A discourse on Beauty. A Project for the International Competition: the Académie des Arts de la Ville de Gravelines
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This thesis focuses on the project for the International Competition to build an Art Academy held by the municipality of Gravelines in the Nord Pas des Calais region, in France.
To begin with it displays a theoretical survey of the concept of beauty in architecture, from ancient times up to the present. It dwells on the interconnection between different art forms and on the relevance architecture has in this process. Eventually the planning is explained in its different stages.
The analysis of Peter Eisenman's approach to planning, as applied to the project of the City of Culture in Galicia, in Santiago de Compostela, is of great importance in this work.
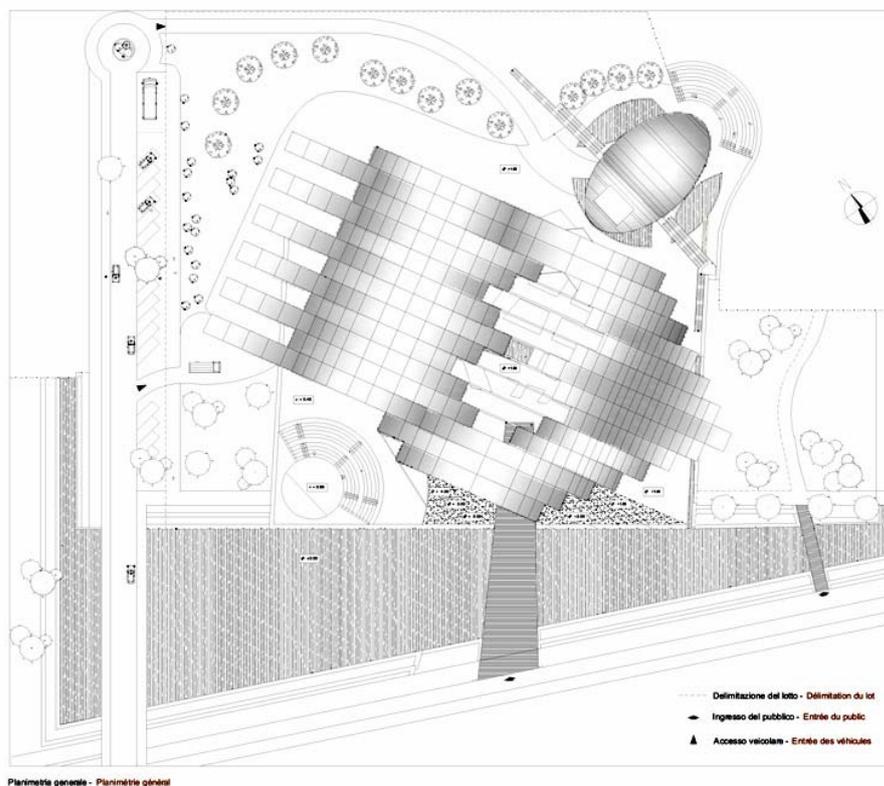

