanon, then in the least there could be a possible parallel with what was going on in Europe.

The section on revivalism in Changing Ideals In Modern Architecture outlines several concepts that Collins considers crucial to the understanding of modern architecture. There are several elements that could be discussed a little further. ‘Formalism’, which Collins considers to be a staple ideal of modernism, was “for a short time, in the early part of the twentieth century,[…] rejected as unsuitable for a modern architecture”.

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88 Ibid. PP. 107
89 Ibid. PP. 127
90 Ibid. PP. 128
91 Ibid. PP. 143
In response to the limitations of raw functionalism, a "new formalism" emerged in the 1950's. It tried to reassert abandoned classical aesthetic devices, such as proportion and symmetry. The formal rules for an appropriate and beautiful architectural expression became of interest because of the poverty of form as the only modernist aesthetic device.93

The destruction of traditional fenestration was not only a product of pure intellectual thought, but rather a product of the rapid transformation in new building techniques which allowed easier manipulation of fenestration on a building façade. Much discussion has been ongoing in regards to ornamentation in architecture and its validity as a modernist tool, even during the modernist period. Henry van de Velde’s thesis on “Ornament” has a double consequence.94 The first is that a definite distinction between ornament and ornamentation was not established during the modernist period and is still a contested subject, and the second is a testament that the argument on the possibility of ornament in modern architecture was in no shape or form conclusive either as an inclusive or an exclusive element in modern design. Still, it is generally agreed upon that modernist architectural surfaces were generally unadorned.95

In the subsequent section of the book, Collins discusses four analogies that became relevant in influencing the ideals that became an integral part of modernism.96 The first analogy is the biological analogy. The main dilemma that this analogy caused was the question whether “form follows function, or function follows form”. This question would define how architects approached the concept of organic architecture, such as can be found in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, for example. The

93 Ibid.
relationship of form to function was the major element that sprung out from the biological analogy along with the concept of organic architecture. The second influential element was a question of adaptation.\textsuperscript{97} The concept of adaptation expresses in turn the flexibility of modern planning as an architectural characteristic, where spaces are designed in such a way that they could accommodate a vast variety of functions.

For Collins, a second analogy that became a significant force in modern architecture was the mechanical analogy.\textsuperscript{98} Though this analogy becomes most prevalent in the writings of Le Corbusier in the first quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, its origins could be traced back in Collins’ opinion to the American sculptor Horatio Greenough and one of his essays around 1843, and with James Fergusson and Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc shortly after.\textsuperscript{99} Therefore, this ideal finds its roots in the middle of the nineteenth century rather than being an exclusively modernist concept.

The third analogy discussed by Collins in this section is the Gastronomic analogy.\textsuperscript{100} The elements of gastronomy relevant to architecture could be summarized in three aspects. The first is that both gastronomy and architecture are a “necessity” rather than a “luxury”. The second is that both are considered a science and an art at the same time. The third is the expense factor, where gastronomy is more expensive than plain cooking.\textsuperscript{101} The relevant characteristic of the gastronomic analogy to modern architecture though rests in the fact that it requires the element of “creative genius”.

This characteristic would be echoed by Auguste Perret when he announced that

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid. PP. 156
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid. PP. 159
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid. PP. 162
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid. PP. 167
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. PP. 171
someone who is not endowed with such “creative genius” would become an engineer, but not an architect.\textsuperscript{102}

The fourth analogy is the Linguistic Analogy. The relevance of this analogy to modern architecture lies in the expressions that modern architects used to articulate their relationship and understanding to their profession.\textsuperscript{103} The terms “architectonic alphabet”, “style”, “vernacular language”, “architectural language”, “composition”, and many others that are considered even to this day as part of the staple phrases of architecture emerged out of this analogy.

How these analogies may be relevant to the Lebanese case is yet to be determined, but it shall be obvious that though Lebanese architects did not contribute to the formulation of these ideas, their architecture reflected many of the concepts generated by modernist principals, especially on the aesthetic level, with façade articulations, unadorned surfaces and geometrical manipulation of forms.

Part four of Collins’ book could be categorized under three major headings. The first is the influence of civil and military engineering, the second is rationalism, and the third is new planning problems. According to Collins the legacy of civil and military engineering to modern architecture was to split the professions of architecture and engineering into two distinct branches.\textsuperscript{104} It also exerted an element of economy upon engineering and military projects. This of course brought back the concepts of form and function, and a lack of ornamentation.\textsuperscript{105} In addition, two major construction elements would eventually become the staple of modern architecture, steel and concrete, both of which found their initial vocation in civil and military engineering.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[102] Ibid. PP. 172
\item[103] Ibid. PP. 173
\item[104] Ibid. PP. 185
\item[105] Ibid. PP. 194
\end{footnotes}
The section under the heading “Rationalism”, on the other hand, considered that “architectural form was essentially structural form.”106 The ramification of this statement would consequently affect the understanding of architectural form as arbitrary and abstract form. It also affected the concept of structural economy limiting aesthetic elements to those following rational criteria.107 This substitution of ornament as elements of decoration with structure as the constituent of aesthetic value would make its way into modern architectural thought. It also seems that Collins personally valued rationalism as a promising ideal of modernity:

It is still potentially one of the most vigorous ideals of the modern age, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is the notion which offers the most fruitful prospects for the future development of modern architectural thought.108

With the emergence of new building types in the middle of the eighteenth century, and increasing a century later with all sorts of new types, new design approaches became necessary to accommodate a new planning reality.109 Functionalism was one of the major elements that dealt with the response of design to the increasing plethora of building types. Le Corbusier expressed that “the plan proceeds from within to without; the exterior is the result of the interior”.110 Such statements addressed external form as a reflection of utility, in an attempt to give a distinguishable character to buildings. For Collins, these thought processes were evident as early as the mid eighteenth century with Jacques-François Blondel, William Mitford and J.C.Louden. This correlation between interior and exterior would be seen with J.C.

106 Ibid. PP. 198
107 Ibid. PP. 200
108 Ibid. PP. 217
109 Ibid. PP. 218
110 Ibid. PP. 218
Loudoun in his *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture*,\(^{111}\) where he states that “every building should appear to be what it is”.\(^{112}\) This approach put the planning process and the traditional approaches to “programme” and “composition” into reassessment. Technological advancements in mechanical service, ventilation and the invention of the elevator necessitated new approaches to space planning that had to take into consideration new spatial and formal elements. Whereas in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, a building was considered a part of a contiguous façade lining the streetscape, the reaction that occurred in the early twentieth century aimed to liberate the architectural object from this dependency and attempted to reconstitute it as an isolated object in space. Planning therefore moved away from “enclosing space”, to being isolated objects in the new modern garden city. This concept was a new image of an old idea, an idea that was central to the Ecole des Beaux Arts.\(^{113}\)

The last part of Collins book discusses the influence of the allied arts on architecture and is divided into four parts.\(^{114}\) The first part deals with the influence of literature and criticism.\(^{115}\) Here, traditional concepts of beauty were first attested and ugliness was accepted as a valid form of literature. This in turn reflected on architectural production through the rejection of traditional aesthetic criteria, and a wide acceptance of abstract forms. This eventually “allowed the leaders of the new movement in the twentieth century to experiment with new architectural forms, new materials, new structural systems and new building techniques with comparative


\(^{113}\) Ibid. PP. 235

\(^{114}\) Ibid. PP. 241

\(^{115}\) Ibid. PP. 243
freedom.” In addition, the pursuit of the expression of “sincerity” in design was borrowed also from the literary circles of the mid nineteenth century. This translated in the attempts of the modernists to create buildings that are true to themselves. This in turn created a sense of distrust towards style, whether in literature, or in architecture. Walter Gropius would later argue against a “Bauhaus Style” claiming that this would be nothing short of a confession of failure. The second element that exercised influence on modern architectural thought is that of criticism:

Before 1750 criticism was simply a matter of reference to universally accepted objective rules, after 1750 it became a subjective literary exercise in which history, psychology and literary allusions provided intellectual ingredients with which artistic judgment came to be inextricably mixed.

The rise of criticism gave credence to the idea that there could not be a history without theory, and established the domain of literary criticism as an art form. This in turn flourished in the increasing amount of architectural magazines that sprung up in Europe during that period. Architectural criticism in a written form became another staple of the modernist period in architecture.

The second part of the final section of Collins book deals with the influence of industrial design on the architectural process. With an increasing number of architects that engaged in the design of furniture, to the increasing number of artisans that engaged in the design of buildings, the lines between the various arts seemed to be blurred. This legacy could be identified in the work and the ideology of the

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116 Ibid. PP. 247
117 Ibid. PP. 251
118 Ibid. PP. 252
119 Ibid. PP. 256
120 Ibid. PP. 257
121 Ibid. PP. 265
Bauhaus. The third part focuses on the influence of painting and sculpture. The influence of these arts on architecture found its elements mainly in the Italian Renaissance and Renaissance revival. In this part, Collins elaborates on seven characteristics by which abstract art influenced the architectural profession. The first is art as a form of research, the second is art as an end in itself, the third is that abstract art was alone truly representative of the spirit of the age, the fourth is that abstract artists constitute an avant-grade, the fifth is that the element of surprise in art is symptomatic of the age, the sixth is in considering art as “non art” or “anti-art” and the seventh is art as “pure art”.

These qualities had the following effects on architecture. Art as a form of research suggested that natural forms are ideally interpretable in terms of cubes, cylinders, spheres and cones. Art as an end in itself suggested that architecture contained no inherent distinction between its quality as a work of art and the formal elements of which it is composed. Abstract art being representative of the age suggested that architects must pursue the same ideals as abstract art if they are to keep with the times. In regards to the characteristic of abstract artists constituting an avant-garde, Collins suggested that architects can only design for unborn generations and create utopias for the future. The element of surprise suggested that architecture should free itself from normal standards. Art as non art or anti-art suggested that modern architectural methods, when compared with traditional building methods, constitute a kind of anti-architecture. Finally, art as “pure art” was a reaffirmation of the notion of architectural works as isolated objects in space.

122 Ibid. PP. 271
Finally, the last part of Collins’ text *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* deals with new concepts of space.\(^{123}\) Collins states here that the concept of architectural space was completely foreign to the English and French, and emerged almost entirely from the German theorists since the beginning of the nineteenth century.\(^{124}\) This concept did not see its true flourishing until the beginning of the twentieth century with Berlage and Mies van der Rohe. In addition, the governing element that assisted in creating modern space in a combination of new technologies and materials coupled with an exploitation of the effects of parallax:

> The aesthetic revolution which has occurred in architecture within the last century has consisted firstly in the reversal of the traditional method of exploiting parallax, and secondly in its extension by means of a greater use of cantilevers and glass.\(^{125}\)

In addition to understanding the various ideals that were part and parcel of modern architecture, Collins’ thesis points to an important idea: It is nearly impossible to find a single architectural edifice of modern architecture that embodies all the ideals or probably half of the ideals discussed in this book. Of course, Collins never suggested throughout the book that there was such an edifice. Modern architecture then, if we are to follow this logic, would display perhaps a certain combination of some of these ideals, while discarding, or even negating, other ideals. Therefore, the concepts discussed in this book could serve as a guideline to identify some of the characteristics of modern architecture if need be, when assessing a certain modernist building.

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\(^{123}\) Ibid. PP. 285
\(^{124}\) Ibid. PP. 286
\(^{125}\) Ibid. PP. 292
Additionally, these concepts, though originating according to Collins in the west, are, and should be, universal in their application. This would significantly widen the scope of modernist classification beyond the boundaries of Europe and the USA.

The critique and assessment of Collin’s text will be discussed later in light of the research that will be presented on the historical developments which occurred in Lebanon in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this regard, this part of the chapter as well as the two following parts are mostly self-referential. The aim here is extrapolate the set of ideas that are central to the discussion that will be presented in the reassessment phase of the research in chapter 6. The relevance of Collins’ ideals to the Lebanese case should be reviewed categorically, that is, in the same sequence that Collins presents them, in an attempt to determine where modernism in Beirut resonates (or otherwise) with such a discourse. When we revisit Collins’ text in light of the historical and architectural developments in Lebanon up until the twentieth century, it will be necessary to go through each of the points that Collins considers as part and parcel of modernism, and how the architecture of Beirut could be relevant to such a text.
2.3: Joseph Rykwert: The First Moderns

Rykwert’s book *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century* is another influential work that traces the emergence of modern design ideologies to the middle of the eighteenth century. His book attempts to reconstruct the historical events and the forces that shaped what he considers to be the first seeds of modern architectural thought. Rykwert first published his book in 1980, and he focused primarily on the eighteenth century where he suspects a decisive split occurred in architectural thought. His book again departs from the first historians of modern architecture by refuting the concept of a total disengagement from history, and by an attempt to reconstruct a more coherent historical context for modern architectural thought and production.

It is worth mentioning that Rykwert does not seem to set out to prove a point, but rather to explore the events, architects, architectural aesthetics and ideas that prevailed through the eighteenth century. His book not only departs from the first generation of modern architectural historians, but also departs from any other history that has looked at eighteenth century architecture and architects. Rykwert investigates unexplored themes during that period, which he regards as instrumental to the understanding of the development of modern architecture. The book presents a unique lens that delves into the detail of historical events to the degree of gossip. The implication of Rykwert calling the architects of the eighteenth century “The First Moderns” is what makes this particularly work relevant to this dissertation. If Neoclassicism is to be considered the first manifestation of modern architectural thought, then it may be necessary to understand how Neoclassicism is relevant in understanding modern architecture in Lebanon during the twentieth century. It is in a

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sense an exploration of these early roots of modernism as Rykwert claims, and assessment of the relevance of the case of Beirut accordingly. On the other hand, it seems difficult to correlate any of the events that were occurring in Europe at the time to the Lebanese situation, especially given that Lebanon did not even exist as a political and national structure at the time. This overview therefore of the ‘First Moderns’ can only be self-referential, and has to do with the manner in which modernism is understood by Rykwert. Once this modernist historical narrative has been constructed, it becomes possible to assess its implications, and review it in a different light in order to be able to relate it to the modernist architecture of Beirut.

Similar to Collins, Rykwert identifies the eighteenth century as the age where a historical split occurred in architectural thought and process, yet he traces the origin of this split into a more defined event. This event is Claude Perrault’s translation of Vitruvius to French.\footnote{127} Therefore, his work re-affirms one of Collins’ central criteria, which is, that modernism was not a revolutionary phenomenon characteristic of the early twentieth century, but rather an evolutionary one. This reaffirmation, similar to Collins, binds modern architectural thinking to a western cultural history. What Rykwert does though in addition, is to provide an account of the architectural productions that supplement his approach to architectural history throughout his book.\footnote{128} Such an approach looks beyond the aesthetics of modernist architecture. And though he considers the polished surfaces of modern design as an important element, modernism corresponds more to ideological shifts in thinking, in historical forces and events that gave shape to modern thought, and in spatial and aesthetic reorganization of architectural elements.

\footnote{127} Ibid. PP. 22
\footnote{128} The wealth of projects discussed specifically in the book is overwhelming and in many instances detailed in terms of the history of design and development.
Rykwert’s book, though dealing specifically with the architecture of the eighteenth century, elucidates the various events and productions that became instrumental in paving the way to modern architecture as it unfolded at the beginning of the twentieth century. The book is divided into ten chapters, each dealing with a specific historical event. These events structure the various concepts that were either instrumental to the formation of modern architectural thinking, or precedents to modern architectural design productions.

The first chapter, entitled “Classic and Neo Classic”, frames the neoclassical period in architecture, which Rykwert describes as “the architecture […] of the second half of the eighteenth century passed into the nineteenth.” This is the period that most of the book’s content is concerned with. In this chapter, he also sets the parameters for posing the theoretical concepts that preceded neoclassicism against what will be discussed in the following chapters.

In the second chapter entitled ‘Positive and Arbitrary’, Rykwert elaborates the impact of Claude Perrault on the French architectural circles. Perrault’s legacy lies in the destruction of the classical models of architectural authority. This started with his translation of the work of Vitruvius to the French language in 1673. With the reexamination of the classical orders during the eighteenth century, and the realization that the classical orders did not fit a unified principle, Perrault paved the way to break from strict classical formulas and allowed a more liberal approach to the use of classical orders. This questioning shook the foundation of the classical tradition, and paved the way to a more critical approach towards design. Compared with what

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129 RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 2
131 RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 46
antiquity meant for the earlier generations, this transformation was an indication of
the disintegration of the divine classical, and the beginning of a new way of thinking.
This change was taken to a higher level with Perrault’s contribution to the design of
the east façade of the Louvre.\textsuperscript{132} His double columniation was met with hostility from
the traditionalist French architects and thinkers. Perrault’s defense of his design
scheme, which was eventually implemented, heralded the disintegration of the
classical tradition.\textsuperscript{133} This design, Rykwert holds, was the “modern” feature of the
Louvre. It was met with hostility by François Blondel, who was the president of the
Academy of Architecture at the time. What Rykwert calls the “battle between the
ancients and the moderns” reached its peak around the end of the seventeenth century
and involved many French thinkers.\textsuperscript{134} The poet and critic Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux
was one of the main figures that supported the ancients, and Perrault was a leading
figure in the group that represented the “moderns”.\textsuperscript{135} Rykwert points out that this
battle was more than an artistic and a political issue: “It was a dispute about the nature
of history, and the relation of the past to thinking, to speculation.”\textsuperscript{136} It was the
beginning of the end of classical authority. Rykwert ends his chapter with another
Perrault, this time Charles, who saw value in other cultures, specifically the Oriental
cultures, and who even suggested that in a royal palace “certain rooms or suites of
rooms should be decorated in foreign, particularly in exotic “styles”, as a compliment
to foreign ambassadors and visiting potentates.”\textsuperscript{137} These attitudes toward design
depart drastically from the Authority of the Renaissance and Baroque architecture,
and their adherence to a strict set of design formulas.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. PP. 31
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid. PP. 47
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid. PP. 25
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid. PP. 26-28
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid. PP. 25-26
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid. PP. 47
In the third chapter entitled ‘The Marvelous and the Distant’, Rykwert discusses the impact of new designs that transcend the local practices and traditions and imported foreign elements from distant cultures such as China, India and the Orient in general.138 There were several factors that contributed to this phenomenon such as the increasing trend to build in the Chinese manner in France, the influx of oriental goods such as coffee and tea in addition to the founding of the first china clay factory in France for the production of porcelain.139 These were historical forces that impacted the west during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The acceptance of the other, of something beyond the western canon, paved the way to the eclectic. Not only was the trend acceptable but even desired and became an indication of a new modern spirit:

By the middle of the century, there was no sizable European house which did not have its Chinese room, either of wallpaper or lacquer panels, its tiles and Ming porcelain vases.140

These practices were a clear indication of the changing ideological factors that governed western architectural production. The Oriental in a sense became the “idealized figure” in the first decades of the eighteenth century.141 The interest was predominantly in regards to Oriental fashions, decorations, buildings and way of life. This interest in the oriental, that is, the foreign, further reasserts the idea that the classical canon was slowly disintegrating. Rykwert’s premise seems to indicate that modern architectural thought and practice started at that moment when the classical canon was put into question, and when classical architecture started to lose its

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138 Ibid. PP. 54
139 Ibid. PP. 59
140 Ibid. PP. 65
141 Ibid. PP. 80
authority, where “the whole intellectual and political atmosphere had suffered a violent shift.”

In the fourth chapter Rykwert expands on the interaction of the west with the Orient and specifically China. The plethora of production that the contact between Europe and China spawned was not a temporary turn of fashion. It would prove to be a persistent medium of production that would multiply as the relationship evolved. This first clash of cultures generated a new attitude towards the use of architectural elements that could be borrowed from other cultures, even construction methods.

This attitude was “reflected by a new precision, a new way of operating with antique elements.”

Rykwert also returns to Perrault’s design of the eastern façade of the Louvre and his free standing double columniation supporting the straight trabeation. This innovative design that departed from the classical tradition, and which was tagged as “modern”, generated a new force of innovation in the French architectural circles in the eighteenth century and created the first seeds of a “universal architecture”. This design would later become a tour de force design element that would be repeated as a sign of a “modern” architectural vocabulary:

Perrault’s colonnade was admired, emulated, and much discussed throughout the eighteenth century and in the latter part of the century came to be regarded as the principal portent of a new architecture.

Perrault’s position would remain central throughout the book. He is regarded as an important factor in the process of transformation from classical into modern.

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142 Ibid. PP. 75
143 Ibid. PP. 80
144 Ibid. PP 81
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid. PP. 84
147 Ibid. PP. 89
Rykwert’s definition of modern again cannot be understood simply as “modernist”. Modern, according to him, is what broke the classical tradition in Europe starting from the middle of the eighteenth century onward along the same line as suggested by Collins. 149 This definition is, in a sense, indicative of the wide range that the term can cover. In opposition though, Bruno Zevi for example sees that modern architecture “emerged in reaction against neoclassicism”. 150 Therefore, where Rykwert regards neoclassicism as the first seed of modernism, others see modernism as a negation of neoclassicism.

In his chapter entitled “The Pleasures of Freedom”, Rykwert elaborates on the newly acquired freedom in design, both in building interiors as well as in the design process. 151 He first discusses the proliferation of architectural pattern books and the impact they had on the architectural profession and the building industry. 152 Before the proliferation of pattern books as a resource medium, the source of power and fashion was centralized in the form of the royal court in France. The impact of these new factors caused a shift in the architectural model from the French palaces to a new architectural type that was becoming predominant: The hotel particulier. 153 These large luxury town houses required a new program of space and new techniques of defining space. This gave rise to new construction materials and methods. 154 These new materials required decoration and this is where the effect of pattern books became prominent. The effects of these books nevertheless remained constrained to

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148 Perrault’s central position in Rykwert’s text is evident throughout the book, where there is mention of him in every chapter in a referential manner.
150 ZEVI, B. 1981. The Modern Language of Architecture, van Nostrand; Reinhold. PP. 3
151 RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 93
152 Ibid. PP.96
153 Ibid. PP. 104
154 Ibid. PP. 105
interior applications. Comparing the impact of the *hotel particulier* to that of the villa in Collins’ book, we see resemblances on how a new building type can cause a transformation and a shift in traditional thinking.

In regards to architectural freedoms in the design process Rykwert cites Juste-Aurele Meissonier’s design for the new façade of the church of St. Sulpice in Paris in 1726 as one of the earliest examples of a heavily decorated surface. The surface of the church façade is “wrinkled” to use Rykwert’s term and although his design had classical elements and precedents. It also showed “an extreme position had been taken, and there would be no simple return to the old norms”. Even though the design was not implemented, it certainly exhibited a departure from the ordinary. Several years later a competition would again be initiated for the façade design and this time Giovani-Niccolo Servandoni would win the design competition. Servandoni’s design is considered by Rykwert to be the first monument of neoclassicism in France, and which had several elements that referred back to Perrault:

Servandoni is much more directly the successor of Perrault. The use of the order’s from Perrault’s book, the exaltation of the coupled columns supporting their straight entablature, the appeal to a conventionalized, a schematized and an unspecific antiquity is Perrault’s heritage.

It is obvious that the influence of Perrault occupies a central position in Rykwert’s analysis of the architecture of the eighteenth century and Perrault is obviously the first true modern architect according to Rykwert.

In the sixth chapter entitled ‘Initiates to Armatures’, Rykwert deals with the British architects from Inigo Jones to Batty Langley and Robert Morris. The element that

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155 Ibid. PP. 109
156 Ibid. PP. 115
157 Ibid. PP. 121
binds this chapter is the freemasonic guilds that prevailed in England during the eighteenth century as a reaction to the collapse of the traditional architectural system.

In her review of Rykwert’s book, Martha Pollak summarizes the central point in this chapter:

In the wake of this loss of the traditional conceptual base, and in reaction to the increased power of the Academies, the profession sought to formulate a new identity. Rykwert claims that it did so, at least in England, through freemasonry. 158

This claim does not seem to be well substantiated according to other reviews of the book. 159 David Watkin for example notes:

Instead we are offered the vague but supposedly unifying theme of freemasonry. Most of the gentlemen amateurs who took over from the master masons of the old guild system were freemasons, but despite assiduous searching Rykwert finds it hard to establish that this had any direct architectural influence. Still trying to emphasize the role of freemasonry, he similarly tells us later that Laugier and Piranesi may have been freemasons. 160

But in this section of the dissertation we are more concerned with extracting a set of ideas that link the propositions put forward in this book with the architecture and ideas of the age with what we commonly identify as modernism in architecture. The central idea here is that the amateurs who took over from the master masons of the old guild system were freemasons. The shift of the basis of design ideology from Rome as the central authority in architecture to France caused a fundamental transformation in British architecture. This is evidenced by the work of Sir Christopher Wren who

Rykwert claims was influenced by the ideas of Perrault. Here again, the connection is weak. It seems to be based entirely on supposition:

[H]e almost certainly saw the *Ordonnance des cinq Especes de Colonnes* of 1683, which John James published in English in 1708. Wren was clearly impressed with the Le Vau-Perrault eastern façade of the Louvre, for which he may have seen a preliminary drawing in Paris; it is difficult to understand how Perrault could not have been on his visiting list, although so far no definite evidence of this has come to light. By 1700 Wren would have read Perrault’s defense of coupled columns (he had used them in the Louvre), and he would have seen them-if nowhere else-on the frontispiece to Perrault’s Vitruvius.161

This account, though highly hypothetical, emphasizes the position that Rykwert is trying to establish, and it is a link from the architectural traditions initiated in France by Perrault which eventually took shape in Britain. This link according to Rykwert consequently caused a shift in British architectural traditions.162

The seventh chapter shifts to Italy under the heading ‘Pleasure and Precision’, and deals with the growing trend of documenting classical buildings with accuracy, such as Greek and Roman ruins in Europe and elsewhere such as Baalbek and Tyre in Lebanon.163 The evolution of this trend caused a growing interest in rediscovering classical architecture. This gave rise to excavations, first by armatures followed by experts. Here Rykwert holds that “the discovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum may be said to have stimulated the neoclassical movement.”164 This chapter ends by discussing Giambattista Vico’s theoretical influences on architectural theory and specifically on Carlo Lodoli who is the central figure in the eighth chapter. What this

Author’s Italics except for *Ordonnance des Cinq Especes de Colonnnes*
162 Ibid. PP. 197
163 Ibid. PP. 273
164 Ibid. PP. 279
chapter sets out to achieve is that the exploration and documentation of classical architecture would yield discrepancies of measurements in the architecture of the ancients. This would set off a chain of events that will cause the questioning of the rules that governed Baroque architecture which claimed its authority based on these ancient models. If the ancient models did not conform to a unified formula, then the authority of Baroque architectural proportions is severely undermined.

Chapter eight entitled ‘Neoclassical Architecture’ begins with Lodoli’s influence on the Italian architectural scene. Lodoli was an interesting figure and his ideas about architecture were revolutionary. He argued against ornament, or at least against its inappropriate use and lack of coherence. In addition, Rykwert suggests that Lodoli “invoked reason as a master of taste” which was “a radical departure and very much against the majority opinion of his time”. Yet Lodoli did not reject the formal language of the Baroque, but rather insisted that planning should be based on convenience, and even though he approved of ornament, Vitruvius was not at its base. Herein lies a fundamental departure from the classical tradition. For Rykwert:

Architecture did not originate in the imitation of wooden elements, but the invention of a true way of building by the Egyptians, which they communicated to the Phoenicians and the Etruscans: The Doric order might even be called the Egyptian order.

Yet, Lodoli cannot easily be included in the company of Perrault or Laugier. His approach is fundamentally different. According to Rykwert, Lodoli in a sense departed from the whole debate that engaged Europe and formulated a new approach towards architecture. Lodoli’s students eventually carried his ideas, especially

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165 Ibid. PP. 288
166 Ibid. PP. 321-322
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid. PP. 325
Andrea Memmo and disseminated them across Italy and Europe. Within this chapter, Rykwert formulates a connection between Lodoli and Giambattista Piranesi.\(^{169}\) What is essential here is that Lodoli’s ideas were also a challenge to the Baroque tradition. In a sense, it was not only the French that were challenging this tradition, but the Italians also. As the foundations of Baroque authority are shaken, this time by an Italian, it meant that the collapse of the traditional system came ‘close to home’.

Chapter nine entitled ‘Ephemeral Splendors’ discusses works that have a transient character such as the representation of architecture in painting such as Villa Albani that served as sort of a museum of art and J.L. Le Lorain’s design of ‘macchine’ which were temporary large pastiche buildings that served for firework displays. Rykwert returns to the influence of Perrault on the design of some of Lorain’s ‘macchines’ stating that “the use of blank areas of wall, adorned with niches and oval medallions above, go back directly to Perrault as do the coupled columns.”\(^{170}\) Rykwert also discusses the use of several architectural devices in the ‘macchine’. One of these devices was the use of the free-floating frieze.\(^{171}\) A second device was through line reduction in drawing methods.\(^{172}\) These devices were influential factors in transforming the design process.

This chapter eventually discusses the work of Piranesi in some detail.\(^{173}\) The elements of the discussion that are of interest to this dissertation confer the influence of Lodoli on the work of Piransei. Rykwert states that in his “Prisons” etchings, Piranesi “represented a total Lodolian architecture, stripped of its conventional

\(^{169}\) Ibid. PP. 326
\(^{170}\) Ibid. PP. 360
\(^{171}\) Ibid. PP. 364
\(^{172}\) Ibid. PP. 367
\(^{173}\) Ibid. PP. 369
ornamental apparatus”. In addition, Rykwert points out that Piranesi considered that Roman law was far superior to Greek law, and Roman architecture superseded Greek architecture by way of the Etruscans. In this sense, the simplicity of Etruscan architecture devoid of lavish ornament should constitute the manner for “inventing a new formal language”. Piranesi also advocates Villapanda’s view about the oriental origin of the orders and attributes the spread of the orders from the Orient to Phoenician influence.

The last chapter opens with the history of the Great Encyclopedia charged to Diderot, and the influence it had on all aspects of intellectual life in France. Blondel was the one who contributed to the Encyclopedia with the section on architecture. In this chapter also, Rykwert elaborates on the legacy of Perrault in the works of Claude Aubry, specifically his scheme for the Place Louis XV that was clearly an interpretation of Perrault’s Louvre façade, as well as Soufflot’s design of the church of Ste. Genevieve in Paris. Rykwert maintains that “it is not so much with the old project for Ste. Genevieve that this church was bracketed, but with the greatest of all exemplars – the Louvre Colonnade”. This is where the main meat of this chapter lies. Jacques-Germain Soufflot’s design of Ste. Genevieve (The Panthéon) was not only a departure from Baroque architecture as Perrault did with the Louvre. Here, Soufflot created a new system, a system that integrated medieval construction methods and details with Baroque aesthetics. His work was a synthesis of several elements in an attempt to create a new national style, a French style, inspired by Perrault. Soufflot was influenced by Gothic architecture and he saw that the Gothic

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174 Ibid. PP. 378
175 Ibid. PP. 380
176 Ibid. PP. 388
177 Ibid. PP. 415
178 Ibid. PP. 432
provided a possibility to create such a style. He gave a lecture at the Lyons academy that pointed in that direction. Rykwert analyzes:

Soufflot’s lecture was one of several contemporary attempts at revaluing Gothic architecture: this revaluation was one of two factors in the creation of a national French style, the attempted renewal of French architecture as a national art.179

Soufflot attempted to combine the better of two traditions, the lightness of Gothic architecture and the proportions of the ancients. Ste. Genevieve is described by Rykwert as a “Gothic cathedral wholly “corrected” according to the rules of taste learned from the ancients.”180

The conclusion of the book elaborates the manner by which this split between traditional and neoclassical though occurred. This split made it possible to question a once unquestionable tradition, which was the Baroque and the classical tradition. Even though the architects still utilized ancient methods and worked within its parameters, the tradition could and would be put under scrutiny. It was Perrault who first started this new tradition, and his legacy is obvious in the work of those who came after him. The unbroken chain of architectural progression since the fifteenth century was to be interrupted, and by the end of the eighteenth century no one could hold it as an unquestionable source of reference. The dispute between Perrault and Blondel was to be the source of discord between the following generations of architects.181 In Rykwert’s opinion, those who came after brought nothing new except to expound on the differences first outlined by Perrault and Blondel:

179 Ibid. PP. 446
180 Ibid. PP. 454
181 Ibid. PP. 465-467
The past could never again provide a quarry of detail and of allusion; the division of history into periodic styles separated such forms into specific reference on one hand and conventional surfacing on the other.\textsuperscript{182}

In conclusion, Rykwert sees the start of modernism at that point in time when Baroque authority started to collapse. The Neoclassical tradition in a sense carried the formation of modernism in its destruction of the classical canon. Seen in this manner, modernism was not a revolution in thought that suddenly came into being by the beginning of the twentieth century, as it has been presented by the earliest historians of the modern movement. It was an evolutionary process two centuries in the making. This tie back to the eighteenth century is on par with Collins’ view on the matter despite the fact that it presents historical events in a different light.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid. PP. 468
2.4: Kenneth Frampton: Modern Architecture: A Critical History

The influence of Frampton’s book, *Modern Architecture*, on the academic milieu is undeniable. It is considered a resource book for architecture students almost worldwide. Its relatively short chapters give a general idea of their respective subject matter, and discuss the main influences that anyone who is interested in that specific slice of history ought to be familiar with. The book does not elaborate on many of these subjects, but one cannot expect much elaboration in such a small book about modern architecture. What this book provides this dissertation is assistance in filling the remaining gap of focusing on the historical events and the figures of the modern movement, and to provide an additional layer of understanding that would supplement those of Collins and Rykwert.

One important characteristic of Frampton’s text is that it is not a connected narrative. It is only coherent on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Each of the chapters in this respect can stand entirely on its own without being referenced to the chapter that precedes it or to the one that follows it. This disjunctive characteristic seems to point to the fact that Frampton is not attempting a coherent theory of modernism but rather an exploration of architectural thoughts and productions of the modernist era.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first part explores briefly the historical framework since 1750 A.D., focusing on cultural, territorial and technical transformations up until 1939. The second part, which is the *meat* of the book, is a critical history of modernism starting in 1836. The third part is a critical assessment of modernism and an extension into the present time.
In the first part of the book, Frampton summarizes the various historical forces and factors that gave rise to modernism. In a sense, Frampton reorganizes and summarizes Rykwert’s book in a linear format, starting with the Enlightenment and giving credit to the transformation that occurred during the Renaissance. He mentions briefly the dilemma of isolating a primary origin for modern architecture. He cites Perrault’s contributions, Abbe de Cordemoy’s treatise, Soufflot’s Ste.Genevieve, and all the way to Ledoux, Boullee and Durand. He then expands a bit further with the work of Karl Friedrich Schinkel in Germany and Labrouste in France and mentions the influence of Rondelet’s book *Traité de l'art de bâtir* of 1802, and consequently Auguste Choisy’s book *Histoire de l'architecture* that was published in 1899.

Frampton seems to reinforce his view along the lines of Reyner Banham:

> These objective illustrations reduce the architecture that they represent to pure abstraction, and it was this, plus the amount of the information that synthesized, that endeared them to the pioneers of the Modern Movement after the turn of the century.

Here there are two main elements that Frampton seems to be aware of. The first is that he has a clear definition of what constitutes the “Modern Movement”, as well as a clear idea of its main figures. From Choisy to his disciple Perret, Julien Guadet and Tony Garnier, the principles of “Classical Elementarist composition” were handed down to the “pioneer architects of the twentieth century.”

Then, Frampton delves into the urban developments that were triggered by the industrial revolution, first in England and consequently the rest of Europe and the world. He discusses Charles Fourier in France where he published his radical vision

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184 Ibid. PP. 8
185 Ibid. PP. 19
186 Ibid.
187 Ibid.
of the new industrial world in 1829, and his disciple Victor Considerant who made the first parallel between housing projects and living on a steam ship, an image that Le Corbusier would return to a century later.\(^\text{188}\) Frampton touches upon the English Park Movement and the French park transformation.\(^\text{189}\) He also touches upon the reorganization of the city of Paris by Haussmann which made use of standard building types, regularized facades, as well as standardized street furniture.\(^\text{190}\)

Frampton also discusses briefly the invention of the passenger lift in 1853, the project for the expansion of Barcelona in Spain in 1858, the plans for rebuilding Chicago in the USA after 1871, and the perfection of the steel frame in 1890.\(^\text{191}\) In short, the massive urban plans that took place during the nineteenth century fundamentally changed the production process according to Frampton and required new and standardized methods as an attribute in design strategies.\(^\text{192}\)

Finally, Frampton discusses the technical transformations in structural engineering from the late eighteenth century up till 1939.\(^\text{193}\) The advancements in steel construction, beginning with the first cast iron bridge over the Severn River in 1779, gave rise to a new form of technology that would eventually impact the architectural design process. Frampton here maintains that these developments partially owe their existence to Perrault’s design for the eastern façade of the Louvre:

> Aside from its use in 13\(^{\text{th}}\) century cathedrals, wrought-iron masonry reinforcements in France had its origins in Paris, in Perrault’s east façade of

\(^{188}\) Ibid. P. 22  
\(^{189}\) Ibid. PP. 23  
\(^{190}\) Ibid. PP. 24  
\(^{191}\) Ibid. PP. 26  
\(^{192}\) Ibid. PP. 24  
\(^{193}\) Ibid. PP. 29
the Louvre (1667) and Soufflot’s portico of Ste-Genevieve (1772). Both works anticipate the development of reinforced concrete.\textsuperscript{194}

In this analysis, Perrault’s work takes another dimension in addition to those discussed by Rykwert. After this, Frampton discusses various developments ranging from suspension bridges to glass houses to the mass production of wrought iron as well as the Eiffel Tower in France and the eventual development of reinforced concrete as a building material, first by the British, then by the French.\textsuperscript{195} The industrial revolution with its ramifications brought new materials as well as new construction processes to respond to the new age of transformation.

The first part of the book then sets out the immediate historical framework of architectural developments that were occurring in Europe and the USA before the start of the twentieth century. These chapters portray the historical image and set up the mood for the body of the book in the section to follow. Yet, there is an important element in the first part that is somewhat downplayed, but occupies an important place in this dissertation. What seems significant here is summarized in a statement that Frampton makes about his historical interpretation in the book’s introduction:

\begin{quote}
Like many others of my generation, I have been influenced by a Marxist interpretation of history, although even the most cursory reading of this text will reveal that none of the established methods of Marxist analysis has been applied.\textsuperscript{196}
\end{quote}

Frampton’s Marxist affiliations, though they surface from time to time throughout his discourse, remain in the background as he stated. This marginalization limits the influence of Marxism and socialism on the Frampton’s consideration on the formation of modern architecture. Only a brief link is alluded to in the second part of the book in

\begin{footnotes}
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\item[194] Ibid. PP.30
\item[195] Ibid.
\item[196] Ibid. PP. 9
\end{footnotes}
the section about William Morris. This point, as crucial as it may be, is relatively unexplored in modernist literature. Socialist modern architecture is widely researched as well as the contributions of socialist architects to modernism. Yet, the critical link between the formation of socialism and the formation of modernism remains largely unconsidered.

Frampton starts the second part of his book with a quotation from Morris, and begins his text with Augustus Pugin’s “Contrasts” and Thomas Carlyle’s opposed position to Pugin.197 Carlyle advocated political and social progression whereas Pugin was more conservative and leaned to the right-wing. Frampton maintains that though both men stood in opposition to each other, they were in agreement on the necessity of change.198 Pugin was inclined towards Gothic architecture to which the Gothic revival in Britain during the nineteenth century owes its origins. Carlyle on the other hand promoted a position which was more socialist and anti-Catholic. Both Pugin and Carlyle would highly influence the theories of John Ruskin, and consequently Philip Webb and Morris.

In this sense, Frampton maintains that the first physical manifestation of modern architecture was in Britain with the arts and crafts movement, placing the date of 1836 ahead of all other dates in the chronological sequence of his book.199 The dates that frame these events, 1836 and 1924, correlate respectively to Pugin’s publication of the “Contrasts” and Edwin Lutyens’ Somme Memorial to the British dead after the First World War. In addition, Morris, being influenced by the work of Marx, developed a lifelong socialist agenda.200 From this perspective, modern architecture can be said to

197 Ibid. PP. 42
198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid. PP. 45
have had socialist origins, which remains one of the very few links to socialism that Frampton provides. Frampton then covers the work of Richard Shaw, Arthur Mackmurdo who “developed a unique style anticipatory of the Art Nouveau”, Charles Ashbee, William Lethaby and finally Lutyens. These developments seem to portray the developmental process of modernization in Britain starting with the Arts and Crafts movement.

Frampton then jumps to the transformations that were occurring in America, with the work of Louis Sullivan and the Chicago school and with that of Frank Lloyd Wright. Here, he focuses on Sullivan’s work on steel frame high rise buildings primarily discussed in the second chapter. New innovations such as the invention of the elevator and the development of an efficient fire proofing system after the great fire of Chicago, helped make the new typology possible. In respect to Sullivan’s work, Frampton maintains that:

Sullivan sought to reconcile that schism in western culture between the intellectual and the emotional, poles which he was to associate later with the Greek and the Gothic.

Sullivan coined the term “form follows function” within the discipline of architecture (borrowing it from the evolutionary biologist Herbert Spencer) which became a central slogan for modern architecture in the decades to follow.

For both Sullivan and Wright, the methodology of design oscillated between “the authority of the Classical order and the vitality of asymmetrical form.” Their search for a new style would eventually lead them away from western sources and into exotic

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201 Ibid. PP. 51
202 Ibid. PP. 54
203 HUGHES, T. P. 2005. *Human-Built World: How to Think about Technology and Culture*, University of Chicago Press. PP. 118
cultures. Wright’s development of his Prairie style would come to be defined around 1901 and mature with his 1904 design for the Larkin building and the Martin house. For Frampton, Wright’s goal, “like that of many of his European contemporaries, was the achievement of a total environment, embracing and affecting the whole of society.” This international aspect in Wright’s work is taken for granted in this account. The exploration of a theoretical framework of modernism that could accommodate modernist productions in Beirut seems to find a place within such an international perspective. Such view seems in a sense to transcend the boundaries of national styles. Furthermore, the international aspect stands in direct opposition to nationalism. This is a very crucial point, because if we can consider that some of these modernist transformations were triggered by a decline in national styles and the rise of an international perspective, such a transformation becomes strongly tied to socialist thought through a shift from national struggles to class struggle. Frampton’s account here does not suggest the possible ramifications this international aspect might have had on the formation of modern architecture. However, Frampton maintains that Wright’s Prairie style constantly oscillated between two poles, one asymmetrical and the other symmetrical.

Frampton then discusses the influence of Viollet-le-Duc’s Structural rationalism on Antonio Gaudi, Victor Horta and Hendrik Berlage. The eclecticism of this influence is important, because each of these architects sought to appropriate le-Duc’s return to regional building each in his own manner. Gaudi tried to reconcile a need to revive indigenous architecture with the impulse to create new forms of expression. At

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205 Ibid. PP. 61
206 Ibid. PP. 62
207 Ibid. PP 64
the same time, the Belgians were sensing the change and were anxious to respond to it in a unique manner. On this point Frampton cites:

We are called to create something which is our own, something to which we can give a new name. We are called upon to invent a style [...] we must try first and foremost to create Belgian artists – we must free ourselves from foreign influences.  

The Belgians it seems were more keen on forming a national style which would utilize the aesthetics of modern architecture. With Victor Horta, the Belgian style came to maturation. His use of iron as a plastic element in domestic architecture was pioneering. Frampton suggests that Horta’s culminating work in his Maison du Peuple took le-Duc’s principles to their logical conclusion. Similarly, in France, Frampton links the work of Hector Guimard with that of le-Duc. He also assumes that like Gaudi and Horta, what Guimard had in mind was “the evolution of the ‘constituent elements’ of a national style as advocated by Viollet-le-Duc.” Frampton’s use of the term “national” and regional” foreshadow his chapter on critical regionalism around the end of his book. The last architect in this chapter is Berlage who is linked to le-Duc through his friendship with P.J.H. Cuijpers “who was already a disciple and correspondent of Viollet-le-Duc”. In addition, Cuijpers’ attempts to rationalize a “national style”, and the influence he had on Berlage correlates again to an emphasis on the “regional” qualities in the work of these men.

Here, the discrepancy between Wright, who was trying to formulate an international architecture, and the Belgians, who were seeking strictly a ‘national style’, is

\[\text{\begin{tabular}{l}
208 Ibid. PP. 68  
209 Ibid. PP. 67  
210 Ibid. PP. 68  
211 Ibid. PP. 69  
212 Ibid.  
213 Ibid. PP. 71
\end{tabular}}\]
downplayed, or fails to be significantly addressed. How could divergent and seemingly contradictory positions be part of the same movement? The tension between the national and the international is paramount in the case of Beirut.

Here also, it becomes clear that Frampton is discussing disparate events that were happening simultaneously around Europe. It is also interesting to note here that these early transformations were happening in politically charged atmospheres. The socialist movement around Europe, beginning with the “Revolutions of 1884” and gaining strength over the following fifty years, is not discussed as a factor in the process of change on the architectural level.

Next, Frampton discusses the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh particularly his work on the Glasgow School of Art.214 The school was designed in the spirit of the Gothic Revival tradition despite Mackintosh’s argument against iron and glass as viable building materials that have the capacity to compete with the aesthetics of stone construction. Frampton then moves to Austria and the Art Nouveau movement which he states was inspired by the English Pre-Raphaelites. The secession movement as it was known included Otto Wagner, Joseph Olbrich and Joseph Hoffmann. Hoffman’s work, especially the design of Purkersdorf Sanatorium would have an influence on the early works of Le Corbusier.215

Frampton moves on to discuss the works of Adolf Loos.216 Loos became familiar with the Chicago School and the writings of Louis Sullivan during his three years stay in the United States. Loos’ ethical sentiments played a major part in his work, which bordered on the edge of social revolution. He attacked the secessionists vehemently,

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214 Ibid. PP. 74
215 Ibid. PP. 89
216 Ibid. PP. 90
especially Olbrich and the whole concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. His rejection of Ornaments was an attack on excess. The chapter on Loos occupies an important location in the book. Here Frampton elaborates on the influence of Loos’ ideas on the coming generation of architects:

No one was better prepared to receive this hyperconscious sensibility than the post war Parisian avant garde, in particular the circle editing *L’Esprit Nouveau*, namely the proto Dadaist poet Paul Dermee and the Purist painters Amedee Ozenfant and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier),[…] there is little reason to doubt that the influence of Loos was decisive in refining the typological programme of Purism;\(^{217}\)

Frampton considers Loos to be the “first to postulate the problem that Le Corbusier was eventually to resolve with his full development of the free plan.”\(^{218}\) The free plan is of course considered one of the main spatial tools of modern architecture, yet it is important to point out here that though the free plan is a pivotal characteristic of modern architecture, it is not considered the sole determinant of modernism. Within a Corbusian context, it is one of five elements that he considered necessary for the production of modernism. Furthermore, these five elements remain characteristically Corbusian, and not necessarily encompassing other modernist approaches to architectural aesthetics.

Henry Van de Velde and his early influences are discussed next. According to Frampton, these influences came from England through the Belgian avant garde group XX. Van de Velde’s stance on the difference between ornament and ornamentation, in contrast to Loos, is noted as a departure from the views that dominated the age. By

\(^{217}\)Ibid. PP.95
\(^{218}\) Ibid.
1905 Van de Velde was displeased with the entire architectural process, and started a rigorous search for new forms.219

It would be necessary to note here that most of these events that Frampton discusses, each hold a set of criteria that are considered to constitute certain defining elements of modernism in architecture. In this respect, modernist architecture should somehow imbue these criteria.

Tony Garnier is the subject of the next chapter. Frampton opens with a selected quote from the French architect:

Determining factors in the establishment of a similar city should be the proximity of raw materials, or the existence of a natural force capable of being used for energy, or the convenience of methods of transportation.220

Garnier’s ideas foreshadow the regionalist tendencies as design criteria. In addition, Garnier was committed to the socialist cause his entire life. His Cite Industrielle was ultimately the vision of a socialist city. The two ideas, regionalism and socialism are further reinforced in Frampton’s text within a modernist discourse, and become central to this dissertation as well. Regionalism is constantly foreshadowed in Frampton’s text, but the impact of socialism on modernism is not clearly delineated. Perhaps the negative attitude to socialism in the US, and the tendency to identify modernism strictly with capitalism,221 has prohibited a clear understanding of the relationship between socialism, Marxism and modernism.

