Medium For Exchange: Mission Bay Media Center/Workplace

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on January 12, 1996
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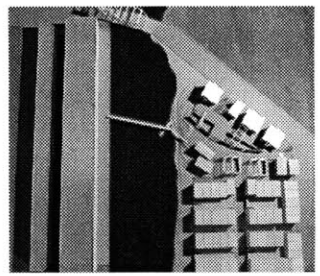
Medium For Exchange



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ABSTRACT

A casualty of the containerization of oceanic commerce, 350 acre Mission Bay in San Francisco, previously a bustling industrial shipping port, has fallen to disuse over the last 20 to 25 years. Within the last five, plans have been finalized to redevelop the area as a new neighborhood, a distinct district such as *the Sunset* or *Nob Hill*. With integration and unification stated as their prime directives (at the scale of the block as well as the city), planners have laid out a scheme which includes 7,500 dwelling units and more than four million square feet of office and Research and Development space (relating to the regional high tech/biotech boom), all to be developed within the strict zoning and design guidelines established by the city.

The thesis takes the 'reality' of the site and the 'best intentions' of the planners as a starting point for an exploration of what a Research and Development workplace could be like in this new socially utopic, post-industrial 'future community.' Rather than blindly accepting a typical scenario where the office is developed as a private, disconnected entity, separated from the neighborhood, 'public' space, and the urbanized landscape of the city, **this workplace aggressively pursues such connections by exploiting its adjacent relationships at various scales and through a variety of experiential methods.** The program, office space for a growing publishing/media company, has the potential to further these connections by expressing the public nature of its work and work products through its architecture. In addition to these external, contextual concerns, the project demands a clear understanding of the internal organization and flexibility required by a technologically evolving work environment; this investigation is similarly informed by a study of connections, the **interior and exterior connections which reinforce the flexibility of spaces** in the workplace.

In the end, the area defined by the workplace will hopefully become a center for the neighbors, the workers, the community; a place that creates the programmatic and societal overlap that the Mission Bay planners so desperately want to achieve.

Thesis Supervisor: Fernando Domeyko
Title: Senior Lecturer of Architecture

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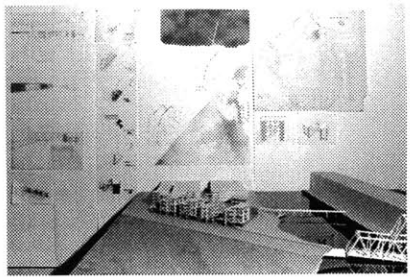

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All text notes are cited as endnotes

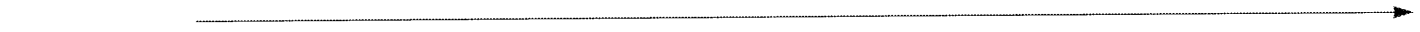
THANKS

Friends don't need to be mentioned because they are the ones who suffered through it all with me, in practice and in proxy. Suffering is good; it reveals friendships. Now I know that my friends are the best.

Parents don't need to be mentioned because they always give the unconditional support and encouragement that is required to accomplish great things. I hope they can see their own greatness too.

Grandparents don't need to be mentioned because they just wouldn't hear of it. Their pride is reward enough. I have learned many lessons from them already. They give me too much.

Advisors don't need to be mentioned because, in reality, it is their project too. We are all students together; some just have more answers. Your sharing is selfless and infinite.



