Project 1: Site Performance and Site Interventions

Design does not simply impose on a place. Site and designer engage in dialogic interaction. At once extrinsic and intrinsic, a site exists out there in the world but acquires design meaning only through its apprehension, intellectually and experientially. Therefore, we claim the site as a relational construct that acquires meaning and value through situational interaction and exchange. This relational condition of the site derives from uninterrupted exchange between the real and the representational, the extrinsic and the intrinsic, the world and the world-as-known.

-- "Why Site Matters" by Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn

The first design act is to define the site. While site is commonly considered the plot of land upon which the building rests, the true site is much more expansive. "Site" is understood to be a construction, determined by one's understanding of its extents and multivalent composition. As such, site has many meanings beyond the built and natural physical landscape, including temporal, social, historical, programmatic, ethnographic, philosophical, and other contexts. A site has multiplicity and behaves as a complex system with numerous embedded systems that work both locally (independently) and globally (in response to one another). Collecting, conceptualizing and abstracting this information allows these relationships that may be latent within the site to develop a presence and thereby be material that the design can engage. It is important to remember the purpose for this analysis is not to re-represent the site, but rather to discover and bring forth the information and relationships pertinent to acting on the site. Deciding what criteria and conditions are important and hence documented, how these conditions are documented, and what relationships are established between them defines the material which our designs will engage.

Albany Bulb

We will spend the semester working on the Albany Bulb in the east shore of the San Francisco Bay. Our multiple projects of the semester will engage the idea of site on the Albany Bulb at various scales and through a range of methodologies.

The Albany shoreline was originally mainly tidelands. Much of the present-day shoreline was created by infilling these mudflats. Construction debris from the adjacent racetrack and other construction and highway projects as well as landfill operations created the "plateau, neck, and bulb" of the Albany Bulb. The Albany shoreline overall grew from 50 to 160 acres between 1963 and 1984 due to such infill operations. In 1984 the landfill was closed and in 1986 the shoreline was declared part of the "public trust" by the State to prevent further infill operations. In the 1990s the park was used for many homeless encampments whose residents also created much of the art

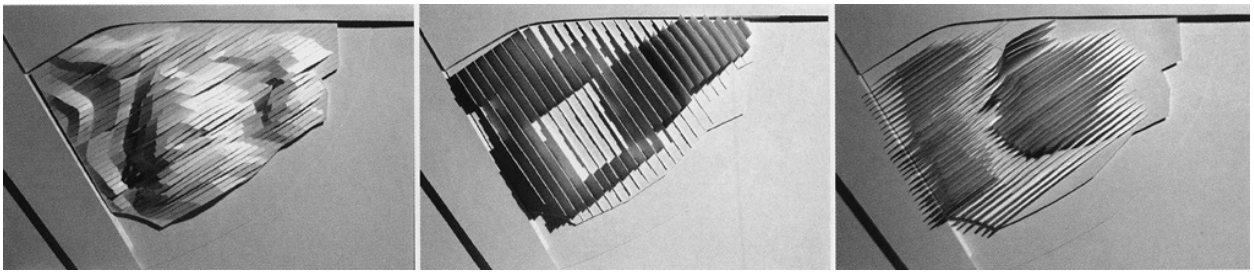
that is in the park. Since then the Albany Bulb has become an official park and its development as a recreational park or nature park has been hotly contested.

The site of Albany Bulb is selected for the work of this semester because it is an intriguing example of the multivalent nature of site. The Albany Bulb is highly ambiguous in terms of being a "natural condition". Infrastructure has been implanted and there is an ongoing battle between what is natural, what is artificial, and what overtakes. The ground itself is built up through landfill operations, natural ecologies taking hold, artists interpreting it using found elements on the site, and various groups creating infrastructures in order to inhabit it. Our site is simultaneously rural, urban, natural, and manufactured, both locally and within its larger context, and thereby highly fragile in terms of a single identity. The continued political debate surround it is a reflection of these multiple identities. Territories of subcultures/ecologies occupy our site at multiple scales and degrees of intensity, making it a much gradated site, without clear black and white definitions, but rather existing in various shades of gray. This site provides a rich context through which to explore and understand the multiple definitions of site and establish relationships between them.

In our first project we will focus on the local condition and consider the site in a material way. We will both literally and figuratively build the same site multiple times using different construction methods to define and reveal the logics at work in the site. We will then intervene on these sites building upon the methodologies established with the initial site construction. This exercise will further our understanding of how site is defined and "constructed" for intervention.