Frampton then discusses the work of Perret.222 He identifies the two main influences at the beginning of Perret’s career as Auguste Choisy and François Hennebique. From

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219 Ibid. PP. 99
220 Ibid. PP. 100
221 BEILHARZ, P. 2009. Socialism and Modernity, University of Minnesota Press. PP. ix
the theory of Choisy and the structural system of Hennebique, Perret could be said to have developed a classical rationalist vocabulary that would impact both his peers and the following generations, particularly Le Corbusier. Frampton maintains that:

Apart from the lucidity of his architecture, and the extraordinary refinement attained in his built work, Perret’s significance as a theoretician lay in his aphoristic, dialectical turn of mind – in the importance that he attached to such polarities as order versus disorder, frame versus infill, permanent versus impermanent, mobile versus immobile, reason versus imagination, and so on. Comparable oppositions may be found throughout the entire corpus of Le Corbusier’s work.223

Frampton also touches upon developments in Germany. He discusses the Deutsche Werkbund, the Glass Chain and the Bauhaus sequentially. The Werkbund was founded by Herman Muthesius, Friedrich Naumann and Karl Schmidt in 1907. Muthesius, influenced by the English Arts and Crafts movement sought to propagate an ideal that joined the concepts of craftsmanship and economy under one roof. This link, and the emphasis on the concept of economy, underpin the socialist connection once more. Frampton also maintains that the Werkbund is intricately linked with the work of Peter Behrens, who was one of the initial twelve members of the Werkbund. Behren’s design for the AEG factory is specifically mentioned. The future of the Werkbund would become inseparable from the Neue Sachlichkeit movement, yet the Werkbund members were always sharply divided:

The Cologne Werkbund Exhibition in 1914 gave expression to an ideological split within the Werkbund between the collective acceptance of normative form (*Typisierung*), on the one hand, and the individually asserted, expressive ‘will to form’ (*Kunstwollen*) on the other.224

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223 Ibid. PP. 108
224 Ibid. PP. 116
The Glass Chain of Bruno Taut attempted to formulate a vision of the world with glass and transparency as its core value through a series of letters published by its members, which included Walter Gropius and Hans Scharoun. Taut’s socialist alignment and ideas were similar to those eventually perpetuated by the National Socialist movement. The Glass Chain, like to Werkbund, also gave rise to internal conflicts that by 1920 started to be expressed among its members, with Hans Luckhardt’s challenging the compatibility of the Chain’s ideas. Frampton quotes:

> Opposite to this profoundly spiritual striving is the trend toward automatic process. The invention of the Taylor System is a typical characteristic of this. It would be completely erroneous to refuse to recognize this tendency of the time, as it is a historic fact. Moreover, it can in no way be proven to be hostile toward art.225

Frampton uses Eric Mendelsohn’s Einstein Tower to attempt to reconcile and synthesize the divisions that were both at the heart of the Werkbund as well as returning to the debate within the Glass Chain. The tower attempted to achieve Van de Velde’s sculptural form, the Profile of Taut’s Glass Pavilion within an organic composition. Additionally, Taut, in advancing his art program, anticipated the rise of the Bauhaus. Frampton observes:

> Taut argued that a new cultural unity could be attained only through a new art of building, wherein each separate discipline would contribute to the final form. ‘At this point,’ he wrote, ‘there will be no boundaries between the crafts, sculpture and painting; all will be one: Architecture.’226

The founding of the Bauhaus came as a result of these previous attempts to find a school that could synthesize the various disciplines under one roof.227 Yet the Bauhaus was not a school with one vision, but rather, a school that came together as a

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225 Ibid. PP. 118
226 Ibid. PP. 123
227 Ibid.
result of a compromise between a workshop-based education and a fine art education. This arrangement “was to divide the Bauhaus, conceptually, throughout its existence.”\textsuperscript{228} The tension between Johannes Itten and Gropius is a clear indication of this polar division, which eventually led to Itten’s resignation in 1923.\textsuperscript{229} In addition, the socialist orientation of the Bauhaus stood in opposition to an emphasis on aesthetic qualities. With Lazlo Moholy-Nagy replacing Itten, his constructivist orientation shifted the Bauhaus more towards socialist ideals.\textsuperscript{230} This eventually culminated in Gropius’ resignation in 1928, when he was replaced by Adolf Meyer. Meyer steered the Bauhaus towards a more “socially responsible” program, while at the same time attempting to resist engaging in party politics within the school. Meyer also was forced to resign in 1930, and was succeeded by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Mies was at the head of the school for three years before it closed its doors in Dessau.

Here, it becomes clear that Frampton is adhering to a certain system of classification throughout the book. Grouping the Belgian architects under one heading, the German modernists under another and so on is not an accident. Frampton resorts primarily to national classifications to group and delineate the analysis, and in some way, it is an understandable approach. Yet, this national approach to classification seems, on the other hand, to negate the international characteristics of modernism. In this regard, Frampton’s text may be described as being expositionist rather than specifically critical.

In discussing the “New Objectivity” or “Neue Sachlichkeit”,\textsuperscript{231} Frampton traces the term “Sachlichkeit” to Hermann Muthesius in reference to the English Arts and Crafts

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\textsuperscript{228} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid. PP. 126 \\
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid. PP. 130
\end{flushleft}
movement. This again grounds the new objectivity in socialist origins. For Muthesius it seems to have meant an ‘objective’ and functionalist approach towards the design of objects.\(^{232}\) The new objectivity was a departure from its original meaning and inclined more towards a socialist attitude to architecture. The new objectivity first found allies from Soviet Russia with El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg in 1921 when they arrived in Germany. In addition, the new objectivity was furthered by the ABC group that included Emil Roth, Hans Schmidt, Hannes Meyer and Hans Wittwer. Frampton criticizes the works that emerged under the rhetoric of objective neutrality, but nevertheless possess a symbolic statement. In his discussion of Meyer’s project for the *Petersscule* in 1926. He suggests that:

> [O]ne may question the designer’s objectivity when elevator shafts are glazed (after Russian Constructivist Models) so as to reveal the ‘machine aesthetic’ in action. Further doubts arise when one considers the undeniably picturesque qualities of the composition.\(^{233}\)

Apart from assessing the achievability of objectivity, Mart Stam’s concept of the “open city” emanated from the new objectivity, in contrast to, and even in rebellion against, traditional urban patterns. The new objectivity found its most expressive domain in housing projects, specifically under the directorship of Ernst May as the City Architect of Frankfurt in 1925. 15,000 units were completed under his direction in a span of five years. His insistence on “efficiency and economy in both design and construction”\(^{234}\) made this feat achievable. This Neue Sachlichkeit would transform Walter Gropius’ work, as Frampton sees it, in the Bauhaus Complex in 1926 and his Torten housing of 1928.\(^{235}\) May became more involved in the problem of housing on

\(^{232}\) Ibid.
\(^{233}\) Ibid. PP. 134
\(^{234}\) Ibid. PP.137
\(^{235}\) Ibid. PP. 138
a theoretical level. The Neu Sachlichkeit would come to an end with the market collapse and the economic depression of 1929.

Next, Frampton discusses De Stijl and Neo-Plasticism. Piet Modrian, Theo van Doesberg and Gerrit Rietveld were the three main players. De Stijl was mainly influenced by the works of Lloyd-Wright and Berlage. From their ten point manifesto, the members of De Stijl seemed to take a staunch stand against the “old consciousness”. Their manifesto is more of a vaguely ideological construct that leaves much to be explained, but one thing is clear: the old ways of looking at art and culture in general had lost their validity. The movement lasted fourteen years and many radical changes occurred during its life span. What is significant here is that the rebellion against the “old consciousness” should be understood as a revolutionary act. Most modernist architects in this respect saw themselves as revolutionaries. This concept plays an important role in the dissertation because revolution, by necessity, destroys one system, and establishes another. Therefore, if modernism belongs to an uninterrupted historical dialogue, then this dialogue becomes grounded in a very specific historical narrative with very clear origins. Any attempt to understand the modernist architecture of Beirut within a historically predetermined framework becomes very difficult, perhaps almost impossible.

What we learn from Frampton’s analysis is that these micro movements that are associated with modernism, on one hand enriched the movement, and on the other played a vital role in terms of diversity when it came to its constituting elements. This prevented modernism becoming a uniform body of rules to which every member must adhere. There would be exceptions to this approach. Le Corbusier would be one of the

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236 Ibid. PP. 142
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
figures in the modern movement that would seek a characteristic uniformity in modern design.\textsuperscript{239} His Dom-Ino of 1915 was an attempt to reduce the structural system to its basic constituent parts. This system, with very minor modification, is still the basis of almost every modern and contemporary building in Lebanon today.

The bulk of the rest of this section in Frampton’s book is divided between three main architects. Chapters 17, 20 and 25 deal with the work of Le Corbusier. Chapters 18 and 26 deal with the work of Mies van der Rohe, and chapter 21 deals with the work of Lloyd-Wright. These three architects are today considered the ‘stars’ of modernism in architecture. The remaining chapters deal with Russian Constructivism, Alvar Aalto and Giuseppe Terragni.

It is not necessary to venture to recount all that Frampton discussed about these architects in the following chapters, but rather to highlight what is of relevance to this dissertation. Le Corbusier’s early development was influenced by an early meeting with Tony Garnier in Lyon, which furthered his dissatisfaction with the Jugendstil, and by his part time employment with Perret in Paris, which convinced him that reinforced concrete was the material of the future.\textsuperscript{240} His work at the office of Behrens in 1915 must have brought him in contact with Mies van der Rohe. Frampton mentions that in 1915, Le Corbusier reinterpreted “the Hennebique frame as the Maison Dom-Ino.”\textsuperscript{241} In 1916 Villa Schwob was realized, where Le Corbusier used “regulating lines” for the first time. What is interesting here, and in a certain way specific to the work of Le Corbusier, is that a classical device was utilized in a modern setting. This utilization may suggest that Le Corbusier was not attempting to break free from the traditional system, but rather, employed what he considered of

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid. PP. 149
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid. PP. 150
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid. PP. 151
value in his design. This was the first of many connections that would link his work to historical precedents. Frampton states that:

In the years that followed, this ‘house-palace’ theme saw its fulfillment in Le Corbusier’s work on two different scales, with related but separate socio-cultural connotations. The first was the free-standing individual bourgeois villa of Palladian precedent, as exemplified in the masterly houses of the late 1920’s; the second was the collective dwelling, conceived as a Baroque palace that could evoke through its ‘set-back’ plan the ideological connotations of phalanstery.²⁴²

Both references, to Palladian villas and to Baroque palaces, suggest that Frampton sees a critical connection between classical and modern architecture in the work of Le Corbusier.²⁴³ His work would evolve to larger projects especially housing projects and eventually to urban development culminating with the Plan Voisin in 1925. Frampton also recognizes that there was a socialist aspect in Le Corbusier’s works, specifically those that dealt with large scale housing projects.²⁴⁴ Yet his work was not totally socialist in a sense that these projects also had a bourgeois aspect. This connection is important because it suggests in a way that modern architecture, especially in the work of Le Corbusier, is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, despite what Le Corbusier himself might have suggested.

Le Corbusier was also different from other modernists in that he attempted to establish a systematic set of rules that could be applied to modern architecture. It was an attempt that defied the variations within the modern movement, and yet in another sense, it added an additional variation of what the architects during the early twentieth century thought modern architecture should be. His five points, published in his book

²⁴² Ibid. PP. 151
²⁴³ Ibid.
²⁴⁴ Ibid. PP. 156
Toward a New Architecture (1923) (Translated to English in 1927)\(^{245}\) is an endeavor in that direction.\(^{246}\) In a sense, Le Corbusier was trying to establish for the modern movement what classical architecture had in terms of guidelines in the design process. Frampton notes this classical aspect in Le Corbusier’s work:

Nonetheless he could not, and indeed did not, deny that the site layout of the Cite Moniale had been determined by a network of *traces regulateurs*, comparable to those used to control the façade of the villa at Garches – a facade which, however much it subscribed to the canons of the Purist machine aesthetic, remained as Classical in its affinities as the Palladian plan type from which its structure had been derived.\(^{247}\)

Le Corbusier’s socialist tendencies, and his visits to Russia between 1928 and 1930, would generate some criticism in Western Europe, and he would be accused of being a “Trojan Horse of Bolshevism”.\(^{248}\) Le Corbusier would not be the only modernist to be accused of having a socialist orientation. Many of the architects who preached modern design had socialist affinities as we have seen earlier, and many aspects of modernism seem to manifest socialist characteristics especially those that addressed social housing.\(^{249}\) This did not mean though that modernism and socialism were synonymous. On the contrary, modern architecture did not bring about significant change in socialist Russia under Stalin:

The failure of the OSA to develop sufficiently concrete proposals for planning on a large scale or to evolve residential building types which were appropriate to the needs and resources of a beleaguered socialist state, in conjunction with the paranoid tendency that emerged under Stalin for state


\(^{247}\) Ibid.

\(^{248}\) Ibid. pp. 179

\(^{249}\) See page 140 for Gropius views where Frampton maintains that Gropius’ views “lay to the left of the Social Democratic position. Even Le Corbusier was accused of being the “Trojan Horse of Bolshevism” by Alexandre de Senger. See Frampton on page 179.
censorship and control, had the effect of bringing about the eclipse of ‘modern’ architecture in the Soviet Union.250

In his last chapter on Le Corbusier, Frampton discusses Corbusier’s relationship to vernacular architecture. This shift towards the vernacular would come about as Le Corbusier would begin to “abandon his faith in the inevitably beneficent workings of a machine-age civilization.”251

This transformation is indicative of the changing ideals in the work of a singular architect over the period of his practice. It is also indicative of the complexity of constructing a coherent and uniform structure for the modern movement, since much of its constituent parts are in constant transformation. This would become evident in several projects ranging from Maison Jaoul, the monastery of La Tourette, and even to Chandigarh. Chandigarh was unique in this respect because it did not adhere to the architectural vocabulary of the west. It was designed to “represent a modern Indian identity that would be free from any association with its colonial past.”252

251 Ibid. pp. 224
252 Ibid. pp. 230
Frampton’s remark is most interesting especially because many see modern architecture in third world countries as either a western import, or as an imposition on these nations either by way of colonialism or ‘superiority’. Wael Samhouri for example sees that the process of modernism was imposed from without. These two elements, “import” and “imposition” are additionally utilized when it comes to addressing modern architecture in third world countries. In a sense, modernism becomes a western property and tradition becomes the property of the east. These two elements find their voice in Orientalism, as well as in third world modernism as we shall see.

The chapters on Mies van der Rohe focus on his work and life from 1921 onward. Frampton sees three main influences on Mies’s early work, especially after 1923. The first is that of Berlage, the second was Lloyd Wright’s work through De Stijl, and the third is Kasimir Malevich’s Suprematism, which would eventually propel him to develop the free plan, as it revealed itself fully formed in the Barcelona Pavilion of 1929. The pavilion, though having classical associations through its column grid, is clearly an elementalist composition. Furthermore, Mies’ approach to building did not adhere to Neue Sachlichkeit, but rather stood at a distance if not to say in opposition to its agenda. This again exemplifies the schism that was inherent in modern architecture and its various ramifications. Mies, similar to Le Corbusier in his early career, succeeded in developing a building typology that would be revealed through structure. His style would become the foundation of a building category that is still in production today. Mies’s approach to design would not be shared by all modern architects of the time. Frampton highlights several approaches to the design aesthetic of Mies in comparison to that of Philip Johnson and Louis Kahn:

Where Mies had always given priority to the direct expression of the structural frame, both Kahn and Johnson concealed the frame, at least externally, placing their particular emphasis on the monumentalization of what might be considered ‘secondary’ components, such as walls, floors, and ceilings. By a similar token, where Mies always chose to emphasize the axiomatic of his composition, Kahn and Johnson masked the inherent symmetrical order of their work by suppressing the frame.

The discussion of Lloyd Wright is relatively short but highlights much of the architect’s concepts of modern architecture. Wright proclaimed glass as the modern

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255 Ibid. PP. 166
256 Ibid. PP. 242
257 Ibid. PP. 186
material par excellence, and suggested that in the same manner that shadows were the ‘brush work’ of classical architecture, light should be the domain of the modern architect. His concept of organic architecture allowed the use of cantilevered concrete structures as if they were natural “tree-like form.”\(^{258}\) Falling Water was the embodiment of this organic concept. His attitude towards the machine was one of inevitability. He considered that the machine was an element with which the architect has to contend. The main three elements that would transform western civilization were electricity, mobility and organic architecture. This “organic architecture”, Frampton maintains, always escaped any precise definition in Wright’s work.\(^{259}\)

The remaining two chapters deal with the work of Aalto and Terragni. Frampton’s consideration of the Finnish architect’s work revolves around regional materials.\(^{260}\) This regional character would eventually resurface in Frampton’s chapter on critical regionalism in the last part of the book.\(^{261}\) Aalto’s focus on wood as a modern building material set him apart from most modernists of his age. His organic approach to architecture set him apart from the Functionalists and Frampton maintains that in a sense he somehow belongs to the ‘group’ of Northern European Expressionist architects.\(^{262}\)

The Italian Terragni who belonged to the rationalist ‘gruppo 7’, attempted to achieve an amalgamation between Italian classicism and modern design. Frampton sees that “gruppo 7 gave more weight to a reinterpretation of tradition than to modernity per se.”\(^{263}\) Terragni’s “Casa del Fascio”, considered to be an icon of Italian Rationalism,

\(^{258}\) Ibid. PP. 188  
\(^{259}\) Ibid. PP. 190  
\(^{260}\) Ibid. PP. 192  
\(^{261}\) Ibid. PP. 314  
\(^{262}\) Ibid.  
\(^{263}\) Ibid. PP. 203
was not completely devoid of traditional aspects, displaying a rationalist column grid, a raised base, and an interior piazza. His Danteum of 1938 displays symbolic characteristics, and as Frampton sees it, it was in many respects “an abstraction of the parti used for the EUR building”, which was an earlier project designed in the same year by Terragni for a competition.

Frampton discusses briefly the tension that ensued between modernism and tradition throughout the western world and beyond.\(^{264}\) He describes the transformations that were occurring in India during British colonial rule. Modernism in India was seen as a way of asserting independence from colonial rule for newly emerging democracies after the First World War. The conflict between modernity and established or emerging traditions was to be seen in the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and even in America.\(^{265}\) In most of these cases, modernism did not gain sufficient popularity as an ideological architectural framework. This according to Frampton was due to “the modernist tendency to reduce all form to abstraction.”\(^{266}\)

Part three of the Book could be divided into two main sections. The first is Frampton’s critical assessment of modernism through his analysis of the International Style, New brutalism, and then through CIAM and Team X.\(^{267}\) The second section deals with international theory and practice since 1962, Critical Regionalism, and finally through reflective practice.

The international style saw the proliferation of modern architecture in the west and beyond. This expansion took the ideas developed earlier in modernism and pushed them to a functional level. The transformations in Brazil, Japan, USA and beyond

\(^{264}\) Ibid. PP. 210  
\(^{265}\) These are different headings in Frampton’s book in Chapter 24.  
\(^{266}\) FRAMPTON, K. 2007. Modern architecture: a critical history, Thames & Hudson. PP. 210  
\(^{267}\) Ibid. PP. 247
transformed modern architecture into a truly international style. For Frampton this style subsumed many of the iconic projects of Modernism and expanded to include newly emerging projects, and became truly universal.  

Brutalism on the other hand, which originally was said to have a Palladian tendency, would change in an attempt to create a different type of architecture. The use of *beton brute* was in a sense a reworking of the Corbusian aesthetics used specifically in Maison Jaoul.

CIAM sought to organize and centralize modern architectural tendencies. The congress formed in 1928 and lasted till 1956, and transformed over the years. Frampton describes three main stages of this development. The first was dominated mainly by the Germans who were mainly socialist and focused on minimal living, the second by Le Corbusier who shifted the main emphasis to town planning, and the third witnessed the triumph of liberal idealism. Team X was comprised of several members of CIAM who challenged its doctrines on its ninth congress in 1953. Team X posed harsh criticism of the problems they identified as integral to modern approaches to architecture. Frampton argues that by 1963, Team X lost steam and became an architectural movement only by name.

From 1962 onward the architectural avant-garde reflected on modernist theory with an increasing number of detachments from the traditional practice. This became noticeable in the growing number of fantastic projects that were spawned during that period. The fact that visionary architecture retreated into designs that were impossible to build, indicated a shift in modernist consciousness. These transformations in modern architectural theory and design and the move from earlier convictions, caused a schism that was to put all modernist beliefs into question. Still, the architectural

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268 Ibid. PP. 248
269 Ibid. PP. 270-271
270 Ibid. PP. 277
avant-garde of the sixties would maintain a sense of social responsibility. Nevertheless, Frampton mentions that the revolutionary aspect of modernism, by erasing cultural connections, has contributed to the destruction of a meaningful urban environment. The eventual diffusion of modernist theoretical constructs was inevitable.

In regards to Critical Regionalism, I will discuss Frampton's position in the coming chapter in more detail, since it is united with the manner in which modernism outside the west is approached. Frampton ends the book by reflecting on architectural practice since the 1980’s.

Overall, the subjects discussed across Frampton’s book are piecemeal snippets of the developments that occurred in the western world around the turn of the twentieth century, with some loosely interconnected threads. It also becomes apparent that there is no cohesion of unified ideology that combines the ideas that fed the architectural impulses during that period. In his review of the book, William Curtis makes an interesting remark:

Frampton's book is curiously fragmentary in effect. It desperately needs a few guiding themes to link one chapter to the next. The book as a whole is a bit like a forest of trees of different ages and stages of development with large gaps between.

This though does not seem to be necessarily problematic. Not constructing a connected body of historical events of the modernist movement is somehow apt. The eclectic nature of assumed influences points only to the several attempts that aimed to respond to a changing society through a diverse set of approaches. Through the sum

271 Ibid. PP. 290
272 Ibid. PP. 328
of this plethora of ideas, we can discern the corpus that is subsumed under the heading “modern architecture”.
2.5: Conclusion:

These three books present multiple perspectives of modernist historiography. Through Rykwert, this chapter explored the origins of modernist thought through the eighteenth century, and with Frampton, it bridged the gap all the way till 1965. In addition, it also looked through Collins at the ideals without the names of the players, as a second layer of understanding, a theoretical layer. The synthesis of these multiple views will come into play during the reassessment of the modernist productions in Beirut.

It is necessary here to assess how each of these discourses will play out in relating our understanding of modernism to the aim of this dissertation, which is to explore a theorization of modern Lebanese architecture in relationship to modernism in general terms. Collins provides a framework of the ideals that are necessary ingredients to modernism as he sees it. In this regard, it would be important to look at modern architecture in Beirut through the lenses that he provides under the five headings of his book which are: romanticism, revivalism, functionalism, rationalism and the influence of the allied arts. It is possible in that sense to revisit Collins’ sphere of modern ideals, but within the Lebanese setting in an attempt to assess how they relate or negate modernism as it flourished in Beirut.

Rykwert’s text on the other hand poses a challenge. The historical era he discusses, as well as the characters that contribute to its formation seem far removed from the Lebanese situation, and seem to constitute an internal dialogue taking shape within a “western” context, and which foreshadowed the rise of modern concepts in the early twentieth century. The manner in which such a discourse could be relevant to the case of Beirut resides in a reassessment of the same events that Rykwert credits with the
rise of modernism in the “west”, in order to provide a reading that could shed a different light on these events on one hand, and potentially provide another discourse of such events that could be related to the Lebanese case.

Finally, Frampton’s text becomes important to this dissertation, when considered under five main characteristics. The first aspect is that Frampton’s account is disjunctive, uncorrelated, and can be read as independent snippets of historical moments. The second is that Frampton considers modern architecture as having two main constituting factors, the avant-garde and technology. These two factors might therefore contribute to the framework against which Beirut modernist architecture is assessed. The third element is the position of socialist and Marxist thought, an element that Frampton introduces at the beginning of his text, but avoids expanding upon in term of its possible ramifications. This dissertation maintains that this overlooked factor is fundamentally crucial to understand the development of modern architectural thought, and probably to modernist architecture itself. The fourth element is the role of the industrial revolution in the proliferation of modern architecture, and the fifth is Frampton’s approach to critical regionalism and what it might mean for the architecture of Beirut. The sixth and final element is the revolutionary versus the evolutionary aspect of modernism, which necessitates a proper consideration within which the logic of the analysis of Lebanese modernism becomes possible.

The following chapter will look at various interpretive methods that have been utilized to understand modernism in settings such as Beirut.
Chapter 3
Interpretive Methods
3.1: Introduction

This chapter explores the modes of interpretation that have been utilized to assess and understand modernist productions outside the “west”. If we are to understand the relationship between modernism as it has been addressed in the “west” and modernism outside the “west”, such as in a city like Beirut, then it becomes necessary to explore the various approaches that have been generally utilized in the understanding of “extra-western” modernisms. These are primarily divided into three main approaches: The first is the Orientalist approach as developed by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978).\(^{274}\) This approach tends to frame modernist productions as a consequence of colonial influence. The second approach is the regionalist approach which maintains that modernist productions cannot be considered modernist per se, but rather were a regional response to a developing process, utilizing modern materials and methods of construction. The main advocates of this approach are Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre and Kenneth Frampton, in his articles that addressed this approach “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an architecture of resistance.”\(^{275}\) The third approach includes the modernist productions outside the “west” under the heading of ‘Third World Modernism’ and considers these productions as a separate body of research. The main contributors to this body of research are Duanfang Lu, who published an edited book under the title of *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity*\(^{276}\) in 2010; and William


In the following chapter we will explore these various interpretive approaches and the manner in which they construct an understanding modern architecture outside the “west”. This step is necessary especially because the case of Beirut seems to fit within this domain of research. This chapter will not attempt to critique the respective methods of interpretation, but merely to present them. Before we can make any critical assessment of their validity or appropriateness to the case of Beirut, we must first briefly outline the history of development of architecture of Beirut till the modern period. It is only then that we will possess all the parts necessary in order to make an informed assessment of these theoretical approaches.

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3.2: Introduction to Orientalism:

Before we venture into an exploration of Orientalism as a concept that is utilized to explain modernist productions in Lebanon, we must first understand two main elements about Orientalism. The first is that orientalism is principally an analysis of textual productions produced by the west about the east. The second is that there has never been a properly constructed domain of research that looks specifically at Lebanese modernist architectural productions via an Orientalist lens. This necessitates a two part analysis. The first is to understand the main characteristics and driving factors in Orientalist theory as presented by Said, and the second is to construct a preliminary Orientalist approach towards Lebanon, in an attempt to understand how this concept might address modernist architectural productions in Lebanon. In a sense, Orientalism as presented by Said is not an overly complicated concept. In this chapter, we will look at a summary of orientalism by Said, how it relates to modern architecture in general terms, and then to construct an Orientalist framework specific to Lebanon in order to understand how we can address such an approach within the dissertation.
3.20: Orientalism

Having no learned men [of its own] yet, Beirut is trying to create for itself a society in imitation of Europe, as it has many fewer models than some other cities in the East: there not being many Europeans [in Beirut], it does so on the basis of what it imagines Europe to be, rather than what it sees of it.278

This is a statement by Gilbert Charmes in the 1890’s, a time that was witnessing changes on the Lebanese cultural and architectural scene. He is quoted by Samir Kassir in discussing the European model in Beirut. Before we can assess such a statement though, we have to understand the interpretive framework from which it arises. Orientalism has two different meanings. Whereas the first meaning refers to western studies of the orient in general terms, whether artistic, literary or otherwise; the second meaning, the one which we are more concerned with in this dissertation, has a more controversial and multi-disciplinary characteristic. This second meaning first took shape with the studies of Said, and more specifically with his book entitled “Orientalism.” C. Ernest Dawn summarizes Said’s intentions in his review of Said’s text:

Orientalism, according to Said, had its roots in the older Christian relation to Islam but was modified by the secularizing currents of the Enlightenment and took its definitive form in the late eighteenth century and the first three-quarters of the nineteenth. Orientalism was structured by Western science - natural and humanistic - with its comparison and classification and consequent subjugation of the particular to the universal, the individual to the stereotype. Thus Islam and the Orient became eternal, unchanging. Orientalism, arising in an age dominated by a European sense of superiority, consigned the Oriental to the inferior, the backward, even the degraded, and easily gave scientific status to theories of racial superiority and to justification of colonial rule.279

Whereas the first sense of Orientalism suggests an objective search for knowledge, the second suggests the presence of a more sinister underlying agenda behind these studies. Said’s argument depends on two powerful catalysts. John MacKenzie describes the philosophical structure of Said’s Orientalist argument as thus:

Edward Said combined and adapted two influential theoretical constructs of the twentieth century to produce his major revaluation of Orientalism. He took Michel Foucault’s concept of the discourse, the linguistic apparatus through which the articulation of knowledge becomes an expression of power, and linked it to Antonio Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony through which elite control is maintained over the masses.280

Through this pair of concepts, Said constructed a powerful argument that still has momentum today.281 His book focuses on the western construction of the orientalist image, and primarily on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He primarily sees Orientalism as patronizing a western attitude towards the orient masked as a concern and an obligation to act as its patron.282 The first pages of his first chapter deal with Arthur James Balfour’s lecture to the House of Commons in 1910 in regards to British colonialism in Egypt. The two main arguments that Said notes in Balfour’s speech are ones of knowledge and power. In addition, Balfour makes several assertions of two main elements in his argument.283 The first is a declaration of the “greatness” of the Egyptian culture and the Egyptian people, a theme that he constantly returns to and the second is an alluding to an obligation to guide the Egyptian people out of their national decline.

280 MACKENZIE, J. 1995. Orientalism, Manchester University Press. PP. 3-4
283 Ibid. PP. 32
Balfour’s speech is seen by Said as the culmination of many decades of a western construction of a particular orientalist image. This manufactured Orient Said claims had a very interesting characteristic:

The Orient studied was a textual universe by and large; the impact of the Orient was made through books and manuscripts, not, as in the impress of Greece on the Renaissance, through mimetic artifacts like sculpture and pottery.  

This characteristic assisted in the construction of an orientalist image that was more akin to imagination than it is to reality. Therefore, what the west knows about the Orient is a fictional construct that is not based on fact and research, but rather a concept that was constructed to posit western ideals against. The Orient would become the antithesis of the west, diametrically opposed to it in every way. This fictional construct managed to group all eastern cultures under a single heading, and address them as a single unit or point of reference. Additionally, all eastern societies became inherently different than western societies. This generalization was established by way of literary texts that could be split into two phases. The earlier phase was through visits to the East by westerners who acted as observers to the cultures of the east. In the later phase, these westerners lived with and interacted with the easterners such as ‘Laurence of Arabia’ for example. Additionally, the center for oriental studies would shift from Europe to the United States by the early twentieth century.

The main catalyst that spawned oriental research in the west emerged basically because Europe became increasingly knowledgeable about the Orient. Additionally from its position of power, it sought to dominate the cultures of the east using this

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284 Ibid. PP.52  
285 Ibid. PP. 38
knowledge. The colonial ambitions of the west found value in oriental research. It provided a quasi scientific justification for assuming control of the political life of their colonies. Said’s central question here becomes:

Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?  

This rhetorical question remains unanswered. In a sense, the book itself is an exploration of the ramifications of this question. At its basis, this is a question of identity. How does identity develop and how cultural identities are formed. The formation of a western identity necessitated the existence of an eastern one, for how can a west exist without an east? This fictional construct nevertheless is not beneficial in Said’s opinion, and “Orientalizing the Orient again and again is to be avoided”.  

Said’s orientalism, instead of being a theory, could be regarded as an anti-theory, that is, orientalism is not advancing a thought, but rather a reaction against a thought. There are two elements at work, the first is ‘orientalism’ supposedly formulated by the west according to Said, and in opposition, an anti-orientalism which is the point that Said is trying to make. For Said’s anti-theory then to be relevant, it must find a dialectical opposite.

3.21: Orientalism and modern architecture

In the field of architecture, the orientalist impact in the west is probably best illustrated by Rykwert in the third chapter of his book The First Moderns. Rykwert’s describes the first encounter of the “Christian West” with the Orient as thus:

\[286\] Ibid. PP. 45
\[287\] Ibid. PP. 328
The encounter of the Christian West with a powerful civilization, which was in some way its equal and in others its superior, had much more of an impact than its meeting with the Mexicans or even the Peruvians. Speculations about the origins of the Chinese, or their connection with the West, with Egypt more particularly, were common.288

This image of a once great and powerful orient would nurture the sense of the exotic. In regards to the near east, and with the end of the Siege of Vienna in 1683 by the Ottomans, the doors of Europe were blasted open to the different, previously inaccessible parts of the Ottoman Empire.

Said’s selection of the eighteenth century as a marked date is no coincidence. It of course denotes the full blossoming of the enlightenment. It is also worth noting that this emphasis on the eighteenth century corresponds with Rykwert’s classification of the rise of the first moderns in architectural thought, and with Collins’ argument that the first modernist ideals were formed during that period. The period witnessed also the early fascination of the west with the east that had several consequences in Europe. One of these consequences was the impact the east had on western architectural production. Rykwert’s description of the design and construction of the “Pavillion de Porcelaine” (The Porcelain Pavilion) for example in 1670, built in the Chinese manner, fits the orientalist bill perfectly.289 It was built “at the height of the Oriental frenzy in France”290 as Rykwert notes. Beginning the eighteenth century, the Orient became an idealized aesthetic figure in the west.

In reaction to this exotic other, many in the west attempted to counterbalance the effects of this oriental and exotic element.291 Rykwert for example places Charles Perrault’s publication of the *Fairy Tales* as recalling “a different antiquity, one which

289 Ibid. PP.54
290 Ibid. PP. 56
291 Ibid. PP. 61
was national and French” in this category. Here again, we see a parallel between western self realization and what Said is proposing, that is, the use of the ‘orientalist’ other as a means of self identification in the west or in this case, a reactionary self identification.

3.22: Orientalism in Lebanon

At the turn of the twentieth century, there were two groups of Lebanese architects that started transforming the architectural scene in Lebanon. Robert Saliba mentions that these two groups consisted of Lebanese architects that were educated abroad. The first group belonged to American educated architects, and were concerned with regionalist questions of local identities, and the second group consisted of French educated architects:

On the Other hand, the Paris-educated group that started practicing mainly during the 30s was far more impregnated by modernist ideology. It broke all ties with the local context and attempted to transfer the new abstract concrete aesthetic from the French "metropolis" to the Levantine provinces.

Said’s Orientalism is relevant to this dissertation because Lebanon, located in the heart of the Middle East, is part and parcel of the Orientalist debate. In his 2002 thesis, George Arbid poses the following question:

How seriously can studies conducted on modernity in the Middle East fend off the orientalism described by Edward Said some twenty years ago? How can a scholar contradict the imagined Middle East?

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292 Ibid.
294 Ibid. PP.24
Arbid’s question poses a dilemma. Orientalism seems to have a forceful impact on understandings of modernist architecture in Beirut and consequently poses a challenge to produce research that could, in a sense, deflect such an Orientalist approach. That is, research does not pay tribute to a western vision of the Orient. What Arbid here is suggesting is that Orientalism is an inappropriate medium for understanding modernist architectural productions in Beirut. Yet, Arbid does not elaborate on the orientalist approach throughout his thesis, and the question remains unanswered. Furthermore, there is a lack of research in regards to this relationship in general terms, that is, between Orientalism and modern Lebanese architecture. This does not mean that the framework of this relationship does not exist. Its boundaries are well defined by Orientalist literature produced on Lebanon by the British, the French and the Americans, specifically in the nineteenth century.

Surely, there is a curious field here that is evoked, but not elaborated. Orientalism has been recognized as a medium of understanding, or in the least, one that has to be dealt with in terms of understanding something about Lebanese architecture. But as mentioned, there is a complete lack of research and publication in this field. There has been no previous argument about orientalism in regards to Lebanese architecture whatsoever. Yet, there are several discussions about modernity and its implications in Lebanon specifically in literary productions.

In this respect, a theory of Orientalism specific to the Lebanese situation must first be constructed. This necessitates the formulation of the position of modernist architectural productions in Beirut as seen through an orientalist lens. In order to critique a proper theory of orientalism that addresses the position of modernist architecture in Beirut, first it will have to be theoretically constructed, albeit in a
broad outline. This is not very difficult since there is an abundance of material to support such research.

There hasn’t been a shortage of orientalists who made Lebanon either fully or partially the subject of their works as we shall see. The studies conducted in the early eighteenth century were by French and then by the British and other Europeans. By the nineteenth century we can add several works by Americans as well. These publications were mostly accounts of travels or attempts at historical documentation of the people that lived in Lebanon. Jean de La Roque published the accounts of his travels in Syria and Mount Lebanon as early as 1722,296 and Charles De Bruyn followed with his travel account in the Levant in 1732.297 ‘The Monthly Review’ which was established in 1749 in London discussed the people of Lebanon in several articles throughout its publications that lasted until 1845.298 In addition, John Heyman who was the professor of the oriental languages at the University of Leyden in the Netherlands, wrote of his travels through Lebanon in 1759.299

During the nineteenth century we find many more resources. Henri Gûys published his journals in Beirut and Lebanon in 1850.300 Charles Henry Churchill published a diary in 1853 about his ten year residence in Mount Lebanon,301 and David Urquhart wrote a diary about ‘The Lebanon’ in 1860.302

299 VAN EGMOND VAN DER NIJENBURG, J. A. & HEYMAN, J. 1759. Travels through part of Europe, Asia Minor, the islands of the archipelago, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Mount Sinai, &c: giving a particular account of the most remarkable places, L. Davis and C. Reynolds.
301 CHURCHILL, C. H. 1853. Mount Lebanon: a ten years’ residence, from 1842 to 1852, describing the manners, customs, and religion of its inhabitants; with a full & correct account of the Druse religion, and containing historical records of the mountain tribes, Saunders and Otley.
It is noteworthy to mention here that the Druze of Lebanon, who are an off chute of Islam, occupy in addition a recurrent theme in regards to their origin, customs and traditions in orientalist literature. The Druze were regarded as part of the exotic orient in this respect. Puget de Saint Pierre wrote his account of the history of the Druze in Lebanon in 1762.\textsuperscript{303} George Washington Chasseaud wrote about the manners, customs and history of the Druze in Lebanon in 1851,\textsuperscript{304} and ‘The Monthly Review’ even noted that some trace the origin of the Druze to have “descended from the first French troops which Godfrey of Bouillon carried with him to the conquest of the Holy land” and that their name is derived from the “Count of Dreux”.\textsuperscript{305} These assumptions were in no respect based on sound scientific evidence of course and reflected a specific outlook which projected constructed opinions upon the orient, in this case Lebanon, and its people.

In addition, not only factual accounts of the orient were of interest. Literary productions such as novels and plays played a role as well to consolidate the image of the people of Lebanon. “Les Bédouins, ou la tribu du Mont-Liban”,\textsuperscript{306} a play in three parts written by Frédéric Dupetit-Méré in 1813 depicted life in Mount Lebanon primarily through a Bedouin tribe with an Arab Prince as its leader.

Knowledge about Lebanon in the west came through the voices of these travelers. These publications, though catering for a westerner’s traditional view of the orient as it was experienced first hand in most cases, affected the popular conceptions of the west about the people who lived in Lebanon or the east, in a specific manner, and

\textsuperscript{303} DE SAINT PIERRE, P. 1762. Histoire des Druses.
\textsuperscript{304} CHASSEAUD, G. W. 1855. The Druses of the Lebanon: Their Manners, Customs and History, with a Translation of Their Religious Code, Richard Bentley.
\textsuperscript{305} GRIFFITHS, R. & GRIFFITHS, G. E. 1787. The Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal, s.n. PP.628
\textsuperscript{306} ALEXANDRE, LANUSSE & DUPETIT-MÈRE, F. 1813. Les Bédouins, ou la tribu du Mont-Liban: Pantomine en 3 actes, Barba.
influenced the general western knowledge of such people. As’ad Yaacoub Khayyat, who was the founder the first co-educational school in Lebanon and the East, attempted to tackle this misconception in his book ‘A Voice from Lebanon’ which was addressed to the British people and published in English in 1847:

I am the more disposed to attempt this work, because few out of the thousands who have attended my public lectures, or who have honoured me by their notice, are really aware of the object of my present visit to England. Some take me for a prince, or at least a chief; others, for a Chinese ambassador, a merchant, or an interpreter. Some think I am a Jew; others a Turk, a missionary, a philosopher, or a lecturer. Christians of every denomination appointing to me a station or an office according to their own preconceived notions.

This clearly demonstrates that the projected image upon the orient is considered unsuitable even to someone who considered the west an ally. Khayyat, as a Christian Lebanese, identified to a certain extent with the west, while maintaining a sense of an eastern identity. Lebanese Christians regarded the west not only as an ally, but also as a protector especially after the massacres of 1860 and the French intervention in Mount Lebanon which came to their aid. This also indicates that the Christians in Lebanon, no matter how they regarded the west, were to a certain degree inconsequential within an oriental Muslim universe. Orientalism therefore could be in a sense extended beyond Said’s scope where he considers that “Orientalism carries within it the stamp of a problematic European attitude towards Islam.”

The west in this respect unified its comprehension of the Orient with almost a total disregard to religious affiliations, or probably, used the distinctions within the orient to its own political advantage. One of the culminating orientalist publications concerning

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307 KHAYYAT, A. Y. 1847. A voice from Lebanon with the life and travels of Assaad Y. Kayat, Madden & Co. PP. 1-2  
Lebanon around the end of the nineteenth century is “La France Au Liban” by Louis de Baudicour published in 1879. In the opening pages Baudicour makes this statement:

Le dernier denouement des affaires d'Orient appelle plus que jamais l'attention sur le chrétiens de Syrie. L'Europe civilisée s'était beaucoup émue, en 1860, des massacres du Liban; il faudrait remonter aux siècles le plus reculés de la barbarie pour trouver de pareilles atrocités. La diplomatie, qui avait cru y parer pour l'avenir, a aujourd'hui un cruel démenti dans la Turquie d'Europe: les massacres de la Bulgarie ne l'ont cédé en rien à ceux de la Syrie.309

The latest outcome of the events in the East requires us now more than ever to pay attention to the Christians of Syria. Civilized Europe was much disturbed, in 1860, by the massacres in Lebanon; it would require us to go back centuries into the most remote corners of barbarism to find such atrocities. Diplomacy, which is believed to be the way for the future, is today in cruel denial in the Turkey of Europe: The massacres in Bulgaria seem to have yielded nothing to those in Syria.310

This statement, in reaction to the massacres that occurred in Lebanon in 1860, displays the two main elements in Said’s Orientalism. The first is that the Orient is Barbaric,311 and the second is that the west is civilized.312 In essence then, it can be argued that the civilized French, validated their colonial aspirations in Lebanon under the guise of protecting the Christians of Lebanon from the barbarism that befell them. Since validating colonial ambitions is a major prerogative in orientalism, then these efforts can only be subsumed within an orientalist theory. This is not to maintain that the massacres did not merit an intervention, but rather that the military intervention used the massacre as an excuse to establish a French military presence at the heart of

309 DE BAUDICOUR, L. 1879. La France au Liban, E. Dentu. PP.1
310 Author’s Translation
312 Ibid. PP. 150
the Ottoman Empire. Albert Hourani and Philip Khoury articulate this position rather clearly:

These changes were communicated to the Middle East, as to other parts of the world, by way of international trade, new kinds of communication and education, and new forms of administration and law, imposed either by indigenous governments, wishing to acquire the strength of the European states, or else by those states themselves as they expanded their empires by means of military strength given them by the changes in their societies.

An earlier generation of historians of the Middle East tended to look only at this second kind of change, and to assume that the ancient societies into which it was introduced were stagnant or in decay, and powerless to resist. Seen in this light the modern history of the Middle East would be that of the imposition of various kinds of European domination over passive and unresisting societies. 313

There has been no previous attempt to assemble, analyze and criticize the body of orientalist literature in regards to Lebanon. The resources I mentioned are only a handful compared to the resources that actually exist. Attempting such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this dissertation. What is necessary though for this dissertation is the construction of an orientalist matrix relevant to the Lebanese situation, and more specifically, relevant to the subject of modernism.

Without dwelling further on the resources, it is necessary to turn towards the position of Lebanese modern architecture within the scope of Orientalism. Said provides an insight into constructing such an orientalist position. Looking again at the opening paragraph in his book:

On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975—1976 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that "it had once seemed to belong to ... the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval." He was right

about the place, of course, especially so far as a European was concerned. The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.314

This statement baptizes the orientalist debate in Lebanon’s war torn city center. The architecture of the city center is identified by Said as epitomizing the western Orientalist vision. The journalist’s statement was an assertion of the vision that was imposed on the orient by the west. This statement though does not satisfy the curiosity of the reader that is raised by Said, for he never elaborates on the architectural image described, nor explains the ramifications of the architectural image within an orientalist framework. Yet, if Said criticizes the west for forcing its own prefabricated image of the Orient and perpetuating an image that was constructed for decades by an orientalist approach to everything eastern, the question becomes then what would be the vision of the Orient about itself, especially in a country like Lebanon? The only possible answer within an orientalist framework is that this type of architecture has an oriental character and it surely cannot be understood through subscribing to a western orientalist approach. Therefore, the orientalism of the orient can only be properly understood from an oriental rather than an orientalist perspective. It is about the orient speaking out and explaining itself, rather than the west attempting to analyze the orient without fully understanding the complex nature of the orient.

The architecture of the central district in Beirut, as cited by Said, evoked a western sentiment that has been under construction for almost three centuries. Said’s point is not in denying the oriental character of the architecture of Beirut but rather in the association of this oriental image with that propagated in the west by Chateaubriand and Nerval, both heavily referenced throughout Said’s book.315

Therefore, if we are to analyze modernist productions in Lebanon according to an Orientalist approach, then we have to assume that the acceptance of modernist architecture and its import from the west is seen as another emblem of western superiority over the orient, and the legacy of the French mandate over Lebanon when the first seeds of this architecture came into being. Modernist architecture is a western

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315 Said references Nerval on pages 1, 8 19, 23, 43, 53, 99, 100, 101, 102, 158, 168, 169, 170, 176, 177, 179, 180, 181, 182, 184, 190, 191, 193, 206, 243, 244, 267, 334, 341, He references Chateaubriand on pages 1, 19, 81, 88, 99, 100, 115, 136, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 181, 193, 341,
invention. The orient’s use of such architecture only reinforces the concept of the west as standing at the top of the power pyramid.

Said’s narrative though provides an interesting insight in the age of orientalist literature about Lebanon, specifically during the events of 1860 in Lebanon, where the Druze, an offshoot of Islam massacred many Lebanese Christians in Mount Lebanon:

In 1860, during the clashes between Maronites and Druzes in Lebanon (already predicted by Lamartine and Nerval), France supported the Christians, England the Druzes. For standing near the center of all European politics in the East was the question of minorities, whose “interests” the Powers, each in its own way, claimed to protect and represent.316

This interference seems to stem from literature that has been produced about Lebanon by both the French and the British.

Fig. 3.2: Beirut City center after its reconstruction. Credit: Author

There have been several arguments in regards to the phenomenon of modernization in Lebanon. The argument stems from the fact that even though Lebanon acquired a modern image since its inception as an independent state, modernization was only skin deep. Modernity in a sense was not at the basis of modernization. In assessing modern literary productions in Lebanon before the civil war and after, Samira Aghacy describes the attitude of Lebanese writers toward modernity:

At the same time, Lebanese writers continue to respond to modernity in a multiplicity of ways. If Western superiority has to be acknowledged in the domain of science and technology, these writers are unwilling to capitulate to Western values in the national, moral, and religious domains. Within this framework, modernity is condemned and seen as a source of imperialistic control, cultural threat, and a source of chaos and anarchy. Because the spiritual harbors the essential hallmark of cultural identity, these writers insist on the need to preserve the distinctiveness of their culture.\(^{317}\)

Aghacy’s main point is to reveal the concept of modernization without modernity in the Lebanese contemporary novel or more specifically, the literary elements in the fictional novel that point towards modernization, which actually expose a lack of modernity. Modernization for Aghacy is the process of introducing western technological elements into a certain society. The other aspect is that of modernity itself:

Accordingly, the West, which is the source of technological development, is seen as a model to be copied and emulated by third-world cultures that are seen as "perpetual consumers" of a modern technology. By contrast, modernity (al-hadatha) is a totalizing ideology grounded in Western cultural norms and beliefs, what Neil Lazarus refers to as the "Westernness of modernity," the traditional concept of modernity as a Western invention. It is

the integration into Arab society of what is considered alien Western ideas and modes of thought.\textsuperscript{318}

These two factors seem to be integral in Aghacy’s thematic exploration. This thematic exploration capitalizes in her rhetoric about an image of modernization, with a lack of modernity still inherent in Lebanese society. This lack of modernity though is not to be thought of in terms of a society that is lost in a modern world, but rather as a society that is struggling to keep the elements of its traditional self. It is a rebellion against modernity. Therefore modernization becomes a foreign element that is adhered to an otherwise anti modernist society.

Even though this analysis unfolds in the field of literary criticism, its main points could easily be transferred to the architectural domain. The reactionary attitude in Lebanon towards modern architectural forms could be represented in the zoning laws that are being passed today in response to a rapidly urbanizing country. This primarily takes shape in two major zoning requirements that have established themselves as standards in almost every suburban zoning law that has been reformed since 2005. That is, since the withdrawal of Syrian troops that have been stationed in Lebanon for almost thirty years. These two elements are the requirement of a red tile roof and a natural stone siding on every building. The percentages usually vary from 40% to 100% depending on the municipality and building location. This attempt to re-evoke the traditional Lebanese image can, in a sense, be considered anti-modern, or a reaffirmation of a traditional architectural identity in the face of a growing concrete jungle spawned by modern construction technologies.

