

## Reflection Paper

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### Aspect 1 | The Relationship between Research & Design

Departing from the instability of Beirut and the richness of its culture, this thesis aims to investigate if it is possible to preserve the heritage beyond the limitations of physical archiving. Digitalization is a tool to transform the tangible into universal, lasting beyond physical decay. The research focuses on two main aspects: storage and digitalization of cultural elements. Case studies of various means of storage facilities: food, cars, culture and information resulted in understanding of the programmatic and functional knowledge of storing. On the other hand case studies of facilities of digital means of creation: museums and data centres resulted in the understanding of required technical specifications and architectural potentials. The design merges these two elements to generate a new hybrid typology.

### Aspect 2 | The Relationship between Theme and Complex Projects

The studio theme 'catastrophe' aims to respond to the ongoing state of crisis in Beirut. Beirut as a city is constantly under construction

economically, socially and architecturally. Due to instability of Middle Eastern politics, it has been the domain of domestic and international conflicts which brought destruction, but also the incentive to rebuild. The Civil War from 1975 to 1990, The October Revolution in 2019 and a top of this, the Blast in 2020 brought destruction and crisis transforming the city into a ruin. According to Lebanese folklore, Beirut was destroyed and rebuilt from its ruins seven times during its 5,000-year history. Therefore, development of Beirut should be interpreted not as an ideal conclusion, but rather a work in progress. "The explosion should be seen as impetus for the change. Besides the immediate humanitarian relief and early recovery, the city needs to establish long-term measures to return to a path of stability and development." It is a necessity for Beirut, and Lebanon, to have a solid understanding of its culture to move forward as identity of the citizens are closely bounded with their culture. A stable foundation for remembrance, awareness and recollection of cultural heritage is currently missing. In combination with external factors accelerating the cultural loss, lack of preservation is the main threat against maintaining a shared heritage which unites the community. Therefore, culture should be stored and preserved. Storing of a rather abstract entity such as culture has similarities with storing goods or objects but it also requires a unique approach. The proposed building

program: "Post-digital Depot" serves this specific need, as an archive in which material objects are analyzed, restored and translated to a digital medium.

### **Aspect 3 | Research Method and Approach In Relation To the Graduation Studio**

The research is approached as seven consecutive questions which results in the design.

The research question is: How can digitalization be utilized for preservation and accessibility of cultural heritage?

1. How does culture unite Beirutians against unrest and destruction?
2. How have destructive events affected the cultural scene in Beirut?
3. What is worth preserving and storing among the cultural heritage of Beirut?
4. What is the anatomy of a storage facility?
5. Can culture be stored in a facility, if so how?
6. How can digitalization be utilized as the method of preservation?
7. How does preservation through digitalization translate into architecture?

Methodology is a combination of case studies and literature research. The case studies are compared in

relation to context and function through re-drawing of architectural means to elaborate on the program and spatial configuration. The first group of case studies focus on storage facilities and means of preservation of objects. The second group of case studies focus on digitalization as an architectural layer. Literature study investigated what is the theory lying behind adaptation of digital culture into architectural thinking?

### **Aspect 4 | Relationship between the Graduation Project and the Wider Social, Professional and Scientific Relevance**

The project is based on Beirut's character as a city of dynamic flows of people, information and culture despite the "ruin" character. It functions as a case study that has potential to be a prototype for preservation of culture in war torn cities. A similar program of fusion of physical and digital storage facility for culture has potential to be developed in cities with similar background.

### **Aspect 5 | Ethical Issues and Dilemmas Encountered**

The main ethical issue is regarding the collection, storage and digitalization of private art collections. Museums around the world such as Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and Norway's National Museum of Art,

Architecture and Design (Nasjonalmuseet) have already developed easily accessible and engaging digital databases. These collections are privately owned therefore sharing of private property with the public is decided by the institution itself. On the other hand, for example in UK, where museum entrance is free almost everywhere, the charity Art UK is working to make the public art collections even more accessible. In Beirut, art is mostly privately owned and works of Lebanese artist are mostly displayed in European and Northern American countries rather than in Beirut. In Beirut, art institutions are mostly galleries rather than museums with permanent collections. This along with lack of depot space was the main result of the heavy impact on the art scene after explosion. In conclusion, generation of the database aimed by the building requires contribution and permission of Lebanese artists for their works to be stored, displayed and digitalized in the proposed program which is the primary ethical issue.