General plan with sketches and photos to introduce the context

A detailed analysis of the context and the existing urban texture together with the need to create a whole complex including three villages to ensure continuity with the urban environment brought to the main concept of this project: the creation of an architectural body actually connected to its environment by overlapping the urban grids of the three villages, on behalf of a "genetic heritage" that has to be recovered to preserve the identity of the environment.
Main features are created by fusing together architecture and topography, as Eisenman does in Santiago.
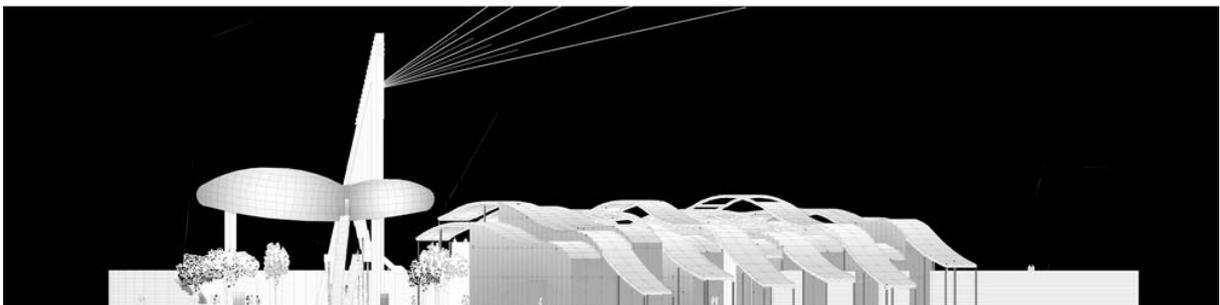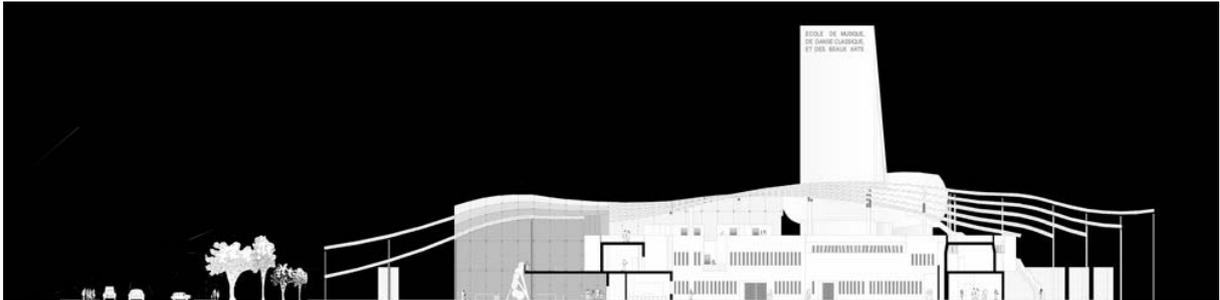
Transversal section and North elevation in night view

At ground floor you can find the frame of the central village within the hexagonal bastioned walls: the external hexagon is crossed by two of the main streets cutting the existing walls and it has an internal partly covered court whose pavement reveals the remaining urban structure.
At a higher level you can find the Petit Fort Philippe grid with its pentagonal boundary. While planning it was decided the internal face should be hexagonal, whereas the pentagonal frame was highlighted in the internal sections and divisions, according to the grid of the urban texture. From the inside of the central building you can reach the wide covered terrace to be used as exhibition area, as well as the hall at ground floor and the external and internal areas of the court.
The third grid, des Huttes village, is Cartesian like and was made into three essential elements of the project, placed along the projection of the coast on the site: the glass blocks of the classrooms and the library, the covering and the auditorium.
The glass components and the covering represent water, an essential feature of the landscape near to the sea. Furthermore, the customer wanted the natural elements to be highlighted in this project because of the great beauty of the place.

This choice, highlighting natural elements of the landscape which are part of the "genetic heritage" of the environment, was therefore due not only to aesthetical reasons, but also to specific requirements of the customer.

The auditorium is the only exception to this rule of composition: with its windings it overlooks the central build and the covering and its scenic tower becomes a landmark.

The whole project is enclosed within brick walls which are not crossed by the village streets but cut by lines developing from the natural element of water, the sea waves.

Perspective views rendered

"Il grande vuoto che Eisenman intende colmare ha a che fare con la stratificazione dei "testi" esistenti e non visibili che affermano l'a-temporalità della memoria nella simbiosi fra futuro, presente e passato." (Silvio Cassarà, Soggetto-Oggetto-Complemento. Breve cronistoria di un'architettura "spiazzante". In Peter Eisenman, "Contropiede", Skira ed., Milano 2005. (The huge emptiness Eisenman wants to fill in is connected to the overlapping of existing "textures" which state the atemporality of memory in the symbiosis of future, present and past)).

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