In essence then, the two phases of the orientalist approach could be theoretically constructed to fit the Lebanese situation. In the first instance, an orientalist approach

\textsuperscript{318} Ibid. PP.
can easily be discerned through the various western publications about Lebanon as part of a larger orient, and in the second, modernization could be considered as a foreign element, a western element that has been imported or imposed on an oriental culture. In terms of the modernist architecture that developed in Beirut, and in the manner it fits within an Orientalist mode of thinking, Jad Tabet sums this position up in the following manner:

Common views about the impact of modern architecture on developing countries often described it as a violent process whereby imported modern patterns, created in Western industrialized countries, were imposed by force on native cultures, destroying their values and traditions. Local modern architects assimilated to post-colonial elites are also described as being brainwashed by imported Western images, suffering from alienation and schizophrenia, and incapable of producing anything but pale copies of the International Style.\(^{319}\)

Yet, this part of the dissertation is not intended to criticize the orientalist approach, but rather merely to present it. In this sense, we can conclude that within an orientalist framework of understanding, we can only project what an orientalist argument would be. In this case, it is basically that modernist architecture, being a western invention, is imposed upon the orient as a sign of western hegemony and an assertion of the supremacy of the technological west. The reception of modernization by the orient as a consumer of western technological advancements solidifies its position as secondary to the west.

**3.23: Conclusion:**

An Orientalist approach towards understanding Lebanese modernist productions surely exists. If it is not elaborated in the architectural field, it is still much debated in

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other spheres such as literature, political science, or cultural criticism. The ideas
inherent in these analyses are, as shown, easily transferable, and Orientalism in
architecture has some strong points. These will be discussed later in the dissertation to
assess their validity or inadequacy in regards to our understanding of modernist
architectural productions in Lebanon.
3.3: Critical Regionalism

3.31: Introduction:

Arbid poses the question in his dissertation on Lebanese modernism: What might be ‘critical regionalism’ for Lebanon, and what might it resist? But before we venture into trying to answer this question, we need to formulate the parameters of critical regionalism in general terms. ‘Critical Regionalism’ is a term that first appeared with the writings of Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in the early 1980’s. Tzonis and Lefaivre consider critical regionalism to be “one of the alternatives to a clearly aging modernism, and to postmodernism’s younger but prematurely ailing sibling, deconstruction.” Kenneth Frampton followed first with an article, and then became the prime promoter of critical regionalism in many of his subsequent publications.

Critical regionalism describes a type of architecture that “engaged its particular geographical and cultural circumstances in deliberate, subtle, and vaguely politicized ways.” This engagement was considered a form of resistance to the homogeneous environment that was being perpetuated by modernist forms, particularly the so-called International Style. Modernism, from a critical regionalist perspective, was erasing local identity, cultural specificity and traditional architectural forms that gave meaning to the built environment. In this sense, it was a form of resistance against the placelessness of modernist architectural homogeneity considered to be devoid of a

325 Frampton, K. 2007. Modern architecture: a critical history, Thames & Hudson. PP. 315
meaningful cultural characteristic. Critical regionalism is not to be understood as a style though. It is rather an attitude towards design that creates regional productions, different, varied yet regionally and culturally meaningful. It is a process of regional communication that eventually gives meaning to the urban and suburban construct, and which are place conscious\textsuperscript{326}

Additionally, as Frampton points out, critical regionalism should not be thought of as a vernacular that has emerged out of a collective set of conditions, but rather the regional ‘schools’ that are a reflection of an architect’s conscious response within the framework of a modern society.\textsuperscript{327} In this respect, we cannot understand for example the architectural productions that emerged in Beirut between 1920 and 1940 as a form of critical regionalist architecture, even though these buildings displayed regional characteristics that took their cue from local aesthetic elements.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{beirut_building_1930s.png}
\caption{A building in Beirut from 1930’s. Credit: İdil Elveriş}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{326} POWELL, D. R. 2007. Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape, University of North Carolina Press. PP. 21
\textsuperscript{327} FRAMPTON, K. 2007. Modern architecture: a critical history, Thames & Hudson. PP. 314
Even though Saliba regards these productions as belonging to a class of their own, a
transitory phase as he classifies them, he still regards them as a symbol of the early
westernization of the city of Beirut, and a consequence of French colonialism
established in 1920. This includes the possibility of contribution of French architects
such as Lucien Cavro for example, yet this perspective remains speculative even in
Saliba’s own words.\footnote{Saliba, R. \& Assaf, M. 1998. \textit{Beirut 1920-1940: domestic architecture between tradition and
modernity}, Order of Engineers and Architects. PP. 25}

In a sense, this section of the chapter could be understood as a link from Frampton’s
expansion of the subject to include the Lebanese case.

\textbf{3.32: Critical Regionalist Approach:}

In an article that was published in 1983, Frampton expanded on the subject of critical
regionalism, delineating six points that constitute the outline for an architecture of
Critical Regionalism.\footnote{Frampton, K. 1983a. Prospects for a Critical Regionalism. \textit{Perspecta}, 20, 147-162.} It is important here to understand the delineation of critical
regionalism through these six points and how eventually the Lebanese situation is
theoretically accommodated. Frampton’s first point addresses ‘Culture and
between civilization and culture still afforded the possibility of maintaining some
general control over the shape and significance of the urban fabric.”\footnote{Ibid. PP-14-30} According to
Frampton, the disruption of the concerns of civilization established since the
Enlightenment gave way to a fundamental transformation where civilization is no longer concerned with instrumental reason, but rather with a never ending chain of means and ends, replacing reason with utility. In a sense, architecture has become a slave to the production industry which has exercised a profound restriction on its possibilities to manifest itself as a transformative element in society.

The second point that Frampton establishes is in regards to the position of the avant-garde in the modern context. The avant-garde, which was always inseparable from the architectural domain and an essential element within modernity, has retreated. This retreat of the avant-garde in light of the struggle between socialism and capitalism caused a withdrawal from its project of transforming the existing reality. According to Frampton, the avant-gardists could not fathom the possibility of transforming the age-old human condition that could break bourgeois repression. This eventually caused the arts to gravitate towards commodity, and towards pure technique or pure scenography, which Frampton associates with “the so called postmodern architects”. For Frampton, the disintegration of the avant-garde represents the end of a critical culture of resistance.

The third point discusses critical regionalism and world culture. With the effacing of the avant-garde, Frampton maintains that the possibility of architecture sustaining a critical practice is only feasible if it can equally distance itself from “the enlightenment myth of progress and from a reactionary, unrealistic impulse to return
to the architectonic forms of the pre-industrial past. This ‘arriere-garde’ as Frampton calls it, is an attempt to reconcile the essence of a cultural identity within the folds of a universal technique in order to ascend towards a future humanistic architecture. An Arriere-garde has the possibility of resistance and the capability of giving meaning to human culture. Critical regionalism in this sense embodies a culture and at the same time is a medium of universal civilization. Critical regionalism then has to deconstruct the culture it inherits within the framework of a universal civilization. What is interesting in this point is that Frampton cites the Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck in a statement that resonates with an Orientlist approach:

Western civilization habitually identifies itself with civilization as such on the pontifical assumption that what is not like it is a deviation, less advanced, primitive, or, at best, exotically interesting at a distance. Frampton here uses Jorn Utzon’s Bagsvaerd Church, built in 1976, as an example of the synthesis of universal civilization and culture. The exterior of the church, an economic and modular precast structure engulfs a more organic interior shell whose construction negates economy. Frampton suggests that the exterior of the church with its modular and rational system stands in opposition to the clearly uneconomic approach to the organic interior. This approach stands in direct opposition to the normative image of a church which, if it would be replicated in a modern society, would only form in kitsch and nostalgia.

The fourth point is concerned in terms of the resistance of the Place-Form. The megalopolis is in a sense invading all urban space and replacing what used to be a
It is more concerned with logistics and infrastructure, and allocating land use and its distribution. Here Frampton deploys Martin Heidegger to explicate the phenomenon of universal placelessness. Frampton maintains that Heidegger’s position in regards to space and place is tightly connected with forms of being, and consequently, being “can only take place in a domain that is clearly bounded.” The bounded domain in this respect becomes a prerequisite for an architecture of resistance. The loss of the urban place as a consequence in the process of modernization can only be reclaimed through the defined domain. The perimeter block, the galleria, the atrium, the forecourt and the labyrinth could all be viewed as elements of an urban form that could be considered bounded. Yet these urban forms, which in many instances have been translated and subverted into malls, housing projects and hotels, still contain the dormant potential of creating the place-form. People in their homes watching television have no need for public space, and therefore, public place disintegrates and becomes only the locus of predetermined social events.

The fifth point discusses culture versus nature. Critical regionalism, as opposed to modernization, embraces a site’s topography as an element of its regional geography. The razing the site to a flat strip of land to minimize cost and maximize production can only be regarded as a gesture towards absolute placelessness. The particularities of a site are disregarded in the process of rationalizing construction. Frampton gives fenestration as an example, both aesthetically and tectonically as a domain of resistance. For Frampton fenestration can give a regional meaning and character if

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343 Ibid. PP. 24
344 Ibid.
345 Ibid.
346 Ibid. PP. 26
347 Ibid. PP. 27
openings can respond to local factors such as the direction of light and its quantity. The even distribution of light should be avoided if a resistant architecture is to have a regional value. The adherence to mass marketed shapes and sizes, and their repetition thereon on a building façade only leads to submission to universal technique and to the disappearance of the relation between building and site. The tectonic, which is not to be confused with the purely technical, should take precedence over the scenographic:

The tectonic remains to us today as a potential means for distilling play between material, craftwork and gravity, so as to yield a component which is in fact a condensation of the entire structure. We may speak here of the presentation of a structural poetic rather than the re-presentation of a façade.348

The sixth point deals with the visual versus the tactile:

The tactile and the tectonic jointly have the capacity to transcend the mere appearance of the technical in much the same way as the place-form has the potential to withstand the relentless onslaught of global modernization.349

For Frampton, to be able to resist the domination of universal technology requires the engagement of all the human senses as opposed to the primary focus on the visual alone. The amalgamation of sensory perceptions in the tectonic experience must resist the overwhelming precedence given to the visual embodied through the emphasis on perspective, and rather engage “the tactile range of human perceptions.”350

The relevance of Critical Regionalism is apparent in the manner in which architecture outside the west could be interpreted, or even envisioned. Critical Regionalism calls for the preservation and the critical transformation of regional architectonic elements

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348 Ibid.
349 Ibid.
350 Ibid.
within a culturally relevant context. This gives local architectures unique identities which are capable of resisting the placelessness of modern and contemporary practices. In addition, critical regionalism could be used as a mode of interpreting modern architecture outside the “west”. Therefore, there are different parts in the manner by which critical regionalism possibly manifests itself in regards to this research. The first is in regards to the understanding of modernism that emerged in Lebanon as a form of critical regionalism, and the second is in specific projects that point towards such an understanding. If the modern architecture of Beirut subscribes to the described six points that Frampton elaborates upon, then it should display regional characteristics that sets it apart from modern architecture in the “west”. Yet, in this respect, this could also mean that modern architecture in Beirut is not “authentic” to the modernist agenda in the ‘west’, as it does not satisfy its conditions either. In this respect, we become trapped between choosing to categorize ‘Lebanese modernism’ either between ‘western modernism’ or ‘Critical Regionalism’.

In his article ‘Modern Beirut’ K. Michael Hays identifies functionalism and the avant-garde as the two aspects usually employed to describe the primary delineations within modernism. Yet Hays maintains that neither of these two aspects is useful to understand the architecture of modern Beirut, neither during the French mandate, nor after. Functionalism, the interplay between form and content, falls short from describing the modernist architecture of Beirut nor can it even be seen as a “symbolic functionalism”. The avant-garde on the other hand does not seem to find a vocation in Beirut:


\[^{352}\text{Ibid.}\]
As for the avant-garde, Beirut modernism seems never to have shared either a productivist desire for proliterianization or Western Europe’s utopia of the new, receiving as it did a modern ‘language’ fully formed, as a limiting condition, or at the very least as a legacy on which to elaborate, more than a goal to be won.353

This for Hays leaves one possible route for understanding, which is, Frampton’s critical regionalism. Hays seems to argue that Beirut’s modernist architecture seems to have resisted western modernism and produced a regionalist architecture that responded to the local conditions. This clearly places the architecture of Beirut in general terms within an architecture of resistance, a critical regionalism that defied both ideology and universal technique as well as the tendency to conform to predetermined global design tendencies. Arbid seems to agree with such a perspective:

With the absence of discursive activity, architectural practice in Lebanon developed a high degree of resistance. It drew its autonomy from silence, yet paradoxically it took its ideas from the market place. In this pragmatic model, not only did form follow function, but form revealed also the pratique that engendered it. 354

This is not to say that Arbid considers critical regionalism the only possible model that can give an insight on the modernist architectural productions of Beirut. His thesis focused on identifying the parameters for future theoretical work, and did not take a position that favored one approach over another.

To display how critical regionalism was manifest in Lebanese modernist productions, we can look briefly at some of the works of the Lebanese architect Aassem Salam. Salam struggled to reconcile modern architectural paradigms with regional elements.

353 Ibid.
His design for the Serail of Saida for example in 1962,\textsuperscript{355} has different parts of the complex organized around interior courtyards, bringing to mind the traditional courtyard houses spread around the region. It bears some resemblance to the Khan of Saida,\textsuperscript{356} which is an older structure in the city dating to the Ottoman period. The resemblance is not only in terms of its general layout as a public building composed around a large central hall, but also in that both the Khan and the Serail have a gallery space that opens towards the central hall.

Fig. 3.4: Saida Serail showing the open central hall. Source: Hani Kosto

\textsuperscript{355} George Arbid dates the building to 1962 while Gebran Yacoub dates it to 1965.
\textsuperscript{356} A khan is a building that was used as a motel for travelers or as a place to store and trade food.
It also evokes Frampton’s point on fenestration specifically in terms of dealing with the details of these openings. Rifat Chadirji, the famous Iraqi architect, who was a close friend of Salam, also utilized a similar vocabulary in his design for the Federation of Industries Building in Iraq in 1966. Arbid points out that Salam was motivated in part by Chadirji’s call for a regional character in architecture, as well as being affected by the architectural syntax developed by the British architect Sir Basil Spence in terms of material articulation on the façade.357

Fig. 3.6: Assem Salam Saida Serail 1962  Credit: Al Mohandes Magazine, 2011

Fig. 3.7: Rifat Chaderji: Federation of Industries 1965  Credit: Chaderji Foundation
Chaderji, who maintained a residence that he designed for himself as well as an 
arborial office, also designed several projects in Lebanon. He was connected to a 
group of working architects that were transforming the architectural and urban image 
of the region. Chaderji sought to create a synthesis between traditional and modern 
architecture:

I set out to learn from traditional architecture and to achieve a synthesis 
between traditional forms and inevitable advent of modern technology. My 
aim was to create an architecture which at once acknowledges the place in 
which it is built, yet which sacrifices nothing to modern technical 
capability.  

Furthermore, Salam, in discussing the architecture of Beirut and the role of 
government, has a concern and a specific understanding of the city of Beirut as a site 
that governs architectural productions:

Urban growth in the city of Beirut has always been dependant on exceptional 
circumstances of varying intensity. Moreover, the site has offered very 
definite limitations for natural growth. The double barrier of mountain ranges 
is a physical handicap to communication with the interior, and other 
Mediterranean coastal cities like Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre and Haifa, all have 
geographic advantages. Flat areas for easy expansion are very limited in 
Beirut, and the mountain slopes reach down to the sea.  

Salam also considered that a regional architecture necessitated a certain distinction 
from western architecture. Raif Fayad remarks on Salam’s attitude towards “imported 
arquitecture”:

كان سلام يرفض سيطرة العمارة المستوردة ووصفها بالعمارة (مع آل التعريف) 
والحضارة الغربية بوصفها الحضارة. كان مقتناً بأن العمارة يجب أن تكون ابٍة  

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358 SHORTO, S., KOSREMELLI, S. & BOYER, C. 2011. A Lebanese Perspective: Houses and Other Work by 
Simone Kosremelli, Images Publishing Group. PP. 21  
Prestel. PP.122
Salam used to refuse the hegemony of imported architecture and characterizing it as the architecture (with the definitive article) and western culture as “the culture”. He was convinced that architecture must be the daughter of its place. Thus he built the Serail of Saida, the mosque of Khashoqji and Broumana high school as well as some of the arches of the ministry of education.361

Maha Zaraqit, a Lebanese journalist, points out that Salam refused to use the pilotis, stressing that his walls reached down to the ground, as if they were an organic element that sprouted from the soil.362 His choice of material, quarried locally, attests to his commitment to a local architecture. His Khashoqji mosque goes further in recomposing the tectonic elements into a new formal language. Elie Haddad describes the work in the mosque:

Even though it used the traditional square star with eight angles as the basis for its plan, it maintained the details of the architectonic pieces from the sandstone walls and the concrete skeleton to the roof. Even though this building is particularly modern, it is nevertheless imprinted with certain characteristics that established a contemporary reading of the Islamic tradition without falling into the tradition of mimicking old forms.364

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361 Author’s Translation


364 Author’s Translation
This attitude, to counter the standardization of the architectural object within a universal world culture; which seemed to erase local traditions and replace them with a singular world image; motivated Salam’s work towards an architecture of resistance. Such architecture attempted to reestablish the tectonic of the vernacular within a modernist vocabulary. Salam’s design for the ministry of tourism’s building on Hamra Street also displays such intentions.
This building again reinterprets the use of traditional arches to weave the exterior space with the interior place. Furthermore, the window treatment is layered over the glass in a modular manner within a modernist vocabulary. The marriage of the regional with the universal creates a unique and local character. This tendency would be definitive of Salam’s work throughout his entire career. In an obituary to Salam in 2012, Yusef Bazzi wrote an article in Al Mustaqbal newspaper that summarized this lifelong quest:

What motivated Assem Salam was his deep passion to shape the styles of modern architecture, from construction methods, materials and styles, to the benefit of the sustainability of the local heritage and identity and their

renewal, and to expose their historical specificity, and to preserve the
spiritual relationship between building and man.\textsuperscript{366}

There is no doubt that there existed in Lebanon a regionalist tendency during the
modernist period. Salam was one of its promoters. He was one of the founders of the
school of architecture at AUB, and was heavily engaged in the formulation and the
policies of the order of architects and engineers in Lebanon. He was elected the
president of the order in 1996 after a political battle over the reconstruction of Beirut
city center. He was a staunch opponent of Solidere, the Lebanese holding company in
charge of the reconstruction of downtown Beirut, because he considered that it was
eroding a historical tradition which will deny the Lebanese people access to a
unifying city center. His career is summarized by resistance against any element that
threatened to cause the severance of a continuous regional building tradition.

Salam consciously strove for reconciliation, and for the production of a regional
tectonic. Regionalist tendencies could be found in many of the Lebanese architects
that were practicing during that period. Farid Trad notes the need to address light and
ventilation concerns particular to Lebanon:

What should be achieved, in Lebanon, is a proper response to climatic
conditions such as protection from sun exposure and healthy ventilation.
Today, most buildings are exposed to the east or west, where the sun is
moderate in the winter and harsh in the summer, thus causing a greenhouse
effect. A proper orientation would expose the house to the north and south,
and ensure appropriate ventilation to all rooms.\textsuperscript{367}

Such a statement would resonate with Frampton’s six points. Other architects realized
the limitations that Lebanon posed in terms of technology, and therefore sought to
produce a modernist architecture that utilized whatever technology was at hand within

\textsuperscript{366} Author’s translation
the general outlines of a modernist architecture. Wassek Adib, a Lebanese architect who practiced primarily during the modernist era, stated in an interview with Arbid that all they wanted to be was to be modern, only to discover that they were local. Perhaps this limiting characteristic played a role in giving a regional character to the modernist architectural productions of Beirut.

3.33: Conclusion:

The reassessment of critical regionalism in a Lebanese context is necessary. If we are to understand Lebanese modernism as belonging to an external version of modernism, one that is uniquely local, with only few influences of “western” modernism, then this suggests on one hand the possibility of several modernisms, and on the other hand, that Lebanese modernism is not an authentic expression of modernism in the “west”.

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3.4: Third World Modernism

3.41: Introduction:

Beyond the discussion of the term ‘Third World’, which is used generally today to describe developing nations, this part of the dissertation will look at how ‘modernist’ architecture in extra western spheres are regarded by researchers belonging to such nations. Third world modernism therefore has become in the recent years a sphere of discussion that attempts to understand modernist architectural productions in third world countries, and how they might relate to the modern movement. The first publication that aimed to unify this discussion is Duanfang Lu’s book “Third World Modernism”, which coined the term itself and engaged several researchers from around the globe to write under this title. This does not mean that there was no previous research, but rather, the consolidation of research on modernism focused on so-called ‘third world’ countries now occurred under a common heading.

The relevance of this sphere of debate to the case of Lebanon seems self evident if we are to consider that Lebanon as a nation belongs to the “third world”. This necessitates in the first instance an exploration of the themes of “third world modernism” and how they might relate to the modern architecture of Beirut.

Third World Modernism also represents a relatively new approach to looking at the development of modernism outside the west. It was triggered by dissatisfaction with the literature produced about modernism in third world countries.369 The lack of any research on modernism outside the west in early publications generated a reaction to initiate interdisciplinary debates in the respective countries. Therefore, Third World Modernism

Modernism cannot be viewed as a unified theoretical approach, but rather as a forum where publications and ideas are disseminated.\textsuperscript{370} Yet, there are some unifying elements that all these approaches seem to share. In addition to the approach of Third World Modernism as a forum of ideas, a new approach attempting to expand the boundaries of this forum to include all non-western histories of modernism has also emerged in recent years. A series of collected essays in an edited book was published under the title \textit{Non West Modernist Past} in 2011.\textsuperscript{371} This book, in a similar fashion to Lu’s, attempts to expand the scope of research on modernism outside the ‘west’.

At its outset, \textit{Third World Modernism} as well as \textit{Non-West Modernist Past} seem to synthesize the orientalist approach as well as the critical regionalist approach even though it has certain reservations about each.\textsuperscript{372} Lu summarizes this approach as challenging the traditional view of the centrality of modernism to the western world:

\begin{quote}
This orientation has been changed as the canonical narratives which privilege Western modes of thinking and aesthetics are challenged, and orientalist perspectives on other cultures are debunked. Informed by turbulent theoretical debates throughout the humanities and social sciences, scholarship on the far-reaching variability of modernism has begun to grow, advancing our understanding of how modernist architecture was adopted, modified, interpreted and contested in different parts of the world.\textsuperscript{373}
\end{quote}

In short, this approach attempts to fill a gap in publications about modernism outside the west, expanding the understanding of how modernism was received in extra western countries, and bridge the research towards a more comprehensive understanding of the modernist movement. Yet, amongst the seemingly disparate

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid. PP 2
\textsuperscript{373} Ibid. PP. 1
\end{footnotes}
viewpoints, there are certain elements that this type of research seems to advocate. Lu identifies how such elements manifested themselves through various processes including “independence, decolonization, nation building, architectural modernization, and the development of the cold war.”

3.42: Third World Modernism

There are several underlying criteria that third world modernism adheres to that span its analytical approach to modernism in general. The first is in its attack on the homogeneity of modernist discourse, arguing that this homogeneity is imaginary at best. In this “mythologized Eurocentric canon”, the modern movement is contested as being anything close to a uniform body of ideas and works, one that anything could be assessed against or integrated into which does not adhere to the simple formula of simply existing in the west.

The second criterion lies in the civilizational claim of modernity as a hallmark of the west exported to the rest of the developing world. As Vincent Scully has stated in his book on Modern Architecture: “Modern Architecture is a product of Western Civilization”. Such a statement constitutes the parameters of this claim. Here, modernism becomes property of the west, and the subsequent modernizations are cast as derivatives. This conceptual construct is also challenged by disputing that modernism can at all be claimed by the west alone, by reference to early modernist ideology that necessitated a transnational identity and global reach through viewing

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374 Ibid. PP. 2
376 Ibid. PP. 256
modernism as globalism, \(^{378}\) that is, a non-exclusive phenomenon. Modernism was supposed to be international. It is an essential criterion in it being a global architectural trend. On the other hand, the success of modernism in the west is highly contested.

![Fig. 3.10: A comment on Loos’ Goldman Sachs façade. The caption reads: ‘Brooding about art, the most modern man walks through the streets. Suddenly, he stops transfixed. He has found that for which he has searched so long.’ Credit: Kenneth Frampton](image)

This was evident by the negative reception of modernist aesthetics in Europe itself that the spread of modern architecture in the west was neither “natural nor spontaneous”. \(^{380}\) The attachment of the position of modernist architecture to colonialism in this respect becomes inevitable, especially given that the formulation of modernist ideals and the dissemination of modernist forms and aesthetics took place in the age of the self conscious colonial rule.

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The third criterion lies in the assumption that modernism is a global phenomenon with a linear trajectory, one which all nations will have to cross.\textsuperscript{381} This view in turn reconstitutes the concept of modernity itself as a prerogative necessity, and the march towards modernity a race where the players’ positions within this global race could be assessed. A European country’s position is somewhat ahead on the race track, whereas an African or middle eastern nation somewhat behind. What this view fails to describe is that the reception of modernism and modernist aesthetics had several factors that guided its implementation in different parts of the world. Whereas for example in China, dropping excess ornamentation from facades and roofs did not take effect until after 1955 in an effort to be more economical, in Beirut, modernist aesthetics had nothing to do with cutting cost or searching for the most economical design, but rather, as we shall see later, the architecture of Hamra for example displayed a well articulated modernist vocabulary that resisted the concept of economy.

In terms of structure, third world modernism seems to deal with two main models. The first model is specific to countries that underwent a history of colonization/decolonization, such as most Middle Eastern countries, India and South America, and the second model deals with countries that underwent a process of modernization as part of nation-building such as China, Turkey or Israel.\textsuperscript{382} Nevertheless, the phenomenon of nation building seems to be a shared ground between the two models. Decolonized countries eventually underwent a process of nation-building, with various intervening factors.

\textsuperscript{381} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{382} In her book, Lu mentions five elements that significantly contribute to this discourse and they are “independence”, “decolonization”, “nation building”, “architectural modernization” and “the development of the cold war.”
The two primary models seem to display four different elements that dominate the discussion. The first element concerns the identity of a modernism that belongs to third world countries, distinct and yet taking its cue from western modernism. The second element falls within the sphere generated by Edward Said, i.e., possessing an orientalist flavor, proclaiming modernism as a uniquely western phenomenon falling within the sphere of western technological superiority. The third is a refusal to accept the notion of multiple modernisms outside the west, as well as the tendency to bundle such phenomena under one categorical set that is variably different from western modernism.\textsuperscript{383} The fourth is a certain recognition that modernism unfolded in the countries of decolonization with a clear distinction between such countries and those of the third world.\textsuperscript{384}

Therefore, this notion of modernism in third world countries becomes tightly connected to the process of either colonization/decolonization or modernization and nation-building driven by a nationalistic ideology, such as that described by Sibel Bozdogan in her book “Modernism and Nation Building”.\textsuperscript{385} Modernism which was utilized as a vehicle for constructing a national identity through a modern urban image falls categorically under the effort to understand how modernism manifested itself outside the west.

Since Lebanon underwent a process of colonization/decolonization, it seems to better fit the second model. The modernization of Beirut has been already researched by several historians, but it is necessary here to give a general idea of this process of modernization. In Beirut, the process of modernization could be said to have

\textsuperscript{384} Ibid. PP. 16
undergone three main phases: The first under the Ottomans, the second during French Colonialism, and the third after the formation of the state of Lebanon in 1943.\footnote{TABET, J. 1998. From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism, Modern Architecture in Lebanon and the problem of cultural identity. In: ROWE, P. G. & SARKIS, H. (eds.) Projecting Beirut: episodes in the construction and reconstruction of a modern city. Prestel. PP. 83}

It is generally maintained that the first modernization of Beirut started with the overall modernization campaign that occurred in the Ottoman Empire around the middle of the nineteenth century with the Tanzania under Sultan Mahmud II. The Tanzania, or reforms, were an overall attempt to modernize the Ottoman Empire to stand in par with Europe. Beirut modernization was accentuated by the destruction of the souks by the Ottomans in 1915, and by a decision from Azmi Bey, the Ottoman wali then to speed up the process of reconstruction. During the Tanzania and up until the French Mandate, Beirut underwent several changes. After the massacres of 1860, the Ottoman Empire dispatched Fuad Pasha to investigate the atrocities that were committed. Fuad Pasha’s presence in Beirut paved the way to the creation of the Mutassarifiyya of Mount Lebanon. In 1888, Beirut became a provincial capital, and witnessed the implementation of Ottoman urban management policies.\footnote{HANSSEN, J. Ibid.”Your Beirut is on My Desk” Ottomanizing Beirut Under Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909). PP.44} This greatly expanded the city’s political power. Yet, even before that period, Beirut witnessed several architectural works that helped shape its ascension to the position of a provincial capital.

By 1885 the rules that governed building practices in the Ottoman Empire were extended to include all Ottoman territories including Beirut. By 1890 the tramway in Beirut started to operate. In 1896, the engineer Amin Abdel Nur translated and edited the Ottoman construction law to be applied to Beirut.\footnote{YACOUB, G. 2003. معجم الهندسة المعمارية في لبنان في القرن العشرين. Alphamedia. PP. 3} The law regulated the widths
of the streets, and governed building types and stipulated zoning laws. Without going further into detail, what is important here is to point out that the transformation of the urban fabric of the city of Beirut under Ottoman rule was not one sided, that is, was not imposed from above, but rather, it was a correlative relationship between the appointed Wali and the municipality of Beirut:

In Beirut, the development of the urban fabric was a conscious joint effort of the Ottoman government and the local population which was played out between the different valis and the municipality. Within this dual process, the border between the Ottoman state and the local society was not a topographical dichotomy, but rather involved discursively produced spaces.389

Public buildings were designed by local architects using local materials and funded by the municipality, that is, through public capital. Beirut seemed to have reflected several technological advances that were becoming popular in modern architecture. For example, the first reinforced concrete building in Lebanon was the Daniel Bliss Hall at AUB in 1900. The first central heating system was incorporated in the Palace of Philippe Pharoun in Beirut in 1901. Additionally, in 1913 the Syrian Protestant College (later AUB) implemented the first engineering program in its educational curriculum, and the same year Saint Joseph University established its first school of engineering.

The second phase of modernization occurred under the French mandate starting in 1920. Here, Beirut became the capital of the Republic of Lebanon, and within a span of 23 years many changes took place. The city periphery grew substantially with the development of Ras Beirut, Basta and Achrafiyeh. In 1922, the first reinforced

concrete water tank was erected in Achrafiyeh, and in 1927, Beirut International Airport opened for business. In 1926, land surveying and property delimitations were instituted, and the road infrastructure was expanded and connected north towards Tripoli and South towards Saida. In 1930 property law was established and the old Ottoman land codes were abolished. In that year as well, the first set of cadastral maps of Beirut were issued. Additionally, the first national concrete plant, the Société des Ciments Libanais was established in 1929 through a joint French/Lebanese private venture.

The first modernist building to appear in Beirut is generally regarded as the Saint George Hotel in 1930, and in the mid thirties four movie theatres in the early modernist style appeared in Beirut. The Almaza Beer Factory by Antoine Tabet was designed in 1934, the parliament in 1936 and the national museum in 1937. These events point to the second phase of modernization, and furthermore, point to a transitional phase from Ottoman rule to French mandate. In 1932, the first comprehensive study of Beirut, known as “Plan Danger” was undertaken.

The immense amount of modernization during the French mandate points to a spirit of rejuvenation in the country that has lifted the burden of Ottoman rule that lasted almost four hundred years. It mobilized Lebanese professionals to contribute in the transformation of the image of the country that they considered to be close to total sovereignty. By 1943, the independence of Lebanon would be solidified, and a new phase of modernization began.

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390 Arbid maintains that the original design that was conventionally attributed to Antoine Tabet is actually the design of J. Poirrier, A. Lotte & G. Bordes with Andre Lotte as the architect in charge. Tabet later on enlarged the third floor and added a fourth floor. He also dates the building to 1931, whereas Robert Saliba dates the building to 1930. Arbid’s date is probably the more accurate.
Arbid stipulates that the progression of this era of modernization should be understood in terms of continuity rather than disruption:

When Lebanon achieved independence in 1943, modernity was a synonym of westernization in continuity with the Mandate rather than a break in search of a national style. The keywords for Beirut were and still are, crossroad of cultures, bridge to the East, arena where East and west meet, the door to the Orient, and the Switzerland of the Orient. With this in mind, the subsequent unfolding of architecture in Lebanon in the 1950s and the 1960s is to be understood in continuity with the previous period, rather than in rupture with it.391

With the independence from colonial power, Lebanon started a new phase of modernization which would reach its zenith during the reign of president Fouad Shehab who ruled from 1958 till 1964. The amount of work during the reign of president Shehab was formidable. The Lebanese government under Shehab managed to establish the legal framework for higher education, the formation of the national center for scientific research, the establishment of the urban planning decree, the establishment of the national central bank, the formation of social security, the construction of local municipal schools for primary education, and so many governmental institutions that are considered essential to the existence of a modern society.

3.43: Conclusion:

The process of modernization and nation building in Lebanon therefore is a necessary element to understand the proliferation of modernist architecture. And though modernism was actively sought during the formation of the state of Lebanon, a sense of tradition was never rejected. The conflict between old and new was almost

nonexistent. Modernism, it seems, was not seen as something to contend with, but rather as a natural process of development.
Chapter 4

History of Modernity and Modernism in

Lebanon & Beirut
4.1: Introduction

The following exploration will look at the development of modern architecture from the general to the specific. First, an exploration of the development in architecture in Lebanon in general will be articulated, focusing specifically on the years between 1860 and 1920. Then, a closer look at the developments in Beirut, specifically those from 1920 till 1940, and then the architecture that developed in Beirut during the modernist era, that is from 1940 till 1975.

The next chapter will zoom further into focus first on Hamra District within Beirut, and then Hamra Street within Hamra district. This exploration, in a sense, provides a hierarchy of investigation from the general to the specific, and will hopefully provide an adequate spectrum of information that will prove useful in assessing the architecture of modern Beirut theoretically.

The tension between modernity and tradition has been a defining factor in modernism. If the “optimistic vitality of early Modernism arises from its origins at the confrontation of tradition and reform,” as Juhani Pallasmaa tells us, then modernism in a sense requires the formation of a modern society, with cultural and social baggage that sets it apart from a traditional society. Here, there are two factors that are of some importance that should be explored. The first is the question of whether modern architecture in Lebanon was imposed, that is, whether it was instituted by the government for example, or by colonial powers before the formation of the modern Lebanese state, or whether the emergence of modern architecture was a process of natural progression that precedes independence or even colonialism. Other

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cities around the world saw modernism as an imported concept, and implemented in a culture that was not yet ready for it. In the case of Chandigarh for example, Frampton makes an interesting remark:

> The emerging crisis of Western enlightenment, its inability to nurture an existing culture or even to sustain the significance of its own classical forms, its lack of any goal beyond constant technical innovation and optimum economic growth, all seem to be summed up in the tragedy of Chandigarh – a city designed for automobiles in a country where many, as yet, still lack a bicycle.  

This contradiction, the sudden implementation of modern architecture which was a quality of the tabula-rasa, was inherent in some of the approaches in modern architecture. This quality nevertheless seems to be lacking in the case of Lebanon. Even in the Hamra region, where urbanization happened rapidly, we can still see today many remnants of the gradual urban progression of style and technique. Furthermore, when Samir Khalaf, the Lebanese Sociologist, spoke about “rapid urbanization”, the period he researched was a span of thirty years. The suggestion from Khalaf is that the Lebanese case underwent a natural process of modernization, perhaps a transformation that was faster than usual.

Still, the development of an architecture that reflects a modern society might not be merely enough of a criterion to integrate such architecture within the framework of the modernist movement in architecture in general, if we can define a movement as such. This still requires the exploration of the parameters of the modern movement, that is, a revisiting of the three accounts that we discussed in chapter 2, and based on this reassessment, the relationship between Lebanese modernism and modern

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395 Ibid. PP.2
architecture as a criterion may be further explored. Therefore, examining modernist architecture in Lebanon requires on the one hand an understanding of the historical factors that lead to the modernization of the nation of Lebanon, and its transformation from a peasant society into a modern urban society. On the other hand, it requires the setting of parameters that allowed such architecture to develop in the process of modernization.

Setting the parameters for such an investigation is somewhat difficult as it pits two poles against each other. On one hand, certain scholars argue that the modernization in the Middle East in general terms came about through external forces. As Albert Hourani puts it:

> These changes were communicated to the Middle East, as to other parts of the world, by way of international trade, new kinds of communication and education, and new forms of administration and law, imposed either by indigenous governments wishing to acquire the strength of the European states, or else by those states themselves as they expanded their empires by means of military strength given them by the changes in their societies.396

This quote is from a book entitled *The Modern Middle East* (1993), a 691 page volume featuring a collection of articles that address the period of modernization in the Middle East. The text is edited by two prominent historians of Lebanese origins, Albert Hourani and Philip Khoury. Yet, peculiarly enough, this volume does not have a single article or chapter on the Lebanese case. This does not seem to be an oversight. It seems simply that the Lebanese case does not fit the predominant model of modernization in the rest of the Middle East because of many different factors. The model of modern Middle Eastern states engaged in this book relates to states with a Muslim majority in control of governance, whereas the Lebanese political and social

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model was constructed upon an equal division of power, to a certain extent, between the two major religious groups, i.e. Islam and Christianity. In brief, the political system is based on a balanced and equal division of political power, with half the parliament comprised of Muslims and the other half of Christians. The president of the Lebanese republic is always a Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister a Muslim Sunni and the Speaker of the parliament a Muslim Shiite.

In addition, the factor of immigration played a very important role. Many Lebanese between the years 1860 and 1914 immigrated to the west. During this period of time, before the formation of the modern Lebanese state, the inhabitants of the land of Lebanon all referred to themselves as “Syrians”, since national identity was not yet shaped amongst the immigrants, they all still maintained a sense of localized identities, almost always associated with the village that they came from. They lived in tight knit communities that revolved around these micro identities. Furthermore, the return of these immigrants to Lebanon had a tremendous impact on the definition of modernity within Lebanon.

It is also worth noting that gender relations in Lebanon had many factors that affected their modern formation, as we shall see. All these factors will be addressed and posited in direct contrast to the rest of the Middle Eastern states.

The other pole of researchers argues that the formation of a modern society in Lebanon came from within. In his book *Inventing Home* (2001), Akram Khater situates the formation of a modern society in Lebanon between the years of 1870 and 1920. This period saw the forging of a middle class in Lebanon and the transition of

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this class from a peasant society into a middle class.\textsuperscript{398} Even though these formative years coincide to a certain degree with the modernist movement taking more definite shape in the west, Lebanese architecture still had a traditional building typology that followed a vernacular convention up until 1920. From 1920 till 1940, a new building type and technology started to emerge especially in Beirut.\textsuperscript{399} This building type was a transition between traditional architecture and modern architecture that was to emerge in the years to follow, and which would eventually define the architectural image of Lebanon.

In this chapter, I will briefly examine the factors that lead to the emergence of a modern society in Lebanon and investigate the transformation of Lebanese architecture from the vernacular type into the transitional “colonial” building type and eventually toward a modernist vocabulary.

It is necessary to note here that this chapter is not intended to provide an in depth examination of the formation of contemporary Lebanon, but rather an exploration of the key historical factors that are essential to the thesis.

\textsuperscript{398} Ibid.

4.2: Lebanese Modernism and Architecture: 1860-1920

To explore the formation of Lebanese modernism in a broad cultural sense requires an exhaustive analysis that goes well beyond the scope of this dissertation. A more poignant and focused approach that is based around our main objective, requires a sort of a labyrinthine journey through Lebanese history that could bring into perspective the elements that pertain to that objective, to explore Lebanese modern architecture in relationship to modernism in general.

Without delving into the impact of education in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, we should explore two important factors that are of relevance. It is necessary to point out that though these educational institutions played an important role in veering the Lebanese population towards education especially with pioneering schools such as that of Ain Waraq, the school that produced the first pioneers of what is usually referred to as “Al nahda” or “the awakening”. The events that started to have an impact on the Lebanese society and pushing it towards modernism would become paramount from 1860 onwards. Additionally, before 1860, the urban development of Beirut can only be seen as part of the reforms that were initiated and carried out by the Ottoman Empire. Between 1840 and 1864, three major developments occurred in Beirut that would dramatically change the urban scene. The most prominent of these elements were the establishment of the Ottoman Bank controlled by the French government, the building of the Wharf in Beirut, and the construction of the road that linked Mount Lebanon to the coast. After 1860, there seems to have been a decisive split which propelled Lebanon towards modernity, even though much Ottoman influence would be still there in the years to follow up until the beginning of the twentieth century.
The two main factors that constitute the broad outlines for the formation of a modern society in Lebanon that are most relevant to our thesis are the immigration process that occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and gender definition that gave a high degree of rights to women in the Lebanese society. The immigration process from 1860 till 1916 which intensified from 1890 onward, witnessed a mass shift of the Lebanese population where during this period, about two hundred thousand Lebanese peasants left their villages and headed mainly to the Americas. Gender definition and the transformations that it underwent between 1860 and 1920, where women gained more power in the social structure, was the second paramount factor that contributed to the process of modernization. These two factors would eventually constitute the formation of a Lebanese middle class on one hand, and a step towards modernity on the other. These transformations would be reflected in the architecture of the period as we shall see.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, many Lebanese left Mount Lebanon and headed to the Americas. The impact of the industrial revolution was already being felt worldwide, and therefore, this immigration process is crucial to the understanding of the formation of modernity in Lebanon. As Khater puts it:

Most studies of “modernity” rightfully identify encounters with the “West” as part of the beginning of that historical process, but they tend to focus on individuals who traveled beyond a particular “cultural space”. However, in the case of Lebanon, it was not just a handful of people who traveled to the “West”; over a third of the population of the Mountain made this journey between 1890 and the onset of World War I.400

Though many immigrants never returned to Lebanon, many did. The exact numbers of these returns are ambiguous, but Khater estimates that by 1914, about 77,000

400 KHATER, A. F. 2001. Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920, University of California Press. PP. 8
immigrants returned. This number is the lowest of five estimates that were calculated using several reports.\textsuperscript{401} If this is the lowest estimated number, then the impact of the transformative role of such an enormous population is undoubtedly crucial in attempting to understand the formation of a modern society in Lebanon. The explanations of the reasons for returning vary from one source to another, but one of the most used reasons, especially in the United States, was that these immigrants returned simply because they did not succeed in the Diaspora.\textsuperscript{402} Khater, as well as others such as Mark Wayman in his book \textit{Round Trip to America}\textsuperscript{403} (1996) do not seem to agree:\textsuperscript{404}

These “Fourth of July Orators” – as one historian called them – could not conceive of any other reason that would compel immigrants to leave the land of opportunity for the “old” country, with its “outdated and oppressive customs”.\textsuperscript{405}

Irrespective of the reason, these immigrants returned with cultural baggage that has been impacted by their view of the west. With conflicting opinions about western civilization, they would pick and chose what they liked, and what they thought inadequate. This category of individuals would transform the following generations of Lebanese society, by sending their children to obtain education, and by building houses that catered to a middle class of their own making. Yet, they are not the sole factor in the process of modernization.

The second element that features prominently in accounts of the formation of a modern society in Lebanon was the process of gender definition, Khater insists this is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{401} Ibid. PP. 111-112
\item \textsuperscript{402} Ibid. PP. 112
\item \textsuperscript{403} WYMAN, M. 1996. \textit{Round-trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930}, Cornell University Press.
\item \textsuperscript{404} KHATER, A. F. 2001. \textit{Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920}, University of California Press.
\item \textsuperscript{405} Ibid. PP. 112
\end{itemize}
paramount in understanding the development of modernization. Gender definition in Lebanon is closely tied with the silk industry. Before silk became a growing western commodity, a Lebanese peasant had a specific set of arrangements that ensured his livelihood, one of which was silk production. With expanding demand for Lebanese silk from Europe, specifically from France, the transformation would impact the Lebanese financial life as well as social and gender roles. In terms of the financial impact, by the early 1890’s there were about 159 Lebanese owned silk factories in Mount Lebanon. This newly acquired wealth would transform the architectural image of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Integrating women in the work force early on, would eventually empower and emancipate women in Lebanon in the decades to follow.

Within the framework of traditional Lebanese peasant life, gender was a well defined hierarchy, and the boundaries were far from flexible. As the silk demand increased, the necessity for manual labor increased. With the formation of silk factories first by French Entrepreneurs and quickly after by Lebanese land owners, the struggle to find skilled labor increased. Lebanese men avoided working in silk factories. The Lebanese peasant considered that working the land was his domain, not working in a factory. Furthermore, men who worked in these factories were extremely unreliable. They would work for a week’s wage, and when they got paid, they would disappear. Silk factory work was considered a transient task.

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406 Ibid.
409 Ibid. PP. 31
This is where the role of women in the industrial domain came in. According to Khater, Lebanese women did not dispute wages, and were a reliable work force committed to working in a factory setting.\textsuperscript{410} Traditionally, the women’s work in a household was not quantified. With women working in factories, her wages became the first indicator of the worth of her labor. In the beginning, a woman’s factory wage was given to the head of the household, but soon this changed as factory owners thought it more beneficial to negotiate contracts with the workers instead of intermediaries. Eventually, a woman’s wage would be put aside for her dowry.\textsuperscript{411} This would eventually give women in the Lebanese culture an early step towards personal financial independence.

These transformations gave the Lebanese peasant a newly acquired wealth that will allow them to transform their living conditions, and would give Lebanese women a stable foothold that would eventually propel them into the modern financial system.

In many countries, modernization was sought at governmental level. In the case of Turkey for example, modernization came from above, through state legislation, and with the reforms that were started first during the Ottoman Empire, and eventually, through the reforms introduced by Ataturk. In Lebanon however, with the lack of an independent state until 1943, modernization took a different path. And even after the formation of modern Lebanon, the Lebanese government did not play a vital role in the process of modernization until the ‘golden age’ of the fifties, during the presidency of General Fouad Shehab.

In addressing this period of development, one building type seems to sit at a peculiar junction of architecture and social modernities. The central hall house that

\textsuperscript{410} Ibid. PP. 32
\textsuperscript{411} Ibid. PP. 36
predominated Beirut and the mountain in Lebanon during the second half of the
tenueenth century is somewhat of an oxymoron. On one hand, it is considered the
quintessential traditional Lebanese type, and on the other hand, it is considered the
first modern house in Lebanon. Frederich Ragette, in his book *Architecture in
Lebanon: The Lebanese House during the eighteenth and nineteenth century* (1980),
locates the central hall house within the traditional building typologies of Lebanese
architecture.412

Fig. 4.1: Traditional Lebanese house in Byblos. Credit: Author

Lebanese residential architecture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries underwent
a progressive evolution from simple mud and rubble construction to cut stone houses
and eventually to the formation of several typologies that defined Lebanese traditional
architecture up until the beginning of the twentieth century.413 Yet the problem of this
evolution is that it is hard to follow. The problem lies in the ability of the researcher to
accurately date the buildings at hand. Ragette recognizes this difficulty:

412 RAGETTE, F. 1980. *Architecture in Lebanon: the Lebanese house during the 18th and 19th centuries*,
Caravan Books.
413 Ibid.
The exact dating of anonymous residential architecture in general is difficult; in a country like Lebanon it is practically impossible. Communal chronicles do not exist, there are only chronicles of a few ruling families or of religious institutions. This is why exact dates can be given only for the residences of important families.414

This is in a certain respect a setback, because tracing the evolution of a building type becomes more of a challenge. Yet, Ragette stresses that “the chronological succession of examples corresponds well to the morphological evolution of the houses, and does not present any contradictions.”415 To determine a line of morphological evolution is also in itself problematic because buildings are related to socioeconomic status. If a peasant in the early eighteenth century could afford to build only a specific building type, and another peasant in the early nineteenth century decided to build a house of equal affordability, how can we distinguish and date these two buildings, especially as the building techniques remained virtually the same? Ragette seems to point to one resolution of this matter. His argument is that dating these buildings is not necessarily reflected through a system of chronological evolution but instead through recognizing the elements of morphological and typological evolution of the buildings, starting with the simplest forms to more elaborate and complex forms.416 This necessitates that we briefly survey the development of the Lebanese house through the development of its morphology from the simplest division of space and use of materials to more complex spatial divisions and a more refined uses of building materials.

According to Ragette, the Lebanese peasant house around the beginning of the nineteenth century was comprised of stone/ rubble and mortar construction with a

414 Ibid. pp.129
415 Ibid.
416 Ibid.
wood and clay roof enclosing one or more rooms. The typology of this house reflected the communal social structure of the Lebanese family. A main room that acted as the central space for the family and guests, and secondary semiprivate or private spaces, depending on the size of the house, were linked to this central space. Since the family occupied the “central position in the extensive framework of communal attachments and traditional loyalties”, the house plan reflected this communality. In its simplest form the Lebanese house had a rectangular shape. It was composed of one room that multitasked for any necessary function. Secondary functions were attached to this common space in bigger houses. (Figures 1 and 2).

