Hypersites in the Urban Realm

A Reinterpretation of Parasitic Architecture

In an urban environment where space itself is hostile, Parasitic Architecture is seen as a tool to converse, link, and explore. "Parasite" becomes "Hypersite", in an urban narrative that counteracts the adversities of the City with ephemeral yet profound conversations with space.

The City we occupy today is often devoid of opportunities to establish a meaningful dialogue with our surroundings. Our conversations with space are closer to loud – or silent – quarrels. This is particularly the case in Ras Beirut, the Lebanese capital's northwestern and predominantly residential neighborhood. A user's typical experience of Ras Beirut is punctuated by adverse encounters with their spatial environment. Such malignant interactions can be defined as elements of urban space that come in our way as users, creating the sense of an antagonistic landscape. They coincide with the appropriation of necessary spaces or the utter inexistence of them, and include:

- **The Wall:** A creator of division, limitation, and separation.
- **Imminent Danger:** Characterized by negligent scaffolding schemes, suspending a constant risk above passersby.
- **The Sky-Block:** The buildings themselves; a barrier to any view of the sky in a dense city with loose building regulations.
- **The Private Facade:** A vertical and opaque inhibitor of contact with the outside.
- **Sidewalk Clutter:** A colonization of the sidewalk by waste, hardly allowing the user to lift their eyes off the ground.

Among others, such examples of aggressive space-user interactions are very common in Ras Beirut, inviting us to imagine strategies that could remediate our relationship with urban space. These strategies would hereby develop upon pre-existing spatial conditions, as opposed to an urban void or plot. This brings to mind the notion of Parasitic Architecture.

Parasitism in the built world denotes a structure that clings onto a larger one, the Host, with the prospect of a selfish extraction of resources. However, we are to question such an accusatory depiction and to interpret the Architectural "Parasite" as an outgoing and outspoken entity, one interested in positively engaging with its architectural, urban, and human contexts. We are to move from the etymological origin *Para-sitos* – the one "near food" and consuming it – to the term *Hyper-sitos* – the "over"-seer and orchestrator of spatial nutrients. The Hypersite is hereby modeled as a sentient architectural organism (Fig. 4), one with a programmatic metabolism, intertwining the spaces and users it affects in an engaging urban conversation (Fig. 5).

With these definitions in mind, a series of typological architectural interventions, the Hypersites, are designed as adaptations to the recurrent adverse scenarios found across Ras Beirut (Fig. 3). These scenarios correspond to host/site types (photos) that fall on a gradient from public to private – from street to built space – allowing the coverage a full urban spectrum (Fig. 2):

1) Hypersites of the Public Realm:

Ten Seconds of Calm – *Theme of Temporary Respite*

We are first brought to the most public of urban entities: the street. This hypersite reclaims both spatial and auditory dimensions of the cluttered sidewalks of Ras Beirut, if only for a few meters, or seconds. It complements the wall, creating an isolating yet insulating moment. The translucent passageway blurs out the suffocating noise and commotion of the street, freeing up the user to contemplate a serene strip of sky. The hypersite is bounded by waste collection units, encouraging its users to maintain its internal sanitary order and to participate in its filtration of the surrounding environment.

Shoreline Explorer – *Theme of Unexplored Landscapes*

The Shoreline Explorer questions one's restricted accessibility to public landscapes, notably the corniche shoreline, which is almost entirely fenced off. This Hypersite is conceived as a view-framing shell inhabited by a circulation that facilitates access and proximity to the sea. While the aim is to transcend barriers, the hypersite makes a conscious decision to make us aware of them. Instead of a localized demolition of the fence, the intervention adapts around it, making it a focal point along one's path towards the shore.

The Scaffold – *Theme of Taming Danger*

Ras Beirut is populated by construction sites with negligent and unsafe scaffolding schemes. The Scaffold hypersite responds to these unmonitored structures not by alienating but by completely integrating itself into them. This Hypersite is a protective passageway that redirects pedestrians towards the safer side of the street. It makes sure to justify this deviation by inviting us to curiously peer through its interactive oculi at the construction process above. The hypersitic unit can also begin to work in pairs across the construction site, in a collaborative effort towards public safety.