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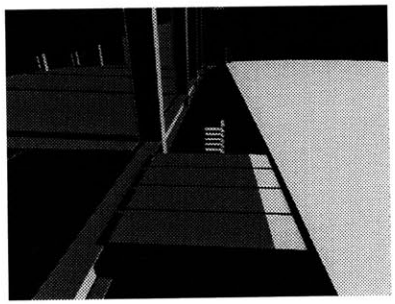
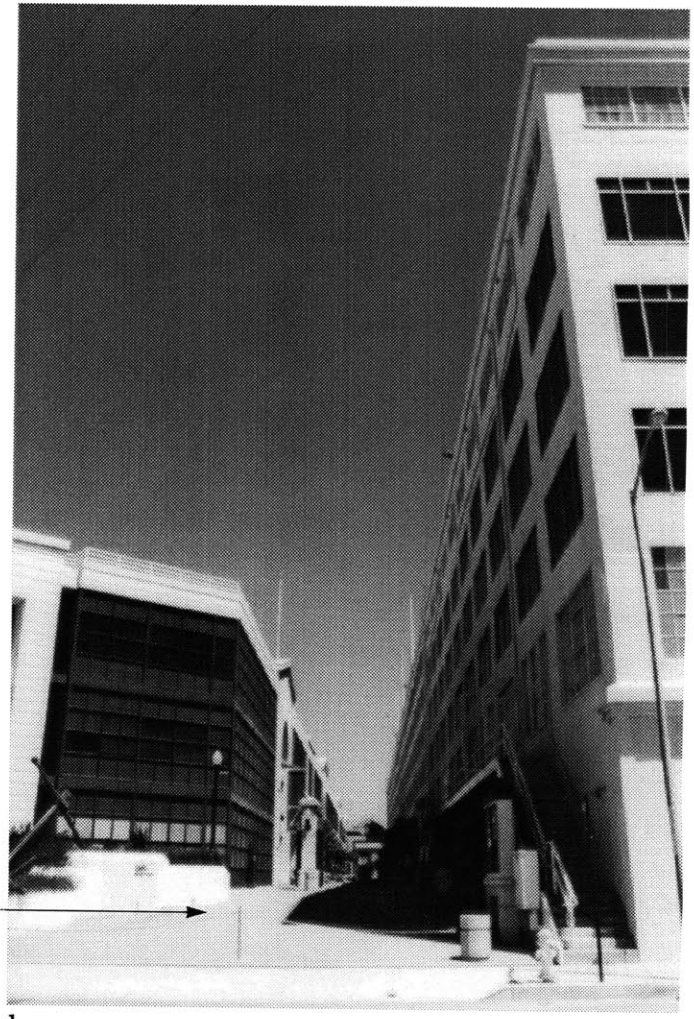


Medium For Exchange may not seem like an appropriate title for a book about a workplace but it does describe the sole purpose for this investigation; to design a working environment that can become the center for exchange between employees, the surrounding neighborhood, and even the city at large. In the development of a new community, in this case Mission Bay, it is difficult to know how to plan for the unexpected meeting, the spontaneous conversation, the unprogrammed event. Parks, pedestrian malls, and squares can serve this purpose well but if poorly placed or underutilized they can become blight rather than benefit.[1]

Usually overlooked, the workplace actually provides an ideal location for a variety of people to interact, to exchange. Across genders, races, and socio-economic histories,the workplace must abide by the laws of equivalence; it can create an organization of unmatched diversity. Extending the realm of the workplace from the isolated interior, hermetic office building to the edge of a public plaza opens up the possibilities for a whole new level of engage-