![Floor Plan](https://example.com/floor_plan.png)

Fig. 4.2: House in Amchit. Credit: Ragette

Other typologies did not stray far from this configuration, even when the floor plan became more ordered and systematized as the house typology evolved.

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417 Ibid. PP. 16
418 Ibid. PP. 11
419 Ibid. PP. 19
These simple houses combined not only living spaces but service spaces as well. The early Lebanese farmer kept some of the animals, such as cows or goats, inside the house. The interior had a level separation inside that placed the livestock on the lower level and the living quarters on the higher level. The house was a combination of stable and home under one roof. The evolution of this early house occurred in terms of the materials used and the separation of human living quarters and animal stables. The sloped topography of Lebanon allowed for a two-story construction that was made possible by the use of the cut stone walls instead of the exterior rubble and mud walls. This configuration though did not negate the communal plan of the house where one space is central and secondary spaces are directly attached to this central space. As Khater observed:

Yet, despite the larger dimensions, the living space of the family was essentially the same as that in older and poorer houses in that it was

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420 Ibid. PP. 17
multipurpose. In other words, the same physical space served as a communal sitting room, eating area, and – at the end of the day – sleeping area. In addition, the roof system was made out of wood and mud that was predominant on peasant houses in Lebanon before the introduction of concrete in the early twentieth century. (Fig. 4.5)

Fig. 4.4: Two storey house in Aychiyye. Credit: Author

Fig. 4.5: House in Aychiyye roof system. Credit: Author

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The overall space combination retained the communality of the house. The communal character of these houses is established through a spatial regulating element. This element is what unites the whole space, and it is usually the communal space. In the case of the “Gallery” house,\(^{422}\) the communal element is the gallery itself. In the case of the “Liwan” house,\(^{423}\) the communal space is called the \textit{Liwan}, and in case of the “Central Hall” house,\(^{424}\) it is the central hall. It is no coincidence that the typology of these houses was named after these communal elements that defined the design of the house and its spatial arrangement.

It is obvious here that the contradictory nature of the central hall house poses a problem of classification. Khater saw the development of this type as a step towards a

\(^{422}\) The Gallery house is a Lebanese type consisting of a room or series of connected rooms that open to the outside through a series of vertical supports.

\(^{423}\) The Liwan house is a Lebanese type consisting of a central covered terrace called the Liwan which is totally open to the outside at least from one side with a room or series of rooms connected to it on each side.

\(^{424}\) The central hall house is a Lebanese house type that consists of a central room called the hall, with several rooms directly connected to it. It is the most predominant house type in traditional Lebanese architecture.
more private and “modern” way of life compared to the older building types which
“pushed the internal life of a family into a more isolated sphere.”425 Opposed to this
view, Soraya Antonius in her book 1965 *Lebanese Architecture*, saw the central hall
house from a totally different angle:

The fact that all the rooms gave onto the central room and in the majority of
cases had no other outlet, meant, first, a total lack of privacy and also a
duplication of effort excessive even for [a] labour-spending age. The lack of
privacy was of course intentional and achieved in a more gracious way than
the contemporary open-plan and glass-walled house.426

The central hall house, though providing a slightly different possibility for privacy
inside the house, still maintained a communal aspect, intentional and necessary. Its
spatial characteristics remained a statement of a social world that is in constant
dialogue with the structured social order of nineteenth century Lebanese culture.

The evolution of the central hall house though is historically and theoretically
debated. The central hall house, which was composed of an arrangement of enclosed
rooms with various independent functions around a central hall has been under severe
scrutiny from many architectural historians and theorists. Robert Saliba here poses
three questions that identify the main elements of the ongoing debate:

Can the central hall house qualify as *la maison moderne Libanaise*, knowing
that Lebanon did not exist yet as a political entity during the second half of
the nineteenth century when this type emerged? Was the central hall house an
original Beiruti creation or an imported model readapted to local conditions?
Finally, did it possess the enduring and intrinsic qualities of a vernacular

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425 KHATER, A. F. 2001. *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-
1920*, University of California Press.

model that emerges from a collective vision, and a long-term experience of local tradesmen with local materials?427

In addition, Saliba quotes Richard Thoumin in 1934 tracing the importation of the red tiled roof to some Lebanese who travelled to France and saw the advantages of the pitched roof as opposed to the traditional flat roofs they were using.428 The “traditional” and “local” characteristics of the house are even contested by Saliba:

The central hall house that we celebrate today as our national icon, the source of our architectural identity, and our traditional building type par excellence, is a hybrid suburban structure resulting from the integration of wrought iron I-beams and roof tiles from France, mechanically sawn timber from Romania, cast iron balustrades and hardware from England, and marble tiles from Italy. Other than the bearing walls built from local sandstone, the majority of materials used are machineage [sic] construction materials imported from Europe with the expansion of colonial trade during the second half the 19th century. The triple arch, the most distinguishing feature of the new type, is considered to be a Venetian import. No conclusive evidence is yet advanced on the origin of the central hall itself as an organizational spatial and planning device.429

On the other hand, Elie Haddad challenges the concept of the Lebanese house typology being an import or even an imitation of the Tuscan style as perpetuated by some architectural historians such as Raja Choueiri.430 In his 2007 article, ‘Between Myth and Reality’, he explores various theories behind the evolution of the typology of the central hall house, refusing the idea that the architectural heritage of Beirut and the Lebanese mountain alike are indebted to Italian architectural contamination that occurred during the reign of Emir Fakhreddine II (1572-1635) and Bachir II (1767-1850).

428 Ibid.
429 Ibid.
430 Robert Saliba mentions that the Lebanese house has been considered a Venetian import, whereas Elie Haddad’s article mentions that some historians have considered it a Tuscan import.
Historically, it is rumored that Prince Fakhreddine brought back with him, after his exile to Tuscany in 1617, a group of architects and builders that contributed to the architectural renaissance in Lebanon during that period, as cited by Haddad in his article ‘between Myth and Reality’ of 2007.\textsuperscript{431} These historians consequently consider the Lebanese architectural heritage of that era to be part of the Italian Renaissance.\textsuperscript{432} Haddad refuses this claim and argues that the architectural heritage of Lebanon underwent an organic growth, siding with several other theorists on this matter ranging from Ragette to May Davie.\textsuperscript{433} Yet, and without delving into the historical conundrum, these arguments attest to the magnitude and importance of Lebanon’s

architectural heritage, and point to the complexity of tracing its origins through a clear
and well defined chronology and architectural theory.

One element that seems to be a recurrent issue in accounts of the evolution of
Lebanese architecture and its relation to modernity is that of functionality.434 The
Lebanese traditional flat roof system required constant maintenance. It seems that
many Lebanese houses at one point in time adopted the red tile roof as a solution
rather than an aesthetic statement. The mud roof required maintenance after every
rainfall using special equipment called the \textit{Maḥedli}.435 The Lebanese house in
general, was built to last, and did not require much maintenance. The traditional
Lebanese flat roof was the only element of the building system that was not worry-
free, and required constant attention. With the rise of sericulture and the accumulation
of wealth that was associated with this industry, many Lebanese peasants started
replacing the old roof system with the new pitched roof.436 The pitched roof did not
require constant maintenance, and therefore, it seems that it was an adequate addition.
This suggests that the use of the pitched roof was not merely aesthetic, but rather
primarily functional. It is important here also to point out that with the introduction of
concrete into the Lebanese market, the red roof construction halted and almost all
remaining traditional houses that had mud roofs replaced these existing roofs with a
poured concrete flat roof instead. After the introduction of concrete, Lebanon
witnessed the end of red tile roofs in middle class houses.

One question poses itself here as an interesting contrast to conventional
understandings of traditional Lebanese architecture: If the red tile roof is to be

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{434} See ANTONIUS, S. \& TCHRAKIAN, P. S. 1965. \textit{Architecture in Lebanon}, Khayats. PP. 8
\textsuperscript{435} A stone cylindrical instrument used to compress the mud on the flat roof to maintain a water tight
condition.
\textsuperscript{436} BURKE, E. \& YAGHOUBIAN, N. 2006. \textit{Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East}, University of
California Press. PP. 39
\end{flushright}
considered a Lebanese traditional element in domestic architecture, why were not all flat mud roofs replaced with red tile roofs instead of concrete flat slabs around the beginning of the twentieth century? If the red tile roof is an inherently traditional element, then it is logical to assume that it was the obvious solution. It becomes clear that the methods of construction that governed red tile roofs were arguably not specifically Lebanese. Once a more affordable material and method offered itself, Lebanon witnessed the death of red tiled roofs. This is easily understandable. The red tile as a building material did not exist in the Lebanese industry neither in the eighteenth nor in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{437} It was imported from Europe. This suggests that Saliba’s argument that the Lebanese central hall house is not a vernacular type is correct. Yet, if we are to reflect a little further on the matter, the central hall house cannot be understood in any other way than modern. It is in essence, an assembled artifact, with its parts fabricated in different parts of the world and combined to form a final product. It is not a product of indigenous material coming together to form a vernacular type. In this sense, this quality of the central hall house reflects an essential characteristic of modern design.

Red tile roofs were not only a viable functional solution to a construction problem, but also a sign of wealth and influence, a sort of conspicuous consumption - a sign of status. This phenomenon could be seen as an announcement, a symbol. The red tile roof was a social and political statement of the emerging middle class in Lebanon during the nineteenth century. These houses matched those of the upper class land owners. The reason red tile roofs were added to old stone houses before the introduction of concrete was to display an acquired wealth, and to show that the flat roof was no longer a necessity. To understand the traditional position of the flat roof

of the Lebanese house properly, we have to have understanding of the social life of
Lebanese peasants during the nineteenth century and their relationship with the world
in which they dwelled.

Fig. 4.8: House in Dekweneh: The right part of the house is the old peasant structure. The
additional room to the left and the red tile roof were added later. Credit: Elie Michel
Harfouche

For a Lebanese peasant during the nineteenth century, the world around him was
highly structured,⁴³⁸ and everything had a purpose. If a sheep was slaughtered, every
single part of the sheep was used, and not a single part was discarded. If he picked his
olive harvest, every single part of the olive was used, even fruit that has fallen on the
ground and rotted. Similarly, the house itself was a well-oiled machine, and a
regulated system governed its day and night as well as seasonal uses. In addition, the

⁴³⁸ FURAYHAH, A. 1957. حضارة في طريق الزوال: القرية اللبنانية. Game’at Beirut al Amerikiah, Manshorat
Kolyet al-Alum wa al Adab. PP. 49-60.
house was not merely the interior space. It extended well beyond the enclosed walls, and everything within that extended environment fell into the context of usability. The roof of the house was no different. There were specific uses assigned to the roof throughout the seasons. A flat roof was an extension of the built environment, and its openness to the sun and wind, rain and snow, determined its use depending on the house’s location, altitude, and the peasant’s seasonal crops. Hana Alamuddin, a Lebanese architect, describes the use of the Lebanese flat roof in an extremely poetic manner:

The roof tops were and are to this day an important part of the house. The long and hard winter months made September a busy month due to the necessity of stocking up the house with foodstuff (mouni). The short availability and high cost of food in winter was turned into an art of conserving, drying and pickling all sorts of fruits and vegetables by the villagers. Small bunches of sticks and pine cones for use as fire wood were dried on the roof. Figs, raisins, apricots, pine kernels, tomatoes, green beans, burgul and kishk were dried for the mouni. Burgul is cracked wheat while kishk is burgul marinated in yogurt. The making of kishk is a highly laborious process. The women frequently collaborated in the preparation of their stocks. To prepare kishk, they would ask the single men and women of the village to help them, providing them with an opportunity to meet. In September, the roofscape of any village in Lebanon is like an oriental carpet rich with patches of color and texture.439

Even the stone stair leading to the roof was designed in such a way that no child or animal could have access to it without a wooden ladder. The flat roof house fell within the structured world of peasant life in the Lebanese village.

Therefore, with the introduction of the pitched roof, the historical usability of the flat roof was abandoned in favor of an aesthetic and social statement. The pitched red roof

439 ALAMUDDIN, H. 1996. The Lebanese House... Beiteddine Festival Program. Beiteddine, Lebanon. PP.4
was a statement of social status, emancipation from a life of hard labor, one which necessitated a flat roof on a house. By the late nineteenth century, even the churches that had flat roofs were adding a red tile roof to their structures:

The churches lining the old enceinte proved to be ever less capable of ministering to local needs, for want of parishioners, and increasingly came to serve a cathedral function, being enlarged and crowned with tile roofs.440

This brief history indicates that from the 1860s up until about the 1920s or so, an essential transformation occurred in the Lebanese urban and suburban landscape. On one hand, the country witnessed a surge of buildings with red tile roofs, and a transformation in the social and political construct of the country, and by 1920, the advent of red tiled roof construction in favor of a flat roof. Later, with the growth of housing demand from the 1920s to the 1940s, another new building typology emerged and defined the urban landscape of Beirut.

The transformation in architecture from the vernacular type to the traditional type was a first step in the evolution of Lebanese architecture towards modern architecture. It is a clear indication that modern architecture was not imposed as an alien object on the Lebanese urban and suburban landscape, but rather, the evolution of Lebanese architecture seems to have paved the way for new technologies and new material integrations into the traditional types. In this respect, we get the first glimpses of the proliferation of modern architecture through material and technology integration.

440 KASSIR, S. 2010. Beirut, University of California Press. PP. 149
4.3: Developments from 1920-1940

From 1920 till 1943, Lebanon was under French colonial rule, as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire gave way to western powers that were to divide the Ottoman provinces amongst themselves, by way of Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916. Both Lebanon and Syria were put under French mandate.

Before that period, the interiors of most houses lacked any western style furniture such as raised beds or even high tables or chairs. By the turn of the twentieth century, this changed dramatically. The transformation of the interior of the household alone was almost total. By 1920, the city of Beirut was westernized in many of its aspects. Yet this westernization did not come by way of subversive imposition. It was not hidden that France intended to modernize Beirut as part of its political agenda:

Plans for further development under Waygand, drawn up by the French architectural and engineering firm of Deschamps and Destree, paradoxically confirmed the Mandate’s intention to make Beirut a showcase for Western-style development at a time when an arabizing tendency in colonial urbanism was taking shape in Maghrib.441

Yet, these attempts never came to materialization due to the resistance of Beirut to the implementation of any urban scale plan on its existing fabric.

In the early 1920’s, many of the central hall houses were still being constructed in Beirut and expanded the urban fabric of the city. What is noteworthy here is that many of the central hall houses had different sizes, yet all of them had a common characteristic. These houses never physically adjoined other houses, or were connected to other houses. Each of them had its own garden, and the urban image of

441 Ibid. PP. 286
residential Beirut before the 1920’s was one of scattered red tile roof houses. As Kassir had noted:

Taken together, these areas resembled a sort of garden city, rising in terraces over a succession of hillsides and crisscrossed by broad swaths of green against the background of snow-capped mountains.442

Fig. 4.9: Beirut – 1920. Credit: J. Deychamps

With the introduction of concrete construction around the turn of the twentieth century in Lebanon, its applications remained minimal, limited to replacing older mud roofs with a concrete roof system.443 This was due to the fact that cement was imported from France during that period. But soon, a new type of architecture started to emerge in response to several factors. The increased importation of cement coupled with the maturation of the newly formed engineering schools at AUB in 1913 and

442 Ibid. PP. 292
443 RAGETTE, F. 1980. Architecture in Lebanon: the Lebanese house during the 18th and 19th centuries, Caravan Books. PP. 84
USJ in 1916,\(^{444}\) meant that by 1920 the multistory residential apartment building came into being.

It is necessary here to reiterate that at the turn of the century, specifically after 1920, there were two main branches in the architectural domain that were developing simultaneously in Lebanon. The first is what is usually referred to as the “colonial style”, and the second, a modernist approach towards design.\(^{445}\) In this chapter, it is necessary to understand the developments that occurred in each of these two branches. The reason is that each of these two branches had different origins and different trajectories. The first, the “colonial style”, was exhausted by about 1940; whereas the second would move more towards modern architecture.

The building typology that dominated most of Beirut between 1920 and 1940 was the multi-story “colonial style” residential building. These buildings adopted the varied plans of the central hall house and stacked these plans in a vertical composition. This typology is somewhat controversial. The reason it was tagged the “colonial style” was due to the fact that it was conceived during French colonial rule. It is possible to see in this typology the first move towards the modern Lebanese apartment building.

What is interesting in the design of these first multi-residential buildings is that even though they followed the typology of the central hall house, their treatment of the roof structure varied between a pitched roof and a flat roof. This variation is important especially because it indicates a conscious decision to diverge from an existing typology that considered a pitched roof an essential ingredient in the aesthetics of the original building typology from which the multifamily building descended.


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What is also necessary to point here is that these buildings were some of the earliest examples of concrete construction in Lebanon.

Fig. 4.10: Building in Ashrafieh. Credit: Author

The use of concrete became more established with the formation of the first Lebanese cement plant. As Saliba observes:

The most dramatic change in the building industry occurred during the first quarter of the century, when cement was gradually incorporated in domestic construction. Between 1923 and 1930, consumption of imported cement increased about five times in the Levant States of Lebanon and Syria, paralleled by a sharp rise in construction permits. The fast growth in cement imports stimulated the creation of the first cement plant in the region, the
Société des Ciments Libanais that was established in 1929 through a joint French / Lebanese private venture.\textsuperscript{446}

Therefore, with the proliferation of engineers educated in Lebanon and abroad, and versed in concrete construction on one hand, and the concrete industry establishing a foothold that was able to cater to the Lebanese construction industry by 1940 on the other hand, Lebanon witnessed the formation of a new typology that invaded the urban scene. Many of these buildings can still be seen around the various districts of Beirut.

The new typology predominant in Beirut catered to the new influx of peasants from the various Lebanese districts. By then, the boundary of the political map of modern Lebanon was taking shape under the French mandate.\textsuperscript{447} The new territorial boundary of modern Lebanon was lobbied for by several Lebanese factions ranging from religious to ethnic groups, and promoted by the Lebanese Diaspora.

This new architecture has also been referred to as a "transitional phase" by Tabet, oscillated between traditional architecture and modern architecture in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{448} Such terminology though suggests that this “transitional” building bridges the space between the traditional type and the modern type. In reality, this building type possessed none of the qualities of the modern division of space, but rather simply stacked traditional type in a vertical arrangement. This vertical expansion was facilitated by new engineering technologies and an access to cement mainly imported from France. But, with the establishment of the first national cement factory, a radical change would emerge on the level of architectural form.

\textsuperscript{446} Ibid. pp 44  
\textsuperscript{447} FIRRO, K. 2003. *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State Under the Mandate*, I. B. Tauris. PP. 10  
The coincidence of the formation of the first cement factory, coupled with the political transition of power from Ottoman to French mandate, in addition to the emergence of a new professional group, that is, the newly graduated engineers from AUB and USJ, formed the nucleus for a new type of architecture.

At the same time a totally new building approach was taking shape in Lebanon, pioneered by a group of architects who were educated in Europe and America.449 Much has been said about the history of the economic, political and social forces that helped generate the immense body of architectural works in Beirut, and therefore the attempt here is to look rather at the history of the architecture itself. It could be assumed that the first building of importance in Beirut to utilize a modernist vocabulary is the Saint George Hotel in 1934, constructed during the French mandate period. Its design is generally attributed to Antoine Tabet, a Lebanese architect who graduated from the Ecole de Beaux-Art in Paris, and who was an intern for a period of time at the office of Perret before he returned and opened his own architectural practice in Lebanon.450

Yet here also there is a discrepancy. Arbid maintains that the design for the hotel was not by Tabet at all, and not even by Perret’s office, but rather by the French firm of J. Poirrier, A. Lotte & G. Bordes.451 Tabet was the site architect during construction and later was commissioned to add the third and fourth floors to the hotel in 1946.452 Probably for that reason, the design of the Saint George Hotel was mistakenly

451 Ibid. PP.80
452 Ibid.
attributed to Tabet.\textsuperscript{453} The hotel nonetheless had a dramatic impact on the Lebanese architectural scene. It quickly became an emblem of modern Lebanon.

Fig. 4.11: A Post Card from the late 1930’s showing the hotel. Credit: Pierre Tristam

Fig. 4.12: Saint George Hotel in the 1950’s showing the additional stories. Credit: oldbeirut.com

The dispute related to the authorship of the design of the St. George Hotel should not affect any research on Tabet’s work per se. In a sense, this dispute provides a better

\textsuperscript{453} Ibid.
understanding of the development of the architect’s style from the school of Beaux Arts through Art Deco into a purely modernist style.

Though the Saint George Hotel is said to have inspired and influenced a rising generation of Lebanese designers to work in a modernist vocabulary, a closer look at the 1930’s seems to imply that this transformation was gradual rather than immediate. During the same year, another Lebanese architect, Rudolphe Elias, designed the Normandie Hotel which exhibited an Art Deco style where the facades showed a tendency towards reduced ornamentation.

This attests to the fact that Lebanese architects were already aware of the transforming architectural environment that was developing in the west, and responded to that changing climate at a local level. If additionally we look at Tabet’s career during these years, we find that he designed the Oriental Hotel in Damascus in
1930 utilizing an Art Deco aesthetic, where the facades showed a developing
tendency to restrict ornamentation to the minimum, a characteristic that Elias utilized
later in the Normandie Hotel, and indicated a shift towards a more modernist
aesthetic.

Fig. 4.14: Oriental Hotel in Damascus, Syria by Antoine Tabet 1930. Credit: Bernard Gagnon

Additionally, during his work on the Saint George Hotel, Tabet had another
commission in 1933 to design a private building, Villa Mexico, in Achrafieh in
Beirut where he appears to have utilized the language of the Beaux Arts in his design.
The evolution of his personal style is a profound demonstration of the various
architectural forces that were in contestation during these decades. Tabet’s leap from
the Art Deco and Beaux Arts to the modernist language takes a more definite shape
from this perspective. Villa Mexico is somewhat unique in this respect. It shows an
amalgamation of the Lebanese triple arch typology translated in a Beaux Arts
sensibility. In a sense then, the Beaux Arts style in Lebanon was somewhat
domesticated at an early stage. This would become more evident in the later Beaux Arts projects, because they cannot specifically be categorized within the international Beaux Arts category, but rather had a unique identity particular to the Lebanese situation.

Fig: 4.15: Villa Mexico by Antoine Tabet 1933. Credit: Author
Saliba’s research on the 1920-1940 period dominates the architectural discussion of that time. Even though Saliba’s book does not claim to provide an exclusive analysis of the architecture of that period, his book nevertheless unites this period under one heading. Arbid mentions that Saliba is “primarily concerned with the evolution of a single type, hence omitting other models.” Therefore, his research may not be considered a thorough analysis of the period.

It seems that the 1930’s and the 1940’s witnessed the proliferation of four major styles of architecture in Beirut. The first, as discussed by Saliba, was the traditional Lebanese multifamily typology. The second was the Beaux Arts style that was adapted to the Lebanese situation. The third was the Art Deco style. And the fourth was the rising style that is the subject of this research and which could be called

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modernist. Sporadically, we find a building that does not fit within these classifications, such as the National Museum of Antiquities. Yet, even though this building is classified by some as Neo-Egyptian, it can easily be claimed to fit within a regional Beaux-Arts style.

Fig: 4.17: Museum of Antiquities, 1930-1937 by Antoine Nahas and Pierre Leprince Ringuet. Credit: DIMSFIFA

In terms of the Lebanese Style discussed by Saliba, we will not delve into details here analyzing its ramifications, since that has already been done by Saliba. On the other hand Art Deco in Lebanon seems to have been completely ignored. Yet, it appears to have been a common theme among many architects who practiced through the 30’s. Elias El Murr’s design of Cinema Roxy in 1932 reflects this tendency, as well as the work of many other architects such as Farid Trad & Fouad Kozah.
The appearance of this style is not surprising, especially if we consider that Art Deco originated in France and flourished around the world in the 1930’s. In this respect, Lebanese architects adopted an architectural language in line with the architectural ‘spirit of the age’. Though, Lebanon during this period was under French colonial rule, which could suggest an emphasized French influence on the local architectural practice. This argument is however problematic, as this was not the only style that prevailed on the architectural scene during these years.

The Beaux Arts style is also evident throughout the Lebanese architectural landscape during these formative years. The founding of ALBA (Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts) in 1837 by Alexis Boutros had an impact on the Lebanese architectural scene in the years to follow. Considering that the Beaux Arts style had declined internationally by the late thirties, and largely ceased to exist by the mid forties demonstrates Lebanon’s late use of the style. This though poses an interesting problem, because, as previously mentioned, the Beaux Arts was not rigidly applied in Lebanon in terms of the international view of this style, but rather it seems to have
acquired a regional flavor. The research of this line of development could (and should) merit a separate and distinct dissertation. But in this dissertation we are more concerned with the modernist movement and the exploration of the various styles in as much as they relate to our understanding of the impact of the modern movement on the Lebanese architectural scene.
Developments from 1940-1975

A summary of the main historical events and the prevailing architectural atmosphere during the modernist phase between is necessary in order to develop a clear understanding of the complete trajectory of development. After 1943, that is, after independence, the country was faced with the harsh economic realities left by the Second World War. It would take less than a decade for Lebanon to pick up pace and become what many referred to at the time “The Switzerland of the East”. Yet, despite the economical challenges to the newly formed Lebanese government, the private sector was quick to respond to market demands, especially the rise of the “merchant republic” philosophy that promoted a free market and modest governmental intervention.456 This tendency which became known as the “laissez faire” policy, promoted an atmosphere of economic possibilities. With the Closure of Haifa seaport in 1948, Beirut seaport captured all the marine traffic that catered to the Arabian hinterland, and again with the crisis of the Suez Canal in 1956.457

The cultural atmosphere then was charged with possibilities and many thought that the formation of a national Lebanese university was paramount to the direction of the newly formed state. The formation of ALBA University (Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts) in 1937 anticipating independence, was a response to a growing consciousness about the necessity of having a university with national roots. As Wadad Makdisi recalls:

For some of us, having an autonomous national university at the dawn of independence was more important than having an army, an air force, or any military organization. And in the early years of the war, a group of educators

456 KASSIR, S. 2010. Beirut, University of California Press. PP. 176
457 Ibid. PP. 361
often met at our home to discuss the possibility of starting such a university. These intellectuals were led by the Architect Alexis Boutrous and included the historian and linguist Anis Freiha. The formation of the architectural program at ALBA was sponsored by Michel Ecochard, the French architect and urban planner, in 1943.

The economic emphasis, as described by Kassir as oscillating “from one boom to another”, would soon be furthered under the presidency of Fouad Shehab, but would also witness the formation of integral governmental institutions which defined the political and economic structure of modern Lebanon. Shehab took several measures to insure the equal division of wealth and to protect the middle class in Lebanon. The institutions that were formed during his presidency included the urban planning ministry, the formation of the central bank, which regulated monetary issuance that was till then controlled by the Bank of Syria and Lebanon, and introduced social security. His government also devised the health insurance program that was eventually put into effect in 1971. In his and the previous presidency, the state did not interfere with the architectural profession or dictate its goals and directions:

It fell to private firms, then, much more than to the state or the city, to search for an architectural language capable of allying the innovations of modernism with the distinctive character of a Mediterranean Arab city.

State intervention at the time of Shehab regulated the market but rarely meddled in the direction of architectural ideals or general design orientation.

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459 Ibid.
460 KASSIR, S. 2010. Beirut, University of California Press. PP. 358
461 Ibid. PP. 415
During the forties and the fifties an architectural style that oscillated between the Beaux Arts and the modernist styles seems to have emerged. The overall layout and façade construction seemed to adhere to a Beaux Arts typology, but the façade decoration seemed to resist ornamentation. This style is widespread throughout the Hamra district and even the greater city of Beirut. Its significance has not yet been critically assessed, though its importance is widely recognized.

![Fig. 4.19: Transitional Beaux Arts Building Style in Hamra. Credit: Author](image)

Many Lebanese architects that practiced during the modernist era experimented with this typology in the forties and fifties. Antoine Tabet’s “Union Building” could be considered as belonging to this style. The typology is considered so crucial to the development of modern architecture in Lebanon that when recently discussions about

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462 Ibid.
selling the Union Building became known, protests began against this action for fear that the building might be demolished. The purchase seems to have been halted.

Fig. 4.20: Union Building by Antoine Tabet, 1952. Credit: Author

It is important here to point out that there are opposing views about the developments that occurred during these years. Some, such as Arbid and Tabet, consider Lebanese ‘modernist’ productions as part and parcel of the modern movement. Arbid for example delineates Lebanese modernism as an inherent quality of Lebanese architecture:

When you speak of heritage in this part of the world, you straight away start thinking about ancient things. For us it is a politically wrong position because it would mean that modernism is the other and tradition is us.

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463 See TABET, J. 1998. From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism, Modern Architecture in Lebanon and the problem of cultural identity. In: ROWE, P. G. & SARKIS, H. (eds.) Projecting Beirut: episodes in the construction and reconstruction of a modern city. Prestel. Where he states that “The history of modern architecture in Lebanon was a dialectic of different schools reacting to each other. Moreover, this dialectic was inherent to modernism”. PP. 93

Others, such as Wael Samhouri, the Syrian architect, consider that these productions were primarily copying the west or imposed from without.\textsuperscript{465} This dialectic has always been part of addressing modernist productions in Beirut. The issue of profitability is very high here especially in the case of Beirut where real estate prices have increased three fold since 2006.\textsuperscript{466} These matters become critical to the formation and transformation of urban space in Beirut. A brief exploration of these views is here necessary.

The title of Arbid’s thesis “Practicing Modernism” clearly maintains that the architectural practice itself was modernist.\textsuperscript{467} But there is a lack of material on the theoretical level which links theory with the practice except for some architects who expressed their thoughts in a few articles. This lack, in Arbid’s opinion, is not an indication of the superficiality of the design process, or a complete adherence to the aesthetics of modernism without questioning.\textsuperscript{468} It is rather a proper understanding of the new building material and the needs of market demand on one hand, and an appropriate consideration of the Lebanese architectural atmosphere in terms of social needs and spatial requirements. In an essay on Lebanese modernism in 1998, Tabet not only agrees but also states that:

This essay will concentrate on the ‘unexplored period’ in the history of architecture in Lebanon, i.e., the two decades that followed Lebanese

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\textsuperscript{465} See IVANIŠIN, K. (ed.) 2013. Architectural Papers Monograph II: Middle East. Landscape – City – Architecture, Zurich: Park Books. where Samhouri states that “the process of modernization took place abruptly and was imposed from without, with no logical evolution from within.” PP 22
\textsuperscript{468} See IVANIŠIN, K. (ed.) 2013. Architectural Papers Monograph II: Middle East. Landscape – City – Architecture, Zurich: Park Books. where Arbid states that “I think it is totally wrong to look at places such as Beirut as places that just consumed modernism. They actually produced it in a very peculiar way.” PP. 23
\end{flushright}
independence. It will try to show that, during this period, attempts were made to find an architectural language which was not simply a degraded version of western architectural models. On the contrary, despite the widespread use of standard commercial clichés, which have overwhelmed the architectural scene in Lebanon since the late ’60s, and despite the present malaise, some of the architectural works produced during the ’50 and the ’60s represented serious attempts to overcome the dilemma of choosing between ‘local traditions’ and ‘imported modernity’.469

These two views maintain the originality and an intact history in the development of Lebanese modernism. On the other side, Saliba maintains that modernist development in Lebanon was eclectic in nature and resembled in process the architecture of earlier periods in that it copied and combined styles without a proper understanding of their historical relevance or aesthetic coherence:

Beirut's eclecticism mirrored the city's cultural dualism, its provincial political status and its petty bourgeois mercantile outlook. It was characterized by imitation without questioning, therefore lacking the underlying integrity of more homogeneous cultures. The latest imports of revivalist trends, from neo-classical to Neo-Turkish and Art Nouveau, mixed or matched, were cast in concrete, freely altered by local builders and superimposed on traditional central hall buildings. This short-lived exuberance (extending for one decade) stopped with the spread of early modernism starting in 1930s. However, the eclectic "spirit" continued, untouched, half a century later. Its shaping cultural forces, created under colonialism, remain unchanged.470

For Saliba, Lebanese modernism copied western models without reflection, as did the colonial style before it. Another perspective is summarized by Samir Kassir who attempted to trace the importation of modern architecture into Lebanon. He speculates

that a “hint of the Bauhaus could be detected” in these modernist buildings, and theorizes that this influence could have come by way of Turkey or by way of Palestine. This is because Kassir speculates that the German Jews who practiced in Palestine before 1948 had an influence on their fellow Palestinians who practiced in Lebanon after the war of 1948, and these in turn affected the Lebanese modernist scene. Kassir theorizes that a line of transmittance might be detected through the works of Rayes, Kanaan, Makdisi and even Karol Schayer, who passed through Palestine before settling in Lebanon and establishing a successful architectural practice. This, in a sense, denies the development of Lebanese modernism from being autochthonous to a cultural milieu, and instead that it had, at least in part, been transmitted through an adjoining country. These opposing views require proper evaluation especially given that Kassir himself confirms that his ideas are merely hypotheses and require proper research.

After the 1940s, the transitional type that was discussed in the previous section disappeared completely and the modernist trajectory prevailed. During that period, you would not have been able to find a single architectural project that used an old division of space or old building techniques. Within the span of a decade, a generation of craftsmen underwent a process of transformation from one type of construction to a completely different type.

The transition from a traditional typology to a modernist vocabulary is a contested issue. Where Saliba sees that this transformation severed all ties with the past, Tabet maintains an opposing position:

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471 KASSIR, S. 2010. *Beirut*, University of California Press. PP. 415
472 Ibid. PP. 415-416
473 Ibid. PP. 416
The architectural language of design pioneers attempted to negotiate the transition between the colonial model of architecture, that, in turn, strove to avoid abrupt formal changes, and the social, economic, and cultural disruptions introduced by modernity. Nevertheless, it is clear that by the 1940s a complete transition had occurred in a short period of time. The pitched roofs were not to be seen and a major architectural tradition would be lost with the passing of a generation of builders that mastered the craft of wood roof construction. In a sense, the flat roof seems to have struck a chord in the Lebanese collective subconscious. Its acceptance and implementation was quick and complete.

There is a similar transformation that happened to another tectonic element of Lebanese architecture in the twentieth century. During the 1950’s, aluminum started to become a popular building material, both in high rise construction and small residential design. Gradually, aluminum frame windows started to replace traditional wood and iron windows in the design process. It is possible to confer that such a transformation could also be attributed to functionality, as aluminum windows require no maintenance compared to decaying wood and rusting iron. Today, aluminum window construction dominates the Lebanese market, and wooden windows are rarely to be found, whereas iron windows and even doors still have value due to the level of security they provide in a country the still experiences certain episodes of civil unrest.

Many architects who practiced during the early 40s subscribed to the modernist ideals. Antoine Tabet, Farid Trad, Bahjat Abdelnour, Fouad Kozah, Said Hejal, and

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Rudolphe Elias are only a handful who could be mentioned. Trad and Tabet, who began in the 30s, were the earliest to start. We also know now that Bahjat Abdelnour for example was very active during the 30s, and designed over twenty five major commissions around the country in that period alone. Fouad Kozah’s profession started early in the 30s, and extended well into the 1970s. Additionally, there were many other foreign architects who resided and worked in Lebanon early on. Lucien Cavro, referred to as the “mandate architect”, for example started in the late 1930s with the “Maternite de France” project in Beirut and his career extended into the late 60s.

In his thesis, Arbid presents his four case studies under four different headings. The first case study about the career of Farid Trad is entitled “Cautious Modernism”; the second, about Antoine Tabet, “Activism”; the third, about the work of the Polish architect Karol Schayer, “ Adopted Modernism”; and the fourth, about Joseph Philippe Karam, “ Unbridled Modernism”. These titles are indicative of the different approaches to modern architecture based on the individuals who practiced them. It is also indicative of the variety of approaches towards the modernist movement, which probably eludes homogeneous classification of architectural productions under any broad outline. Trad and Tabet are considered by many to be the

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478 Ibid. PP. 79
479 Ibid. PP. 100
480 Ibid. PP. 129
pioneers of modern architecture in Lebanon. Jad Tabet, Antoine Tabet’s son, insists that both architects subscribed to a modernist ideology.\textsuperscript{481}

The government during the early years of independence did not play a major role in the construction boom that took place then. It was the private sector in Lebanon during that time that was extremely efficient, as Kassir recognizes:

Apart from a few projects […] the state was noticeably absent. The private service sector, already with a long tradition of innovation behind it, succeeded in doing what needed to be done.\textsuperscript{482}

In the 60s, when construction methods and a modernist aesthetic language had been properly formulated along similar lines described mainly by Collins and Frampton, Lebanon experienced a boom in construction which almost entirely utilized modernist architectural aesthetics. The 50s and the 60s are widely considered to be the golden age of modernist architecture in Lebanon. The Lebanese scene during these years drew many international architects and firms such as Alfred Roth, Oscar Niemeyer, Addor & Julliard, Alvar Aalto, André Wogenscky and many others. The current architectural scene in Beirut still attracts many international architects.

4.5: Conclusion

After examining the progression of architecture in Lebanon from the Ottoman period to the mandate period to the modernist period, we find that there are several elements that seem to constitute a continuity and several others that seems to break free and establish new beginnings. This is not surprising since the process of change always involves both aspects. As Collins would put it, some changes constitute evolution, and

\textsuperscript{482} KASSIR, S. 2010. Beirut, University of California Press. PP. 365
some revolution. Yet these transformations do not seem to be inclusive or exclusive to one or the other, that is, either completely evolutionary, or completely revolutionary. Certain aspects could be considered revolutionary, as in breaking from the traditional typology, yet certain aspects that seem evolutionary in that this break was at times gradual in the work of some architects, especially those whose work spanned the period of technological and cultural transformation. For this reason this thesis will examine the architecture of the city of Beirut from the general to specific, to understand the transformations that the urban fabric experienced during the modernist period, as well as examining the district of Hamra and eventually Hamra Street.

This concise survey of the trajectory of Lebanese architecture from vernacular to traditional to colonial and modern gives the first clues as to the position of modern architecture in Lebanon. It is possible to state here that the process of modernization in Lebanon was not an abrupt imposition that came with the arrival of French colonial powers in 1920, nor was it imposed from without or even institutionalized on a governmental level, albeit the government did encourage the concept of the modern state. Modernism in Lebanon, it seems, underwent an evolutionary process, both on a cultural level as well as on an architectural level, and these two seem to have chronologically coincided from the nineteenth century onward. This premise is essential to this thesis, because it rules out the possibilities that modernism in Lebanon was a solely foreign or ‘western’ object implanted on Lebanese soil; nor was it imposed on the Lebanese urban scene by the Lebanese government in an authoritative manner. Modernism in Lebanon emerged as a result of several historical, cultural and architectural catalysts that came together in the early twentieth century in line with the architectural developments that were occurring worldwide. It is not to claim here that Lebanon had the industrial structure of that of Europe or America, but
that it responded to the changes that were occurring on the international scene in a unique way.
Chapter 5

Hamra Urbanization & Hamra Street
5.1: Introduction

To be able to understand modernist development in Beirut, we must first look at the actual architectural works. This would properly situate the theoretical framework with the actual built environment. The case study therefore becomes an historical and a visual reference against which we can move forward to understand the position of such modernist development. It is, in a sense, an attempt to move away from generalizations and look specifically at the actual built environment and the extent to which it contributes to the modernist morphology of the city of Beirut. This would also allow us to look at an example of the complexity of the architectural situation.

This chapter will therefore look at the urban and architectural transformations concentrically by looking at the urban development of the district of Hamra in general and then to look specifically at the architecture of Hamra Street, the major axis that bisects the Hamra district from east to west. But before looking at these two elements within the dissertation, it is first necessary to delineate the importance and the crucial position that modern architecture occupies in Lebanon and in the city of Beirut specifically. The tension that surrounds the research of modern architecture in Lebanon and the attempts to preserve it are high. This controversial subject is frequently fraught with politics and financial interest. Second, it is also important to understand how the urbanization within the city of Beirut in general is compared to that of urbanization of other Middle Eastern cities.

Focusing on the Hamra District, I will first establish why Hamra specifically, should be the focus of this research. As previously mentioned, there are several elements that contribute to the selection of Hamra as a paradigm of modernist architecture in Lebanon. The first is that the development of the Hamra district from agricultural land
to a fully developed urban center occurred between the years 1920 and 1975. This offers a slice of historical development that fits into the time frame this dissertation is interested in. The second is that Hamra preserved many of the traces of its architectural development. Therefore, the various architectural styles are still available even though today some buildings are being demolished to make way for new construction. The main interest here is not a detailed analysis of the Hamra district. It is more an interest in the history of its urban development as well as in the lessons that could be learned from studying this development. This is because Hamra district displays a similar developmental process to other districts in Beirut in terms of its architecture and urban development, yet eludes any prejudice that could be attributed to the development of other more religiously uniform districts. The development of Hamra is therefore indicative of the developments that occurred around the city of Beirut in general terms, albeit Hamra’s development was more rapid due to its proximity to the city center.

Looking at the historical framework, the developmental process and the specific case study will aid in establishing the last necessary element for the aim of the dissertation, and will allow the formulation of an informed perspective on Beirut’s modern architecture.
5.2: The urbanization of the city of Beirut

The urbanization of the city of Beirut in general terms does not seem to fit under any particular urban model. The modernization of Middle Eastern cities, in a sense, has several common threads that run across their modern history. It is the contention of this dissertation that the Lebanese case, though sharing some commonalities as it responded to similar historical and technological forces, departed significantly from such unified models of modernization. Additionally, Beirut displays even more difficulty fitting into models of urbanization and modernization that are usually utilized to understand modernization both in the west, as well as outside the west, and even more particularly in the Middle East. As Hourani previously stated, modernization in the region could be divided into two main categories. The first is the model of nation building along western lines, such as in the case of Turkey. The second is modernization that aimed to maintain an eastern image such as that of most Middle Eastern countries. The case of Lebanon seems somewhat elusive. As mentioned previously, Hourani and Khoury did not include any research that addressed the Lebanese case in any section in their book, *The Modern Middle East*, and likely for good reason. It simply does not seem to fit any of the models that are discussed in their book.

Additionally, the urbanization of Beirut does not seem to adhere to the urbanization patterns of major cities in the third world. Samir Khalaf’s book on the urbanization of the district of Hamra in Beirut reflects several of these discrepancies. Khalaf first

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maintains that western models of urbanization are inadequate to understand the
urbanization that occurred in ancient cities of third world countries such as New
Delhi, Cairo, and even Mexico City:

Among the major differences revealed by these and other similar studies, one
is perhaps the most striking: that to a considerable extent urbanization in the
Third World has not been associated with the same massive and labor-
intensive process of industrialization observed in Europe and North America
in the late 19th century. Consequently, it is not surprising that some of the
characterizing features of "industrial" cities—such as specialized land-use
patterns, segregation of socio-economic classes and the undermining of
traditional basis of social solidarity—should not manifest themselves in cities
of the rapidly changing societies of Africa and Asia.486

Khalaf also maintains that additionally the case of Beirut is somewhat particular, even
though it displays an urban image influenced by the west:

The urban growth and structure of Beirut discloses further, and perhaps more
dramatically, the inadequacy of Western models, particularly since its urban
tradition and conception of planning and urban control have been inspired by
western concepts. At all three levels-the historical, physical and social
dimensions-Beirut's urbanization provides an especially relevant setting for
testing the universality of such models.487

This specificity of the development of the city of Beirut requires an explicit look at its
modernist architecture in general terms.

It also seems that most international architects who practiced in Lebanon during the
modernist era, started to arrive around the beginning of the 1950s, with few
exceptions such as Lucien Cavro. This additionally shows that the architectural
influence of foreign architects on the local level may not have been instrumental, that
is, the architectural works produced by international architects in Lebanon were not

487 Ibíd. PP.2
the driving force behind the Lebanese modernist tradition. Rather, it likely was the existing exciting modernist architectural atmosphere in Lebanon which attracted most of these architects to work in Lebanon.
5.3: The Importance of Hamra District

As mentioned earlier, the selection of the Hamra district as a case study is not arbitrary, but contributes to the aim of the dissertation, that is, the attempt to formulate a theorization of Lebanese modernist architecture within the framework of the modernist movement. In Hamra, there are samples of every phase of development. From a traditional building typology, to the evolved multifamily typology, to art deco, Beaux Arts and modernist, these architectural works stand side by side in Hamra. This variety allows a good correlation and provides a good illustration of the urban development of Hamra district. Furthermore, it also constitutes a unique amalgamation of urban identity. The district is not a homogeneous urban construct, but rather a blend of an eclectic composition that gives it its unique urban identity.

Fig: 5.1 Traditional multifamily Typology
Credit: Author

Fig 5.2: Beaux Arts Typology
Credit: Author
Additionally, the Hamra district, by eluding any cultural or religious uniformity predominant in other areas of Beirut, offers a good example indicating that modernist development in Beirut was not necessarily dictated by factors such cultural or
religious considerations. Most Beiruti districts display specific religious and cultural identities. Achrafieh for example is largely an upper class Christian district with western cultural affinities, whereas Basta is an almost entirely Sunni Muslim district with middle class Arabic tendencies. Beirut in this respect has always been considered a “mosaic” rather than a “melting pot” of cultures and religions. Hamra seems to escape this “poly-nuclear” classification as Khalaf calls it. Therefore, the district of Hamra is an opportune instance where the “melting pot” is actually realized within the city of Beirut, and therefore “displays some of the salient features which characterized Beirut's urbanization”.  

The history of the Hamra district extends to the middle of the nineteenth century, where the whole district was comprised of farming land that did not exhibit any signs of construction. It was only after the 1866 formation of the American University of Beirut, originally known as the Syrian Protestant College, that the area witnessed some construction, beginning with houses that were built by the teachers who acquired lands adjacent to the university. Some of these houses still stand today. The area grew in the following decades, and took its current name from the “Hamra” family who occupied the neighborhood known today as Hamra street. From farming land in 1920 to a completely urbanized district in 1967, the development of the district of Hamra could be considered extremely rapid. Yet, this urbanization was not planned or regulated at a government level. The earliest developments, as mentioned, were directed towards residential houses to cater to the growing body of educators at the American University. Residential multifamily

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488 Ibid. 12
489 Ibid. PP. 21
490 COSTELLO, V. F. 1977. Urbanization in the Middle East, Cambridge University Press. PP. 79
buildings came soon after, and the area remained predominantly residential till the early fifties, when commercial buildings started to invade the open plots.

Hamra therefore displays an eclectic architectural composition ranging from early twentieth century houses to the transitional architecture that emerged between 1920 and 1940, and the modernist building typologies that predominated afterwards. Today, the area is witnessing a new phase of construction through the demolition of older structures to construct high rise residential buildings.
Fig: 5.5: Plans of the development of Hamra District. Credit: Samir Khalaf⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ Ibid. PP.36-40
The modernist style architecture in Hamra is abundant. In addition to the work of local architects, many signature buildings by international architects could also be found. At the north end, and close to AUB campus, we find Gefinor building designed by Victor Gruen in the late 1960s. It displays characteristics of the international style and has overwhelmingly glass facades on all sides.
The Fransa Bank building on Hamra street that was designed by Alfred Roth and the Finnish architect Aalto in 1964 and displays International Style qualities. On Hamra Street also as we shall see later and across from Fransa Bank to the east is Bank of Lebanon, designed by Swiss firm Addor & Julliard in 1964. The building

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exhibits more façade articulation than the above projects, but still maintains a homogeneous grid.

Fig. 5.9: Fransa Bank Building. Credit: Author.

Fig. 5.10: Bank of Lebanon building. Credit: Author.
5.4: The Architecture of Hamra Street

Hamra Street is probably one of the most prominent streets in Lebanon. It is considered by many to be the heart of Beirut, the “other center”, after the Beirut Central District was taken over by Solidere. The street is lined with modernist style buildings which dominate its image, but also, some other buildings still survive from previous eras. It is necessary here to go into some detail about the buildings that define Hamra street.

Dating the buildings in Lebanon is a challenge due to several factors, as mentioned earlier. Most governmental records of the city of Beirut seem to have been lost during the war. This obstacle is faced by many researchers of Lebanese architecture, as Aseel Sawalha, the Lebanese anthropologist mentions:

> [t]here were other obstacles in researching a postwar urban environment. For example, accessing official and published materials necessary for the research was an elaborate task. During the war, many of the official records such as reports, maps, and city plans had been burned, lost, damaged, or moved to unknown locations, so it was almost impossible to locate or access documents and government reports.495

Identification of the buildings has therefore relied on existing references in books, and through field work. But the most valuable resource has been the database that Arbid compiled in his dissertation in 2002,496 and a small directory of the city of Beirut published in 1969, before the outbreak of the war.