2) Hypersites of the Private Realm:

Sky Watcher – *Theme of the Expanded Mind*

The Sky Watcher is adapted to the windows of the first floors of buildings, which are often obstructed by neighboring buildings, and in inevitably close proximity to the intense sound pollution of the streets below. This intervention questions the inefficiency of a typical window in this given context, and functions as a space for contemplation amidst a deafening environment. Through its introverted nature, the Sky Watcher behaves as an expanded mind of sorts. It connects to its host building via a circulation tube lined with bookshelves, forming a personal micro-library. In this way, the hypersite begins to share a cultural interface with its users, establishing an intellectual relationship.

The Bridge – *Theme of the Nuclear Neighborhood*

The Bridge is a larger, semi-private species of Hypersite. It inhabits the interstitial parking lots that fall between residential buildings with blind, "anti-social" facades. A circulation path links the two buildings together with a communal sequence of steps, forming a suspended nuclear neighborhood. The floor becomes an engaging social membrane punctuated by playful and adjustable furniture units. The Bridge encourages neighbors to spontaneously meet and engage, and to go beyond the privacy and introversion that their building facades impose. Over time, more floors begin to infiltrate the hypersitic system, allowing it to grow and take deeper root.

The Torch – *Theme of the Autonomous Sentinel*

The Torch finds its home along dark, narrow alleyways, on the windows of low-rise buildings. It builds on the rhizomatic network of electric cables that links homes in these areas together. The Torch adapts to this interconnected environment as a multifaceted balcony. It is equipped with a solar panel that provides energy to its host home, and extends its own electric chord outwards to pioneer a new and autonomous form of energy circulation, one that is much more reliable than the current state of affairs in Beirut. The Torch is hereby far from selfish, doubling as a well-functioning light pole during the night.

3) Hypersites of the Public-Private Interface:

Green Moment – *Theme of Re-Infused Purpose*

The Green Moment injects a public green strip into deprecate and abandoned houses. Dwarfed by their surrounding buildings, these houses lay hostile in their lifelessness. The first step

towards re-inhabiting such spaces is proposed through a re-activation of the roof area, creating a small-scale park with public access from the sidewalk. The green path originates from the heart of the structure, which is marked by a tree. This focal point stresses on the need for greenery in Ras Beirut, and encourages collective gardening initiatives whereby visitors leave their mark on the structure, as it is part living.

The Funnel – *Theme of the Urban Well*

Perched on the roof of imposing high-rise buildings, The Funnel focuses on the collection of water, whether from the rain, or the reservoirs of its host. It is a common working space for the inhabitants of the building, while providing water to users of the sidewalk below, forming an urban well. It encloses a glazed water-collection system that allows for the contemplation of the elements. As such, the Funnel is conceived around its empathetic relationship with water and people. The intervention's true potential, however, is only achieved when it is placed in symbiosis with the Green Moment. The Funnel provides water to it, facilitating its gardening activities and the Green Moment responds in gratitude, extending an oculus in the Funnel's direction. Such interactions, which would be typically hidden and disregarded as infrastructure, are made obvious, and take center stage. What we see here is a cycle of recognition, a dialogue between architectural organisms that is ultimately passed down to their users.

In a context of hostility, uncertainty and inability to rely on our spatial surroundings, The Architectural "Parasite" has been hereby reimagined as a tool to establish niches of stable, reliable, and positively engaging space with a meaningful subject matter. The term "Parasite" becomes obsolete, favoring the name "Hypersite". The Hypersites are curious forms of architecture. They adapt to the hostilities of space, and their symbiosis with the City is a bridge for us to begin our own. Together, they form an urban acupuncture of sorts (Fig. 1), an architectural ecosystem that puts user perspective first and tackles the universally experienced yet often over-looked details of the City. Proposed to us is an exciting urban journey, and the Hypersites are our companions along the way.

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