Attached is a map of the Albany Bulb. For this project, each student will work with a minimum 50 foot wide slice across the 'neck' of the Bulb (shown by the red box). The exact location of this slice and its boundaries are to be refined by the student as part of the site investigation. These boundaries can be static, evolving, ephemeral, projected, overlapping, etc. Boundaries will define the edges of the site you investigate but the site will also contain several boundaries.

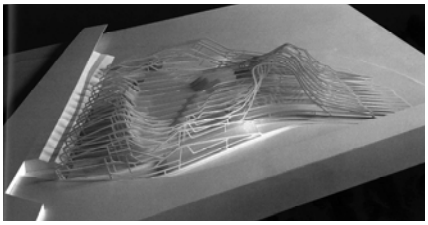
1a: Site constructs



Zaha Hadid, preliminary models of the Strasbourg Mosque

The first part of the assignment is to construct a series of models of your selected site. Each of these models should represent the topography of the site as well as two of the following criteria as you observe them within the site:

Territories	Edge, limit
Threshold, transition	Light / dark
Flows (e.g. wind, water)	Thick / thin
Heavy / light	Static / movement
Surface / Volume	Nature / artifact
Frame	Infrastructure
Vegetation	Accumulation and Densities
Material conditions	Occupation



These terms are purposely left vague and it is up to you to clearly define how they manifest themselves within the site you chose.

There are many site conditions that can be observed or analyzed in order to collect information about your selected criteria. Some site conditions are more perceptible than others, their scale ranging from the macro to the micro. Some are visible (light, roads, vegetation, fauna, existing buildings), others not (micro waves, sounds, property lines). Some are tangible or audible, others olfactory or altogether not accessible to the familiar senses, but rather to the intellect (historical events, for example).

You will explore the site by walking, sitting, listening and using all of your senses as well as measuring. Site conditions vary in how they manifest themselves (distributed linearly, as a field condition, sparsely, irregularly, consistently, etc) and in scale. Use appropriate methods for the site condition you are collecting. You are asked to observe and analyze the site with a minimum of two methods for exploration: map-based and observation-based. The map-based method should entail measuring selected site conditions (e.g. counting, dimensioning, collecting data) and recording them in relationship to a datum (e.g. plan drawing, sea level, etc.). The observation-based method should entail recording the site conditions in their context through photography, video, drawing, etc. Photography is appropriate as a general memory helper and for eventual photomontages, but should also be used deliberately to record shadows, textures, structures, adjacencies, and frame views. Video allows to perceive and record moving and changing conditions, or to record movement along a path. Drawing can be used to indicate one's perception or detailing a condition.

Be sure to bring a map of the site with you on your first visit. Remember that the site conditions can change at different hours of the day and on different days of the week-(end) so multiple visits will reveal additional information about the site.

From your site observations and analysis, construct the site three times representing the topography and the same two selected criteria. Each model should utilize a different method of the following construction techniques:

1. Linear / gridded / triangulated
2. Surface / origami
3. Solid / volumetric

All three models should be built of the ***same*** material and to scale. The models should be 1/16"=1-0" in plan and 1/8"=1'-0" in elevation, which will give a 3" wide x ±15" long x var. height model. You can use wood, cardboard, museum board, or other materials that allow you to work with the above three construction techniques.

Although you are constructing the same three criteria for each site with the same material, how these criteria are represented will differ with each modeling technique. For each construction technique, develop a series of rule-based if/then scenarios for how the material is deployed to demonstrate specific criteria. In each model, it is important that you remain very consistent with the language of that model. For example, if the site is constructed by layering cardboard, an edge cannot be made with a vertical folded piece of cardboard but rather needs to be constructed with the layered cardboard manipulated in such a way to demonstrate the edge.