495 SAWALHA, A. 2010. Reconstructing Beirut: memory and space in a postwar Arab city, University of Texas Press. PP. 19
The sheer diversity of style, height and aesthetics make Hamra street a very eclectic conglomeration of architectural statements. It is as if there is no governing rule that unifies this set of architectural items. Yet these buildings, upon a closer inspection, seem to have responded to the local requirements in many respects. The northern buildings, whose main facades face the south, generally responded to the all day sun with *brise soleil* or more solid treatments on their elevations. The south side buildings which do not get much sun during the day, had glass facades in many instances, or many windows and balconies that are more open and receptive of light.

These characteristics show in the first instance that even though architectural styles were employed freely, local factors played a role in their design. This type of modern architecture which Elie Haddad calls “responsive”497 is something that sets this type of architecture apart. Arbid asserts that Beirut cannot be considered one of the places that simply consumed modernism, but rather produced it in a very particular way.498

Fig. 5.11: Hamra Street Map 1. Source: Beirut Directory (1969). Credit: Beirut Directory.

Fig. 5.12: Hamra Street Map 2. Source: Beirut Directory (1969). Credit: Beirut Directory.

500 Ibid. PP. 120-121
These old maps were helpful in visually understanding the transformations that occurred on Hamra Street since 1969. The following description of Hamra street will begin from west to east and is intended to provide a visual and textual reference to the buildings that line up Hamra street. The information on these maps was primarily collected from field work. As for the buildings whose construction dates and architects were identified, this dissertation relied on information from Arbid’s dissertation to determine this data.

The guide map on the top left provides the location of the buildings investigated, and references them by number to the images of these buildings. The selected buildings are primarily the ones that belong to the era that this dissertation explores, that is, the thirty years or so after the independence of the state of Lebanon.
As stylistic classifications are inevitable, it is necessary to point to what is considered 'modernist' in terms of referring to some of the buildings that are described on these maps. As this dissertation is keen on exploring the parameters of modernist architecture, both in Lebanon and abroad, it might appear hasty to classify any of the buildings as belonging to a modernist style. But, as certain buildings are referred to as such on the following maps, it should be noted that such references remain at this point stylistic classifications rather than the subject of the theoretical underpinnings as explored by Frampton, Collins or Rykwert for example. The intent in describing these buildings as modernist is not intended to frame them theoretically as such, inasmuch as resorting to familiar and common descriptives of a modernist style, whether through the use of concrete as a building material, the liberations of structure from facades, the more expansive use of glazing, or the abstract and geometric manipulations of the facades, free plan organizations or an overall attitude towards the design process and exterior aesthetics, or perhaps a combination of some or all of these elements.
5.5: Maps of Hamra Street
A clearly modernist building. Like many other buildings on Hamra Street, the exact date of construction is unknown and the architect of the building is also unknown. The building though predates the civil war and was probably belongs to the 60's era.

LAHOUD BLDG

These two buildings appear in the first instance as one because the floor heights and the overall geometry of the buildings looks very similar. The architects are unknown, but it might be that the same architect designed both buildings. Building height agreement on Hamra street is rare to be found as buildings that line up the street vary drastically from one to the other. These buildings also cannot be accurately dated but it is safe to assume that they belong either to the sixties of the seventies of the last century.

MANSOUR BLDG

This building could be categorized as a transitional building type between modernist and Beaux Arts. These types of buildings were predominantly designed by architects who graduated from ALBA university, which focused on a Beaux Arts educational curriculum. These buildings are characterized by a grid that organizes their facade manipulation, their earthly color such as yellow, brown or limestone, and their rounded corner when they are located on a cross street. The corner treatment could range from being a balcony, to enclosing windows as in Shehaiber building (Image 6). This building was probably designed in the 50's. Its architect is also unknown.
The Chaar building is an old Art Deco building that has been retrofitted with a contemporary look. This old building with the unique window treatments on its upper floors seems to belong to the 50's. The architect of the building is also unknown.

This building also seems to belong to the transitional Modernist/Art Deco style practiced primarily by ALBA graduates. This building might probably be designed by Joseph Philip Karam in the early 50's, before his modernist phase.

Awad building is a residential building that could also belong to the transitional typology, with a clear grid on the facades and a rounded corner.

Awad building is a residential building that could also belong to the transitional typology, with a clear grid on the facades and a rounded corner. Residence plaza on the other hand displays a more modern facade with a rational organization and a geometric composition.
AL KHATIB BLDG
This building belongs to a group of buildings in Lebanon that attempted to reinvok a Lebanese identity through the use of stone veneer as a facade treatment. Date and architect unknown.

SAMIRA MIIS BLDG
This building was designed by Karol Schayer and Wassik Adib in 1962. Schayer and Adib collaborated on many buildings in Lebanon with a third engineer named Bahij Makdisi.

WUSULI BLDG
Here again we can see the transitional type probably by an ALBA graduate. The yellowish color and the simple geometrical facade with a rounded corner. The aluminum entry here also could be considered as a later addition.

ADHAM BLDG
This building is unique in spanning its balconies all along its facades. The architect and the date of construction is unknown, but it is probably that it was built sometime during the 60's. It composition seems to resemble the transitional type, but the geometry of the balconies seem to be more geometrically articulated.

ZAKHARIYA BLDG
A clearly modernist facade composition, but with a decorative treatment of the balcony finish and a wrought iron railing. Though the architect and the date are unknown, this building probably belongs to the 60's of the last century. Again, the aluminum and glass is surely a later addition.
CINEMA STRAND

Designed in 1962 by Robert Wakim at Dar al Handasah, Cinema Strand is a clearly modernist building in its geometry and composition. The brise soleil on the facade is made out of metal and inlaid horizontally. The building has a central courtyard that is open to the sky.

AL SAADA BLDG

Unusual facade articulation. Date and architect unknown.

AL MAWLA BLDG

Art deco style. Date and architect unknown.

HIDHOD BLDG

This building displays an uncanny modernist aesthetic. It is one of the most interesting buildings in terms of its facade articulation and geometry. Abandoned for years, this building could become set for demolition. Date and architect unknown.

MARWA BLDG

Rounded balconies and articulated pergolas on the roof give this building an art deco character. The date and the architect are unknown.

ABC BLDG

This building again seems to belong to the transitional type with a little more interesting facade articulation. Date and architect unknown.
This 3 story art deco building probably belongs to the 40's of 50's because of its height. Architect and date unknown.

Another 2 story art deco building sits across the street. The first floor has been transformed into a retail store. Architect and date unknown.

These two buildings display a recognizable modernist character with their articulated geometry and simplified facades devoid of any ornamentation. Their dates and architects are not known, but they probably belong to the 60's or possibly 70's.

The typology of this building is almost a staple in the city of Beirut and Lebanon in general. Clean lines, rational geometry. This art deco typology is prevalent in Beirut. The exact date of this building and the architect are unknown.
HAMMOUD BLDG
Another art deco building sits next to Karam building, having rounded corner balconies and an interesting geometry. The date of construction and the architect are also unknown.

TAQLA BLDG
It seems that this section of Hamra street is rich in art deco style buildings. An interesting composition with clean lines and rounded corner on the first floor. These building are a testament to the rich art deco heritage present in Beirut.

AL MIZAAN & GHANEM BLDGS
The age of these two buildings are unidentifiable. They could have been built in the seventies, but also possible in the eighties, though highly unlikely with the civil war raging. Al Mizaan feature beton brute elements in its facade.

EL DORADO
El Dorado building is another prime example of modernist architecture in Lebanon. The design features an enclosed rectangle with a glass facade on the upper floors and a recessed ground floor. Architect and date are also unknown.

ITANI BLDG
This is another three story buildings with a simple geometry that was probably built in the 40’s or the 50’s before land prices in Hamra spiked. Like many buildings like it, the architect is unknown.
This building was designed in the early 1950’s by the Italian architect Umberto Turati who practiced primarily in Lebanon.

This building seems to belong to the post 1975 era, especially with its use of aluminum window treatment. Architect is unknown.

This building also seems to be post 1975 on account of its aluminum window treatment, but these would also have been replaced at a later date. Architect is unknown.

This is an interesting building which is very difficult to date solely from its architecture. It could belong to the late 70’s when aluminum started to be available. Architect is unknown.

A clearly modernist treatment of the building geometry and facade. The exact date of the building is unknown as well as the architect.
Another art deco building sits on Hamra street. Its stairwell projects from the side and is open to the outside through vertical openings running from top to bottom. Date and architect unknown.

This building also seems to belong to that group of buildings that could be called transitional between Beaux Arts & modernist. It is a historic landmark of the civil war. Exact date and architect unknown.

This building was designed by William Sednaoui. The exact date is unknown but it is probably in the 1960’s. Sidnaoui also designed the Sehnaoui building on the same street.

Designed by George Rais in 1957, Cinema Hamra is a landmark in Hamra district. Rais was a master of detail and all his buildings displayed a commitment to modernist aesthetics.

Designed by Schayer and Makdasi in 1957, this building is also another landmark in Beirut. With a clear modernist design ethics. Schayer, a Polish architect who made Lebanon his second home, produced many buildings that stand today as a testament to modernism.
ABDEL BAKI BLDG

Probably belonging to the 50’s or 60’s era, this building displays art deco characteristics but in earthy colors. The architect is probably Sami Abdel Baki, who was an engineering professor at AUB.

MAKAREM BLDG

This is another modernist building that features some art deco characteristics with the brise soleil treatment above the balconies. Date and architect are unknown.

SAROUlla BLDG

Designed by Schayer, Mokdisi and Adib in the 1960’s. The building facade is composed of a geometrical grid where an interplay of void/semi void and solid occurs. The modernist characteristics of the building are clearly recognizable. Next to Saroulla sits Estral building which probably belongs to the eighties or even the nineties.

AMATOury BLDG

Probably belonging to the 50’s or 60’s era, this building displays art deco characteristics but in earthy colors. The architect is probably Sami Abdel Baki, who was an engineering professor at AUB.
YOUNIKOMSHIAN BLDG
Another art deco style building with the stair tower having horizontal openings. The architect and the date are unknown, but could be attributed to the 50's when these buildings were popular.

BOU ASSAF BLDG
Another Art Deco Style Building belonging probably to the late 50's. Architect unknown.

LE MARLEY HOTEL
The hotel seems to have had its facade retrofitted, but from the older aluminum windows, it is probably built in the late 70's or the 80's. Architect unknown.

RUBEIZ BLDG
This building displays a rational grid on its facade and the pergola on top places it somewhere in the 50's, where such pergolas were allowed by law as roof treatments.

SURATI BLDG
Surati building was designed by the Italian architect Umberto Turati also possibly dating to the late 1950's. Next to it stands Montreal building with a glass facade. The date and the architect of this building are unknown.

MONREAL BLDG
HAMRA STAR
A mixed use building with retail on the ground level and a hotel on the upper floors. This building could be considered as belonging to the transitional category between Beaux Arts and Modernist typologies. Building date and architect are unknown.

ANNAHAR BLDG
The old Al Nahar Newspaper headquarters building designed by Ibrahim Saliba in the 1970’s before the beginning of the civil war in Lebanon.

SEHNAOUI BLDG
Sahnaoui building was designed by William Sednaoui, who taught architecture at the ALBA (Academie Libanaise de Beaux Arts). The building was damaged during the war and restored in 1996 by MEG architects, the architectural firm associated with the Lebanese modernist architect Pierre Neema. The firm redesigned a completely new façade for the building. The building’s geometry clearly displays a Beaux Arts composition retrofitted with a glass façade.
BANK OF LEBANON
Designed by Swiss architectural firm Addor & Julliard in 1964. Addor & Julliard designed several buildings in Beirut. Starco Center close to the city center in 1957 is another building that carries their signature.

FRANSA BANK
The building was originally called Bank Sabbagh and was designed by Alvar Aalto and Alfred Roth in 1964. The modernist character of the building and the star architects who designed it clearly indicate its modernist identity.

MINISTRY OF TOURISM
Designed by Aassem Salam in the mid sixties, this building displays modernist tendencies with regional characteristics such as concrete arches on the first floor and the interior gallery space. The geometrical pattern of the window treatment is also inspired by eastern motifs. Salam was interested in questions of local identity and regional character instead of the purely modern aesthetic.
Figure 5.14: Map image # (1) Napoli Hotel. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.15: Map image # (2) Hotel Plaza. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.16: Map image # (3) Lahoud Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.17: Map image # (4) Mansour Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.18: Map image # (5) Chaar Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.19: Map image # (6) Shehaiber Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.20: Map image # (7) Awad Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.21: Map image # (8) Residence Plaza. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.22: Map image # (9) Al Khatib Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.23: Map image # (10) Samira Miis Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.24: Map image # (11) Wusuli Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.25: Map image # (12) Adham Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.26: Map image # (13) Zakhariya Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.27: Map image # (14) Cinema Strand. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.28: Map image # (15) Al Saada Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.29: Map image # (16) Al Mawla Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.30: Map image # (17) Hidhod Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.31: Map image # (18) Marwa Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.32: Map image # (19) ABC Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.33: Map image # (20) Isa`i Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.34: Map image # (21) Farah Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.35: Map image # (22) Rbeiz Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.36: Map image # (23) Sinno Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.37: Map image # (24) Karam Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.38: Map image # (25) Hammoud Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.39: Map image # (26) Taqla Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.40: Map image # (27) Al Mizaan Building & (28) Ghanem Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.41: Map image # (29) El Dorado. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.42: Map image # (30) Itani Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.43: Map image # (31) Esaily Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.44: Map image # (32) Modca Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.45: Map image # (33) Rasmani Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.46: Map image # (34) Abdel Rahman Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.47: Map image # (35) Safi El Deen Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.48: Map image # (36) Sidani Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.49: Map image # (37) Wimpy Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.50: Map image # (38) Picadilly Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.51: Map image # (39) Cinema Hamra. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.52: Map image # (40) Horse Shoe Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.53: Map image # (41) Abdel Baki Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.54: Map image # (42) Makarem Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.55: Map image # (43) Saroulla Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.56: Map image # (44) Amatoury Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.57: Map image # (45) Younikomshian Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.58: Map image # (46) Bou Assaf Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.59: Map image # (47) Le Marley Hotel. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.60: Map image # (48) Rubeizi Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.61: Map image # (49) Montreal Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.61: Map image # (50) Surati Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.62: Map image # (51) Hamra Star. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.63: Map image # (52) Annahar Building. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.64: Map image # (53) Sehnaoui Building. Credit: megarchitects.com
Figure 5.65: Map image # (54) Bank of Lebanon. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.66: Map image # (55) Fransa bank. Credit: Author.
Figure 5.67: Map image # (56) Ministry of Tourism. Credit: Author.
5.6: Conclusion

This overview of the urban development and the architecture of Beirut in general and Hamra and Hamra street in particular is not a critical assessment of the modernist architecture that developed in Lebanon during the three decades following independence. It is intended as a visual guide and a building block in the process of understanding modern architecture in Lebanon. In order to properly understand the position of Lebanese modern architecture, it was necessary to look at the architecture that developed in Lebanon between 1945 and 1975. What we can learn from this exercise is first that modernist architecture was a part of a process of development that was neither exclusively imposed by colonial powers, nor by the local government. It was generated as part of the entrepreneurial process that dominated the Lebanese urban space during these years. If anything, it seems that the local government took its cues from the private sector, such as in developing the central bank or the ministry of tourism. Furthermore, the government tended to rely on local talent for its projects.

Having established (i) a theoretical framework that could be relied on; (ii) a historical framework that illuminates the process of development, and (iii) a concrete perspective of the actual architectural works in question, in the following chapters a process of reassessment can begin. It becomes necessary here to reassess the historiography of the modern movement before making any critical evaluation of the modernist architectural productions that prevailed in Lebanon during the modernist period.
Chapter 6

Reassessing Modernist Literature
6.1: Introduction

Before dealing with the issue of framing Lebanese modernism in terms of modernism more broadly, there is an essential pre-requisite that needs to be addressed. It resides in the importance of distinguishing between two different spheres of investigation: theory and practice, especially that the relationship between the two could range from non-existent to completely overlapping in architectural literature. And if attempting to reconcile these two spheres is not an easy task within the historiography of modernism proper, it becomes even more difficult when considering two different domains, one which is modernism and the other that might be called ‘Lebanese Modernism’. Theory and practice, whether in addressing modernism, or Lebanese modernism, becomes problematic. Additionally, there are two distinct arenas within the theoretical domain. The first is the theory produced by the modernist architects themselves, and then there are the theories that were produced later by architectural historians, which address earlier modernist theories as well as modernist practice.

If the aim is to understand the position of Lebanese modernism within the framework of modernism in general terms, then the relationship between theory and practice in both European modernism and Lebanese modernism have to be positioned in a way where one could inform the other. The outcome of this analysis would vary from the determination of each of the steps. For if modern theory and modern practice are to be considered as aligned to a certain extent, and modern Lebanese practice and modern Lebanese theory is considered as also aligned to a certain extent, the correlation of these two conclusions would take the analysis of this dissertation in one direction. If Lebanese practice and theory are not aligned, or modernist practice and modernist theory are not aligned, then this analysis would take a totally different direction. Additionally, the possibility that the described method of analysis above is not
efficacious to understand this relationship and a different approach is necessary, it
would likewise yield different results. But as the dissertation aims is to formulate the
framework of understanding and not to arrive at a definitive statement, a more flexible
exploration of the possibilities that any of these routes can take might be allowed.

Assessing the modern movement in subsequent literature also plays a critical role in
the process of classification. In Frampton’s book for example, *Modern architecture, A
Critical History*, in the first edition, there was no mention of the works of many
modernist architects outside Europe and the USA. In the succeeding editions many
changes have been made to include such architects and their works. The second
edition also saw the addressing of ‘Critical Regionalism’ pertaining to cultural
identity. The complexity of addressing everything and the author’s mindfulness of
the target audience also plays a part. In this respect, literature about the modern
movement has to come into play. The problem though seems to be that in a
dissertation as such, there is not enough time or space to address all these matters.
Therefore, the analysis is restricted to reviewing and assessing the three books
surveyed on modernism, reviewing and assessing the interpretive methods surveyed,
and in light of these two, attempting to reposition Lebanese modernism without
necessarily arriving at a conclusive statement. Arriving at a conclusive statement
would entail a simplification of the problem as such. If the theory and practice of
modern architecture are assumed to be simply unified and have a reciprocal
relationship, then this would solve one part of the problem. The second part of the
problem is to also assume that theory and practice in Lebanese modernism constitutes
a unified body of work. These assumptions would greatly simplify the process of
analysis in comparing the two models to each other. But alas, this is not the case, and

this would be a shallow and convenient simplification. In a sense then, in the case of Lebanon, it is necessary to explore how the practice may have informed the theory.

6.2: The Problematic of Classification

Three seminal books that address modern architectural thought have already been surveyed, for the intent in this research. It is necessary here to attempt to extract a set of ‘rules’ if they could be called as such, that would give a better perspective on what constitutes the “modern movement” in architecture in such a way that may assist us to understand ‘Lebanese Modernism’.

Frampton and Rykwert both seem to agree that the seed of modern architectural thought occurred with Perrault in the mid eighteenth century. Perrault’s challenge to the classical model of operation in the field of architecture, on several levels, shook the architectural foundations that were established since the Italian renaissance. This disturbance would pave the way for many ideas and ideals that became part and parcel of the modern movement, as we saw in both Collins and Rykwert’s accounts. But the question also becomes whether this disturbance is sufficient as a factor for classifying the architects of the eighteenth century as “modern”. This classification additionally, if possible at all, remains on the level of architectural thought that ushered the beginning of the destruction of Baroque architectural conventions. The aesthetics of modernist architecture though would take more than a century to begin to take shape. It becomes evident with the total abandonment of traditional aesthetical elements and ornamentation and with the search for a new system completely independent of Baroque and even Enlightenment concepts of space and aesthetics.

This transformation according to Frampton would start with changes in space planning that were first realized in Webb’s “Red House” in 1859, Louis Sullivan and
the Chicago school introduction of a new system of constructing high rise buildings in 1886, as well as Lloyd Wright’s complete departure from classical design and the rethinking of the entire architectural volume from 1890 onward. Rykwert does not venture further than the Enlightenment in his analysis and therefore the architectural elements, though they were revolutionary in their own time, were still utilizing classical vocabulary. This makes his work only applicable within a historiographic/theoretical domain. Collins, who clearly states that his work is theoretical in its essence, does not address the physical transformations that occurred in western architecture during the modernist era. His book is intended to be a history of “thoughts about architecture, rather than a history of architecture itself”. This clear delineation between theory and practice as mentioned is critical for this dissertation.

Among the three authors there is a good idea of the beginnings of modern architectural thought, the ideals that shaped this thought, as well as an assessment of the history and the theory of such work coupled with the productions generated in the west.

In this respect, among the three authors, we can discern several threads that constitute some sort of a weave between theory and practice. Therefore, if Lebanese architecture could be viewed through similar lenses, it might be possible first to come to terms with a totally new structure. It is possible to maintain that the Lebanese architecture of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century does not seem to belong in any shape or form to the seemingly continuous ideological transformations that were occurring in the west, and the productions that emanated from this process. Modern architecture, if

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505 Ibid.
it is regarded as constituting a continuity of the western architectural tradition that
transitioned from Baroque to the Enlightenment and eventually to modernism, can
only be self referential, regardless of whether this transition was gradual or abrupt.
Yet such an assumption could be misleading.

Whether the transition to modernism necessitates a pre-requisite of belonging to the
preceding architectural styles is an essential question in this equation. If this is the
case, then modernism would appear to belong solely to the west. If modernism is to
be regarded as a break from any traditional architectural system and the adoption of
modern approaches to planning and aesthetics, then this would widen its reach and
make it truly a universal architecture. In addition, it would also mean that a unifying
ideology or even a unifying typology or aesthetic should not be an issue, since
modernism would necessitate a continuous effort to develop beyond a singular
aesthetic or a singular form, and perhaps, to develop beyond itself as a regulating
system.

The modern movement, up until the 1970’s, has always been considered a revolution
in architecture as well as the arts. Many of its proponents considered themselves
divorced from the ideals and aesthetics of classical architecture and regarded
themselves as the pioneers of a new way of thinking. Yet, even though they
recognized that architecture can never be truly divorced from history, since its
fundamental principles are always at the basis of its construction, they nevertheless
had a clear understanding that the limits of this continuity was only on a theoretical
level. New forms, new materials, new methods of construction and new possibilities
were at hand in a way that was never possible in the previous eras of human history.
In this sense, the distinction between abstract thought and actual building becomes essential. If we would adhere to this logic, then Lebanese modernism is validated in the sense that it underwent a radical transformation from classical Lebanese and Mediterranean forms and from traditional modes and means of construction to a completely new system that became the basis of a modernist architectural image. In this respect, the rise of every nation from traditional architectural heritage to a universal model of design and construction, albeit regionalized and at certain times localized, shared the spirit of a world undergoing a process of transformation. This avenue of thought would make not only Lebanese modernism part and parcel of the modernist movement, but probably any modernism that occurred in the so called “Third World”.

It is probably necessary to assume that Collins’ perspective on what constitutes modern architecture is an acceptable avenue to be taken into consideration, and probably used as a measuring stick against which Lebanese modernist production could be assessed. The same should go for both Rykwert and Frampton. This chapter is, is in a sense, an exercise in attempting to assess Lebanese modernism against these three systems, and then attempting to extract the lessons to be learnt from these assessments.
6.3: Reassessing Peter Collins: Western or Global Ideals?

Collins’ text provides a clearly identifiable set of themes that run through his thesis. Therefore, if we are to look at each of these points with the Lebanese case in mind, we can begin to understand how Lebanese architectural history could relate to the ideals that for Collins are essential to our understanding of modernism. The five major themes he discusses are: Romanticism, Revivalism, Functionalism, Rationalism, and the influence of the allied arts. The relevant subject headings that fall under these themes can serve as a textual guide against which the Lebanese situation may be assessed, and this is what the first part of this chapter will attempt.

Romanticism, which includes the concept of a “revolutionary architecture”, the influence of historiography as well as the influence of the picturesque on the early formation of modernist architectural ideals are a necessary ingredient to the understanding of the formation of modernism in the west. As mentioned earlier, Collins’ formation of these ideals are restricted to the west during that period, and cannot be understood as a valid catalyst for the formation of a modernist architectural scene in Lebanon, and probably neither in India, China or elsewhere in second or third world countries. The intellectual debates were restricted to Europe in the first instance. This revolution in thought, as per Collins, can only be relevant in a western atmosphere where these architectural ideals were being debated and taking a more definite shape.

In addition, during the nineteenth century, Lebanon did not even exist as a separate political entity. In the case of India or China, or even Turkey, the historical circumstances would be different. Lebanon’s case is probably best comparable to that of Israel. How can we then claim that these transformations on the level of
architectural thought be at all relevant; or if not relevant at least comparable; to a
country like Lebanon which became a separate and distinct political entity only in
1946? Though this might present itself as a self-evident truth, it brings about a very
complicated historical subject, that is, the very question of a Lebanese national
identity.

This question requires at least some investigation to be able to proceed further in this
line of analysis. There are primarily two opposing views on the matter of national
identity in Lebanon. The first group regards the formation of the Lebanese nation as
an exclusively colonial enterprise which was enforced by France and Britain after
their colonial rule. The second, which stands in direct opposition, considers that
Lebanon was under Ottoman occupation for 400 years, and the formation of the state
of Lebanon was nothing short than a historical struggle over the centuries to restore a
historical status that is uniquely Lebanese. In this respect, the first camp considers
that Lebanon belongs exclusively to the East, and the second camp considers that
Lebanon has always been on the junction of east and west.

With the formation of the Lebanese state in 1946, the constitution stated that Lebanon
has an Arabic facet, and did not state directly that Lebanon was an Arab country. This
definition clearly suggests that the founding fathers of the Lebanese state belonged to
the second camp. After the end of the civil war in 1990 and the Taef Accord, the
constitution was amended, and the phrase about an Arabic facet was completely
changed by stating that Lebanon is an Arab country by identity. This
transformation demonstrates that the first camp succeeded in reconfiguring the

identity of the Lebanese nation along a more Eastern path, at least on a constitutional and hypothetical level. I say hypothetical of course because never in the course of history was the land of Lebanon a uniform ethnical, religious or cultural entity.

This demonstrates the deep division that was and still is at the basis of a postcolonial society. The ideological war though is merely political. It has nothing to do with the actual identity of the various groups that constitute the Lebanese population. In fact, it would seem that the definition that considered that Lebanon is a multifaceted society is much closer to the truth than a mono-faceted definition. The question though is how this brief history helps us in understanding anything about modernist Lebanese architecture.

The answer is perhaps not very difficult. Because if we concede that Lebanon is multifaceted, then this should easily be observable from its architecture which means that it should reflect both an eastern tradition as well as a western tradition, and even probably an amalgamation of both traditions at certain instances. The architecture of Hamra Street suggests that this is in fact the case. There is a variety of Eastern influenced architecture, to the purely modern, as well as attempts to the amalgamation of both Eastern and modern simultaneously as in the façade of the ministry of Tourism by Salam. The integration of stone arches into a modern compositions is clearly an attempt to domesticate the international style.

On the level of architectural production and aesthetic characteristics during the modernist period, there is without dispute an immense body of work in Lebanon as a whole and particularly in Beirut that is generated by modernist concepts of aesthetics, form, construction and spatial planning. If we are to concede that Lebanon is purely an Arab country, then the immensity of architectural production should at least reflect
a substantial amount of aesthetically Eastern motifs or characteristics throughout its modern architecture, but again this is not the case. Alternately, we see that there is a direct connection between what was happening in Lebanon in the three decades following independence with what was happening worldwide. Modernism is therefore the direct influence of this western facet, a modernist architecture that is mostly devoid of regionalist character: An international architecture. Farid Trad was such an architect. In an interview in 1960 he commented on the relationship between traditional Lebanese and modern design:

Lebanese style is found in traditional architecture of arched galleries and red-tiled roofs. This style cannot be applied to modern architecture. In the rural areas, stone is the material that is mostly used, whereas in cities, the majority of buildings are built in concrete. In this regard, one should admit that building materials and techniques, air conditioning, electricity, elevators, and so on, are determinant factors contributing to an international style.509

The architecture of Trad attests to these principals, where modern aesthetic is predominant. These architects probably aligned themselves completely with the west. On the flipside, regionalists such as Salam, and his attempts to reintroduce eastern motifs in his architecture seem to represent the ideals of the founding fathers and the original constitution, an amalgamation between east and west.510 Others such Jacques Liger-Belair for example, a Belgian-Lebanese architect, went further than Salaam in looking not at eastern motifs, but rather at local Lebanese architecture specifically and

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attempted to modernize its structure while maintaining its local aesthetics as in the villa he designed in Maad.511

![Villa in Maad by Jacques Liger-Belair](image)

Fig. 6.0 Villa in Maad by Jacques Liger-Belair. Credits: dubizzle.com

There are several other instances of comparison. Modernism and regionalism in Lebanon can also be read along political rather than purely architectural lines. This new reading of the architectural scene suggests that modernism in Lebanon is not merely an imported image. It is tied to more fundamental issues that are embedded into its transforming political and national history.

In regards to Collin’s discussion on the “Awareness of Styles” an important factor presents itself. Collins maintains that the Modern concept of “Style” must be understood as taking a proper shape only after 1920:

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Between 1920 and 1940, as a result of a revolution instigated by a number of well-known pioneers, a return was gradually made to the traditional philosophy of building as understood before 1750, even though there were radical differences in appearance because of changes in structural techniques. Hence the decades from 1750 to 1920 must be regarded, according to this theory, simply as an unhappy interlude interrupting an otherwise continuous tradition.512

The fact that Collins mentions these two dates 1920 and 1940 is almost prophetic of the transformational atmosphere that was occurring in Lebanon during these years, if not recorded on an intellectual level, then definitely observable on the architectural level. Saliba has explored the so called ‘colonial style’, but as we have seen, there were many others searching for a modernist vocabulary applicable to Lebanon such as Tabet, Elias and many others. This search was not necessarily due to exercises on the nature of architecture, but rather seems to have been spawned by necessity, the necessity to respond to market demand. These two decades witnessed these first attempts to expand vertically instead of horizontally. This necessitated the adoption of a new approach to construction techniques and consequently architectural form, which of course is described by Collins in his chapter on “Primitivism and Progress” where he suggests that these transformations “fulfilled the needs of an evolving society”.513

Tabet's Villa in Beirut in 1933 attests to this search for identity. It also fits within the timeframe that Collins considers critical. This suggests that Lebanese architects were not merely copying foreign aesthetics, but were rather engaged in searching for a local manifestation of international ideas.

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513 Ibid. PP.68
The whole section on revivalism from Collins does not apply to Lebanon in the fashion that he described it. Yet, during the mid eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Lebanon experienced a boom in construction, mainly residential, that exhibited Mediterranean architectural characteristics. It has been argued by many that the architecture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is nothing short of the

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Fig: 6.01: Villa Mexico by Antoine Tabet 1933. Credit: Author

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Ibid. PP. 59
revival of Venetian types. ⁵¹⁵ Jacques Liger-Belair in his book *L’habitation au Liban* (1966), agrees with the Austrian art historian Hilde Zaloscer who claimed in her book *Survivance et Migration* (1954)⁵¹⁶ that the Lebanese central hall houses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are revivals of the facades of Venetian castles during the fifteenth century, especially with the works of the Venetian architect Michel Sanmicheli. Liger-Belair seems to approve of this idea that this type “bounced” back to Lebanon from Venice:

The exchanges were so frequent between Lebanon and Tuscany and Venice. Italian architects were also called to work in Beirut and they interpreted the central hall plan with a totally Italian exuberance.⁵¹⁷

Some researchers mentioned earlier, such as Elie Haddad, disagree, and consider that this type has evolved locally over many centuries.⁵¹⁸ They refuse the idea that this type was transmitted or revived in Lebanon during these centuries. But this was only on the level of residential architecture. In regards to public buildings, Ottoman architecture dominated public space under Ottoman rule.

Yet, there are cases that would lead us to reflect on whether there were instances of revival in the same sense as that described by Collins. In Lebanon, some of these cases started to take shape from the middle of the nineteenth century up till 1920. A quick look at some projects would give us an idea of the framework of this phenomenon. Since Lebanon is a multicultural and multi-religious society with an eclectic history, from Islamic to Crusader architecture, and from Greek and Roman to Ottoman, there are many sources to draw from. Around the end of the nineteenth

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century, the Maronite church was aligned with western forces, especially after the massacres of 1860, as discussed earlier. The design of the Cathedral of Saint George in Beirut is testimony to this alignment. It was commissioned by the Maronite diocese, and the church was designed by the Italian architect, Giuseppe Maggiore from Mineo in 1894. The church displays many classical Roman features, and could probably be classified as Roman Revival or even neoclassical. Maggiore was also commissioned to design the church of Saint Estephan in Batroun in 1910. Until then in Batroun, the church of Saint George belonging to the Orthodox denomination was the largest church. Saint Estephan church also displays many neoclassical characteristics.

Fig. 6.1: Saint George Cathedral, Beirut, 1894. Credit: Lebnen18
These two churches and several others have displayed a revival of sorts. The design of the churches and the elements they exhibit were to affect the aesthetics of many other churches that were built afterwards. The church of Qrayyi, built in 1910 in South Lebanon exhibits an eclectic collection of Roman and Eastern motifs. The Roman motifs were clearly influenced by those of Saint George Cathedral.
These transformations are not merely architectural decisions, but rather political and religious decisions as an affirmation of the commitment of the Maronite church to western ideals. In contrast to what happened in the west though, the concept of revival is imported and transformed. If we were to locate Maggiore’s churches in Italy, they would take one meaning. If they were to be in France, they would take a different meaning, and their location in Lebanon gave these two churches a totally different meaning again. If we are to apply the same theory towards modern architecture, we would likely come to similar conclusions. Therefore, context becomes an important factor in the process of understanding.

In his chapter on “eclecticism” Collins elaborates on a concept that perhaps best describes the Lebanese situation. The impact of eclecticism in the west though is seen by Collins as another step in the formation of modern architectural thought. Ecclecticism emerged as “the only viable doctrine which could be accepted in the circumstances of the time” after the public’s faith in the claims of the Revivalists was completely destroyed.\(^{519}\)

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But to say that this concept applies to Lebanon similarly to the west is an understatement. Eclecticism cannot be merely a western phenomenon. It is by necessity universal. Collins claims that ornamentation was a major concern before 1880 since “no new structural system was created before that date”520 and variation could only happen through ornamentation. This was the situation almost anywhere before the introduction of significant new methods of construction. Since ornamentation was the only mode of variation, it cannot merely be considered a western phenomenon, but rather a universal phenomenon.

In the section on functionalism where Collins discusses the four analogies, we must take a step back and consider what this section is attempting to achieve. To review, Collins discusses four analogies: the biological analogy, the mechanical analogy, the gastronomic analogy and the linguistic analogy. First, it seems that these analogies were predominant in written form. To claim that Lebanon, or probably any third world country, was part of the discussions that shaped the architectural ideas generated by these analogies seems a little farfetched, but closer inspection could shed light on some developments that might suggest otherwise. To say that these ideals, though originating in the west, did not have an impact on the formation of modern Lebanese architecture would be a mistake. It is obvious that Lebanese architects were aware of the intellectual forces that were at the heart of modernism. Additionally, many of the first Lebanese modernists such as Ilyas Murr who graduated from MIT in 1905, and Mardiros Altounian who graduated from the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris in 1918, were exposed to modernist ideals overseas and eventually established their

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520 Ibid. PP.123
architectural professions in Lebanon. The influence of these early pioneers in Lebanon on the following generations of architects who were locally educated and trained is yet to be researched, but there is no doubt that there was an intellectual thread and a clear understanding of modernist aesthetics amongst many of those who shaped the urban image of modern Lebanon. The analogies discussed by Collins were and still are part and parcel of the architectural curriculum in most Lebanese architectural schools today.

In regards to the manner by which Collins deals with ‘rationalism’, and the impact of military engineering on architectural thought after the definitive split between engineering and architecture in France around 1750, it is possible to point out here that even though the formation of a distinct branch of education specifically for architects (an event that did not occur in Lebanon till 1957) might not be considered as a definitive element in the formation of modern thinking as we might assume. Some of the prominent early modernists, such as Lloyd Wright who attended University of Wisconsin in the civil engineering program, were trained as engineers not as architects.

Many of the early Lebanese modernists were engineers rather than architects, as the profession of architecture was not established as a separate discipline till 1952 in Lebanon with the formation of the school of architectural engineering at ALBA (Academie Libanaise de Beaux Arts). In this respect, the split may not be as decisive as Collins claims it to be, especially since today new educational programs encompassing architectural engineering are common and are seen as necessary to

contemporary practices. Yet, in regards to the factor of economy that military engineering exerted on the building practice, no information seems to exist on this from a historical point of view. There is evidence though that might suggest that especially during the Ottoman period, the barracks that were built in Beirut and in other districts in Lebanon must have had some influence regarding the techniques and principles of efficiency favored in any military approach around the world. The most famous of these barracks is the Grand Serail, built by the Ottomans in 1853, which later became the prime minister’s headquarters. Kassir mentions that this building “was the first government decision to directly affect the city’s development.” This in a sense may suggest that military structures had a direct effect on development in Beirut.

![Grand Serail in the early 1900’s. Credit: Wikimedia](image)

Here, there seems to be an opportunity for further research on this subject which could yield interesting results, but as this dissertation is focused on a specific avenue

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523 KASSIR, S. 2010. *Beirut*, University of California Press. PP. 134
524 Ibid.
of research, expanding the parameters would go beyond the scope of the research intention.

On the other hand, the concept of economy was an essential element of daily Lebanese life in Mount Lebanon where economy was part and parcel of a poor farming society. Therefore, while Collins’ concept of economy could be argued to have been influenced by military engineering and design methods, in Lebanon, a culture of economy built into the farming society could as well be argued to have played a major role in helping modern architecture to appeal to the Lebanese way of life.

In regards to the impact of new building types on the formation of modern architecture, it is necessary to point out that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and because of the economic boom that Lebanon witnessed due to the silk trade, many new building types emerged, not only to cater to the new industry, but also to reap the benefits of the new social status that came with it. Before the eighteenth century, most buildings were residential and displayed a provincial character. The central hall house, which has been considered the modern Lebanese house of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries par excellence, is a byproduct of this economic boom. Other buildings such as silk factories and associated structures, Khans and market places were expressions of other building types that were also significant. Their emergence paved the way for the formation of a modern society in Lebanon.
The building type which became predominant during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which had a significant impact on Lebanese architecture was the Lebanese central hall house. Yet, though it is considered a traditional type, it is by no means a vernacular type. It is considered by Saliba as the first “modern” Lebanese house, which paved the way to many other types that utilized its image and methods of construction.525 The reason that Saliba considers it the first Lebanese modern house is due to this discrepancy between traditional and vernacular identities:

The import of mass produced construction materials from Europe increased during the second half of the nineteenth century, leading to a gradual change of domestic building form and structure. From a preindustrial type relying on local building materials, the "modern" Beirut house of the second half of the nineteenth century emerged as a hybrid suburban structure integrating wrought-iron I-beams and roof tiles from France, mechanically sawn timber

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from Romania, cast-iron balustrades and hardware from England and marble tiles from Italy.\footnote{SALIBA, R. \& ASSAF, M. 1998. \textit{Beirut 1920-1940: domestic architecture between tradition and modernity}, Order of Engineers and Architects. PP.21}

This discrepancy between traditional and vernacular points toward the shift that occurred in building design and technology starting from the middle of the nineteenth century onward and coinciding with the global impact of the industrial revolution. This transformation also points toward the fact that modernization in Lebanon was not abrupt, but rather gradual.

If we are to accept the premise that the mid eighteenth century is the date of the emergence of modern architectural thinking, then we have to look at what was going on in Lebanon during that period. In terms of architecture, Lebanon witnessed the formation of a new architectural typology that would define its traditional architectural image for centuries to follow, the modern central hall house. In terms of the political construct, Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire, and its architectural heritage belongs to that period. Furthermore, the reign of Prince Bashir II witnessed many projects ranging from infrastructure and bridges to palaces:

In circa 1806, he ordered the building of a splendid palace on the hill of Bayt al-Din (or Btaddin), not far from Dayr al-Qamar, and shortly afterwards moved the seat of his government there. The palace of Bayt al-Din, and the canal constructed in 1812-15 to supply it with water from the springs of Nahr al-Safa, some ten miles away, remain until this day the most impressive of the Emir’s public works. Bashir II also built bridges which are still standing, and ordered the construction of paved mule-tracks to replace the old dust tracks.\footnote{SALIBI, K. S. 1977. \textit{The Modern History of Lebanon}, Caravan Books. PP.23}
Many have discussed the transition from an Ottoman architectural heritage to a western architectural heritage around the beginning of the twentieth century, and the formation of the modern city of Beirut. In an article, Jens Hanssen delineates this transition:

It is very tempting to project the history of a city’s physical development back in time and measure an epoch by virtue of its contribution to the city’s present shape. However, such an approach is bound to disregard those historical epochs which have ostensibly left no or few physical traces on the ‘modern’ city. Furthermore, an approach set out to trace lineages of a ‘modern city’ is dependent on present definitions of modernity and does not capture the extent to which the population of a given age perceives urban transformation.

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It is clear here that Hanssen sees the impact of French colonialism on the urban fabric of the city of Beirut as betraying a long urban tradition. He also considers that this impact erased much of what constituted the Ottoman character of the city of Beirut. Yet, Hanssen’s view of this transformation is lacking in certain respects. The problem here is that the influence of France on the Lebanese architectural scene, if it is to be viewed as an orchestrated endeavor, would only be applicable from 1920 till 1945, when Lebanon was under French colonial rule. The years predating should be seen in light of Ottoman rule, and in addition, in light to what was going on in the architectural scene in Turkey. Yet Hanssen’s perspective has some merit. Lebanese architectural history, even its modern history, cannot be considered separate from Ottoman architectural history in Lebanon. The architectural thought that governed the Ottoman Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be considered as an integral part of the Lebanese architectural process.

Here, modern architectural thought is not by necessity tied to a moment in time. If it originated in Europe, and more specifically in France, as some argue, or in Italy, as others argue, it should not have any bearing on the integration of modernist architectural productions say in Iceland, the USA, or India for example. It may be the case that belonging to a modernist architectural category does not depend on contributing to the formation of that modernist thought, but rather on reciprocating certain ideals and aesthetics that are essential for modernist thought, image and perception.

Therefore, it can be argued that it is not necessarily through the formulation of the principals of modern architecture that determines the inclusion or the exclusion of a building or even the architecture of an entire city within a modernist category. It is

530 Ibid.
more probable that such inclusion or exclusion is dependent upon the adherence to
some or all of the principles that are claimed to constitute modern architecture. The
reason for saying “some or all” here points to an important factor in the process of
classification. This factor builds on the impossibility for any building to adhere to all
the governing criteria that are associated with modernism, especially where
modernism catered at times to socialist ideals and at other moments to elitist clientele.

If we return for a minute to Hays’ two main characteristics of modern architecture,
namely “functionalism” and the “avant-garde”, we find that in the first instance, the
formation of objective design methodologies and standardized means of production
are two indisputable factors that contributed to the formation of modern Lebanese
architecture. Whereas the “avant-garde” is what is claimed to be lacking, or so it
seems.

In any of the chapters of Collins’ book so far discussed, the constituent elements that
contributed to the formation of modern architectural principals had some relevance
one way or another to the Lebanese case. In the section concerned with the influence
of ‘Literature and Criticism’, there seems to be a very interesting and complex case. If
we are to consider the two centuries in question, that is, the eighteenth and the
nineteenth centuries, Lebanon’s literary history underwent a radical transformation.
The first printing press in the Middle East was installed in Lebanon at the Monastery
of St. Anthony of Kozhaya as early as 1610. The press characters were the Syriac
script of the language of the Maronite Church. The press printed books in the
Syriac language and also in the Arabic language which was transliterated into Syriac

531 HAYS, K. M. Ibid. Modern Beirut. PP. 79
532 HITTI, P. K. 2004. History of Syria, Including Lebanon and Palestine, Gorgias Press, LLC. PP. 676
533 The Syriac language is a variant of the Aramaic language not to be confused with Syrian which is
considered to be a dialect of the Arabic language spoken in modern day Syria.
script. The first Arabic printing press would not be established till 1702 in Aleppo in Syria,\textsuperscript{534} and then in 1733 in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{535} Printing presses in Egypt would not be established till 1798.\textsuperscript{536} The first printing press ushered the ‘Nahda’ or ‘Renaissance’ in the Middle East and many Lebanese were part of the group that spearheaded the movement. Though the Nahda is considered to belong to the nineteenth century, it could be argued that it had its origin with these developments that took place in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{537} Lebanese Christians particularly, such as Nasif Al Yaziji, Boutros Al Bustani, Faris Alshidiaq, and many others, were revolutionary figures in the Nahda movement. In Salibi’s words:

Such Lebanese Christians were the vanguard of an Arabic literary revival which, in time, was to spread from Lebanon to every other country where Arabic was spoken. By their efforts ‘Arabic became again a pliable tool of thought and learning’, the Arabic heritage was rediscovered and studied, and the broad lines for future developments in literature and journalism were set. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of their contribution in this respect.\textsuperscript{538}

This spawned a plethora of publications, where the Arabic language took its modern form. It is not clear, and there isn’t enough research on these decades of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in relation to Lebanese architecture specifically that could be extrapolated from any surviving texts. This could also be another possible avenue for research, but yet again, beyond the scope of this dissertation.

This does not mean though that if such texts either do not exist or have not been read from an architectural perspective that architectural ideas were not recorded. On the

\textsuperscript{535} MELLOR, N., RINNAWI, K., DAJANI, N. & AYISH, M. I. 2013. Arab Media, Wiley. PP. 34
\textsuperscript{536} Ibid. PP. 35
\textsuperscript{537} KHATER, A. F. 2011. Embracing the Divine: Passion and Politics in the Christian Middle East, Syracuse University Press. PP. 5
\textsuperscript{538} SALIBI, K. S. 1977. The Modern History of Lebanon, Caravan Books. PP. 143
contrary, it is more plausible to suggest that such criticism existed and was a part of the architectural and literary process.

In addition, there might not have been many avant-gardists in terms of architectural criticism on the Lebanese modernist architectural scene during the modernist era, but there have been enough publications to point towards modest contributions to modernist architectural thought, that would have been considered as avant-garde within the local setting. Still, architectural theory in Lebanon written by architects during that period and before is somewhat elusive, and most of these writings have been collected in Arbid’s thesis.\textsuperscript{539} But this does not mean that the subject of architecture did not surface in other literary sources. Indeed, Collins’ prerogative in constructing modernist architectural ideals depends to a certain degree on literary sources, and this is where also the Lebanese case becomes somewhat relevant.

Looking at Lebanese literary productions around the turn of the twentieth century, it is evident that many Lebanese authors were already assessing the relationship of man to his built environment. If the works of Gebran Khalil Gebran in the early twentieth century are examined for example, many references could be found alluding to the relationship of man with the built environment. In \textit{Spirits Rebellious} written in 1903 Gebran says through one of the main characters of the story:

\begin{quote}
With the strength of our arms we lifted the columns of the temple, and upon our backs we carried the mortar to build the great walls and the impregnable pyramids for the sake of glory. Until when shall we continue building such magnificent palaces and living in wretched huts?\textsuperscript{540}
\end{quote}


This statement is nothing short of a call for an architecture that caters to the human being, and possibly socialist in its tone. Additionally, it is a call for an architecture for the people, an architecture that escapes the domain of the elite, so in a sense, in line with one of the programs of modern architecture. It was a cry against the highly decorated and highly ornate houses of the upper class in Lebanese society:

Look at those majestic mansions and sublime palaces where hypocrisy resides; in those edifices and between their beautifully decorated walls resides Treason beside Putridity; under the ceiling painted with melted gold lives Falsehood beside Pretension. Notice those gorgeous homes that represent happiness, glory and domination; they are naught but caverns of misery and distress.541

Fig. 6.51: Sursok Villa in Beirut, Now a Museum

There are surely many other literary references that one can draw upon that would fall one way or another into a modernist concept of life, this is especially the case given

541 Ibid. PP. 16
that most of the Lebanese writers were living overseas. The Pen League for example, which included Gebran, Michael Neamy, and eight other members was the first Arab American literary society and was formed in 1916 by Nasib Arida in New York, and revived after the First World War in 1920. These writers contributed much to the formation of modern thought, and attempted to reconcile eastern and western values through their writings. If the impressive body of Lebanese literary productions during the early twentieth century is taken into consideration, then Collins’ argument in regards to the position of ‘criticism’ and its influence on modern though as applied to Lebanon may not be far-fetched after all.

In terms of the influence of industrial design, the Lebanese case does not seem to contribute anything new that is relevant to the arts and crafts movement that is considered central to Collins’ mode of analysis, but in regards to the influence of painting and sculpture, this is a domain that remains largely under-researched in Lebanon. There are indications on many levels though that the work of many significant Lebanese artists that produced artworks during the modernist era in Lebanon had a lot of influence on the social scene:

A critic once told me that my work has a European influence. No, it’s a universal influence, in fact, what I experience, everyone in the world experiences.

