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Dense Ecologies/City and Bay Student Projects

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Throughout this volume are images of student projects from the studio *Dense Ecologies / City and Bay* conducted at UC Berkeley, Fall 2013 and 2014. Below is a description of that studio and the guidelines that inspired the work.

Studio lead by Mark Anderson, Nicholas de Monchaux, Ray Gastil, Mark Smout, and Laci Videmsky at UC Berkeley, Fall 2013/14

Dense Ecologies/City and Bay Student Projects

"…Our challenge is to stop thinking of [man and nature] according to a set of bipolar moral scales in which the human and the nonhuman, the unnatural and the natural, the fallen and the unfallen, serve as our conceptual map for understanding and valuing the world. Instead, we need to embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural, in which the city, the suburb, the pastoral, and the wild each has its proper place, which we permit ourselves to celebrate without needlessly denigrating the others…"

—William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 1996.

From the effects of hydraulic mining in the 19th century, through the combined effects of bay fill in the 20th, to the de-industrialized (and often demilitarized) brownfields of the early 21st, the San Francisco Bay is an exemplary crucible of the often-fraught

relationship between cities and the larger ecology that support them. And as the margin's of today's bay begin to be returned to a "natural" state through extensive man-made remediation, we seek to question whether the bay can also be a new vessel, of a new kind of relationship between cities and ecologies; one that emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the relationship between urban civilization and natural wild, and avoids oversimplification and image-making in favor of the real complexities of cities and landscapes developing together. As noted by William Cronon, a skeptical attitude about "Nature" is not at all a rejection of the ideals of sustainability and ecological survival; rather, it might be vital to them.

Sites and Program

Projects began with a scrutiny and interpretation of a single, body-scaled object and its surrounding environment; dynamic and fluxing, adapting and acting to a range of changing natural as well as artificial influences. Dimension and scale entwine with the concrete and the imaginary, to construct a speculative instrument with which to measure, accentuate and record site conditions.

This speculative instrument is itself a way to devise investigative methods with which to scrutinize and interpret surrounding environments. These methods and instruments could be pocket-sized (portable and miniaturized) or gigantic. They could also be incredibly simple. They serve to gather empirical 'measured' data with which to read and better understand each site, or to enhance subjective or sensory notions of space.

The large-scale urban proposals that emerge out of the speculative investigations have the potential to reveal forgotten histories, fuse the past with the present, imagine possible futures,

and synthesize new cultures, constructing architectural proposals that are profoundly influenced by their surroundings and offer restless mutable future possibilities to the inhabitants.

The Sites

1. Hunter's Point, San Francisco: A 600-acre Superfund site in the confines of San Francisco, adjacent to the often-marginalized Bayview neighborhood, and the subject of a broad redevelopment plan.

2. Former Cargill Salt Ponds, Redwood City: The recent site of a failed large-scale development plan, the former Cargill salt ponds in Redwood City should be mined for their adjacency to under-examined Bay Area archetypes; from data centers to corporate fortresses, mud-flats to migratory habitats.

3. Coliseum City / San Leandro Bay: The site of a large-scale urban design effort underway in Oakland, this site adjoining San Leandro Bay is currently home to the Oakland Athletics, Oakland Raiders, and large expanses of asphalt.

4. Richmond Field Station & environs: Today home to much of UC Berkeley's back end of services and storage the Richmond Field Station is slated to become the center of a newly-imagined "global campus" for the university. It is also home to one of the most economically challenged and environmentally active Bay Area communities.

Program

Our program for the sites follows from multiple, seemingly irreconcilable pressures on the bay's margins: First, to house evermore housing and economic activity as the Bay Area increases in density and population. Second, to ensure the survival and expansion of crucial bay-side habitat, especially the marshes that clean the bay and protect its margins from flooding. Finally, to allow each of these very different habitats to coexist, not only in the present, but in the near future, where sea-level rise and climate change will inundate existing marshlands and force migration inland, and where large-scale projects for levees and dams radically alter the spatial, and ecological nature of our encounter with the bay.