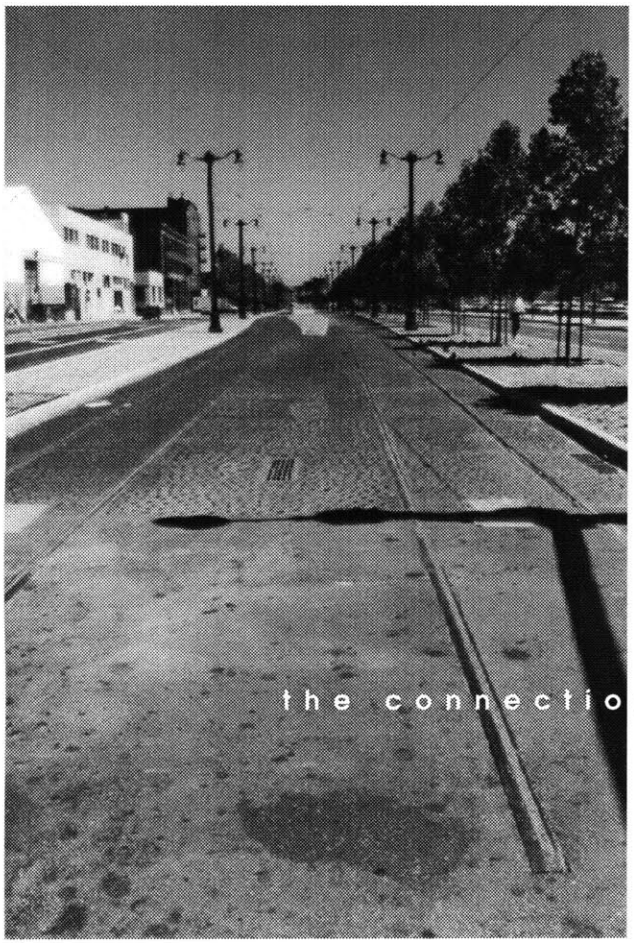
1 China Basin Terminal

1 This is the 'courtyard' of China Basin Terminal, the converted warehouse across the channel from the site. Narrow dimensions and day-long darkness spoil any opportunity for its public or extracurricular use. It is this archaic attitude toward the workplace, internalized, individual offices, separated from each other and their surroundings, which produce such useless residual spaces.

ment. But just as parks and plazas must be maintained, exchange must also be facilitated. The city and the local community must feel connected to the workplace, the workers to each other, for exchange to take place. This is the role of the architecture and the thesis; to build and strengthen those connections.

The book is organized as a narrowing of terms and of scales: terms are **defined** (context, program, building, structure) and then their **connective** potentials are investigated through the built project (the thesis design). The scale of investigation also narrows, jumping from the city, to the site, to the building, to the detail. The strength of each connection is built on the strength of the preceeding definition; they are mutually dependent and, hopefully, mutually beneficial. At times, the reader may become lost in the pursuit of a specific connection but, by the end, the final connection should be made and the framework for exchange should be clear. Remember, this workplace is only a vehicle for a much larger social and contextual exchange.

Embarcadero Muni

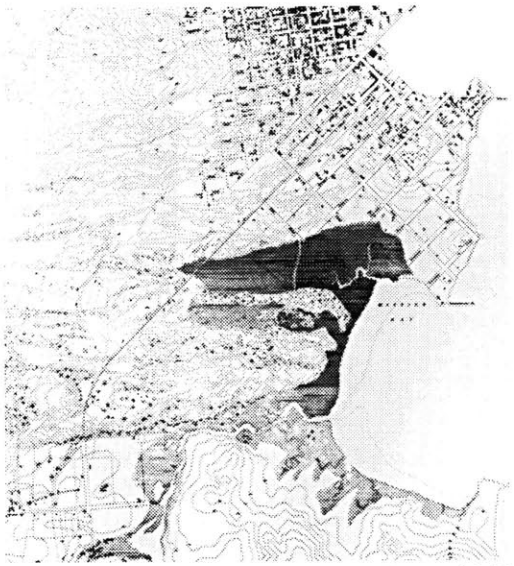


2

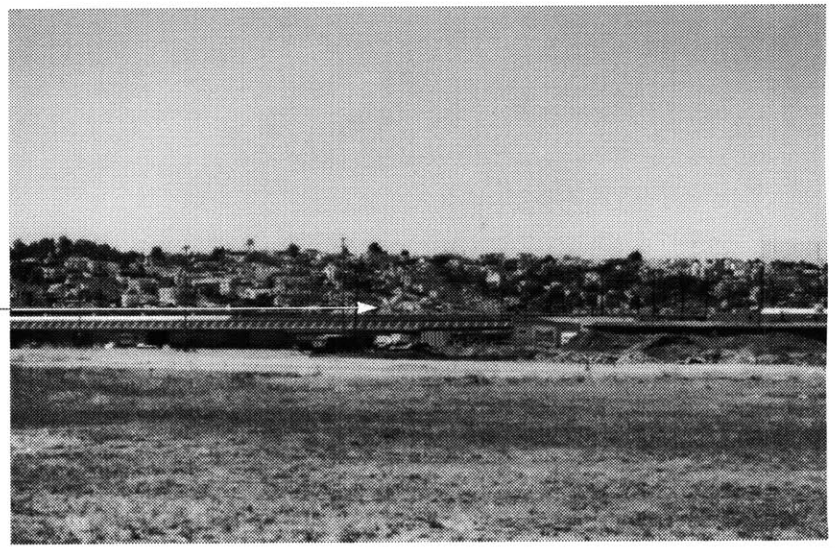
2 Connections can take place at a variety of different scales. These rail lines which end at the edge of Third Street, one of the primary thoroughfares on the site, will soon link with San Francisco's light rail line (Muni) to provide transportation services within Mission Bay and along the rest of the bayside waterfront. The site then becomes easily accessible to the whole city, not just the neighborhood itself.