This is how Saloua Choucair, the Lebanese artist, described her work, which took shape from the early formation of the Lebanese state in the 1940s till today. Her work, most of it now at the Tate museum in Britain, displays a struggle to reconcile local tradition with modernity.

In this respect, we can find that almost all the ideals that Collins alluded to in his book as central to modern architecture, had some relevance in the Lebanese culture, and not necessarily through idea contamination with the west. The ideals therefore can be viewed as emanating from a western locus and timeframe as Collins would contend, but not necessarily exclusive to the west. Perhaps in a way, these ideals are an integral part of the development of western architectural theory from the enlightenment onwards, but in no way restricted to the west.
6.4: Re-reading Rykwert: Western Divisions and the Concept of Origin

It is necessary here to understand Rykwert's position in the matrix of modern architectural literature. Rykwert's book is entitled *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century*. This is the first indication that he considers the roots of modern architecture to reside somewhere within that historical period. Rykwert's account then, is about relating historical events to modern architectural thinking. This relationship is established through reviewing historical events in the field of architecture in Europe during the eighteenth century. Yet, whereas Rykwert can see the developments of these events as pointing towards modern architecture, it is an objective of this dissertation to provide a critique of this text in a manner that could serve the aim of the dissertation.

Rykwert's text therefore poses a challenge, especially to a locale such as Beirut. The events and the names and architects he discusses are at first glance completely disconnected from any narrative that could be of any relevance to Beirut modernism. This in a sense makes Rykwert's text an affirmation of the primacy of the “west” over modern architecture, specifically because it seems to explore an inner dialogue unique within a European context. The question here then becomes, how is Rykwert's text relevant to the dissertation?

Rykwert's narrative remains a constructed text, that is, he weaves his theoretical position utilizing the plethora of historical data available to him through a unifying concept, and this concept is a constructed concept. It is his prerogative to call these architects “The First Moderns”, therefore establishing a connection that spans two centuries. It follows therefore that this dissertation will attempt to provide an alternative narrative of the events of the eighteenth century to that of Rykwert. This
alternative narrative building on much of Rykwert’s information, yet providing a different perspective of these historical developments, might assist in understanding modernism as a phenomenon, and foster the possibility to relate Beirut's modernism to these events through providing a wider context for historical assessment. This part of the dissertation then is not about relating Lebanese modernism to Rykwert's text per se, but rather, about providing a re-reading of the historical events in Rykwert's text in a manner that could prove relate-able to the situation of Lebanese modernism.

Martin Heidegger, in his book *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971), talks about the concept of origin:

"Origin here means that from which something is what it is and as it is. What something is, as it is, we call its essence or nature. The origin of something is the source of its nature." 544

The concept of origin is critical to this dissertation, because many architectural historians of the modern movement have tried to locate the origin of modernism at one point or another, both, in time and place. Rykwert sees it in the eighteenth century, Pevsner in the Arts and Crafts movement,545 and Tafuri, though he seems to contend with the concept altogether, in the Baroque itself.546

This dissertation will now look at Rykwert’s work as it reassesses the historical context that he argues held the seeds of the first moderns. If we are to accept that history in general cannot be reduced to a unified model, then we have to seek other perspectives to try to understand such historical models. There is always much dispute about the origin of things, about the interpretation of history and about the possibility

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of a conventionalized model of any historical era. The history of western architectural thought does not seem to be any different. But, within this seemingly controversial history, certain elements could be distinguished, forming a connected thread. This thread weaves a history of confrontation, a history of transformation. Revisiting the history of western architecture specifically during the eighteenth century, where Rykwert positions the origin of modernism, is necessary here. This part of the dissertation is an attempt to reassess this history through a set of polemic positions innate in Rykwert’s text as well as in other theoretical literature that deals with the events discussed in his book. I am proposing here to revisit these events from three positions. These positions include the place of Gothic architecture in opposition to the Baroque tradition, the Greco-Roman tradition and the canon of the orders. These three subjects, which Rykwert returns to throughout his book, require a reassessment in terms of their impact on modern architecture. In a sense, I will be using the historical threads that Rykwert provides to reconstruct a different perspective of the events of the eighteenth century using the concept of origin inherent in these three positions.

6.41: Baroque vs. Gothic

The Italian Renaissance has been considered throughout the history of the west as a pivotal era. It gave rise to a renewal in the arts that set it apart from the middle ages. The Renaissance originally started in Italy in the fourteenth century, presumably in Florence, and expanded afterwards to the rest of Europe by the sixteenth century, a long span of almost two hundred years. This gave Italy precedence and authority, and Italian architects by association became the masters to be emulated. Such a position of superiority always invokes envy. True, the Italians were the rightful inheritors of the great Roman Empire, and their architects justly revived art and architecture in Italy. Their Renaissance would eventually reverberate in Europe.
The Renaissance through the Baroque period in architecture has been called by the architectural historian Paul Frankl “the period of reaction against Gothic”. Frankl, who refused the claims that Gothic vestiges can be found in the work of Brunelleschi and Michelozzo, attests that by the time of the Renaissance and afterwards “the entire development indicates as clearly as do the sources that the Gothic was considered vanquished and was detested.”

Gothic architecture seems to have had a very curious position in the history of western architecture. It has been vehemently attacked by many throughout the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, but on the other hand, many others have regarded Gothic architecture as sublime and considered it to offer a different model for emulation. This division that posits Gothic architecture against Baroque architecture is not only worthy of investigation, but also points to a schism in western architectural thought. I will start this investigation around the middle of the seventeenth century, the period when the Baroque began its descent.

By the seventeenth century, France was becoming a major power and a potent contender under the kingship of Louis XIV. In 1687, and in the courts of the Sun King, Charles Perrault, the famous author of the Fairy Tales and a member of the French Academy made a very bold suggestion: the age of Louis XIV rivals, if not surpasses, the age of Augustus. This suggestion was read at the French Academy to celebrate the King’s recovery from an illness. What happened during the reading and after is well known and documented. Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux shouted for the

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reading to stop, and Racine called it a joke. The famous “Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns” reached a tipping point.

The “Quarrel” could be considered as the polemic peak of an anxiety innate in Renaissance humanism, which for the Ancients had authoritarian reference. The Moderns on the other hand advocated critical assessment of all literary and eventually artistic productions, as a form of a sovereign process. The Quarrel was not restricted to France, but also engaged many other nations throughout Europe, France and Italy primarily and eventually Germany and England and the rest of Europe. Charles Perrault spearheaded the “Moderns”, while Boileau was the main figure representing the “Ancients”. The Moderns included in addition to Perrault, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, Pierre de Marivaux, Voltaire, as well as René Descartes. Francois Blondel on the other hand sided with the ancients. Even though this incident was a climax in the debate, the events leading to it were already brewing for decades.

A central figure in this Quarrel is Claude Perrault, Charles’ brother, who was a physician as well as an architect. Claude Perrault had three major contributions that tipped the balance of the Quarrel. The first was his design of the eastern façade of the Louvre around 1667, the second his translation of Vitruvius’ “Ten Books on Architecture” to French, which was published in 1673 with a controversial commentary by Perrault himself, and the third was his book Ordonnance Des Cinq Especes De Colonnes published in 1683. The design of the eastern façade of the Louvre was the first of a chain reaction.

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550 Ibid.
551 Ibid. PP. 32
In 1665, Gianlorenzo Bernini, one of the most renowned Italian artists and architects of his time, arrived in Paris through an invitation from the Sun King to design the new façade of the Louvre. Joseph Rykwert describes the event as such:

Bernini realized rightly that he was surrounded by hostility from French architects and from some officials, and so he worked secretly. Perrault, managing to sneak in, prepared a criticism of the scheme, which he discussed with Colbert; so that although building started again on Bernini’s scheme when he returned to Rome in the autumn of that year (having refused to stay in Paris because of the cold), his project was shelved.\(^{554}\)

By 1667 Bernini’s project was completely abandoned. Here, Claude Perrault’s design for the Louvre came to light. Perrault’s design was a departure from classical architecture, and caused much controversy. The façade featured a coupled free standing columniation supporting a straight trabeation, something unprecedented in the classical manner. Blondel attacked the design, and called it structurally unstable. It is not necessary here to delve into all of Blondel’s attack, but focus on one part of the argument. This part included a curious demeaning statement directed at Perrault’s design: Blondel alluded to a Gothic influence: an accusation. Perrault defended his design in the commentary to his translation of Vitruvius:

> The taste of our century, or at least of our nation, is different from that of the ancients and perhaps it has a little of the Gothic in it, because we love the air, the daylight, and openness [dégagemens]. Thus we have invented a sixth manner of disposing of columns, which is to group them in pairs and separate each pair with two intercolumniations. . . . This has been done in imitation of Hermogenes. . . . What he did by removing a range of columns in each aisle, we do within a colonnade by removing a column from the middle of two

\(^{554}\) RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 30
columns and pushing it toward the adjacent column. This manner could be
called the Pseudostyle.555

And he continues:

But the greatest reproach he believes to make against our Pseudostyle is to
say that it resembles the Gothic. I might hesitate to agree with this fact in my
note, but assuming that the Gothic in general (and taking into account
everything that composes it) is not the most beautiful style of architecture, I
do not think that everything in the Gothic must be rejected. The daylight in
their buildings, and the openness that results are things in which Gothic
people differed from the Ancients, but they are not things for which the
Gothic should be disdained.556

The fact that “Gothic” is presented in a negative light by Blondel, and Perrault’s
defense of certain positive Gothic characteristics point to an important argument
underlying the main dispute.557 Perrault was a very nationalistic figure, and
considered France under the reign of Louis XIV to have reached a golden age, similar
to the views of his brother. Bernini’s arrival in France to design its most important
building could be seen as a statement that consolidated the superiority of Italy over
France in the architectural arena, and second it seems to have insinuated a lack of
French talent worthy of such an undertaking. This would definitely not be allowed,
not only by Perrault, but also by many other influential French figures.

Up till the seventeenth century, the whole of Europe was living the legacy of the
Italian Renaissance. For almost three hundred years Europe paid tribute to this
heritage, including the French, whose architects were mostly trained in Italy.558 The
disdain for Gothic architecture is nothing new. In a sense, it is the legacy of the

University Press. PP. 6
556 RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 85
Architecture, OUP Oxford. PP. 244
558 BRIGGS, M. S. 1914. Baroque Architecture, McBride, Nast. PP. 166
Renaissance. The negative sentiments towards Gothic architecture are first felt in Italy and specifically in Filarate’s treatise on architecture in 1464. His treatise marks an obvious disdain for the Gothic:

I beg everyone to abandon modern [Gothic] usage. Do not let yourself be advised by masters who hold to such bad practice. Cursed he who discovered it! I think that only barbaric people could have brought it into Italy.  

Filarate is probably unique during the fifteenth century in that he voiced his dissent for the Gothic style publically. Others such as Alberti, Baramante and Leonardo were more subtle, and did not attack the Gothic style in any of their writings, nor even Raphael who even considered that the style of the Germans “did make some sense”. Filarate’s sentiment would be echoed much more forcefully by Vasari in the sixteenth century:

Then arose new architects, and they, after the manner of their barbarous nations erected the buildings in that style which we now call Gothic, and raising edifices that, to us moderns, are rather to the discredit than glory of the builders, until at a later period there appeared better artists, who returned, in some measure, to the purer style of the antique.

The Renaissance writers clearly felt that the Gothic style was a reason for the decadence of the arts during the middle ages. Still, several architects such as Palladio maintained that Gothic architecture had some merit. These attacks reached a climax with Vincenzo Scamozzi who picked up the torch from Vassari. Scamozi attacked

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559 FILARETE, A. A. & SPENCER, J. R. Filarete’s Treatise on Architecture: Being the Treatise by Antonio Di Piero Averlino, Known as Filarete, Yale University Press. Book VIII Folio 59r
560 Bracketed use in the quote is per original.
Gothic architecture calling Milan Cathedral “a perforated marble pile” and described the palace of Doges in Venice as “deformed and ugly”. By the end of the sixteenth century anyone who was not working in the Baroque style was not considered noteworthy. Wittkower mentions that “there was probably no Italian architect of importance during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries whose terms of reference were other than classical.” Even one of Italy’s greatest architects, Francesco Borromini, was criticized by Pope Alexander VII and even by Bernini as inclined to Gothic architecture on the merit of his birthplace in Milan.

Ever since Baldinucci's days it has been maintained that there is an affinity to Gothic structures in Borromini’s work. There is certainly truth in the observation. His interest in the cathedral at Milan is well known, and the system of buttresses in S. Ivo proves that he found inspiration in the northern medieval rather than the contemporary Roman tradition.

Bernini also criticized the “Gothicism” in Borromini’s work. Upon his visit to France for the design of the Louvre façade, Bernini had a discussion with Paul Fréart on the road to Paris which Fréart recounted in his diaries:

"We discussed Borromini, a man of extravagant ideas, whose architectural designs ran counter to anything imaginable; a painter and a sculptor in their architecture took the human body as their standard of proportion; Borromini must have derived his rule from some chimera."

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that Borromini’s inclination to Gothic features was not a stated or a well-formulated theory of architecture, yet his Gothic influences

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564 Ibid. PP. 18-19
565 Ibid. PP. 88-89
and his designs were to be the first of two factors that would eventually transform Italian sentiment towards Gothic architecture in the decades to follow. The second factor came through Guarino Guarini, “the most outre follower of Borromini.”

Guarini admired Gothic architecture and analyzed the Gothic cathedral in his book which was published almost fifty years after his death. Guarini had good reason for admiring Gothic. In 1662, he was commissioned to design the church of Sainte-Anne-la-Royale across the river from the Louvre. He designed this church in the Piedmontese Baroque style, and he spent the years between 1662 and 1665 in Paris. There, he got acquainted with the science of stereotomy codified mainly by the Jesuits in France whose work “brought about a seventeenth century Gothic revival in France”. Guarini admired the art of stereotomy of which the Italians knew nothing. His attitude toward Baroque architecture was another influential element that assisted to instill a change of mood in Italy. This of course is not to say that Italian architecture underwent a Gothic revival at all. This is only indicative of the hostile attitude of Italian architects towards Gothic architecture up until the eighteenth century. This change in sentiment though is not surprising since it marks the rise of France as the supreme power in Europe and the decline of Italian architectural influence.

Things were not so different in France around the middle of the sixteenth century. Up until then, the manner of the ancients was considered the rule of good taste, as mentioned earlier. When Perrault presented his design for the Louvre, he was opposing an uninterrupted tradition through a major design commission. It is true that Perrault’s design cannot be considered remotely Gothic, but it nevertheless was a

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568 RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP.16
569 Ibid.
challenge to classical authority as well as to Italian supremacy. The Gothic “character” in his design, as per Blondel’s accusation embodied this revolt against the established order. In addition, the Gothic presented a unique opportunity: The Gothic style was not Italian by birth. Therefore it opened up the possibility of another architectural tradition, another reference, with a rich history that could serve as an alternative to Baroque authority.

Pitting history against itself was a shrewd move by Perrault, and the ripples it generated began to multiply. The commitment to the superiority of the Gothic style would be later echoed by Abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier and Jacques-Germain Soufflot in the eighteenth century, Laugier in his book *Essai sur L’architecture* (1753) and Soufflot in his design of Ste-Geneviève (the Panthéon). 571 Soufflot’s design of the central church of Paris broke the long held tradition of adhering to a coherent architectural style and fused Baroque elements with Gothic aesthetics. Soufflot’s work was in line with Perrault’s strategy. As Rykwert suggests:

Soufflot’s lecture was one of several contemporary attempts at revaluing Gothic architecture: this revaluation was one of two factors in the creation of a national French style, the attempted renewal of French architecture as a national art. 572

It wasn’t long before the rest of Europe took a cue from France. In Germany J.J. Winckelmann was one of the first to state that Roman art was derivative, and asserted the primacy of Greek art. 573 He claimed that current Roman art is simply imitating the

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period of decadent art of the Greeks. Greek revival in Europe has been thoroughly discussed in art history, as well as in architecture, beginning in Germany with Winckelmann. Winkelmann, while attempting to establish a relationship between German and Greek thought, removed Gothic from the equation. Yet, the philhellenic movement in Europe would diverge with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing took Winckelmann’s ideas further in an attempt to establish a unique analytical process. What Lessing attempted differently was to institute a different approach than the French. His criticism of French classicism seems to have been nothing short of a calculated move to establish a separate German theory of art that shares at its base a Greek model, but diverges in terms of its appropriation. Goethe would soon follow in Lessing’s steps. The Gothic in Germany would not be reestablished as a viable architectural model until the eighteenth century with Karl Friedrich Schinkel.

In Britain, things also took a different route. Sir Christopher Wren had a polemical career when it came to Gothic architecture. He clearly did not care much for the manner of the Goths and preferred the style of the ancients. Yet his career is fraught with discrepancies. He resorted on many occasions to design in the Gothic style, such as his work on Christ Church in Oxford. The Gothic tradition would not regain an elevated position in Britain till 1844 with John Ruskin whose affection for Gothic was already predated by the works of Augustus Pugin and his Contrasts in 1836 reassessing the architecture of the medieval British church in the fourteenth and

575 BAER, J. & DAVID, Z. V. 2006. Preparing liberty in central Europe: political texts from the spring of nations 1848 to the spring of Prague 1968, Ibidem-Verlag. PP. 51
576 HAYNES, K. 2003. English Literature and Ancient Languages, OUP Oxford. PP. 139
fifteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{579} Though the two men stood at different crossroads, their Gothic tendencies were a common factor. Ruskin’s dislike of the Baroque would seem to stem from his high religious sentiments against the Roman Catholic Church:

It is of the highest importance, in these days, that Romanism should be deprived of the miserable influence which its pomp and picturesqueness \textsuperscript{sic} has given it over the weak sentimentalism of the English people; I call it a miserable influence, for of all motives to sympathy with the Church of Rome, this I unhesitatingly class as the basest.\textsuperscript{580}

Pugin on the other hand, who was a Catholic convert, advocated the Gothic on the merit of its superior architectural qualities.\textsuperscript{581} The Gothic revival in England in the nineteenth century would produce more Gothic style buildings than any other period. This conflict between the Baroque and the Gothic in England extended well into the nineteenth century. Pevsner’s account of the design for the new British Government offices in Whitehall, London in 1867 shows that this rivalry of styles still had momentum during the neoclassical period in Europe. The British architect Sir George Gilbert Scott charged with the design, could not persuade the government from their inclination to the Renaissance style towards a more Gothic aesthetic, which eventually caused what has been called “the battle of the Gothic and Palladian styles”.\textsuperscript{582}

The reassessment of the Gothic tradition was not the only element of contestation that the French utilized to counter the established Baroque convention. The revision of the whole Greco-Roman tradition was inevitable. The Gothic revival had an underlying purpose still though: it was not the only lens through which a historical era

\textsuperscript{579} PUGIN, A. W. N. 1836. Contrasts: Or, A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day. Shewing the Present Decay of Taste. Accompanied by Appropriate Text, Author and published.


undergoing a phase of transformation could be viewed. History is complex in nature and cannot be reduced to a singular form of analysis. Yet this historical diversity only adds to the complexity of understanding western architecture: there is not one uniform historical model.

The battle between the Gothic and the Baroque points to an important factor. This factor seems to have had more to do with national identity and possibly religious persuasion, than it had to do with an avant-garde attitude towards architecture. Within such an understanding, modernism seems to be somewhat distant from forging national architectural styles, since modernism was in a sense an encompassing approach rather than a style tied to a cultural and a national medium. In this respect, we can begin to question the validity of Rykwert’s thesis of attributing modern concepts to the architecture of the eighteenth century.

So here, the first perspective on the origins of modern architecture which could destabilize the conventional modernist canon of historical reference is evident. Though the events of the eighteenth century must have played a certain role in the formation of modern architecture in the early twentieth century, it must be made clear that any such role may be accidental (and unintentional). In other words, the architects of the eighteenth century were not necessarily seeking to be modern, only dueling in a battle of national identities. The rejection of the authority of tradition, notwithstanding the simple choice of which style suits a particular context or building type such as a church or a public building, is not merely sufficient to claim modernity as a character of the Enlightenment.

There is no doubt that there was a shift in thinking, and in approaching the classical authority starting around 1750. But the challenge to this classical authority may not
necessarily be considered as driven by a new 'modern' spirit, but more probably by an
insatiable feeling to destroy the long held tradition through a growing national
sentiment in each of the European countries. It seems that this feeling is more similar
to the attitude that originally caused the disintegration of the Latin language in Europe
as the language of institutions and the language of authority, in favor of the local
vernaculars beginning the middle of the 16th century, whether in Italy, Spain, France,
Germany or even England. Surely, modernism capitalized on the transformations that
the Enlightenment brought about, but it seems again that the energy and the spirit that
fueled the Enlightenment are of a different nature than those that fueled the modern
movement. Modernism was more of an attitude on an international level, something
that engaged the whole world against the entirety of the architectural tradition: styles,
aesthetics, materials, approach, planning, thinking, etc., instead of something that was
geographically localized in any one country of Europe.

The events that were taking shape in Lebanon during the eighteenth century therefore,
could be also viewed from such a perspective. The revival of the Arabic language by
Lebanese Christians was an attempt to forge an alliance with the Arab Muslims
against the Turkish Ottoman Empire:

This secular nationalism, based on the Arabic language and cultural tradition,
was closely connected with the Arabic literary revival which was taking place at the time in Lebanon.[…] The Arabs, according to the Arab
nationalist theory, had once been a great nation with a glorious history and a splendid civilization; in time, however, they had fallen under the domination of the Turks and had gone into decline. To reverse this historical process and restore the Arab nation to its greatness, early Christian Arab nationalists invited their Moslem compatriots throughout Syria to join them in a general Arab movement to oppose Turkish claims.583

The Arabic Renaissance triggered by Lebanese intellectuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries then was a step towards modernization on its own accord, and had its own internal logic fueled by national aspirations. In a sense, Lebanon underwent a phase of ‘renaissance’, similar to the enlightenment in Europe, but not necessarily a modern phase. Modernism would have to wait till the beginning of the twentieth century.

6.42: Greece versus Rome

Another influential theoretical sphere appeared in the Greco Roman tradition and the challenges it started to face from the beginning of the eighteenth century onward. This Greco-Roman polemic constitutes a continuity of a tradition of conflict and a rooted division within the history of architectural theory in the Western World. Its roots are possibly traced to two different approaches that are more political than theoretical or even architectural for that matter. The outer shell of the debate on the issue of origin in architecture could be viewed in its simplest form as a conflict between two models: The Greek model and the Roman model. These two models were initially consolidated in the classical tradition and were usually thought of as constituting continuity: The Greeks founded western art, and Rome was the Great inheritor of the Greek tradition.

These two models have been in constant flux since the displacement of Greece as a center for the arts, and the rise of Rome as its successor. They would come into opposition with the flourishing of the Enlightenment. The apex of the age of Pericles in Greece seems to be posited against that of the age of Augustus in Rome. In this respect, Charles Perrault’s proclamation that the age of Louis XIV to be greater than the age of Augustus demonstrates a clear polemic understanding of these two
historical models and consequently their implications.\textsuperscript{584} These two models that constitute the two most prominent ages of architecture in the history of ancient western architecture seem to have always influenced architectural production in Europe and therefore it was not surprising that during the Enlightenment the Greek model would be revived to counter that of the Roman.

Questioning the authority of classical architecture in eighteenth century France provided an opportunity to sever ties with Italian architectural supremacy. The French Academy of Architecture was founded in Rome in 1666 by Colbert, and almost all French architectural training was conducted in Rome as mentioned earlier. Therefore, it was only natural to find almost all of the prominent French architects working in the Baroque style. Perrault was an outsider in that respect. He was trained as a physician, and he imposed himself on the architectural profession. Therefore, he had no connections or allegiances to Rome and the Italian architectural tradition.

Before Perrault there have been some attempts towards historical disengagements from Italian superiority, but it remained modest, in written form, and mostly took shape in positing Roman architecture against Greek architecture and asserting the precedence of the latter.

Roland Freart de Chambray’s book \textit{A Parallel of the Antient Architecture with the Modern} (1733) translated by John Evylyn to English reduced the five orders to the three main Greek orders and considered the Tuscan and the composite orders as inconsequential:

\textsuperscript{584} RYKWERT, J. 1983. \textit{The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century}, MIT Press. PP. 26
His Parallele of 1650 was a manifesto of classicism that praised the ancient Greeks as the supreme artists, [and] condemned contemporary architecture in France and Italy as corrupt.585

But with the scant information that was available on actual Greek architecture, these attacks were only hints that took their cue from historical chronology: Greek architecture was considered older than Roman architecture, and its buildings were attested by Rome’s foremost architectural theorist Vitruvius.586 Examples of this could be heard through Fréart de Chambray as well as Jacques-Francois Blondel, (Nephew of Blondel).587 Perrault’s destabilization of the classical model paved the way to far more aggressive sentiments. This attitude can be felt in Laugier’s book *Essai sur l’Architecture* (1753). With Laugier, a new tone started to form. In his book, he announced that “architecture has only midling obligations to the Romans, and that it owes all that is precious and solid to the Greeks alone,”588 galvanizing the total separation from Baroque and Roman architecture.

At the same time, the sentiment in Italy was growing to reorganize architectural thought into a more rational theory. This change in attitude could be felt strongly with the work of Carlo Lodoli. Lodoli’s attitude in Italy was already prefigured by the ideas of Borromini and Guarini. Lodoli sought to reformulate the architectural process based on reason rather than on convention. Planning, he argued, should be based on convenience first.589 In addition he tried to give ornament a new meaning, one which was appropriate and inherently structural. Yet, his ideas to reorganize the classical tradition should not be confused with the views of Perrault, or Laugier for that matter.

Lodoli sought to depart from the debate that engaged Europe, and attempted to provide Italian architecture with a new perspective. He did not want to destroy current practice but rather, as Rykwert observes, to purge it from all that is untrue, while maintaining its classical language.\textsuperscript{590}

With the rediscovery of Greek architecture that occurred around the middle of the eighteenth century, the argument took a much more decisive form. Up until then, Rome was considered the only surviving model of antiquity. Roman architecture exercised authority, and was at the basis of the Renaissance in Italy that overflowed into the rest of Europe. With the Ottoman Empire loosening its rules on travel to Greece and the Middle East around 1740 and the rediscovery of the Greek temple at Paestum, the argument started to take a more defined shape. One of the figures that made a huge contribution to the view that advocated the superiority of Greek architecture was Julien-David Le Roy. Le Roy published his book \textit{The Ruins of the Most Beautiful Monuments of Greece} in 1758 after his trip to Greece.\textsuperscript{591} His book was received within the French circles with high acclaim. Le Roy praised the architecture of the Greeks and placed Roman architecture as “distant second”\textsuperscript{592} in comparison.

This hostility against Roman architecture substantiates an attempt to counter the historical attitude of the Italians against the Gothic. French Neoclassicists it seems had three major arguments that stood to counter the classical Roman tradition. The first questioned the validity of classical laws, which were attacked by Perrault. The second was the Gothic tradition which equaled in production that of the Baroque, and the third was the primacy of Greek architecture over Roman architecture. With this

\textsuperscript{590} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{591} ROY, D. L. 2004. \textit{The Ruins of the Most Beautiful Monuments of Greece, Getty Research Institute.}
triple argument the French succeeded in decentralizing the entirety of the Baroque tradition. At this point, it seems that the sentiments towards Roman architecture started to seep into the rest of Europe starting with Germany.

Karl Friedrich Schinkel attempted throughout his work to make use of both architectural languages, the Greek and the Gothic. The position of Greek culture in Germany was already established. Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller were already attempting to link German nationalism to the ideals of ancient Greece.593 Schinkel attempted to marry Greek architectural concepts with Gothic structural superiority. Even though the two styles were different, Schinkel saw a link between the two that he attempted to exploit:

His ambition was to fuse Greek, Gothic and Teutonic elements in a vision of a united Germany, which he spelled 'Teutschland', following the patriotic fashion which had become popular during the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon.594

The attempt to fuse Greek and Gothic is not surprising in this respect. It is already responding to the developing attitude throughout Europe to establish national architectural identities separate and distinct from the Baroque tradition. But the Germans it seems, in this respect, would not concede to French superiority easily. Initially, they still had hostile attitudes towards Gothic before Schinkel attempted to exploit the Gothic tradition in his work.

By the early eighteenth century, architectural history seemed to be divided between two poles: The Baroque with its origins in Roman architecture, and the Gothic that was linked with the Greek architectural tradition. The link between Greek and Gothic

was already foreshadowed in the work of Abbe de Cordemoy by 1706 in his *Nouveau Traite de tout l’architecture*. Frampton mentions that for Cordemoy “the free standing column was the essence of a pure architecture such as had been made manifest in the Gothic cathedral and the Greek temple.” This link would hold true for the following generations of European theorists and the restoration of the position of Gothic architecture would continue in their work. In France, Viollet-le-Duc would reaffirm the supremacy of Gothic architecture and Auguste Choisy would highlight its superior structure:

> Comes the Gothic period…the new structure is the triumph of logic in art; the building becomes an organized being whose every part constitutes a living member, its form governed not by traditional models, but by its function, and only its function.

The architectural transformation within Europe would eventually begin to affect the Italian mainland. Lodoli, sensing the end of an era for Italian supremacy over the arts, seems to have attempted to reconstitute history in a more rational manner. In this respect, he stands at an interesting junction. On the one hand, he realizes that the classical era is drawing to an end, yet on the other he searches for a path that could guide Italian architecture in a direction that will allow it to remain a powerful force in the western architectural arena, and not a follower. In a sense, Lodoli seems to be more classical than those who were considered classical. He attempted to “purge” the current practice instead of destroying it altogether. His intuition was to fight fire with fire. In the game of chronology, he would introduce a new element that will prove useful a century later. His path would lead towards contesting the chronology of

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597 RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 324
598 Ibid. PP. 325
Lodoli therefore attempted to dislocate Greece as the origin and replace it with Egypt and Tuscany:

The heritage which the architect of his day accepted was not that of an idealized Greece, or even an idealized Rome. Behind the classical ideal, there towered the true stone architecture, invented by the Egyptians and passed by the Etruscans to the Romans; it was the architecture of the wise ancient Italians.  

In this sense, Lodoli circumvented the Greek tradition altogether. This would eventually bring about a totally new set of criteria that would play out in the decades to follow, which in a sense, brings us to the canon of the orders in architecture and the debate that revolved around it from the eighteenth century onward.

The Greco-Roman tradition further accentuates that divisive nature of historical accounts. Rykwert’s thesis again faces scrutiny in light of this historical re-reading of the events of the eighteenth century. The battle to dissociate from Baroque style took another dimension. This dimension also seems to have had little or nothing to do with modernism. It seems more to have been yet another stepping stone towards self identity driven by national aspirations.

If we reflect on the pitting of Greece against Rome in Europe as a means to an end, then there might be a modern parallel that played out in Lebanon beginning around the turn of the twentieth century. The idea of an ancient culture that could give unity to a national identity became more prominent around the end of the nineteenth century as writers, thinkers and politicians were trying to formulate a different history that could unite the Lebanese nation. Arabism as we discussed, was one common history but many Lebanese, especially Christians, were concerned about such unity.

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599 Ibid. PP. 326
600 Ibid.
with a broader Muslim sea around them. Therefore, many opted to revive a more ancient history that predated Arabs and Islam: The Phoenician culture.

The Phoenicians occupied the Lebanese coast from around 2,300 BC onward.\(^6\) The Phoenician culture has always been evident in Lebanon’s archeological history, and became most relevant with the excavations of Joseph Ernest Renan, the French historian and archeologist in Byblos during the nineteenth century.\(^7\)

One of the earliest champions of Lebanese Phoenicianism was Charles Corm, the Lebanese entrepreneur, and carried further by many prominent Lebanese thinkers such as the Lebanese poet and philosopher Said Akl.\(^8\) In the same manner that the war of cultural origins and alignment in Europe influenced architectural production, the war of cultural origins in Lebanon must have also played a role in affecting architectural ideas and ideals at certain instances. Whether one could claim that modernism was a means to an end in opposing an Arabic identity, a modernism devoid of arches and decorations, to a view where modernism was reconstituted with Arabic motifs by way of reintroducing arches and the stone material to inject an eastern character into the modernist aesthetic. Salam’s Ministry of Tourism building on Hamra street is one example that stands as a testament to the effort of the search for an eastern identity. Salam’s conscious search for a regional modernism stands apart on Hamra Street where many other buildings on that same street did not seem to be deeply concerned with such an approach.

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But the fact remains that these possible explanations would take a political dimension beyond architecture. Yet, in a sense again, these attempts were more in line with the ideas that Europe experimented with during the Enlightenment. The attempt to revive Phoenicianism in the early twentieth century was similar to what the Lebanese attempted with the Arabic language and culture, successfully, during the eighteenth century. But this time, the attempt was not as successful. Even on an architectural level, there was not a single building that adhered to a “Phoenician Identity” in Lebanon in any shape or form.

It is not the intention of this dissertation to engage a debate in regards to the cultural and historical identity of the Lebanese people, as this is beyond the scope of the investigation. The issue is merely raised to point out two important factors of relevance. The first is that the developments in Europe viewed through the lens of the Greco-Roman dichotomy add a specific layer that could stand on equal basis with other analyses of this historic period, and therefore suggest that these events were not necessarily triggered by a search for modernity, but rather, were a result of attempts to
forge national identities in Europe. The rejection of tradition should not merely be considered a staple of modernism, as this rejection has happened several times during the history of architecture, whether in Europe or elsewhere. The second element is also to suggest that though these events took place in Europe, there seems to be a similar example to the war of cultures that took place in Lebanon and which in turn could arguably be referred to as an important factor for implementing and advancing modern architecture in Lebanon in the early twentieth century. This parallel though is not to say or advocate such a position, but merely to present a certain similarity.

6.43: The canon of the orders

Much has been written about the canon of orders in architecture, but underlying a seemingly straightforward classification of a classical system is a much more sinister context. In his book “The ten books of architecture” the Roman architect Vitruvius illustrates the three main Greek orders: the Doric, the Ionic and the Corinthian. In addition, he talks about one more order, the Tuscan.\footnote{POLLIO, V., MORGAN, M. H. & WARREN, H. L. 1914. *Vitruvius, the Ten Books on Architecture*, Harvard University Press. PP. 120} An additional order, the composite, first appeared around 82 AD in the arch of Titus, in the forum of Rome. The composite would not be considered as a separate part of the classical orders until the Renaissance. These five orders would constitute the language of architecture from the Renaissance till the end of the neoclassical period.

The tension caused by the orders lies again in the historical debate on origin. In the mid seventeenth century, the famous “Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns” pitted two groups against each other as we have seen. Those who sided
with the Roman model, and those who sought to destroy it. Le Roy’s work was in line with the latter. His previously mentioned book, *The Ruins of the Most Beautiful Monuments of Greece*, pays homage to the superiority of Greek architecture and is an attack on the entire Roman architectural heritage. Le Roy went further than Laugier in attacking the Roman architectural tradition in stating that:

All in all, it seems that the Romans lacked the prolific genius that led the Greeks to so many discoveries. In the orders, they invented nothing of consequence: the one to which they laid claim, known as the Composite, is no more than a somewhat imperfect mixture of Ionic and the Corinthian.

In this sense, the supremacy of Greek architecture resided in their establishment of the architectural orders at the base of western architectural production. Yet, and despite Le Roy’s argument, the Italians did not concede to such attacks and this claim was not to go without a proper response. Giovanni Battista Piranesi would soon enter the debate and attack Le Roy for his assault on the primacy of Roman architecture.

Piranesi was a very interesting character. He had high national sentiments, and his works, such as *Roman Antiquities of the Time of the First Republic and the First Emperors* (1756) and *Views of Rome, Then and Now* (1760) and many others, attest to this. According to Rykwert, his “necrophiliac passion for the glory of ancient Rome” was to guide his lifelong work. As Le Roy and Winkelmann carried out their attacks on Roman architecture, Piranesi published his book *Della Magnificenza de Architettura de' Romani* in 1761 responding to their allegations. What makes

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607 Ibid. PP. 221
609 Ibid.
Piranesi’s response significant is his etching of Tuscan column bases in the *Della Magnificenza* found near Alba, and from his work with the British antiquity dealer Thomas Jenkins while excavating the tombs at Corneto.612

In *Della magnificenza*, Piranesi argued for the independence of the Etruscans from Greek influence and took issue with Leroy's assertion that the Tuscan order was nothing more than a primitive version of the Doric. He believed that both derived from the same source, the God-given architecture of the Temple of Solomon. Stressing the inventiveness and superior intelligence of the Etruscans. Piranesi provided illustrations of round Tuscan column bases found near Alba on Lake Fucino as proof that the early Italians were capable of generating forms distinct from those used by the Greeks. These round bases were deemed more appropriate for their situation than the standard square bases of the Greek Ionic and Corinthian orders. Indeed, the baseless Doric order so much admired by Leroy served Piranesi as evidence of the ignorance of the Greeks, who did not realize that wood in direct contact with the ground was susceptible to rot.613

It is not surprising that Piranesi would exploit the Tuscan argument. This reasoning was already foreshadowed by Lodoli’s attempt to restore balance in the battle of origin as discussed earlier. Furthermore, the Temple of Solomon would provide an additional sphere of debate in the dispute on origin.614 Piranesi here of course is drawing on J.B. Villalpando’s commentary on Ezekiel and his drawings of what the Temple of Solomon must have looked like, in an attempt to justify the divine origins of the orders. Rykwert remarks that:

Villalpanda’s [sic] message was comforting: the “advanced” architecture of Italy was not only a repository of ancient “gentile” wisdom, being derived

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ultimately from the example of the Egyptians [...], but the more correct it was, the nearer it came to divine revelation.615

Villalpando was of course affirming the supremacy of Roman architecture by elevating it to a divine position, not only in antiquity, but also in Christianity.616 This tradition that classical architecture had its origins in the Middle East played a pivotal role in the theoretical debates of the age.

If we return to Lodoli’s argument though, we will find that there are two models for the origin of architecture that extend the debate beyond the geography of Europe. The first is to the Egyptians, and the second to the Middle East, and more specifically to the temple of Solomon. This debate goes beyond Greek-Roman rivalry. The intent for the Italians appears to be aimed at the preservation the central position of Italian architecture in the western world, whereas the intent of the rest of Europe appears to be aimed at decentralizing this position in an attempt to forge separate national architectural identities. The sources drawn from were varied, yet they had to adhere to a logical system with an internal rational consistency. Chronology therefore dictated that earlier models of stone architecture must be situated within the framework of the debate. Hence Egyptian and Middle Eastern architectures were made to take sides in the debate. Yet, at this point, the two base models within Europe were now the Etruscan (the source of Roman architecture) and the Greek. To the Italians, Egypt was the source. Rykwert summarizes this position clearly:

> Architecture did not originate in the imitation of wooden elements, but in the invention of a true way of building by the Egyptians, which they

615  RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 9-10
616  Ibid.
communicated to the Phoenicians and the Etruscans: the Doric order might even be called the Egyptian order. \(^{617}\)

Piranesi furthermore, does not consider the orders to be of Greek origin at all, but rather in his *Apologetical Essay in Defence of the Egyptian and Tuscan Architecture* (1769) credits the Phoenicians for introducing into Greece the three orders. \(^{618}\) In this sense, Greek architecture is dislocated in the chronology of origin and cannot be itself the origin of Roman architecture. Piranesi’s argument is thus twofold. The first is that the origin of Roman architecture is not Greek, but Etruscan, and that Greek architecture is in itself a derivative rather than a self contained canon. \(^{619}\) In rationalizing that the Phoenicians transmitted the art of architecture, to both Etruscans and Greeks, Lodoli and then Piranesi (clearly influenced by Lodoli’s ideas) \(^{620}\) attempted to put both western architectural traditions on the same platform at least in terms of origin.

The debate was not restricted to Italy, France and Germany. In England Wren made several remarks on the origin of the orders that contributed to the debate. In his tracts, published in 1750, Wren asserts that “The Tyrian Order was the first Manner, which, in Greece, was refined into the Dorick Order, after the first Temple of that Order was built at Argos.” \(^{621}\) In making such a statement, Wren was attempting to rationalize to a more logical degree, the chronology of origin and the dissemination of architectural ideas throughout the Mediterranean basin. He criticized Villalpando’s romantic reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon in the Corinthian manner, and rationalized

\(^{617}\) Ibid. PP. 322  
\(^{621}\) WREN, C. 1750. *Parentalia or memoirs of the family of the Wrens viz. of Mathew bishop of Ely, Christopher Dean of Windsor ... but chiefly of --- surveyor-general of the royal buildings ... now published by Stephen Wren*, Osborn. PP. 358
that the temple must have been built using the Tyrian order, an order that must have resembled to some degree the Doric in its proportions. To Wren, Villalpando’s reconstruction was nothing short of “mere fancy”.

Wren reflects on the ongoing debate, and expands on the origin of the orders. His position is aligned with the rationale that traces the orders to the Temple of Solomon. Yet, there is an additional factor which he introduces:

I could wish some skilful artist would give us the exact dimensions to inches, by which we might have an idea of the antient Tyrian manner; for it was probable Solomon by his correspondence with King Hiram employ’d the Tyrian Artists, in his Temple; and from the Phoenicians I derive as well the Arts as the Letters, of the Graecians, tho it may be, the Tyrians were Imitators of the Babylonians, and of the Egyptians.

If any merit is to be given to the debate over the origin of the orders in architecture again, we can return to the two main elements that are relevant to the dissertation. The first is that the debate over the origin of the orders is not aimed at finding modernist ideas or ideals, but rather another tool in establishing national primacy over the architectural tradition. The second of course is that this debate is also relevant in the last quote of Wren as he attributes the origin of the orders to the Tyrians, which of course, are the ancient Phoenicians of Lebanon. Therefore, we can again say that the debate, whether it has any merit and relevance in regards to modernism, would be relevant in both cases to the Lebanese context because of either the questioning of national identity as formative or because of the inclusion of the Phoenicians. But again, these intellectual wars during the eighteenth century were probably relevant

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623 Ibid. PP. 344-345
within their historical context, and probably should not be given the heavy weight of the label of “The First Moderns”.

The heart of the debate in Europe in the eighteenth century could be seen not necessarily as a search of origin, or an avant garde that was looking towards modernism, but more probably as an attempt to overcome the central position that Italy occupied from the Renaissance till the late Baroque. By 1750, Italy’s position was decentralized, and Italian architects were theorizing how to regain their position. The rest of Europe was trying to formulate architectural identities that employed the Greco-Roman tradition, but each country in its own unique way. All the elements that have been discussed, the position of Gothic architecture, the Greek/Roman dispute, as well as the orders of architecture would again find their way into the creases of modernism by the turn of the twentieth century.

Even though this historical reorganization and reinterpretation does not seem to be heavily relevant in terms of architectural thought and production to the Lebanese case, it is a necessary deconstruction of the structures that have established themselves in Rykwert’s text as the essential infrastructures of modern architecture. Rykwert attempts to construct his concepts to support a modernist reading of the eighteenth century architectural atmosphere in Europe. But the reinterpretation provided in this dissertation poses a polemic that is aimed to destabilize Rykwert’s reading that the disintegration of the Baroque tradition was aimed at establishing a modern approach to architecture, or even that this disintegration should be considered as ushering in the modern tradition.

If this rereading is possible, then it poses an alternate history to the events that took shape around Europe in the eighteenth century. This does not mean that the historical
trajectory that led to the formation of modern architecture was not influenced by these
events, but rather, that these events should not necessarily viewed as conscious, or
even subconscious efforts that had modern architecture or any other possible
alterative in mind. They simply were a result of a natural process of transformation,
one which could be claimed by any culture that underwent transformation during the
eighteenth century, and not even specifically in Lebanon. In a sense, the rereading
removes the exclusivity of the historical link between European architectural history
and the rise of modernism. It might be read though as removing the European
emphasis, and a possibility for any culture to recognize the shift in thinking towards
Enlightenment, perhaps in challenging canonical authorities, and subsequently
towards modernism. It is necessary to reiterate here that this dissertation recognizes
the importance of the transformations during the Enlightenment, and considers them
paramount to the formation of modern thought in the twentieth century, but not
necessarily as ‘modernist’ in their own accord.

Furthermore, the uncertainty over the origins of modern architecture points out to the
possibility that seeking the origin of anything is elusive. If we are to examine some
statements by the writers themselves about classifying historical periods from an
architectural perspective, we find that the sheer diversity is interesting. Frampton for
example summarizes:

*Changing Ideals* took its cue from Leonardo Benevolo’s *Storia della
architettura moderna* (1960) in that it pushed the frontier of the new back
into the middle of the eighteenth century, as opposed to Nikolaus Pevsner’s
*Pioneers of Modern Design* (1936) which located the emergence of the new
with the birth of the English Free Style and the realization of Philip Webb’s house for William Morris in 1859.624

And though Frampton mentions that Collins uses 1750 as a starting date, Collins himself attests to the problem of locating an origin:

The Limits of the history of modern architecture are as difficult to define satisfactorily as the limits of any other kind of modern history[…], but all recent writers on the subject have recognized that its origins go back much further, even though they may not agree as to where exactly they began.625

In his book on modern architecture, Frampton also recognizes this difficulty as mentioned earlier by stating that “the more rigorously one searches for the origin of modernity, however, the further back it seems to lie.”626 Frankl refuses all this classification, and chooses to treat “the entire continuous development from Brunelleschi to the end of the nineteenth century as one unit”.627

The sheer diversity of these perspectives and their contradictory nature might leave one at a loss. Yet, it is also possible to say that the fact that establishing historical links that go further back in time is due to the essential nature of history in that it does not stop suddenly nor begin suddenly, even though this dissertation recognizes that some maintain that this is possible. Still, there are always links to past events, and these links are possible in many directions through many cultures and languages. This ultimately opens up the possibility of reviewing modernism with a wider lens, taking into account an expanded sphere of cultural diversity beyond the geographical borders of Europe. This dissertation is in essence, part of that expansion.

625 Ibid. PP. 15
626 FRAMPTON, K. 1981. Modern architecture: a critical history, Oxford University Press. PP. 8
6.45: Transition to Modern architecture

The rise of modernism in architecture in the early twentieth century had a massive impact on the profession of architecture and the domain of architectural theory. On one side, it unified the momentum of architectural production throughout the Western World and beyond, and on the other side it divided architectural theorists concerning its origins, its objectives, and even its defining characteristics. Even though almost every architectural historian and theoretician agrees on the difficulty of tracing the roots and origins of modern architecture to a specific age, trend, era, or style, everybody seems to have attempted to do so.

One theoretical approach states that the origin of modern architecture lies in the rise of Neoclassicism in France which put into question the validity of classical doctrines. The change that started with Perrault, rippled throughout Europe paving the way to modern architectural thought and aesthetics. The date of 1750 is significant in the history of architecture. This is definitely the position of Collins who considers that the four revolutionary architects of the late eighteenth century were John Soane, E.L. Boullee, C.N. Ledoux and J.N.L. Durand. It is no accident that three of these architects are French. In addition, Collins maintains that the ideals first formulated during the enlightenment were the catalyst for modern architectural thought. Rykwert’s position is also clear in stating that the definite split occurred with Perrault in his design of the façade of the Louvre, and the position of Perrault remains central in his writings.

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629 RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 23
Not everybody though seems to agree with the origin of modernism residing in the Enlightenment, and starting with the French. Tafuri considers Laugier’s theories as initiating the architectural framework of the Enlightenment,\(^{630}\) nevertheless considers that the roots of modern architecture lay elsewhere. The concept of origin occupies an important position in the work of Tafuri, despite the fact that he seems to consider that a unifying concept of a modernist movement as such is impossible:

[T]he very concept of a modern movement, when viewed as an attempt to accredit a collective and teleological doctrine to the new architecture, is itself the product of a reassuring, but entirely inoperative, fable, one whose origins we must seek out, whose function we must analyze.\(^{631}\)

The only possible way to view the modern movement is by accepting the fact that there might be as Tafuri says “many beginnings for many histories”.\(^{632}\) These histories are probably as diverse as the productions that were spawned by the movement during the decades of the modernist era. Yet, to deny the dialogical relationships of the aesthetic vocabulary inherent in these productions may be a step in the wrong direction. Tafuri seems to agree and realizes that “the entire cycle of modern architecture can be viewed as a unitary development.”\(^{633}\) This development itself though is not to be considered homogenous, but rather fragmented, and cannot be attributed to a collective doctrine unifying its productions. This interesting position is not new and could be observed through Nikolaus Pevsner’s book *The Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*.\(^{634}\) The first edition in 1936 of the book was entitled *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From*


\(^{632}\) Ibid.


William Morris to Walter Gropius\(^{635}\), and the title was changed in the second edition in 1949 to Pioneers of Modern Design. The change in the title reflects the change in perspective, one that realizes the difficulty of grouping modernist productions under a single movement.

