

Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
A4104.004.2018: Studio IV; Spring 2018
Robert Marino Studio

“At the foot of this cliff a great ocean beach runs north and south unbroken, mile lengthening into mile. Solitary and elemental, unsullied and remote, visited and possessed by the outer sea, these sands might be the end or the beginning of a world. Age by age, the sea here gives battle to the land: age by age, the earth struggles for her own, calling to her defense her energies and her creations, bidding her plants steal down upon the beach, and holding the frontier sands in a net of grass and roots which the storms wash free. The great rhythms of nature, to-day so dully disregarded, wounded even, have here their spacious and primeval liberty; cloud and shadow of cloud, wind and tide, tremor of night and day. Journeying birds alight here and fly away again all unseen, schools of great fish move beneath the waves, the surf flings its spray against the sun.”

Henry Beston, The Outermost House, A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod

Montauk Land-Seabridge
Montauk, NY

Land-sea Bridge

The negotiation of the boundary between sea and land involves the architect in a complex battle in which she/he must necessarily take sides, or possibly remain neutral. The work for the semester will involve the design of a public facility at an extraordinarily sensitive environmental juncture; the ocean beach in Montauk, New York.



Western View, Montauk Beach, December 3rd, 2017

History

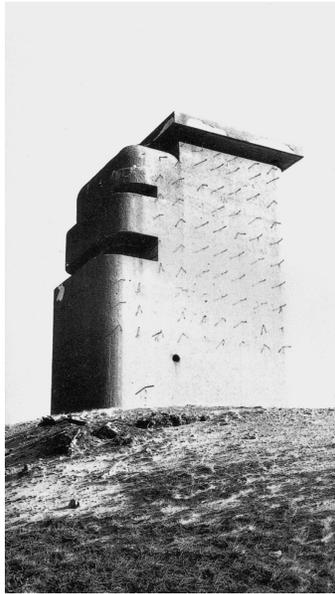
The easternmost end of Long Island has only just recently become a popular recreational adjunct of New York City. As was the case everywhere in the new world, it was initially a place to gain a foothold, a place for survival. Through most of its history it was a seafaring territory, most easily gotten to from Boston Harbor, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, or Cape Cod. It was land surrounded by the sea, yet blessed with very fertile alluvial soil. Its inhabitants were just as apt to be of the seafaring as well as the farming type, able to gain their livelihood as did their Native American forbears, through a balance of fishing and farming.

Things have changed. It is now a place primarily appreciated as being one of the last remaining natural environments within a 2-3 hour drive of New York City, and as such it is primarily a place of recreation. The tensions generated by change are evident. One of the most interesting current political discussions involves the theories of land use and preservation: How should the natural environment be used? How much of, and of what type of business establishments should be supported? Are there alternate uses of public land that are more in keeping with open space preservation?

The US Army Core of Engineers, as part of a much larger south shore reconstitution project, has built an artificial dune on the ocean beach in Montauk. It was, and is, a highly contested project on environmental, aesthetic, and political grounds. The dune has recently suffered considerable erosion and the "bridges" providing public access to the beach have been degraded and deemed unsafe.

Project

The "bridge" that encompasses an architectural program, is a well-known type. A "bridge" might encompass a healing method, showing an understanding of natural processes, or a defiant monument, seemingly impervious to the imperatives dictated by Nature. The "bridge" proposed in this studio is hopefully a poetic construct that can both respond to useful program and be instructive to the public.



German Artillery Bunker, Southern French Coast
Photo Paul Verilio



Andrew Geller, Fire Island House

Site: Ocean Beach, Montauk, NY

The land-sea bridge will be formed by a useful, necessary, and very public program: a youth recreation center. The costs associated for this public facility will be borne by the oceanfront businesses benefiting from the protective artificial dunes constructed by the US Army Core of Engineers. The bridge/recreation center will be located at one of the existing access points bridging the dunes.

The site is just west of one of the most popular surf beaches on the east coast, Ditch Plains, which because of its offshore rock floor, provides continuously breaking waves with predictable qualities. To the west, private oceanfront homes and hotels populate the beach to Heather Hills State Park. The park preserves lands across the entire breadth of the "south fork" of Long Island at this point, westward to the village of Amagansett where private ownership prevails.



Ocean Beach, Montauk, NY showing public access points

In many ways, our studio project concerns the evolution of change on eastern Long Island. In a continuum of constant change of use, how is the architect to balance her/his efforts towards new necessities? How can we negotiate between the Native American's distaste for the ownership of Nature, the pioneer's will to survive and conquer the environment, and an advanced capitalistic democracy's need to overlay Nature with commerce? The architect has the opportunity to choose a direction.

Research

Initial research for the semester shall include, but not be limited to:

The US Army Core of Engineers project to stabilize the south shore of Long Island

Dune movement as exemplified in "The Walking Dunes", (to be visited.)

The principles of marine architecture.

Boatbuilding methods and materials.

Method

Initial tactile research will be conducted concerning concepts required of bridging in an unstable medium.

A Short Reading/Viewing List:

McPhee, John. The Control of Nature

Beston, Henry. The Outermost House

Mathiessen, Peter. Men's Lives

Thompson, D'Arcy. On Growth and Form