CONTEXT

Mission Bay began, as its namesake would imply, as a bay. But like much of the rest of the San Francisco bayside interior, it was filled with trash, rubble, and earth, an effort to expand the use of the surrounding port and pier facilities.[2] By the turn of the century, the bay and the marshy expanse beyond had been completely filled in and at least partially inhabited by the growing industries of that time. The rail lines that serviced these industries produced a dominant pattern across Mission Bay, linking the port with the nearby storage warehouses and to mills and mines beyond. Local industries such as glass making and shipbuilding were also established on this false ground. By 1920 all that remained of the original aqueous Mission Bay was the China Basin Channel, a narrow slot of water used to further the shipping capacity of the area.



3 *Mission Bay, 1850*

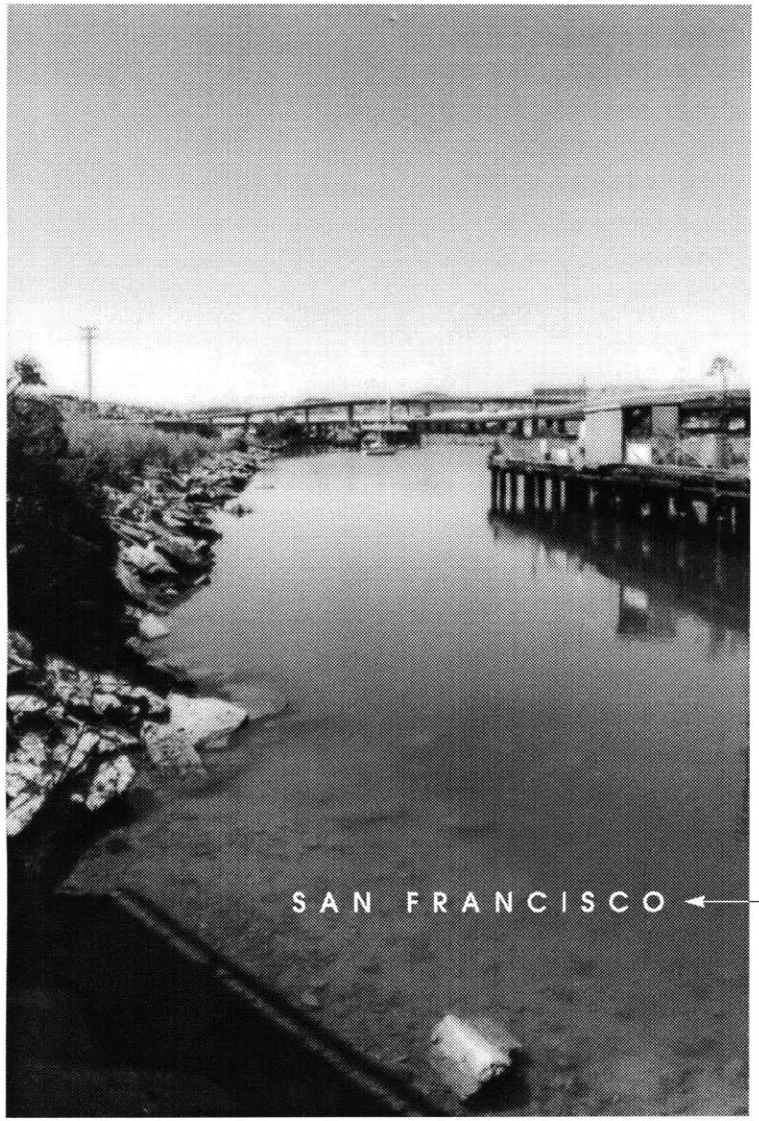


Mission Bay, 1995 4

Medium For Exchange

3 A map from the 1850's shows Mission Bay in its original state, a bay surrounded by marshy swamp land. Its use as a city dump and for post earthquake rubble storage changed the terrain dramaticaly.