Yet Tafuri also seems to want to mark out the origins of this collective modernist heterogeneity, which brings us back to his early theoretical works, those specifically on Borromini. He traces the fundamental change, and the initial catalyst for modern architecture to an Italian reference, whereas most French, German and British historians trace it to a French reference. Andrew Leach analyses Tafuri’s stance on the matter of origin in his article Francesco Borromini and the Crisis of the Humanist Universe, or Manfredo Tafuri on the Baroque origins of modern architecture.\(^{636}\) His analysis is most revealing. Leach expands on Tafuri’s “effort to understand […] the ‘original sin’ that gave rise to the intellectual, institutional and technical conditions inherited by contemporary architecture”.\(^{637}\) Tafuri insists on the existence of a trigger that caused the fundamental transformation in the history of architecture. He suspects that it was Borromini’s work that initially lies at the base of this transformation.\(^{638}\)

This does not come as a surprise. Borromini surely strayed from the tradition of Baroque architecture in Italy, though his work is regarded as belonging to the High Baroque period.\(^{639}\) Rudolph Wittkower agrees with the difficulty of locating Borromini within the sphere of Baroque architecture. Though he classified Borromini within this period, he recognized that “among the great figures of the Roman High

\(^{635}\) PEVSNER, N. 1936. Pioneers of the modern movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius, Faber & Faber.


\(^{637}\) Ibid. PP. 301

\(^{638}\) Ibid.

\(^{639}\) WITTKOWER, R. 1973a. Art and Architecture in Italy 1600 to 1750, Penguin Books. PP. 197
Baroque the name of Francesco Borromini stands in a category of his own.⁶⁴⁰ As mentioned earlier, Borromini’s work has been accused of carrying Gothic influences, both by the Pope and by Bernini, which eventually led to Borromini’s demise. Tafuri therefore considers that primarily, the Enlightenment sought to destroy any connection with the Baroque:

> It is, however, important to underline that the deliberate abstraction of Enlightenment theories of the city served only at first to destroy Baroque schemes of city planning and development.⁶⁴¹

Yet not all Italian theorists agree. The relationship between Greek architecture and modernism is re-evoked again by another modern Italian theorist, Bruno Zevi.⁶⁴² Zevi’s position is somewhat elusive though. He is somewhat negative towards the architects of his age, and considers that the history of architecture is marked by missed opportunities. Zevi’s staunch position against the school of Beaux-Arts marks his theoretical agenda.⁶⁴³ This position, which singles out the school as the origin of all iniquity carries several exclamation marks. The school of the Beaux-Arts is considered a continuity of the French Academy of architecture. Therefore Zevi’s attack is loaded with historical baggage. Yet his position is eclectic. Zevi seems to want to depart from the whole architectural theory, and sees value in disparate architectures ranging from Greek to Roman to Gothic, as well as some Renaissance and Baroque works such as those of Michael Angelo and Borromini.⁶⁴⁴ It is obvious though that he disdains the Baroque as much as he disdains the Beaux-Arts.⁶⁴⁵ For Zevi, The Renaissance through the Baroque was nothing than more an architecture of

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⁶⁴³ Ibid. PP. 4
⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.
⁶⁴⁵ Ibid. PP. 17
an unstable state that tried to appear invulnerable. This is why in his opinion the Baroque evoked the Greco Roman tradition mythically to camouflage the instability of their state.

In addition to taking a staunch attitude against Baroque architecture, Zevi also believed that Gothic architecture had more to offer to modern architecture than the Baroque did.\footnote{Ibid.} To Zevi, if the modern movement is to be considered a revolution, then the history of architecture is filled with such revolutions which are, according to him, “against repressive bonds throughout the ages”.\footnote{Ibid.}

Perhaps the whole history of architecture could be reread in terms of symmetry neurosis. Certainly that of western architecture could be. It is no accident, for example, that Italy was the first country to revive the worship of this idol during the Renaissance, while other countries continued to develop the Gothic style.\footnote{Ibid. PP. 17}

The anti-symmetry sentiment is considered by Zevi as an essential element of modern architecture. According to him, this asymmetrical aesthetic could be first found in Greek architecture, especially in the Acropolis.\footnote{Ibid. PP. 18} Here, Zevi’s correlation between Gothic and Greek is no accident. It appears to draw on the history of conflict uniting the two architectural histories against those of the Renaissance and the Baroque. Zevi’s attitude is, in a sense, the climax of a growing sentiment in Italy first felt through the works of Borromini and Guarini.

In short, for Zevi, Greek architecture is of a high value, but not in the sense rationalized by the Beaux Arts. Roman architecture, as well as some Renaissance and Baroque architects hold value, but should not all be seen as belonging to the Baroque.
tradition. For Zevi, the Beaux-Arts, while it claimed to establish the primacy and importance of the Greek tradition, mutilated its basic concepts and twisted it to fit an agenda.\textsuperscript{650} It is obvious though that Zevi considers the modern movement as liberation from the classicist tradition, including the school of Beaux Arts, and in a sense, liberation from French domination over the arts, a “reaction against neoclassicism.”\textsuperscript{651} The modern movement held the promise to transform the status quo established since the advent of the enlightenment.

Frankl considers the historical period as starting with the Renaissance till the end of the nineteenth century as one unit.\textsuperscript{652} Here he sides with the first generation of architectural historians such as Hitchcock, Pevsner, Kaufmann and even Giedion, that the twentieth century architecture should be considered a separate historical unit disregarding the various approaches towards its historiographic analysis. For those early historians, tracing the origin and causes of the modern movement, something that most of them considered a matter-of-fact, varied in their analyses.

Reyner Banham, who reflected on these ‘origins’ in his book \textit{Theory and Design in the First Machine Age}, did not go further back than the nineteenth century:

These predisposing causes were all of nineteenth century origin, and may loosely be grouped under three heads: firstly, the sense of an architect’s responsibility to the society in which he finds himself, an idea of largely English extraction, from Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris, which was summed up in an organization founded in 1907, the Deutcher Werkbund: secondly, the Rationalist, or structural approach to architecture, again of English extraction, from Willis, but elaborated in France by Viollet-le-Duc, and codified in Auguste Choisy’s magisterial \textit{Histoire} at the very end of the century, though the parallel tradition in Germany has no major exponent after Gottfried

\textsuperscript{650} Ibid. PP. 4
\textsuperscript{651} Ibid. PP. 3
\textsuperscript{652} FRANKL, P. 1968. \textit{Principles of architectural history: the four phases of architectural style, 1420-1900}, MIT Press. PP. 3
Semper; and thirdly, the tradition of academic instruction, worldwide in
distribution, but owing most of its energy and authority to the *Ecole des
Beaux-Arts* in Paris, from which there emerged, just after the turn of the
century, Julien Guadet’s compendious summery of his course of professional
lectures.\(^653\)

In this respect, Banham locates the underlying causes behind the development of
Modern architecture chiefly in England, and partly in France. In direct contrast to
Zevi, Guadet’s theory course at the Ecole des Beaux Arts is given a critical position in
the emergence of modern architecture. Frampton agrees:

> It was through Guadet’s teaching at the Beaux Arts, and his influence on his
> pupils Auguste Perret and Tony Garnier, that the principles of Classical
> ‘Elementarist’ composition were handed down to the pioneer architects of the
> 20th century.\(^654\)

The division between a group of French and British theorists on one end, and Italian
theorists on the other, exemplifies the historical tension inherent in the battle of origin
that extended into the modern era.

This historical re-reading of the ideas that prevailed during the Enlightenment shows
that much of the concern about origin seeped into the various aspects that loosely
constituted modernism. It also may suggest that the same events have many different
readings that do not necessarily contradict each other, but rather provide a totally
different approach to understanding historical events. The meaning injected into these
events by Rykwert might have certain resonance, but this does not make it necessarily
authoritative. In a sense then, this lack of authority becomes an important factor in
understanding that the transformations that occurred during the Enlightenment should


not be regarded as either conclusive not could they be considered as the only mode of understanding modernisms.
6.5: Re-Reading Frampton: A Disjunctive Narrative or a Reflection of Reality?

Tournikiotis, in his book *Historiography of Modern Architecture*, mentions that Frampton’s book is concerned with criteria that are more connected with the “communication of knowledge than with the formulation of a different discourse about the history of the recent past.”655 This is specifically because Frampton’s book is disjointed, and explores various themes that could stand each by itself without necessarily being connected to the previous or the following theme.

Frampton, as with Collins and Rykwert, is concerned about the beginning of the modernist period, that is, the origin of modernist architectural thought. He recognizes though the possibility of diverging theories on this subject. Yet, his tendency in general terms seems to be on par with those of Collins and Rykwert. Frampton agrees that the more plausible origin of modernist thought resides in the middle of the eighteenth century in France, but he does not dwell much on these early origins. What seems more important to him is the later catalysts that gave modernist thought more definite shape. He suggests that “the development of modern architecture after the enlightenment seems to have been divided between the utopianism of the avant-garde […] and the anti-classical, anti-rational and anti-utilitarian attitude of the Christian reform first developed in Pugin’s *Contrasts* of 1836.”656

In a sense then, his book is not a coherent whole, but rather snippets of the highlight events that contributed mainly to what he considers to be the formative and catalytic points of modern architecture. This characteristic though must not be regarded as a negative attribute. In fact, its relevance to this dissertation becomes more prominent because of this characteristic. Frampton’s account, in its exploratory mode, allows for

inclusion, rather than being a tightly controlled narrative. Lebanese modernism in this sense could have been another chapter in his book without compromising the book’s rational, stylistic, or historical narrative.

Frampton’s account, though not forming coherent whole, is probably more reflective of the realities of the transformations that were occurring during the modernist era. In a sense, if we consider modern architecture as a non-coherent subject, it becomes more in tune with the historical events that took shape during the first half of the twentieth century. Additionally, the historiography itself is so myriad that if taken as an object, it is heterogeneous in a similar fashion to the history of modern architecture.

The first part of Frampton’s book is a condensed account of the historical factors discussed by Collins and Rykwert in their respective books up until the middle of the nineteenth century. This quick review in the first part of the book is only a preparation to the main part of the book discussed largely in part two.

It seems that Frampton considers Pugin’s *Contrasts* along with the works of the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle as the two main catalysts that called for the “spiritual and cultural disconnects of the second half of the nineteenth century.”657 The ideas put forth by these two authors were a great influence on Ruskin, with which Frampton’s historical account of modernist thought begins. Ruskin’s position in regards to modernism seems to be central, specifically after he published *The Stones of Venice* of 1853. The link afterwards between Ruskin and Morris becomes clearer when Frampton establishes the connection when Morris was still a student at Oxford.

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657 Ibid., pp. 42
What is of interest here though is the connection that Frampton establishes between Morris and Marxist thought. This connection is crucial, because it launches modernist architectural thought in a different direction. When Perrault challenged the classical doctrines, he was set to establish a French architectural style distinct from Italian Baroque. Also, the tension between Gothic and Baroque was not a battle to create an international style, but rather to establish national architectural identities. The same goes for the position of the orders in architecture, where the battle of origin was a tool to debunk an authoritative architectural style in order to form national architectural identities.

Marxist thought, as well as socialist tendencies succeeded in establishing a tension within the architectural field that escaped the boundaries of national conflict, and propelled architectural thought into a totally new domain, that is, an international domain. Capitalism can also be viewed from a similar perspective. It is possible to state here that both capitalism and socialism paved the way to a new approach to architecture as universal concepts. And though Frampton seems to recognize the position of Marxist thought, he nevertheless does not elaborate on this crucial distinction, (as he himself states). Marxist critical thinking in Frampton’s book remains on the level of interpretation, rather as being used as a vehicle for analysis.

Here, this dissertation is keen on delineating this critical aspect because within this sphere, modernism takes a broader scope, geographically and culturally. Instead of being a set of scattered events that were merely fueled by national aspirations, a more universal idea becomes the organizing factor in the process of formation of modern architectural thought. The shift of the center of conflict from national conflict to class struggle, whether in socialism or in capitalism, transformed the dynamic of

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658 Ibid. PP. 9

- 314 -
understanding within architecture. This in a sense became the main catalyst for attempting to develop an architecture for the people.

Frampton’s book though, as mentioned, seems to be a gathering of the various events that occurred around the world. Modernism in this respect is presented as the sum of these events. In such analysis, national movements or major architectural figures are seen as an integral part of the process of the formation of modern architecture. The work of Lloyd Wright and Sullivan in the ‘USA’, the Deutsche Werkbund and the Bauhaus in ‘Germany’, Russian Constructivism in ‘Russia’, etc., are tied in Frampton’s account to national cores that sometimes remained contained within a certain locale, and at other times spread beyond this locale.

If we look at modernism from this perspective, that is, by seeing these developments as formative in the process of modernization, modernism becomes the resulting event rather than the core catalyst. This may suggest that modernism is an effect instead of a cause. Collins on the other hand saw modernism as the set of ideals that became recurrent and more pronounced in the twentieth century, rather than the set of events that constituted a movement.

But here again, it seems that there is another way of looking at this process, and it lies in presupposing that these ideas that started materializing in concrete and steel beginning in the early twentieth century, were in a sense responding to the fact that the shift of the struggle from national identities to international class representation was instrumental. This is not to say that all Marxist thought by necessity is central to modernism, or that modernist thought is intricately tied to Marxism, but merely partly affected by the shift that was generated as a result of Marxist thought. The same goes for capitalism and the formation of a middle class in America that became most
prominent during the middle of the nineteenth century. The main idea here is that with modernism, we see a shift in the process of representation from one sphere to another, that is, from a struggle to define national architectural identities to a struggle that engaged the international community based on the position of architecture in class distinction. The old structure of theoretical struggle that gave birth to the enlightenment found a new vocation after it exhausted its arguments at the dawn of the industrial revolution. Some architectural historians such as Benevolo consider that the industrial revolution is central to the formation of modern architecture:

Modern architecture was born out of the technical, social and cultural changes connected with the Industrial Revolution; if, therefore, one intends to discuss the single components which then came together into a single synthesis, one can say that modern architecture began with the effects of the Industrial Revolution on building and town planning, i.e. between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth.659

But here again, and even though the industrial revolution was instrumental to the development of modern architecture as a building practice, it should be seen not as providing the theoretical shift towards modernism but rather as an instrument in its realization.

In this respect, we can view the sum of events, and the various key figures and submovements of modernism, as local responses to this changing dynamic, or as a collaborative effort to address the new set of criteria that this new dynamic has brought about. Frampton’s thesis makes much sense when viewed in this light. The sheer diversity of responses internationally to the modernist problem as presented by Frampton becomes clearer. Reflecting on the architecture of Hamra with this in mind, the international aspect that it lends through the employment of international

architects such as Gruen, Addor & Julliard and Edward Stone substantiates a broader look on modernism.

Fig. 6.61: Fransa Bank by Alfred Roth and Alvar Aalto  Credit: Author
Fig. 6.62: Fransa Bank Building by Edward Stone. Credit: Author

Fig. 6.63: Gefinor Center by Victor Gruen. Credit: Author.
In retrospect, the post-modernist era in architecture, with a certain lack of localized responses such as those that happened during modernism, is possibly indicative of an attempt to overcome that shift that occurred from national struggle to class struggle during modernism. It is even possible to assume that postmodernism attempted to establish a shift from class struggle towards more aesthetic and design oriented problems within the architectural field, even though some consider postmodernism as challenging the meta-narratives of modern history.

Frampton claims that his historical analysis is not influenced by a Marxist view of history, despite his Marxist theoretical affiliations. It is also important to point out here that Hays agrees to a certain extent with Frampton in that there are two main catalysts that are definitive of modern architecture:

Two characteristics in particular have been usually been maintained as definitive of modern architecture. The first is functionalism, the intersection of brute facts of utility with objective design methodologies and standardized means of production. Functionalism of course, is linked with the need for an enormous amount of housing, especially in Germany after World War I, and for a wider distribution of products, including architectural products, to an emergent mass public. The second characteristic is the avant-garde, involving, in one form or another, some notion of a self-critical formal practice as well as the incorporation of advanced technology.660

Hays’ statement here is very interesting especially if we consider that most of the modernist buildings under study in Lebanon are primarily apartment buildings that catered to a newly emerging middle class. Traditional Lebanese houses that were discussed earlier did not fit the modern concept of a middle class housing but rather targeted an emerging wealthier part of the population who made their money from the

silk trade. Additionally, if we look at Hays’ reference to the avant-garde and the incorporation of advanced technology, we find several instances of the self-critical formal practice in written form. Several examples of Lebanese architects that produced some literature in regards to the Lebanese situation on this matter can be found. For example, Antoine Tabet reflected frequently on the Lebanese architectural profession:

> It is not logical to consider one canon for beauty, immutable, with one single way of expression. I would not want to launch here a long-lasting debate and give preference to regional or national architecture over modern architecture and vice versa. It is my contention, though, that no contradiction exists between traditional or local architecture, and modern architecture that I call for. The former was also modern and revolutionary in its time due to the available materials and prevailing economic and social condition. I do not believe that our predecessors ever had in mind to name any of their architectural achievements a "national style," rather being concerned with buildings that satisfy their needs, and that were appropriate with their specific context and natural resources.\(^{661}\)

Tabet also mentions that “before being interested in style and decoration, the architect ought to be driven by the essential structures that serve the widest population, primarily social housing, rather than be concerned with palaces.”\(^{662}\)

In regards to technology, we find an almost complete transformation in building technology that gave rise to a modernist architectural image in Beirut. Technology was not only in terms of the use of concrete as a plastic building material, but also in pushing the boundaries of concrete construction to new levels. For example, Arbid mentions in his thesis that Farid Trad “did not blindly follow the modernist trends, he willingly incorporated new building techniques and technology.”


\(^{662}\) Ibid. PP. 89
Arbid also discusses technology in the work of the Lebanese architect Ilyas Murr who graduated from MIT in 1903:

His achievements in the field of structure are legendary. While he was building the Cinema Roxy in 1933, the municipality refused to give him a permit for fear of having the balcony free of columns collapse. Ilyas Murr convinced the authorities by loading it for a full week with sand bags weighing twice the weight of the 300 persons expected to occupy it.663

In this respect, there seems to be many instances where the conditions that both Frampton and Hays refer to as essential characteristics of modern architecture, are

663 Ibid. PP. 30
present in one way or another. It is also safe to presume that as more research is produced on this subject, more examples could be found.

Yet addressing these two aspects only would be a localized response to both Frampton and Hays, and would not extend beyond the scope of their perspective of modern architecture. This again brings us back to the historiography of modern architecture and the varied branches of its presentation and even analysis:

We can thus see history as an intellectual activity that introduces order into the true events of the past in accordance with the course taken by the historian – or, more accurately, with the predetermined angle of vision from which he makes his choices. However, this activity is not sufficient to make the facts intelligible or to explain reality.⁶⁶⁴

The historiography presented by Collin, Rykwert, Frampton, and even this dissertation, is a sort of history that springs out of existing literature. In a sense, it is attempting to reconcile certain aspects of the literature with the existing architectural works discussed.

An additional element in Frampton’s book is that fact that it changed throughout the several editions of its publication to include extra-western architects such as those in Brazil and Japan, points to the fact that Frampton recognizes the limits of previous scholarships on modernism that extended beyond the geographic scope of that which commanded attention in Europe and the USA. This extension though has not come as a constituent part of the formation of modern architecture but rather as a consequence of the transformations that were occurring in the west.

Critical Regionalism will be discussed and explored in respect to the Lebanese situation in the next chapter, but it is important here to indicate that since Frampton

opted to include a chapter addressing this subject in a book entitled Modern architecture: A Critical History makes the distinction that the only avenue to understand regionalist variations of modernism, is to view them as distinct and separate from an “original modernism” that is by necessity western. This interjection stands in direct opposition to the possibilities discussed earlier that are generated by the fragmentary nature of the book, which could possibly include Lebanese modernism, Indian modernism, Brazilian modernism, or any other modernism under a separate heading. The fact that Critical Regionalism as a heading is intended to group such “additional” implementations of modernism, sets them apart as a separate subject that must be studied separately. The delineation indicates that though these localized “types” of modernisms are in certain respects influenced or generated by modernism in the west, they do not possess the qualities that modern architecture in the west possesses. This in turn reconstitutes certain homogeneity of modern architecture in the west despite the fragmentary character of Frampton’s book.

Sibil Bozdogan addresses architectural historiography that privileges western models in modern architecture over extra-western models:

Simultaneously, the great masters, masterpieces, and master narratives of western architectural tradition have been placed under critical scrutiny. The result has been that our awareness of the politics of architecture - i.e., the complicity of architecture with structures of power and dominant ideological agendas in society -is heightened, calling into question our inherited architectural culture, which privileges the autonomy of form and form making.  

This perspective has been gaining momentum in the past decade or so, and it is reasonable to assume that it will impact all previously produced literature on

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modern architecture. This is not necessarily due to specific agendas. The nature of research and the limit of investigation are difficult in the west and are even more difficult in countries like Lebanon. This makes the process of criticism itself more difficult, because it must take into account the limits of producing literature in an area outside your locale or zone. Therefore, research on Lebanese architecture for example can only come from within. This does not mean that research cannot come from without of course, but rather that a grass root domain of research is inevitably necessary in every locale.

6.6: Conclusion

In conclusion, Frampton’s fragmentary snippets of history are indicative first of the difficulty of constructing a coherent history of the modern movement in architecture. The fragmentary nature of Frampton’s book holds the possibility of inclusion. His chapter on Critical Regionalism though perhaps undermines the possibility of inclusion, and rather allocates a separate locus for extra western modernisms under that heading. Lebanese modernism therefore, could have been easily integrated in Frampton’s book, if it wasn’t for the chapter on critical regionalism, which dictates its allocation on the margins of modernism rather as a contributing chapter in an all encompassing whole.

This stands in direct opposition also to the international aspect of modernism itself. If modernism was intended to be an international phenomenon, transcending national boundaries and catering to a human population instead of a western population, then why is there a need for segregation?

The question that is central here is “why?” Why should Lebanese modernism, as all other modernisms be allocated a status on the margins of modernism in the west, and
not be regarded as contributing and essential elements that are necessary for modernism as an all encompassing concept? In this respect, Frampton’s book seems to be at odds with itself. On one hand, it offers the possibility of inclusion, but on the other hand, it dictates the parameters of such an inclusion.

Bozdogan’s statement above seems to point to the heart of the problem. Maybe it is a question of power and politics, but also it might be that the nature of history and that of research are hazy at best to the historian’s eyes, and that the tendency to separate time and place into periods and regions makes things a little bit easier to view and understand.
Chapter 7

Reassessing the Interpretive Methods
7.1: Introduction:

The three major interpretive methods that have been commonly utilized to understand modernism in non western have already been surveyed: orientalism, critical regionalism and third world modernism.

But it is necessary here to re-assess the relevancy of these approaches to the Lebanese case and to reveal the internal structures that permit these various understandings. One common factor that seems to bind the three approaches is that they focus primarily on modern development “outside the west”. Orientalism has a more political aspect to it, Critical Regionalism has architectural and Post-colonial factors, and Third World Modernism seems to create a domain of research restricted to certain sociopolitical entities.

In this chapter the attempt to synthesize each of these approaches as it relates to the Lebanese case will be undertaken.
7.2: Critique of Orientalism

To deny the impact of western culture on the formation of modernism in Lebanon is unreasonable. To reduce the emergence of modern architecture to that singular specific impact is simplistic and reductive. An Orientalist approach would set only to prove such point. In a sense, the contact between civilizations always carries the seeds of the new, of the unknown. The contact between Europe and China for example, brought many transformations to Europe. The Porcelain Pavilion discussed by Rykwert in his book is a simple example. The complexity of a street such as Hamra street would be another example of the resistance of architecture to be reduced to simple or singular explanations. Cultural contacts are never an osmotic process, but a process of mutual exchange.

The position of modern architecture in western colonies is problematic. One of the reasons is that it has had two different and opposing interpretations or attitudes. The first saw modern architecture as a sign of emancipation from colonial rule, such as in the case of India. Rohan Kalyan explains the reasons:

India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, gave modern architecture official sanctioning “as the approved national style and symbol of a fresh start after Independence.” Modern architecture, according to Nehru, “offered India a vision of the future based on a functionalist language that was free of colonial associations and of reference to specific religious or ethnic traditions.”

In a sense, modernism in India was doubly beneficial. On one hand it did not have any associations with traditional British architecture, and on the other hand, it seemed to have a character that would transcend the multitudes of Indian traditions and religious

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666 RYKWERT, J. 1983. The first moderns: the architects of the eighteenth century, MIT Press. PP. 54
affiliations. Its lack of a specific historical character was considered a positive attribute in the formation of a modern society as described by the Indian prime minister. In contrast other cultures under colonial rule saw modern architecture as an imposed foreign import, such as in many Arab countries as Khaled Adham points out:

In the Arab World, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, as part of the colonial heritage, we’ve been stuck with the presumable “search for, or defense of identity,” which is part of a paradoxical position between two seemingly opposed views: tradition versus modernity. Traditionalists have been opposing the excessive application of the modern-usually conflated with Western colonial powers, principles and ideas.668

This duality may indicate that modern architecture was not really the issue at hand, but rather a tool to promote other agendas, political, cultural and the formation of national identities. The polemical nature of this dialectic suggests that interpretation has an elusive nature. It also indicates that meaning is not only relative, but also has an element of intention.

Though the dichotomy of East and West was to become more prominent to Lebanese immigrants as the culture shock and the vast differences were heightened when they began to immerse themselves into a new cultures overseas, such as in North America, its ramifications in Lebanon were of a different kind. During these formative years, that predate the formation of modern Lebanon, specifically with the hardship and the identity crisis that the Lebanese immigrants faced in the west, the concepts of East and West, which played an important role in how these immigrants identified themselves in the Diaspora, did not provide sufficient arguments to sustain an Orientalist case. Khater writes:

In public newspaper articles and private conversations emigrants argued over these matters, especially as they found themselves caught in the midst of the artificial construct of “East” and “West”. Were they of the “traditional” (read: backward) “East” or of the “modern West”? Were they on the side of science and enlightenment or that of superstitions and ignorance? Ridiculously reductionist as these questions may appear in retrospect, they were nonetheless compelling to many emigrants.669

Khater though does not advocate an Orientalist approach towards understanding immigration and the formation of a middle class in Lebanon. He maintains that these poignant remarks and the East/West dichotomy remained theoretical in nature.670 The transformation of Lebanon towards the path of modernity did not come solely from external influences, or even abruptly, but rather was in the making for a long period, as we have seen. The history of evolution was gradual rather than sudden. Furthermore, the structural system of the Lebanese Central Hall house is indicative of the exchanges that have been taking place for a long period between Lebanon and many European countries.

In terms of the impact of the west on modern architecture in most Middle Eastern countries, there was divided opinion. Some saw danger in the rapid transformations that were occurring in their societies and in their urban landscape. Sayed Karim in Egypt wrote a poignant comment about this transformation in 1940:

“We are in a phase of transformation that has its dangers. We have connected with the modern global civilization, and we have started to copy it. Our culture has made contact with that modern scientific

670 Ibid.
culture, which is the image of the age we live in. So we ascended with our small boat into its volatile current, willingly or obliged.⁶⁷¹

In Lebanon, the situation was not that different than Egypt in assimilating the west, though the transitional period underwent a slightly different process.

This scene is described by Samir Kassir in his book *Beirut*:

In these images, one sees a mixture of architectural styles, the novel juxtaposition of traditional and western dress (Ottomanized by wearing the tarbush), and the intrusion of modern public spaces into an ancient and closed environment. The city was passing through a transitional phase, like other Ottoman metropolises in which there was no clear demarcation between the European and the Arab city – The opposite case to Algiers, Tunis, or indeed Cairo.⁶⁷²

What is interesting in Kassir’s description is the demarcation of transitional space. In the cases of other Arab cities, this demarcation was well defined, but in the case of Beirut, it seemed that the city itself was transforming.

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⁶⁷² KASSIR, S. 2010. *Beirut*, University of California Press. PP. 129
On the other hand, in Lebanon many accepted modernism as a natural evolutionary process. Two elements here are of interest. The first is the fact that during the early twentieth century, Lebanon was still under Ottoman rule. The modernization of the city of Beirut was carried on by Ottoman decrees:

This was official modernity, brought into existence by the Ottoman state in the form of regularly laid out squares, widened streets, and government buildings, and reaffirmed by means of official ceremonies.673

673 Ibid. PP.147
The second element was that French colonial rule in Lebanon was, in a certain respect at least, a mutual agreement, something that was lacking in many other Middle Eastern states. As the American King-Crane commission in 1919 showed:

The two Americans to whom it had fallen to conduct the Allies’ inquiry into the climate of opinion in parts of the former Ottoman Empire, following the refusal of the French and the British to take part, had obtained an unambiguous result. Their survey of the various elites in the Levant had shown that an overwhelming majority, except in Mount Lebanon, rejected any mandate.\(^{674}\)

This single interjection, “except in Mount Lebanon” suggests that in the case of Lebanon, when it came to its approach of the French mandate, was not observed as a negative event when compared to other Arab states.

Additionally, France ruled Lebanon from 1920 till 1943, and these twenty three years hardly compare to colonialism in many other countries that left a substantial footprint over the urban and architectural scene, since both of these activities are usually slow.

Setting up a case for Orientalism in terms of understanding modernist productions in Beirut is a difficult task. There are so many elements that do not fit an Orientalist formula. Furthermore, there are many Lebanese theorists that have opposed such a simplistic approach to the Lebanese architectural situation.\(^{675}\) Tabet opposes any Orientalist understanding that could be applied to modernism in Lebanon:

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\(^{674}\) Ibid. PP 254

Modernism in Beirut was not conceived of as a representation of ‘the West,’ as opposed to traditionalism representing ‘the East.’ Rather the different aspects of modern architecture were reinterpreted and became integral to the local architectural scene. The history of modern architecture in Lebanon was a dialectic of different schools reacting to each other. Moreover, this dialectic was inherent to modernism.676

To subject modernist architecture in Lebanon to an Orientalist interpretation is to assume that either the French mandate imposed modernist ideals on the Lebanese urban and architectural situation, or that modern architecture in Lebanon took the form of unfounded oriental aesthetics in modern form. To suppose that French colonial rule shaped the formation of the Lebanese urban environment and architectural identity during the mandate years is a proposition that would be difficult to validate. This is especially the case given that modernization as we have discussed was not an abrupt transformation that occurred in Lebanon, and was not intended to replace traditional culture by any means:

[T]he Lebanese display a capacity - astonishing to the student of political development- for embracing tradition and modernity with only minimal politically relevant psychological effects. In Lebanon, modernization does not mean destroying the old but simply adding the new.677

There is no denying that the French introduced many elements of modernization during the mandate period, but it has been well documented that at many instances, several attempts to transform the urban fabric of Beirut by the French were unsuccessful. Assem Salam discusses several of these attempts in his article ‘The Role of Government in Shaping the Built Environment’ (1998). “Plan Danger”, prepared in 1932 for example was the first comprehensive study of Beirut which dealt

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with many urban developments ranging from Parks to circulation to sewers and so on. The plan though was never implemented and remained ink on paper. The second plan, which is called the “Ecochard Plan” was commissioned in 1942 during the mandate and submitted for consideration in 1944 after the independence. This plan, though it was well detailed and precise, was never approved. A third plan prepared in 1950 called the “Egli Plan”, which recommended the implementation of the Ecochard Plan with several modifications, was also never approved. It was not till 1964 that a new plan was prepared, influenced by Ecochard’s original plan with modifications, and approved. This plan though, which Ecochard dissociated himself from, came as a result of major developers in Lebanon lobbying to loosen restrictions on planning rules and regulations.\(^{678}\) It was more an outcome of local politics than proper planning. Compared with Ecochard’s success in Syria with his master plans for Damascus and Aleppo, the case of Beirut was completely resistant to imposing a plan that did not take into account its specific conditions, especially those that ignored the economics of the city itself:

Ecochard’s approach to urban planning entailed the depreciation in value of many parcels of real estate that would no longer be available for private development. The threat to entrenched interests was plain. [...] The laissez-faire attitude that dominated the merchant republic under the presidencies of Bishara al-Khuri and Camille Chamoun had no patience for such restrictions on profitability.\(^{679}\)

This suggests that the imposition of a master plan on the city of Beirut was met with much resistance from many different sources, not only during the mandate, but also many years after independence. If we try to prove that the French mandate imposed


\(^{679}\) KASSIR, S. 2010. Beirut, University of California Press. PP. 412
an orientalist agenda in Lebanon through their rule, whether by instituting modern architecture as a western import or by interfering in reshaping the urban landscape, we will likely find that both claims will remain unsubstantiated.

Arbid on the other hand considers that modern Lebanese architecture was a true expression of a society and a culture, that Orientalism is incapable of explaining, and contrastingly considers the past and ongoing reconstructions of the city center of Beirut as a victim of Orientalist revival.\textsuperscript{680} This reconstruction process of Beirut has not been humanistic, but rather entrepreneurial, which denied the city center to local residents and transformed it into a high-end commercial district aimed at attracting foreign tourism and capital. The image of the city center today would in a way fall into Said’s description of the Orientalist image of Nerval and Chateaubriand

described in his book.\textsuperscript{681} In a sense, Arbid accepts that Orientalist approaches in contemporary architecture could be found, but also considers that these were not a result of colonial rule.\textsuperscript{682} He also maintains that such Orientalist approaches were non-existent during the modernist period in Lebanon.

An additional element that problematises to the Orientalist approach is evident in the reception of modern architecture in the West itself. This reception of modernist aesthetics in Europe was not what we today associate with our perspective of such forms as the emblems of the modern movement, or even of a western architectural aesthetic. The Weisenhoffseidlung for example was considered by some at the time of its inception as an alien form, importing Middle Eastern aesthetics and imposing it in Europe.\textsuperscript{683} Orientalist approaches today it seems have reversed the formula upon themselves claiming modernism to be not only a western property, but also a symbol of western superiority.

\textsuperscript{681} SAID, E. W. 1979. \textit{Orientalism}, Vintage Books. PP. 1
If modernist forms in the West were thought of as inferior, tasteless and seen as eastern by some, and in the East were seen as western by some, then the whole concept of Orientalizing the implementation of modern architecture in the East becomes problematic. This indicates that there might be different agendas behind Orientalizing modern architecture as a western import, or as an emblem of western civilization. Anti-orientalists, in their attempts to decentralize orientalist ideals, argue against the propriety of the west over modernity. Here we find modernist aesthetics at an interesting junction, used by some as a tool of derision, and by others as a tool of asserting supremacy.

The last element that makes the Orientalist approach confusing resides in the fact that Islamic architecture itself was under fire at the turn of the twentieth century as a form

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of colonial manipulation in many countries that were under colonial rule. Saliba is one
to put forth this perspective:

Concurrently, the attempts by local designers and builders to stick to a Neo
Ottoman style as an affirmation of an Arab-Islamic identity was an exercise
in self deception. Islamic revivalism was a Western Colonial creation (like all
revivalist styles), figurative and skin-deep, with no reference to "the stylistic
differences between various regions of Islam and periods of its history."685

But Saliba adds here an interesting statement:

No such movements arose in Beirut. Islamic revivist styles were applied in
residential architecture as pastiche or corrupted copies, in bits and pieces,
diluted or hybridized by local builders and engineers.686

What seemed to be happening in Beirut is that theoretical constructs were treated as if
they had no impact on the business of architecture. Everything was permissible and
everything was also acceptable. For this reason, Saliba calls this period in Lebanon
“eclecticism”. This characteristic did not seem to stop at the end of the two decades of
colonial rule, but extended into the modernist era, where we find that modernist styles
were employed vicariously. This trend is probably as alive and well today as it was
then. Even if we are to debate such a perspective, there is some thread of truth in the
argument, perhaps not applicable on a general level, yet existent.

In a recent book edited by Haddad, a perspective on contemporary architecture might
shed some light on how the Lebanese architects probably approached modern
architecture in the early twentieth century, characterizing contemporary architecture

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685 SALIBA, R. & ASSAF, M. 1998. Beirut 1920-1940: domestic architecture between tradition and
modernity, Order of Engineers and Architects. PP. 34
686 Ibid.
as “a modified or hybrid version of Modernism, stripped of any social or political objectives.”

Therefore, if we are to consider Lebanese modernism as lacking the political and social agendas mostly associated with modernism in the west, it is possible to consider such architecture as a forerunner of the type of architecture described by Haddad. The aesthetic variations that we observe even in modernist architecture in Hamra and particularly Hamra Street point to this consistent search for new forms of architectural expression without necessarily the attribution or the injection of political or social meaning.

Fig. 7.3: Horse Shoe Building. Credit: Author (Map Figure #40)

Fig. 7.4: View of some buildings in Hamra. Credit: Author.

Fig. 7.5: A&P Building in Hamra. Credit: Author.
In addition, with the exception of buildings by Salam where the questions of identity and regional aesthetics are more prominent, the vast majority of the buildings in Hamra, and in Beirut at large, seem to lack any eastern or Orientalist references in the cliche, formal or aesthetic sense. If we merely look at the buildings on Hamra Street alone that satisfy this category, we will find numerous examples. Cinema Strand (Fig.), Hidhod building (Fig.) Isa`i building (Fig.) El Dorado building (Fig.) Abdel Rahman and Safi El Deen buildings (Figs.), and others display geometrical modernist aesthetics that lack any culturally specific reference at first sight. It is probable that the spatial divisions of the interior spaces could hold some local significance, but the extant variety of spatial arrangements that modern space division affords could easily account for such variations, as the open plan was not a sole governing criterion in classifying modern space.

The problematic here could be extended through a simple comparison. Orientalism is applied in the case where east meets west. This duality is debatable, especially that in constructing an east/west polarity inevitably unifies the east as it does the west, as homogeneous wholes. Colonialism is therefore seen as a process of subjugating the east by the west. In the case of Lebanon, the historical effort for self definition that prevailed starting with the Lebanese Prince Fakhreddin as well as with Bashir II, are not raised as colonial rule, but rather as a part and parcel of a larger east, at that time, the east of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans ruled Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East, for 400 years. Compared with the three decades mandate by the French, this has never been raised as an issue of contempt, as if it is supposed to be the natural order of things. This distinction again points to the fact that colonial narratives may be colored by a political agenda rather than by critical research.
At this junction we find that the problem of an Orientalist approach has to cut through much material in order to reconcile all these historical contradictions within a theoretical framework. Such conflicting positions may point towards an inherent problem in the structure of these arguments. It may point to underlying agendas that have attempted to utilize architectural form as a tool for arguments beyond the boundaries of architecture. Without elaborating or questioning further the agendas themselves and their ramifications, it is sufficient here to say, specifically when reflecting on the particularities of Hamra, that an Orientalist approach towards situating modern architecture in Lebanon lacks both coherent argument and historical evidence.
7.3: Critique of Critical Regionalism

As with other interpretative approaches, Critical Regionalism has had advocates and critics alike. We have already surveyed the parameters of Critical Regionalism and its scope within Lebanese modern architecture, but here, we must look at the other side of the coin both in terms of the concept itself, and its applicability in regards to Lebanese modern architecture. The basic criticism mainly brought against Critical Regionalism is that it is a construct that is imposed from outside on colonial or postcolonial architecture. Keith Eggener is one advocate of this critique:

As an intellectual construct it can be highly problematic. When applied, as it has often been, to the architecture of developing, postcolonial nations, the term Critical Regionalism exemplified a phenomenon described by the urban historian Jane M. Jacobs: "Just as postcolonial tendencies necessarily inhabit often optimistically designed postcolonial formations." Critical Regionalism is such a formation. Identifying an architecture that purportedly reflects and serves its locality, buttressed by a framework of liberative, empowering rhetoric, Critical Regionalism is itself a construct most often imposed from outside, from positions of authority.688

It is possible here to go into a debate as to where the parameters of Critical Regionalism become the central subject of criticism, but it would be probably more prudent not to engage entirely in the debate. What is of more interest is to disengage briefly from the debate and assess the constituting elements that Critical Regionalism might imply in relation to the Lebanese situation.

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The first question that comes to mind is that if the only viable model of modernism in Lebanon is that of Critical Regionalism as Hays suggested earlier, then how are we to classify all modernist productions that do not portray discernible regionalist characteristics? Buildings such as the Bank of Lebanon or the Saroulla Building come to mind. Bank of Lebanon clearly displays international style characteristics, designed by a European firm, without specifically considering regional factors, whereas the Saroulla building, though considering factors such as location and sun orientation cannot merely attribute such characteristics to be solely Critical Regionalist requirements. Such considerations have been necessary for architectural design since ancient times.

Fig. 7.6: Bank of Lebanon Building. Credit: Author. (Map Figure #54)

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One possible suggestion is by studying the plans and the spaces of these modernist buildings, a critical assessment could be made as to whether they conform or do not conform to modernist planning criterion. The problem though here is that modernist space planning cannot be unified under a singular planning methodology, or a uniform planning strategy, nor can modernist aesthetics. If modernism cannot be considered a singular building type, then it becomes rather more of an attitude towards the design process. Therefore, whether this “form” of modernism could be classified as regionalist is somewhat problematic.

Tabet, in his article ‘From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism’, argues that regionalist questions became more prominent only in the late 1960’s, when modernist architecture in Lebanon was beginning to wane in line with international modernism and influenced by the changes that Team X brought to the modernist movement as a whole. During these years, Lebanese architects diverged into two different tendencies. The first evolved as what Jad Tabet describes as “towards the adoption of a Brutalist
language". This approach was influenced mainly by the Japanese Metabolists. The second was directed towards a more regionalist approach:

The second tendency evolved towards a more contextual approach, preoccupied with issues of identity, scale and meaning, which required a reconsideration of modernist principles in the light of regionalist traditions.

Jacques Liger-Belair and Assem Salam belong to this category of architect. Tabet does not deny that Critical Regionalism played a role in modern Lebanese architecture, but he sees it coming at the end of the modernist period rather than having a formative role in the process of creating a modernist urban environment. Furthermore, it is not a generalized attitude that predominated the Lebanese architectural scene, but rather was limited in its scope and interest.

If we are to understand modernist development in Lebanon through the lens of Critical Regionalism, we find that the concept itself seems to be lacking in many ways, even though it is relevant in other ways. The first problematic that arises here is that Critical Regionalism was formulated as an alternative to the homogenizing aesthetic of modernism, and as a substitute to the postmodernist approach in architecture. In a sense then, it was perhaps a projective method to govern the design process, rather than a method of interpreting historic or previous works.

Yet, the applicability of the concept itself in a retrospective approach to modernism in non western countries is, in a sense, possible. However, such an attempt would also have certain challenges. One of these challenges is the possibility of applying the mode of interpretation to a vast variety of architectural productions, as a unifying

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690 TABET, J. Ibid. From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism, Modern Architecture in Lebanon and the problem of cultural identity. PP. 101
691 Ibid.
692 Ibid. PP. 102
693 Ibid. PP. 84
concept. How is it possible to equate the Indian experience, for example, with the Lebanese experience or the Brazilian experience? This would in a way suggest that the failure of modernism in the west was because it lacked the regionalist aspect that it was afforded in its application outside the west. This would also suggest that these projects should be considered prototypes for contemporary architectural practice that advocates a regionalist agenda.

Since Critical Regionalism is an approach with well-defined parameters, it is possible to assess how it could be utilized to understand modernist productions in Beirut. Frampton’s six points of resistance would serve as a guideline in the process of understanding how a modern architectural heritage in Lebanon could be understood, and whether the case of Beirut fits within a critical regionalist framework.

The first point that Frampton describes is the game of means and ends. Therefore, a regionalist form of architecture must not be a total slave to the production industry. In Lebanon, and since the independence, there has been no resistance to such a thing. If anything, the production industry gave birth to most modernist productions in Lebanon, and still does. Many lament this unfortunate reality. As Haddad mentions:

The architectural decline that we are still witnessing today is apparent also in the collapse of the urban infrastructure which is necessary for architecture, and which would distinguish between city and village and preserve green spaces and old buildings, etc. All this is witnessing today a process of total destruction under the influence of land speculations and the complete absence of fundamental rules that could preserve nature and heritage as a base to preserve economy and society.  


The influence of the production industry is also clearly apparent in the case of the urban plans of Beirut discussed earlier. The powerful impact of the real estate market on the urban scene in Lebanon, as we have seen previously, is evident throughout its modern history. In a sense then, the first point that Critical Regionalism raises does not seem to have an applicable history to support it.

The second point of resistance concerns the avant-garde. This point is almost completely lacking in the history of modern architectural thought save for a couple of architects which include Tabet, Trad and Blair. This phenomenon has been raised by Hays himself even though he still suggested that Critical Regionalism might be the only way to understand the modernist productions in Beirut. Lebanon seems to have lacked an avant-garde during the modernist years, something that Frampton deems necessary. In this respect then, a question becomes essential as to whether a regionalist form of architecture has to satisfy all six points of resistance or whether some of these points are merely sufficient. This in another sense would exclude any exterior forces necessary for the production of the architectural object. If this was the case, and we can exclude the influence of the market and the avant-garde, it would, in a sense, detach the architectural object from its urban and intellectual context. It is highly unlikely then that any of the six points of resistance could be eliminated and still be able to classify a work of architecture as responding to a critical regionalist agenda.

If we look back at the architecture of Hamra Street, we are again confronted by a certain lack of eastern aesthetic references in its modern architecture, except for the buildings designed by Salam. Salam though cannot be considered the yard-stick

against which we can measure, or at least try to understand, the modernist development that occurred in Lebanon during the thirty years following independence.

Fig. 7.8: Ministry of Tourism Building by Salam. Credit: Author. (Map Figure # 56)

Fig. 7.9: A modernist era Hamra building retrofitted with a “green” character. Credit: Author.
The Ministry of Tourism Building by Salam on Hamra Street is a unique example of the modernist aesthetics that line that street. Salam’s attempt to synthesize eastern “arches” and stone columns on the first floor with the more geometrical composition on the top floors shows a clear attempt and a conscious search for an aesthetic that could be categorized as regional. The fact that he decided to make the arches out of concrete and dress the side with stone could be read a statement to his regional intention. Furthermore, the geometric composition of the façade displays a clear understanding of modern elevation construction through the separation of the compositional elements, thus marrying the modern with the regional. But if we are to consider the larger district of Hamra, Salam’s building seems as a rare instance attempting to synthesize the regional with modern.

In comparison, the retrofitted modern building seems to be merely a formal tribute to green architecture prevalent today, as it is appears to be a literal reorganization of the building façade as part of the rehabilitation process of the building for resale. This attitude towards architecture and the invocation of current architectural trends for mere profit is prevalent in the city of Beirut, and stands at odds with Critical Regionalism.

The third point may address Frampton’s attempt to reconcile the essence of a cultural identity within the folds of a universal technique. Here we can find that several architects in Lebanon who attempted to do so, not by promoting the vernacular, but by trying to preserve or transform some of the architectonic characteristics into modern aesthetics. Salam as discussed is one as well as Liger Blair. What is also noteworthy here is that many works by these two architects have not succumbed to market influences, and that both have produced critical architectural literature on the Lebanese situation proper. Therefore, the previous two points find in certain instances
certain applicability in this respect, albeit, this applicability would be restricted to the
works of only few of these architects and is incapable of explaining the vast amount
of modernist architecture in Beirut. Haddad mentions that the possibilities that were
introduced by *beton brut* during the fifties opened new possibilities for regional
variations and in Lebanon “found great popularity as it appeared to answer functional, climatic and cultural specificities.”\(^697\)

The fourth point which addresses the attempt to reclaim public space through
reasserting traditional human urban places such as a public market instead of malls for example, was not specifically relevant in the Lebanese context during the modern era, especially as Lebanon did not and still does not have a retail system type structures, even though they are becoming more popular. Yet, though these “malls” have a commercial character, they still present a different approach that in many instances take their cue from local requirements rather than from international models. Saida Mall for example, designed by the Lebanese architect Dany Daoud, attempts to reinterpret the traditional semi-open market place in a modern composition. The connecting corridors in Saida mall are semi covered with a glass ceiling, and have open passage to the outside, in a sense that you do not have to pass through any doors to go into the mall.

On the other hand, the reconstruction of downtown Beirut has been raised as problematic and is considered to erase a large part of Lebanese memory and replace it with an artificial construct that caters to the wealthy and the foreign. But in the modernist era, these modernist buildings became themselves landmarks of place and memory in various instances. The fight to save many of these modernist buildings from destruction is a testament to their public and urban value within the Lebanese social milieu. Here again it seems that Critical Regionalism also has some validity.

Modern architecture constitutes the larger bulk of architectural productions within the city of Beirut and Lebanon in general. Yet the question remains whether it was these works of architecture gave them this social status or whether architecture by default acquires meaning through the human factor. Sometimes the most mundane objects hold the most meaningful position in people’s minds.
Even though it is hardly unlikely that we can relate these questions to the developments that occurred during the modernist era as mentioned earlier, by the end
of that era in Lebanon, there was so little open green spaces to cater to the dense population. The decline of green spaces in the city of Beirut and elsewhere is still a cause for complaint. It is also possible to maintain that the current development in Beirut would eventually acquire historical validity after much of the hype has faded.