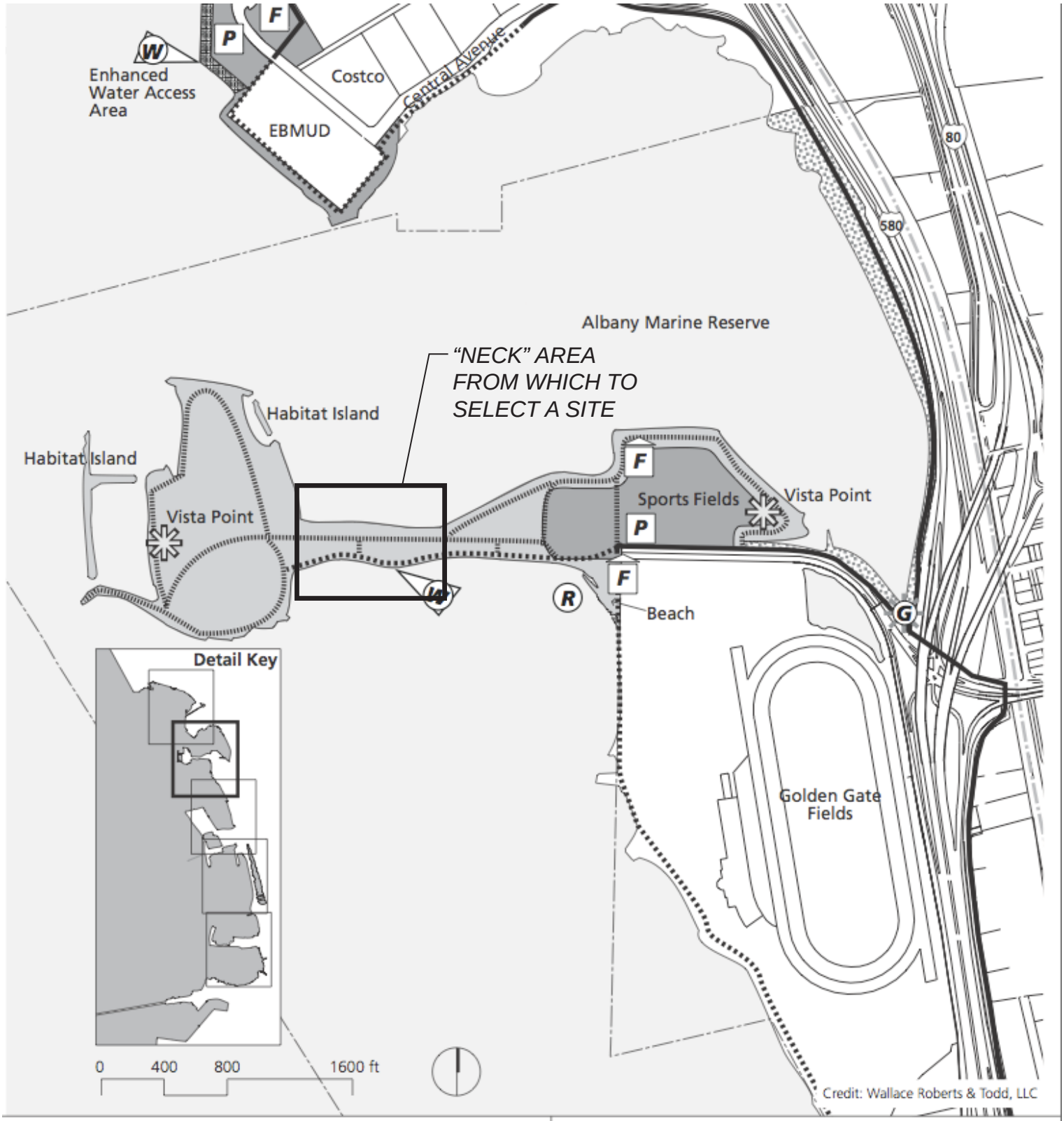
Using the criteria you selected, define the boundaries of the site you are modeling. These boundaries should be the same for all three models. Recognize that this exercise is an exploration. With each model you learn something new about the site and about the language you are using to represent selected conditions of the site. You will therefore need to build these three models more than once in order to refine them.

Reading

Carol J. Burns, "On Site: Architectural Preoccupations", in **Drawing/Building/Text**, Andrea Kahn ed., Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, pp.147-167.

Schedule

M	8/31	First day of class – project 1a introduced
W	9/2	Site visit and documentation
F	9/4	Map-based and observation-based site documentation, criteria selected and first site construct Model completed (all models to be 1/16"=1'-0" in plan with the elevation heights doubled)
M	9/7	School Holiday (no class) Two site construct models complete
W	9/9	Pin-up: Site documentation and three refined site construct models



Eastshore State Park
General Plan

Figure III-8:
ALBANY SHORELINE