4 Wild grass stretches back to the freeway in Mission Bay today. Most of the 300 acres are open for development. The slope beyond the freeway is Potrero Hill.



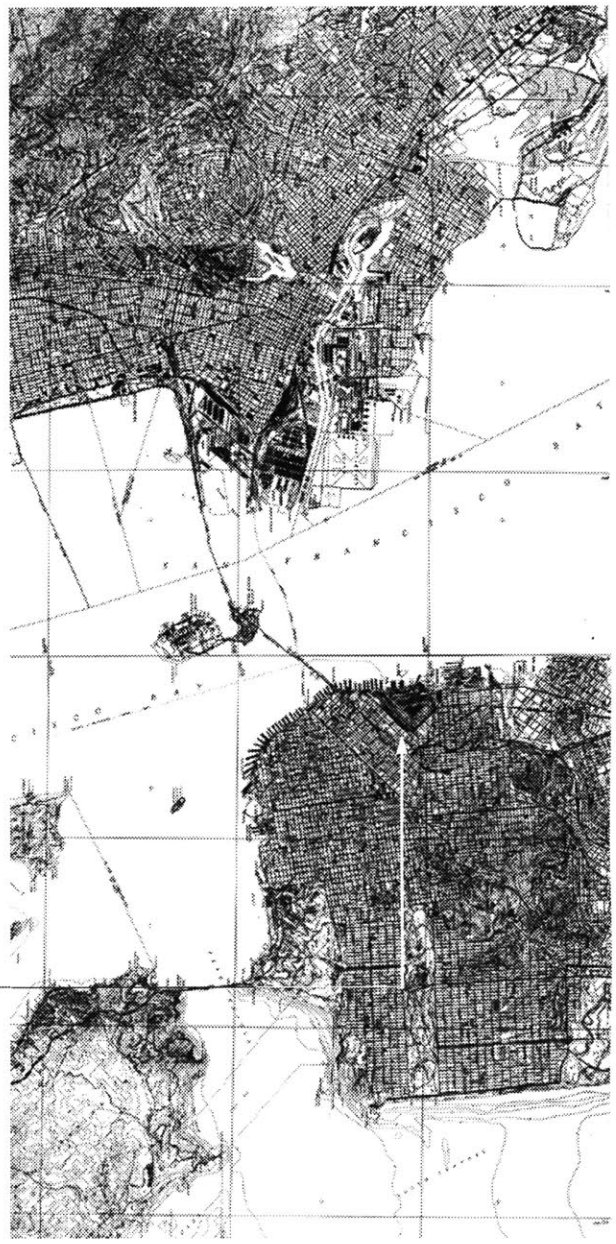
5 *China Basin Channel*

Today Mission Bay is primarily open space. Most of the industries and commerce that once placed great demands on the port's facilities have disappeared or relocated. While a number of rail lines still pass across Mission Bay, most are now for passenger travel; only a few which are left on the bay side are still used for shipping.[3] Bordered by elevated Interstate 80, the China Basin Channel, the Bay (and its lingering port facilities), and the industrial edge of Potrero Hill, Mission Bay has evolved into more of an island than a bay. All of that is soon to change.

In the early 80's, the main property owner of Mission Bay, the Santa Fe Railroad Company, recognized the potential of its landholding. Mission Bay contained over 300 acres of virtually unused land less than one mile away from the downtown of a city clamoring for more housing and economic stimulation; it could certainly provide both. The initial proposal, depicting large scale buildings and an internal marina, was rejected.[4] This prompted a

5 The China Basin Channel (shown here looking West from Fourth Street) projects into Mission Bay on its northern edge. Fallen from its former industrial glory, the channel is now home to a houseboat community, a small pier-cafe, and little more. Still, it is a pleasant (i.e. not stagnant) extension of the San Francisco Bay. Park frontage is planned along its edge as part of a continuous waterside greenway for Mission Bay.

second wave of discussions about what should be done with the area. Environmental and business interests were weighted but by far the greatest concern was with the proposed character of this new development. Still feeling the sting of post WWII redevelopment projects which cursed many great western cities, San Francisco wanted to avoid the responsibility of supporting another scaleless, place-less development.[5] As a result, strict design guidelines were implemented to help carefully shape the future growth of the area. Comprehensive enough to fill 140 pages, the document covers virtually every facet of a new community; residence, recreation, transportation, etc.