The fifth point relates to the dialectic of nature versus culture. In a sense, a site's topography is to be respected, as well as its response to the various local factors. We cannot assume that Lebanese modernist architecture achieved all this in Lebanon, but in many instances, we have seen a conscious attempt to respond to local factors. If we consider the buildings that line up Hamra Street for example, we would see that the buildings facing south almost all responded to light by manipulating the tectonics of their southern facades with Brise Soleil, whereas the buildings that faced north had more open fenestrations and most of the time unembellished glass facades.

Fig. 7.11: Fransa Bank Facing North
Credit: Author (Map Fig. #55)

Fig. 7.12: Rbeiz Building Facing North
Credit: Author (Map Fig. #48)

Fig. 7.13: Horse Shoe Building Facing North
Credit: Author (Map Fig. # 40)

Fig. 7.14: Cinema Hamra Facing North
Credit: Author (Map Fig. # 39)

Fig. 7.15: Estral & Saroulla Facing South
Credit: Author (Map Fig. # 43)

Fig. 7.16: Abdel Rahman Bldg. Facing South
Credit: Author (Map Fig. # 34)
This though is not necessarily true of all modernist developments. If the Lebanese model resisted the possibility of a *tabula rasa*, it was not because it was a rejection of the concept itself, but likely because of the challenges that Lebanese geography and topography exhibited. This topography of hills and vales, mountains and valleys leaves very little flat spaces for undertaking such a task. Today though we are witnessing land reclamation towards the sea such as in the case of the Solidere project, Alisar project and even in Dbayeh Marina. This expansion towards the sea was deemed easier than having to deal with land ownership laws and complicated geography.
The sixth point, dealing with the tactile versus the visual, emphasizes the tactile rather than the visual. In a sense, Frampton maintains that the tactile has the proper ability to relay intent in both a culturally significant manner, as well as in a visually appealing aesthetic. Details that are solely intended for visual appeal have no rooted cultural or architectural significance. This point specifically has been argued against by many, where certain ornamental forms are seen as essential elements within the framework of specific cultural identities, and where the visual takes symbolic meaning:
Regionalism, as a counter process to internationalism through which modernism was criticised [sic], could have been an encompassing system in analysing [sic] architectural works, if the main theorists of regionalism had not limited the scope of this theory to only modern and abstract way of designing and thinking in architecture. Some of them, like Curtis, criticises [sic] Islamic ways of cultural expression in symbolic and popular architectural designs while the other, like Frampton, only count a modern expression of regional identity in architecture as ‘critical regionalism’.699

Even though the debate over whether symbolic renditions attached to buildings are purely for visual reference and have nothing to do with the tactile, such elements do carry certain cultural values that might elude the tectonic, but find meaning within the cultural framework it is embedded in. Many of the pergolas that crown buildings during the modernist era in Lebanon for example were triggered by local laws that allowed the addition of a penthouse within the parameters of the law.700

The applicability of the sixth point also finds some resonance in Lebanon’s modernist productions, but also lacks a necessary encompassing characteristic. Some buildings favored the tectonic, but many others considered the visual as important.

In all these points, we can find examples that affirm and negate each one of these points in the modernist era. Yet, it is almost impossible to find all of these points combined in one project. Going back to Salam’s Ministry of Tourism building on Hamra Street, we can find some regional characteristics in its aesthetics. As mentioned earlier, the façade composition, the use of arches, the use of local materials, the manner in which the base walls ‘sprout’ from the ground all point to this direction.


700 See Map Figures 10, 13,14, 17, 20, 38, 39, 40, 43, 47, 48, 52.
But other buildings, even by unknown Lebanese architects such as the Hidhod building on the same street or the Annahar newspaper building or Farah Center or Isa’i building lack such regional aesthetics and display pure geometrical manipulation on the facades. There are no discernible regionalist aesthetics to explore or point to, other than the roof pergolas mentioned earlier, which were triggered by local laws.
These are only some examples on Hamra Street alone. The architecture of the city of Beirut is dense with similar buildings that belong to the same era, that do not reflect any discernible regional character. How can we then understand these productions within the framework of a Critical Regionalist theory? The limited scope of applicability of Critical Regionalism is restrictive and falls short of addressing the massive body of modernist productions in Beirut.

Addressing Critical Regionalism in respect to modernism in Lebanon on the other hand does not exclude the parameters of its own criticism. In essence, if Critical Regionalism is supposed to address the specificities of a culture, and the unique qualities of a region, how would such an approach be applicable in the case of a newly formed nation state such as Lebanon, that has been under Ottoman rule for four hundred years, under French mandate for about thirty years, (not to mention earlier histories all the way back to the Phoenicians) and is still struggling to define its national and cultural identity? If Assem Salam found for example a possibility to redefine Islamic architecture in Lebanon, could his architecture be culturally and
regionally representative in a country like Lebanon where monastic Maronite churches stand side by side with local Islamic architecture, which in essence differs greatly from Islamic architecture in the region for that matter?

If we are to take two primary examples of what is considered regionalist architecture in Lebanon, Salam’s Khashoqji Mosque and Raoul Verney’s Faqra Church, a proper assessment is required to determine whether these two examples truly represent a culturally relevant architectural form and a regionally pertinent design. Verney’s design deviates in the space arrangement from the traditional Maronite church, and enters the church on the diagonal instead. Other than using local stone as an exterior veneer, the church displays completely modernist characteristics in form and space manipulation. Khashoqji mosque on the other hand has no precedent form in Lebanese local architecture, and purely manipulates geometrical forms, two interlocking squares, to produce the architectural work. The possibility of attribution to regionalist architecture, despite the intent, remains questionable at least on formal grounds. This of course does not undermine the importance of both buildings, but rather only questions the possibility of classification under the heading “Critical Regionalism”.

Fig. 7.24: Khachoqji Mosque
Credit: Andre Trad

Fig. 7.25: Faqra Church
Credit: Andre Trad
The final question goes back to the post-colonial dilemma. Though Critical Regionalism could be relevant in New York or Germany, it is often used to diffuse the tension between cultural identity and the built environment most evident in post-colonial spheres:

Like the postcolonialist project Ricoeur described, Frampton's version of critical regionalism revolved around a central paradox, a binary opposition: "how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization." It is the tension arising from this problem—the struggle to resolve it more than its eventual resolution—that fuels critical regionalist discourse. This fact underlies Frampton's emphasis on issues of resistance and process over product.

Critical regionalism's fault lines stand most clearly exposed in these emphases. "It is," Jacobs writes, "a revisionary form of imperialist nostalgia that defines the colonized as always engaged in conscious work against the 'core.'” In stressing place, identity, and resistance over all other architectural and extra-architectural considerations, critical regionalist rhetoric exemplifies the "revisionary form of imperialist nostalgia" described by Jacobs. It makes paramount a struggle where no struggle might otherwise have been said to exist. It routes to the margins an architecture that might not otherwise be imagined standing there.701

In conclusion, we can reflect on Hays’ comment, suggesting Critical Regionalism as a possible avenue for explaining Lebanon’s modernist heritage. Hays’ comment does not seem to find a general applicability, albeit the relevance of his statement does find certain elements in the works of a few architects. In general terms however Critical Regionalism might be able to explain the works of some of Lebanese architects during the modernist era, but falls short of explaining the encompassing modernist production as a whole. Additionally, Critical Regionalism requires a conscious commitment to the prescribed six points of resistance. This would suggest that not

only would the architect be aware of these six points, but also to belong to a line of thinking and a sort of a “group” of people that are cosigned to design within its parameters.

Yet, even if we are to think loosely of Critical Regionalism as a form of modernist architecture with a regionalist understanding, and varying degrees of applicability of such understanding depending on the region it is produced in, such a perspective also falls short of explaining the vast body of modernist productions in Beirut, and might require individual analysis on a building by building basis to assess whether such a perspective applies. It is most probable though, that if such a tacit understanding or cultural dynamic exists, then it would address some productions un-inclusively. The variations inherent in Beirut modernist architecture seem more varied to be understood through a single lens, or as a single and homogeneous manifestation of modern architecture. Therefore, there is a selective process that would exclude many and possibly include only few.
7.4: Critique of Third World Modernism

At the heart of the position of modernism in third world countries, there seems to be two models that are at play. The first is concerned with modernization and nation building as discussed by Sibil Bozdogan in her book *Modernism and Nation Building* (2001), and the second is located in the manner of modernization during colonization or after decolonization. These two models constitute the heart of the case for “Third World Modernism”. Whereas in countries where the first model predominates, such as Turkey or Israel, the general policy was to emulate the power of the west by following western examples, not only in building institutions but also in building policies. The second model on the other hand seems to be in constant tension and apprehension, with colonial powers as propagating an imposed modernity devoid of any cultural specificity, and more specifically, western in image and character.

If we are to look at Lebanon’s case through these lenses, the two models seem to converge, but none seems to be entirely inclusive. On one hand, the newly formed Lebanese nation, though engaged in nation building and looking westward for its models, did not have the historical supremacy of the Ottoman Empire nor did it have the self-contained identity formation of, for instance, Israel. Even though some researchers such as Haddad see the transformations that occurred during the sixties in Lebanon as assisting in nation building, backing such a claim remains elusive:

The efforts of the Lebanese State to forge a new identity for the new country, specifically during President Fuad Shehab’s rule [1958-1964], an identity at once distinct and independent from the French Colonial and Pan-Arab

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703 Ibid. PP. 10
704 Ibid. PP.8
affiliations, may have found in the International Style a tool for the implementation of a desired modernity.\textsuperscript{705}

The emphasis here is on the word “may”. This is because even though the aspect of nation building seems plausible, it is perhaps not entirely probable. The reason is that the government did not interfere in the workings of the private sector, albeit the possibility that some governmental institutions such as educational and governmental buildings could fall under this category. Yet this also could be attributed to the fact that the building technology that was available during the sixties was already established, and it promoted building techniques that were almost entirely modern. The free market and the private sector seem to have directed the course of events rather than the government. In other words, nation building was not fully regulated at state level, but rather was subject to the forces inherent in the essence of a free market.

The colonialism/de-colonialism dichotomy on the other hand also falls short of explaining the position of modern architecture in Lebanon. The outlook and attitude of the majority of the Lebanese people towards France as a colonizing power does not fit the predominant anti-colonialist sentiment. Here some elaboration is necessary.

In May of 1926, a “Caliphate Conference” was held in Egypt as a reaction to the abolishment of the Caliphate and Sharia law in Turkey in 1924. Historically, Sunni Muslims around the world looked towards the Caliphate as the center of Muslim power and guidance. Now, the center of Sunni power has been replaced by a secular system. This transformation mobilized not only the Sunnis, but also the Shiaas around the world. At the conference the Caliphate was declared a necessity in Islam, but there

was no material action translated.\textsuperscript{706} Two other conferences followed, the first in Mecca in 1926, and the second in Jerusalem in 1931. Neither was capable of resolving this issue, and the position of Caliphate as it was in Turkey disappeared as a political force in Islam. This change caused confusion amongst many Muslims and spawned a global reaction:

In the turmoil of political and religious movements that followed, Shias and Sunnis found pressing reasons to join forces. Intra-Muslim polemics began to appear trivial in the harsh light cast by colonialism and secularism.\textsuperscript{707}

After the First World War, France and England mainly divided the various parts of the Ottoman Empire amongst themselves. The Middle Eastern and African states of the Ottoman Empire were Muslim in their vast majority with the exception of Mount Lebanon.\textsuperscript{708} After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire which ruled over these states for almost four centuries, and the division of these states between British and French forces, Lebanon stands out as an anomaly. All other states looked to self realization as a process of reconciling the concept of modernization with the established concepts of Muslim laws.

The Lebanese situation was unique. Over half of its population was comprised of Christians, and the other half divided amongst Shias, Sunnis and other minorities. The possibility of forming a separate country was highly plausible, especially to the Lebanese Christians who rallied around the world for this cause. Instead of regarding

\textsuperscript{706} KHADDURI, M. 2010. \textit{War And Peace in the Law of Islam}, Lawbook Exchange, Limited. PP.290

\textsuperscript{707} NASR, V. 2007. \textit{The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future}, W. W. Norton. PP. 106

\textsuperscript{708} In the Middle East, Yemen, Jordan and Oman were under British Colonial Rule, and Syria and Lebanon were under French Colonial Rule. All these countries have Sunni majority except for Lebanon. Iraq, which was under British Colonial rule, had a majority of Shiite Muslims. In Africa, Egypt and Sudan with Sunni Majorities were under British Colonial rule and Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco were under French Colonial rule also with Sunni Majorities,
colonization as a negative force of occupation, in Lebanon colonization was seen by many, especially the Christians, as a step towards state formation:

While Turkish and Egyptian intellectuals were engrossed in attempts to justify modernism in the light of Islam, or Islam in the light of modernism, no such consideration disturbed the Christian intellectual in Lebanon. True, the traditional social background of the Eastern Christian, in Lebanon and elsewhere, differed little from that of the Moslem. Yet the Lebanese who identified himself as a Christian could easily accept the West, with none of the Muslim’s religious or political reservations. Not only was the Westerner a Christian like himself, but he also appeared to him as a champion and a protector. After the troubles of 1860, Western Powers were the agents which guaranteed for the Lebanese Christian the autonomy of his country and the safety of his community. As a result, the intellectual movement in Lebanon during the nineteenth century, in that it was led by Christians, was in sharp contrast to contemporary developments in Turkey, Egypt, and other Moslem countries. 709

In order to understand the distinction better, we need to look at the situation from a different angle. Whereas most newly colonized states considered themselves part of a larger Islamic nation, and maintained apprehensive feelings towards western colonial powers, the Lebanese majority saw colonization as a step towards freedom from Ottoman rule and a step closer towards self governance. 710 It was, if not a positive force, at least a force of change towards the goal of a separate and sovereign nation. The political shrewdness of the Lebanese Christians before, during and after the colonization of Lebanon secured Lebanon as an autonomous political entity. 711 Therefore, it cannot be categorized with the same group as that of the remaining colonized states, if only as it related to the majority of the Lebanese Christians. Yet, the formation of the modern state of Lebanon did not seem to have had any major

711 HOVSEPIAN, N. 2008. The War on Lebanon: A Reader, Olive Branch Press. PP. 34
contradictions in the early years of its formation. The division of power amongst the confessional groups seemed a well balanced compromise that had the capacity of success. It is by no means that the balanced equilibrium that lead to the formation of the Lebanese state is being rationalized, but rather an attempt is made to highlight the different sphere this new formation occupied relevant to colonial powers. In a sense, relatively speaking, Ottomans were the colonial power that exercised its rule over Lebanon for four centuries, and French colonialism that lasted twenty five years from 1918 till 1943, was to be regarded as the saving grace from Ottoman occupation. The term “colonialism” therefore carries a relative meaning in opposition to what it meant to Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Tunis, and probably even to India.

The national policy for modernization initiated by the newly formed Lebanese government after the independence which reached its zenith with the presidency of Fouad Shehab from 1958 till 1964, could possibly be comparable to the modernization efforts that occurred in Turkey under Ataturk. The comparison could be drawn from the fact that both countries used modernism, through government policy or through the private sector, as a vehicle for nation building, albeit the different offshoots and trajectories they took. Whereas in the Turkish model religious institutions had to be secularized and language reformation was necessary, in Lebanon it was a matter of formation rather than transformation of government institutions.

The similarity also lies in the fact that Turkey was not inhibited by the scepter of a colonial power, but rather had a well established vision and plan for its future as a modern westernized state. In comparison, the newly formed Lebanese state advocated a democratic state, free economy, and a multi relegious system that guaranteed the freedom of speech and religion, and the relation with the colonial power was not one of apprehension. Though today’s Lebanese political system is characterized as a
dysfunctional democracy, the laws inherent in its formation and its constitution were
directly derived from the western democratic model.712 In another comparison,
Lebanese modernism also has something that is akin to the productions that took
place in the state of Israel after its formation, in the sense that these models were
devoid of the tensions inherent in colonial and post colonial architectural discourse.

During the French mandate period, the French were met with adamant resistance in
Syria and elsewhere, whereas in Lebanon political life “continued vigorously.”713 This
distinction is paramount to understand the political and social atmosphere that gave
rise to modernist architectural productions during that era, and the position and
reaction of such production in comparison to that which occurred in other colonized
states. These productions were a democratic expression of a society that regarded
itself as free and progressive. They never acquired the symbols of western domination
that similar productions invoked in the colonized states in the Middle East. The
attitude around the Arab world is summarized by Khaled Adham:

In the Arab World, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, as part of
the colonial heritage, we’ve been stuck with a presumable “search for, or
defense of identity,” which is part of a paradoxical position between two
seemingly opposed views: tradition versus modernity. Traditionalists have
been opposing the excessive application of the modern—usually conflated
with Western colonial powers, principles, and ideas. As a consequence, they
have distorted tradition by framing it as the antithesis of modernity.714

In addition, the plethora of architectural productions in Beirut occurred after the
formation of the modern state of Lebanon, and therefore cannot be categorized as
belonging to colonial modernism. Positioning Lebanese architectural productions

714 IVANIŠIĆ, K. (ed.) 2013. Architectural Papers Monograph II: Middle East. Landscape – City –
Architecture, Zurich: Park Books. PP.22
therefore within the sphere of third world modernism in this respect remains inadequate.

Unlike Turkey, where modernization was embraced as a sign of marching towards civility, and unlike most decolonized countries around the middle east, where modernism was approached with a sense of suspicion, in Lebanon, modernization to a certain degree carried neither the positive ideological content of the Turkish march on the “logical path” nor the weary cautiousness of decolonization of the Arab world. For the largest part, the Lebanese state exercised no authority upon the modernization process. Modernization in Lebanon seems to have been market driven coupled with an enthusiasm for the new.

Third World Modernism, as an appropriate framework for Lebanese architecture, is probably harder to critique than Orientalism or Critical Regionalism. The reason is that it encompasses a broad range of approaches towards modernism in third world countries, and provides a variety of approaches for analyzing and assessing modernist productions in developing nations. Whereas Orientalism has a specific scope and domain of criticism, and Critical Regionalism has specific parameters for inclusion or exclusion, Third World Modernism lacks both. Yet, there are several points that are necessary to address in terms of its scope and reach. The first issue with Third World Modernism in that it has a specific geographic and cultural target, which is, Third World countries. Vikramaditya Prakash addresses this issue specifically:

What does it mean to claim "modernism" for the "Third World"? While I recognize that "modernism" is hardly a term that is uncontested, in this essay I am using "modernism" as the normative that is usually used to describe the modern movement in architecture, or just modern architecture. I am in

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sympathy but in contestatory relationship with the claims of "alternative modernisms" or "many modernisms," the claim that modern architecture took many forms world-wide each of which must be recognized for its own unique distinctiveness. \(^7\)6

Third World Modernism was given this name in 2011 by Duanfang Lu in her eponymously titled book that is subtitled “Architecture, Development and Identity”. The controversial aspect of the term “Third World” is part of the problematic of classification. This is something that Lu seems to realize, and recognizes the tension within the term itself. Nevertheless, grouping these modernisms under a title that already has geopolitical references and political tensions might still be problematic. In 2012, another book following a similar agenda came out under a different heading “Non-West Modernist Past: Rethinking modernisms and modernities beyond the west”. This book recognized in a sense the problematic with terminology and the risk of creating a geopolitically charged entity:

It has been argued that the naming of a geopolitical region serves at least two purposes: it can be used to describe and acknowledge an existing reality even though this reality exists independently of its name; and it can also be used to imagine a reality that is yet to exist or would otherwise not exist—although as Donald Emmerson has warned, one “who uses the name incautiously risks…projecting homogeneity, unity and boundedness on a part of the world that is in fact heterogeneous, disunited, and hard to delimit.”\(^7\)7

Their choice of “Non-West” falls under this reasoning, so as not to invoke an already existing sphere of research. Yet this naming, though recognizing the pitfalls of identification, creates and reinforces the western identity of modern architecture, that is, it homogenizes the west as a geopolitical entity, and non west as a separate and


distinct entity. This polarization is dangerous because it assumes on one hand that the west, and consequently modern architecture in the west as a unified model; something that it is not.

Therefore, a grouping of countries under the heading "Third World" or “Non-West” is somewhat problematic. Additionally the social, economical and cultural variations cannot in a sense unify the architectural productions that occurred in these so called “Third World,” or “Non-West” countries under a single heading.

Both these spheres of investigation, “Third World” and “Non-West” approaches to Modernism outside the “west” as a sphere of discussion inadvertently create a distinction or a polarity within modernism. In a sense, it seems to define western modernism in term of a dialectical opposite, in the same manner that Orientalism seems to define the West in Said's case. This distinction is problematic. We can only here discuss modernism in third world countries, how they relate to modernism in the west, or how they responded to that modernism, and probably how some even contributed to that modernism. But this means that they cannot be part and parcel of the modernist movement in a proper sense, for that becomes an exclusive property of the west. The problem therefore is not about creating a platform of discussion, but it is about creating a specific platform of discussion that has the “West” as an a priori coherent geopolitical construct.

It is necessary to have a sphere of debate that relates modernist productions around the globe that have been underprivileged in the sphere of research and theory. If taken lightly, both “Third World Modernism” and “Non-West” modernism are necessary as platforms for discussion. As Lu notes “little attention was devoted to modern architecture in the Third World, which was considered merely lesser forms of
Western Modernism."\(^{718}\) In certain instances, this is true but it is not necessarily the norm. And even though some researchers might extend their research beyond a certain geographical area, they are limited by the amount of information on these geographies as well as an adequate knowledge of their respective history. Research is a lengthy process, and if there is a lack of research on the architecture of certain countries, it is not necessarily to be assumed intentional. In recent years we have seen research expand in many countries where it has previously been lacking, and in most instances, this research was conducted by the natives of these countries. This is not surprising considering that natives have usually more vested interest in understanding their immediate surroundings, its history, and its implication.

Tabet, Arbid, Sarkis, Saliba, Haddad are some of the names that have been showing a growing interest in the modernist decades in Lebanon. In addition, the district of Hamra was one of the first subjects of sociological urban studies that Sarkis conducted in 1973.\(^{719}\) The Hamra district seems to exhibit heterogeneity not only within the sphere of Middle Eastern architecture, but even in itself as an evolving urban fabric. It also exhibits an international character on account of the international architects that contributed to its development. The Holiday Inn by Andre Wagonsky, Fransa Bank by Alfred Roth and Alvar Aalto, Phoenicia Hotel by Edward Stone, and Gefinor center by Victor Gruen are a few examples of the international collaboration of the architectural profession that developed in Lebanon during the modernist era.


Fig. 7.26: Holiday Inn by Andre Wagonsky. Credit: Author.
Fig. 7.27: Fransa Bank by Alfred Roth and Alvar Aalto. Credit: Author.
Fig. 7.28: Phoenicia Hotel by Edward Stone. Credit: Author.

Fig. 7.29: Gefinor Center by Victor Gruen. Credit: Author.
In conclusion, a platform of discussion is necessary, and if this platform targets research-disadvantaged regions as a group to promote theoretical and historical productions, then such an approach is necessary. Yet, to claim coherence to research-disadvantaged locals would be highly disadvantageous, and to group them in terms of dialectical opposites or under similar geopolitical categorizations can easily curtail meaningful distinctions and outcomes. In the case of Lebanon, modernist development definitely fits under the category where lack of research has curtailed the understanding of the urban environment, as well as a proper understanding of modernist productions and their position in the overall history of modernism.
7.5: Conclusion:

In a sense, there seems to be certain relevance to Orientalism, Critical Regionalism, and Third World Modernism approaches of understanding, but also, there are many setbacks and contradictions. The Lebanese case so far has eluded the possibility of being pinned down to one approach or the other, yet, at the same time, has found relevance in certain elements in each approach. This indicates that each of these approaches falls short in terms of appropriating the modernist phenomenon in Lebanon.

The question at this point becomes: If none of these approaches is capable of explaining the full spectrum of Lebanese modernism, then how are we to proceed? Perhaps the difficulty of positioning Lebanese modernism indicates an inherent problematic. But, where would this problematic be? Is it in the interpretive methods? Is it in our understanding of the modernist movement in general? Or perhaps it is in Lebanese modernism itself, a modernism that might not belong?
Chapter 8

Positioning Lebanese Modernism
8.1: Introduction:

The two primary perspectives that have governed the theorization of modern architecture in cities such as Beirut has been either the traditional modernist perspective, which has been elucidated and critiqued in chapters 2 and 6, or a more regional perspective, whether orientalist, critical, or third world modernist, which have been explored and critiqued in chapters 3 and 7 respectively. The lessons from these conceptual constructs after their exploration and assessment will be integrated in this chapter as useful tools for understanding.

Locating a theoretical position for Lebanese modernism produces a challenge to the predominant interpretive methods generally utilized for understanding ‘extra western’ modernisms. It seems that these various approaches have been responding to an established historical and theoretical practice, and attempting to reconcile the dualities and the polarities that modernism, beyond its ‘traditional’ geography faces.

This chapter tries to understand the position of Lebanese modernism through synthesizing the lessons learned so far from surveying and assessing the history of modernism and from surveying and assessing the various interpretive modes relevant to our situation. Yet, it is not only in Lebanon that this complexity is evident, it is potentially relevant to all aspects of the spread of modernism in the early twentieth century, and is relevant to the history and theory of modernism itself.

If we are to consider a phenomenon such as modernist architecture in Lebanon, the two main catalysts that constitute this phenomenon are modern architecture as an encompassing term and Lebanon as a geopolitical, social and cultural entity. This
dissertation has attempted to engage with both. The medium that binds these two
together is that of interpretation. Therefore, this dissertation attempted to establish a
theoretical framework for research that addresses modern architecture in Lebanon
through the key interpretive lenses available. The analysis undertaken did not
specifically aim to find a definitive answer for the preliminary question at the heart of
this research, which is, to understand the position of modern Lebanese architecture in
relationship to modernist architecture in general terms. The main focus has been on
defining the various historical, theoretical and architectural parameters for this
investigation.

One objective of the exploration of the theoretical framework is to understand
modernist architecture, not only within Lebanon but also within other localities
around the world. This same purpose has been driving many researchers outside the
common modernist historiographic sphere to reassess modernism within these
localities. The problem so far has been caused by two paradigms, the first is a lack of
research in general in regards to modernism in these localities, Lebanon included, and
the second, a predisposed and conflicting, not to say, jaundiced historiography of
modernism itself. Resolving these two paradigms is an ongoing struggle to any
research on modernism as such. This is why engaging with a specific and defined
empirical example such as Hamra and Hamra Street is valuable.

This final chapter will attempt to synthesize the lessons learned from the history of
development towards modern architecture in Lebanon, and to assimilate the various
interpretive approaches that have been delineated so far, within a reassessed
understanding of modern architecture in general terms. As modernism is a global
phenomenon, it is necessary to consider the historiography of Lebanese modernism
within the wider historiography of modernism internationally.
Looking at the history of modernism in general terms, it possible to infer that modernism as a phenomenon is by no means a uniform construct or a homogeneous body of work. It is not merely an object that could be looked at as a singularity; as the historiography of modernism seems to be more of a heterogeneous process. Additionally, this historiography is as diverse and contradictory as its architectural aesthetics and internal politics. This is true of the earliest historians of modern architecture where the modern architecture they attempted to construct was diverse and even contradictory at times. Their accounts furthermore do not “share the same cohesion; each text is cohesive only within itself.”\textsuperscript{720} It is also true of the later historians of modern architecture. They have since then “profoundly influenced all subsequent studies of, and research into, modern architecture.”\textsuperscript{721}

The apparent reason for this contradiction seems to be in the various agendas prescribed \textit{a priori} to the understanding of the historical events that occurred during the first half of the twentieth century. If I were to be brave, I would go as far as to suggest that these histories did not seem to see what modern architecture was, but rather what they wanted it to be, or in some instances, what they thought it could or should be.

It also seems that the current literature dealing with modernism in architecture operates according to these contradictions. Whether through Orientalism, Critical Regionalism, or Third World Modernism (Or non-west-modernism for that matter), these approaches seem to be stuck within the initial framework that was set for understanding ‘Western’ modernist historiography. To present an argument that eludes this dichotomy from within the historiography of the modern movement is

\textsuperscript{720} TOURNIKIOTIS, P. 2001. \textit{The Historiography of Modern Architecture}, Mit Press. PP. 22
\textsuperscript{721} Ibid. PP. 21
difficult, because any such argument will be utilizing the infrastructure and the vocabulary of said historiography. Therefore, an assessment of Lebanese modernism from within this sphere of understanding would only succumb to the inherent contradictions embedded in the historiography of modernism. This means that it will be lost in the labyrinth of conflicting agendas and the various constructed views of history on one hand, and would only be repeating the same arguments utilized by the three approaches of understanding that have been surveyed so far.

The reassessment of modernism may require two separate processes. The first necessitates a fresh outlook on the modernist movement itself, and the second would be dependent on the outcomes of the first process. For if we are to determine first that the modern movement is a cohesive body of work, this would lead our investigation in one direction, and if we determine that it is a fragmentary and contradictory process, this would lead us in another direction. These two directions constitute the second process, and consequently ground our conclusions by the path chosen.

Perhaps the only way to understand the position of Lebanese modernism in this regards necessitates a fresh outlook on the ‘modernist movement’ itself, a name that is somewhat appropriate if taken loosely. For if we consider that modernism somehow defined a ‘movement’ in many different directions, then modernism in Lebanon may be explored as simply one such direction. If we accept such an interpretation, not only would such a perspective allow the integration of Lebanese modernism within the folds of the modern movement, but will also allow for the integration of international branches of modernism within a general understanding of modernism. This would inevitably require us to expand the definition of the modern movement beyond the limited scope and locale it was given by the general and common history of modernism. Additionally, the tension inherent within the historiography of
modernism, and the schism between the first, second, and even the third generation of historians of the modern movement, leaves the outsider of this internal monologue at some loss.

This problematic seems to be tied with an imbedded contradiction inherent in most analytical methods that have addressed modernism so far. It may reside in two main perspectives that have governed most approaches to the interpretation and the historiography of modernism in general. The first is in the connection of architectural thought and architectural production in this historiography, and the second is in a perspective of history as a progression of events that are evolving continuously.

8.2: Strengths and Limitations:

The dissertation had certain strengths and certain limitations. The first strength is that it consolidated the three theoretical perspectives that have been and are still utilized when assessing modernism in a city such as Beirut, namely Orientalism, Critical Regionalism, and Third World Modernism. The second strength is that it looked the wider spectrum of the development of Lebanese modern architecture, and established the proper historical context for its understanding. The third strength is that it attempted to establish the links that were up till now missing between the three essential parts of the research, i.e. Lebanese Modernism, Modernism in the west, and modernism outside the west, especially on the theoretical level. The fourth strength is that it set the proper theoretical framework for any future work that would address modern architecture in Lebanon.

As for the limitations of the dissertation, the first limitation is in the scope of buildings that could have been considered. The author realizes that there are possibly other manifestations of modern architecture that could have been addressed, but this
would have broadened the scope of the dissertation beyond its limits. The second limitation is in the geographical scope, where the dissertation focused specifically in its micro research on Hamra District and Hamra Street. A different approach could have been pursued by the author, such as looking at specifically selected works of architecture that are scattered within the city of Beirut. Yet, it is in the author's opinion that the results of such an investigation, though they might yield some additional information, would not stray far from the conclusions reached in this dissertation. The fourth limitation is that the dissertation lacked a more concise elaboration on the spatial planning of the buildings involved due to the boundaries set by the dissertation itself, and due to the rarity of resources available for such an undertaking. The author attempted on various occasions to acquire such information from governmental agencies, only to find that much of this information was lost to war.

8.3: Reassessing modernist historiography

The historiography of modern architecture displays many contradictions as discussed earlier. The first problem lies in attempting to unite architectural theory with architectural production. By giving architectural form the possibility of holding meaning as a sort of a codified script, architecture begins to resemble a linguistic process. It is not necessary here to detail structuralist and post-structuralist theories of architecture, but it is enough to point out that there are many critics to this perspective as there are promoters. Yet, to join theory and production together means that inevitably, we are driven to understand the architectural process as a textual process, and the possibility to read architectural developments through the procession of architectural objects in history. This will also mean that the history of architecture could become a linear process that is possible to follow from one phase to another.
The unity of architectural history in this case necessitates a coherent and well defined architectural language, something that might not be easy to substantiate. What is of interest here is that through this textual approach, a system of understanding is possible. If such a system truly exists, then it becomes possible to read architectural history as a unified whole, consequently, uniting two separate disciplines, architectural history and architectural production:

If we take a practice like architecture, we can see that, as in the case of language, history is present, not as a process in which each phase negates a previous one, but as a series of traces that survive in current ways of looking at the world. Once knowledge is grasped as a radical orientation, in possession of embodied being, the relationships between history and theory, and between theory and practice in architecture appear as fundamentally non-problematic.722

The view that this perspective affords is of critical importance, because modernism in this respect is tied to specific events that belongs to a specific culture, and can only exist within the parameters of such culture. This is where modernism becomes the ‘property’ of the ‘west’. But, this is not the only view that is possible. To consider that modernism is a global phenomenon, not restricted to a specific culture, would stand in direct opposition to such a perspective.

The negation of history and theory is not something new. Many have argued against the possibility of correlating the two. Hanno-Walter Kruft for example mentions that the term “architectural theory” “would assume a constancy of meaning that this term might not have”, adding that “an abstract, normative definition of such a kind is both impractical and historically indefensible”.723 Collins himself recognizes the conflicting views between the history of architecture and the history of architectural

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theory as two separate fields and points out that the question of “how to define the
distinction between architectural history and architectural theory”\textsuperscript{724} was established
the moment architectural history became a part of an institution.

Collins also delineates early in his book the question of the origin of modern
architecture. It is important to understand part of the inherent contradiction in
architectural historiography at play here:

Modern architecture is usually considered to be the kind of architecture
peculiar to the twentieth century, but all recent writers on the subject have
recognized that its origins go back much further, even though they may not
agree as to where exactly they began.\textsuperscript{725}

The problem of origin resonates with Frampton’s idea that “the more rigorously one
searches for the origin of modernity […] the further back it seems to lie.”\textsuperscript{726} Rykwert
seems more reserved, locating these origins in the middle of the eighteenth century as
we have seen, and to a certain extent, both Collins and Frampton do not openly
disagree. Therefore, architectural history and architectural theory are at odds, or let us
say that they are at least to be considered separate disciplines. The difficulty of
separating architectural theory from practice also succumbs to the same reasoning.

This problematic seems recurrent in all discourses addressing modern architecture:

It has been correctly said that this critique was more often directed against the
self-perpetuated mythology of modernism than against modern architecture
itself—which was far from allowing itself to be restricted by the narrow
concept of functionalism or the total rejection of history that was proclaimed

Press. PP. 141
\textsuperscript{725} Ibid. PP. 15
\textsuperscript{726} FRAMPTON, K. 1981. \textit{Modern architecture: a critical history}, Oxford University Press. PP. 8
by theory. But it is not so easy to separate the practice of modernism from its
theory.\textsuperscript{727}

The relationship of history, theory and practice in architecture is a controversial
relationship. It is only in the assumption of the agreement of the three branches that
modern architecture could be made to belong to the “west”. The impossibility of this
agreement though suggests that there might be different agendas at work here. If
current research on modernism determines ‘Orientalism’, ‘Third World Modernism’
and even ‘Critical Regionalism’ as possible avenues of understanding of this
phenomenon in the respective locales, then there is an \textit{a priori} assumption that
architectural history, theory and production pertaining to the modern movement could
be unified as a coherent whole. This is hardly possible.

The theoretical constructs that the three historians surveyed, find their relevance in
architectural thought, but not necessarily in architectural production. The fact that
Frampton chose to dedicate a very small portion of his book to the period before the
middle of the nineteenth century is not only an indication of the rarity of aesthetic and
stylistic architectural references available to his thesis before that period, but also to
the difficulty of correlating architectural thought with architectural production within
a modernist theoretical framework before the twentieth century.

Collins on the other hand, does not discuss architectural works inasmuch as he
focuses on the theoretical aspect of historical architectural thought and its progression.
This separation is paramount in the process of understanding. In a sense, we have to
consider architectural thought as an autonomous organism different from architectural
production, something that Collins clearly points to when he states that his book is

“intended to be a history of thoughts about architecture, rather than a history of architecture itself.” Frankl also seems to agree with such a position:

The history of architecture was separated from artistic development and became a historical discipline. It was no longer pursued in order to find new prototypes and to recommend certain styles. It now had its own importance as part of humanistic scholarship.728

This separation between thought and production is paramount in the process of understanding. If we are to consider that architectural thought and architectural production are necessarily synchronous, we will not only be at loss in terms of appropriating Lebanese modernist architecture, but even have trouble reconciling modernist architectural productions in general terms with architectural theory because of this hypothetical interdependency. The synchronicity between theory and practice in modernism would assume that there is homogeneity within modernist discourse. This seems difficult to establish. This synchronicity would also suggest the possibility of modern architecture being an emblem of the western world, which in turn requires a very specific linear trajectory in history, thought and production. The probability that this is possible seems remote.

It is possible to say here that Lebanese modernism upholds the aesthetics of the modern architectural work, but does not necessarily contribute heavily to the domain of the development of international modernist architectural thought. In this respect, it becomes possible to locate Lebanese modernist production within the scope of modernism in general terms, that is, within the scope of modernist architectural productions.

728 FRANKL, P. 1968. Principles of architectural history: the four phases of architectural style, 1420-1900, MIT Press. PP. 194
Looking back at Hamra we can clearly see modernist aesthetics and design strategies implemented to a large extent in the manipulation of exterior form.

Fig. 8.1: Hidhod Building. Credit: Author
Even in the above buildings (Figures 8.1, 8.2), where it was not possible to identify the architect, the modernist aesthetic is prevalent. It is possible to suggest here that Lebanese architecture between 1943 and 1975, particularly of Beirut and Hamra, was affected by the international modernist architectural culture, which became part and parcel of local architectural practices that defined the three decades following independence.

8.4: The national/international dilemma reconstructed

The analysis of the developments that occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, highlighted in Rykwert’s book, undeniably points to the formation of national architectural identities throughout Europe, at least on the level of architectural thought. These countries were then at odds and did not think of Europe as a single economical and cultural unity as we are experiencing it today (to a certain extent). Therefore, the theoretical bickering that was occurring during that period was likely fueled by national aspirations. Perrault’s struggle, in seeking to raise the status of French architecture and create a theoretical break from Italian Baroque through newly implemented arrangements and proportions, may not have been directed towards the universal liberation of the architectural process, but may be merely to widen the schism between the newly rising French cultural power and the declining Italian hegemony over the arts.

The relevance of these events to understanding Lebanese modernism is paramount. If modernism is partly an offspring of the shift of theoretical struggle from national architectural identities to class struggle instead, then this would allow the classifications of these architectural transformations in the eighteenth century on one hand to fall within the domain of architectural thought rather than that of architectural
production. On the other hand, it will also indicate that this fundamental difference would negate the ‘modernism’ of these early transformations, especially on the level of architectural production. In other words, it is difficult to understand architectural productions that occurred since the middle of the eighteenth century up till the dawn of the twentieth century as ‘modern’ in terms of a specific understanding of the word. To simplify the process, if modernism necessitates a dependency on/upon national aspirations, then any transformation that does not satisfy this criterion may not be properly classified as ‘modernist’.

A very important parallel here also becomes possible. If this fundamental shift, from the specific to the general, that is, from national to international, is paramount to the understanding of the formation of modern architectural thought as well as production, then any attempt to revert to a more geographically bounded realm or a bounded cultural identity, negates any proper understanding directed towards modernism in general terms. Therefore, if we are to limit modernism as a property of the ‘west’, whatever our definition of this ‘west’ is, this directly means that we will be negating a primary premise of modernism, which is its international property, and limiting it again to a specific cultural or geographical domain. It will fall under a categorical understanding of an architectural transformation in line with the transformations that were occurring in Europe around the middle of the eighteenth century.

**8.5: Revolution/Evolution, Inclusion/Exclusion**

The contradiction becomes more evident in the revolution/evolution dichotomy. The first generation of architectural historians of the modern movement, with the exception of Hitchcock, saw modernism as a revolution in thought and in design,
which was a view not much different from that of the architects who produced it.\textsuperscript{729} Contrastingly, the second generation of architectural historians in general capitalized on the evolutionary process, which afforded the possibility of connecting past and present architecture within a unifying discourse. Thus, within such an evolutionary understanding of modernism, questions of origin as well as historical progression become necessary ingredients. The question of the impact of both models of understanding here becomes necessary, because each position provides different possibilities.

Within an evolutionary understanding of history, the Eurocentric model becomes validated, whereas within a revolutionary understanding of modernism, history and origin hold little weight, since revolution, by necessity, cuts ties with history and establishes new beginnings. In recent years, the evolutionary model has almost completely taken over, and the revolutionary model receded. We rarely encounter anyone today that does not subscribe to the influence of the second generation of architectural historians. Whether in agreement or disagreement with the history and theory put forth by the evolutionary process of modernist development, the logic and synthesis of this approach is visibly dominant. Contrastingly, the earliest modern architects always thought of themselves as revolutionaries, yet without totally shunning historical lessons. In the same respect, the earliest historians portrayed this sense of revolution, and were enthusiastic about the new world it was going to give birth to.

\textsuperscript{729} Hitchcock was the earliest to tag the date of 1750 in his book Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration. He saw a continuity of modern architecture from that date onward. See HITCHCOCK, H. R. 1929. Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration, Ams PressInc. PP. xxi and PP. 3
In a sense, the evolutionary perspective of history ultimately may give root and validation to a “western” centric prerogative. The revolutionary perspective on the other hand, though having most of its proponents from Europe and America, has a more international aspect, and seems to dodge much of the orientalist and post-colonialist rhetoric that the evolutionary perspective generates. Still, these early histories focused primarily on European and American works, and did not regard architecture produced beyond their geographic boundaries. And even though a revolutionary perspective seems more suitable to understand modern architecture internationally, it has also certain setbacks. This is because it will require a complete reassessment of the framework and scope of the modern movement on one hand, and a readjustment of the inclusive/exclusive properties that it garners on the other. Yet there is a possibility that the exclusivity of a western-centric understanding of modernism might be evaded.

The framework of revolution/evolution can also be applied to architectural thought. It is possible to claim that there was an evolutionary process of thinking about architecture with a certain framework, and that this process was interrupted by a different mode of thinking. The revolutionary aspect of architectural thought does not necessarily coincide with the revolutionary aspect of architectural production. The confusion seems to arise through inextricably linking architectural thought with architectural production and correlating the revolutionary aspect of architectural thought with the revolutionary aspect of architectural production within a bounded and interlinked timeframe. Philip Johnson’s statement that “forms beget more forms, whereas ideas barely have influence on them,”\(^\text{730}\) somehow recognizes this confusing relation between thought and practice. This statement seems to be an attempt to point

to that distinction, the one between thinking and doing. It becomes evident here that 
only within a specific theory that joins architectural thought and architectural 
production such a “western” perspective would be possible. Such a view assumes that 
if a revolution in architectural thought and theory happened in the middle of the 
eighteenth century would mean that this revolution, even though it took time to 
materialize, is the basic source of modern architectural production that predominated 
the first half of the twentieth century. Between the two perspectives then lies a 
contradiction. If the revolution in thought did actually materialize in form in the 
middle of the eighteenth century through rearrangement of classical vocabulary, then 
why would it also be considered the source of modern architectural aesthetics and 
space planning?

The revolution/evolution dichotomy seems to suggest that there is an inherent 
problem in the historiography of modern architecture. It is by far not a coherent body 
of work, nor a unified object that we could assess any architectural production 
against. The earliest histories defined and related the scope and arena of modernism 
within a specifically bounded geographical and cultural framework. The specificity 
and homogeneity of this framework is however highly disputed. Since these were the 
everiest histories of modernism, they spawned a massive body of literature that still 
have force today. There have been many challenges to this historiography, and much 
debate about its validity, yet, this debate remains in the most part bounded within the 
original geography, that is, the “European and American” boundaries.

The recent literature that has been produced concerning Orientalism and Third World 
Modernism, seems to adhere to the logic of this bounded geography, and attempts to 
negate it through a dialectic, by creating a parallel history and a parallel geography 
that is primarily defined through opposition, that is East vs. West. But retrospectively,
the growing body of literature that has been exploring modern architecture "beyond the west" in the past decade or so, has this lingering feeling that there is a lack in understanding and in appropriating modern architecture in general terms, and the manner in which modern architecture could be explained within these respective countries.

If we go back to the division of architectural production from the production of architectural theory, we can find that the early history of modern architecture becomes also more plausible. This would situate again modern architecture as a property of the twentieth century alone, and in a certain respect agree with Frankl who considers the entire period from Brunelleschi to the end of the nineteenth century as one separate unit.731 Such a perspective of history creates a sharp distinction in architectural history before and after the dawn of the twentieth century.

8.6: Positioning Lebanese Modern Architecture

If we are to adhere to an evolutionary history both in theory and in production of modern architecture, interdependent and inseparable, then Lebanese modernist architecture has to undergo a total reassessment within a very specific understanding of such a history. This though is problematic, because even though many have attempted to establish such a link, it remains highly criticized. Furthermore, the link between history and theory is even more problematic:

A dilemma made itself apparent; namely, how to define the distinction between architectural history and architectural theory. The importance of this distinction cannot be over-emphasized, since the very validity of the notion of a theory of architecture is now hotly debated. Essentially, the distinction is

731 FRANKL, P. 1968. Principles of architectural history: the four phases of architectural style, 1420-1900, MIT Press. PP. 3
this: that the theory of architecture is concerned with everything pertained to
the way people actually build in the present, whereas the history of
architecture is concerned with the way people used to build in the past; but
the distinction between the two was by no means easy to determine in the
nineteenth century and it is still not easy to determine.732

This highly problematic correlation seems to be integral to the understanding of
modernism on an international level. Attempting to dissolve or resolve these
contradictions though seems to pose other problems. The complexities and paradoxes
inherent in modernist history and literature should not be viewed as a negative aspect
of modernist theory, but rather as an opportunity to expand and articulate the literature
to accommodate cities such as Beirut.

For, if we are to accept that architectural thought and architectural production are two
different and separate domains that do inform each other, but are not necessarily in
constant and calibrated relationship, this would afford architectural productions in
Lebanon, and elsewhere for that matter, to be part and parcel of the project of
modernism. The domain of architectural theory would have to be assessed separately
within the parameters of its contribution to modern architectural thought, whatever
that might be. This second approach would inevitably mean that the revolutionary
aspect of history is possible, at least as it relates to architectural form and aesthetics.

The fact that architectural history has two different approaches towards interpretation
carries with it a seed of possibility. If one approach is exclusive, the other is inclusive.
This would suggest that the current historical trends in architecture, specifically those
that view history as an evolutionary process, might need to be reassessed. This

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reassessment could be that actually, the two aspects, evolution and revolution were possible simultaneously: evolution on the level of architectural thought, and revolution on the level of architectural production. If viewed as separate disciplines this would allow for the possibility of understanding both branches of modern architecture. This perspective would have a critical advantage, because on one hand it will allow for understanding international modernism within the fold of an adjusted understanding of the movement, and would not negate the massive body of architectural theory and history that capitalized on the evolutionary aspect of development, albeit, these accounts would have to be adjusted to reflect this distinction between theory and practice.

To revert to the history of transformation that occurred in Lebanon since the 1920’s, the shift from traditional type to modern aesthetics is nothing short of a revolution in production. The abrupt cut that occurred in Lebanon is not very different from the transformation that occurred in Europe for example, although in Lebanon, even the suburb created a totally new building type at least in terms of construction methodology and space planning. The aesthetics, though many consider them insignificant and even probably devastating on the suburbs, took their cue from modernist shapes and materials.

The complete aesthetic transformation of the residential type in Europe before and after the twentieth century for example, indicates a fundamental shift in the design, material and technology. This transformation was affected by an international phenomenon. The same occurred in Lebanon on a national level. By the 1930s, there was almost not a single building built in the traditional style with traditional materials. Even the multifamily buildings in the 1920s that utilized the traditional central hall
plan were using advanced building materials and technology. By the early 1940s, the transformation was total and complete.

Beirut, it seems, still has the capability of attracting star architects such as Raphael Moneo who recently designed the Beirut Souks building, Jean Nouvel who designed the Landmark building and Norman Foster who designed the 3Beirut building. The boom in development in Beirut contrasted against the fragile security situation in the region seems only understandable in a city that has housed so many contradictions.
Fig. 8.4: Landmark Building by Jean Nouvel. Credit: Author

Fig. 8.5: 3Beirut Building by Norman Foster. Credit: archiscene.net
The complexities of Hamra Street and the complexities of urban development in Hamra and Beirut in general appear to pose a challenge to the conventional approaches to modernism. They also pose a challenge to emerging approaches to what could be labeled as "extra western modernist literature". This interesting position seems to elude conventional methods of classification, as well as contemporary approaches to modernist criticism. It is perhaps this quality that the modernist architecture of Beirut carries, which offers the possibility of expanding the reach of what has traditionally constituted the nucleus of modernist development.
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