6 San Francisco Peninsula

6 Even at a regional scale, Mission Bay stands out, its industrial residue forming a sharp contrast with the residential patterns that surround it. Within the next 20 years this situation will dramaticaly change. New development, compatible with existing San Franciscan proportions and patterns, will, in all likelyhood, erase the industrial 'mark' from future maps.
The white arrow points toward Mission Bay.

7

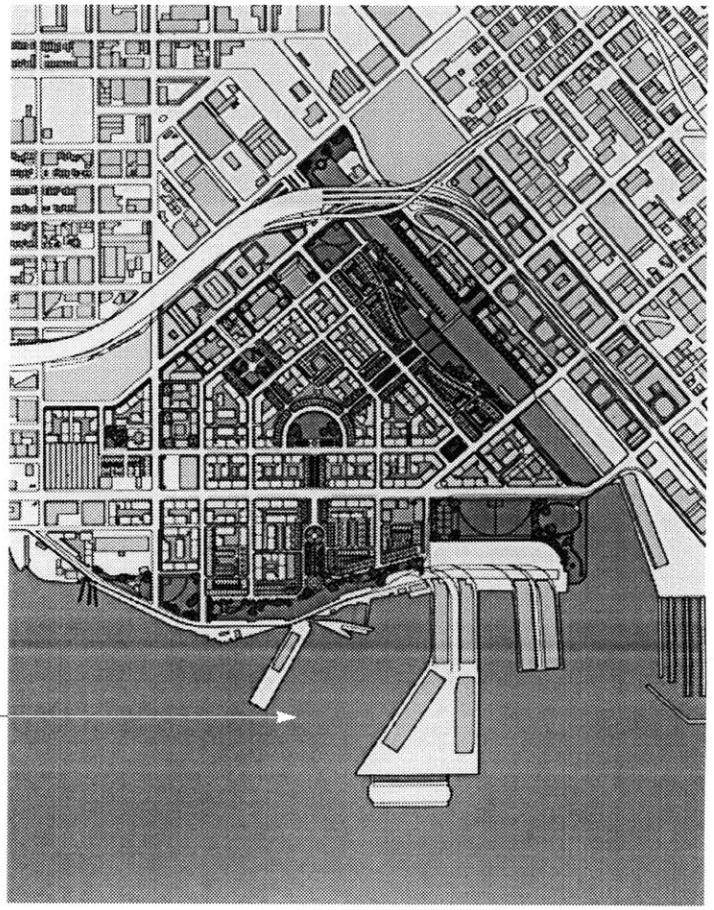
7 Today, Mission Bay stands out pretty clearly from the tight city fabric of San Francisco. Most of the structures that remain on the site will be demolished in order to provide a 'clean slate' for new development. Proposals for new construction seem to be focused on the north side of the site, (near China Basin Terminal and Third Street) providing an active area in which to propose the workplace (shown circled in black)

STREET PATTERNS

On the surface, many of Mission Bay's planning ideas appear to be borrowed from existing local models. Haight-Ashbury, Western Addition, North Beach, and the thirty or so other local 'neighborhoods' are compelling examples to follow. They all assert individual qualities within a palette that is distinctly San Franciscan. Unfortunately, the Mission Bay plan seems to overlook the individuality and the past of its own terrain in a valiant effort to emulate qualities consistent with the rest of the city. At the same time, the plan fails to resolve the physical connection between Mission Bay and the urban fabric which surrounds it, perhaps a more crucial factor in maintaining the continuity of the city.

At the largest scale, the plan proposes new land uses and a new street layout. In words, the new street pattern 'unifies and resolves' the two dimen-

'Their' Mission Bay Plan



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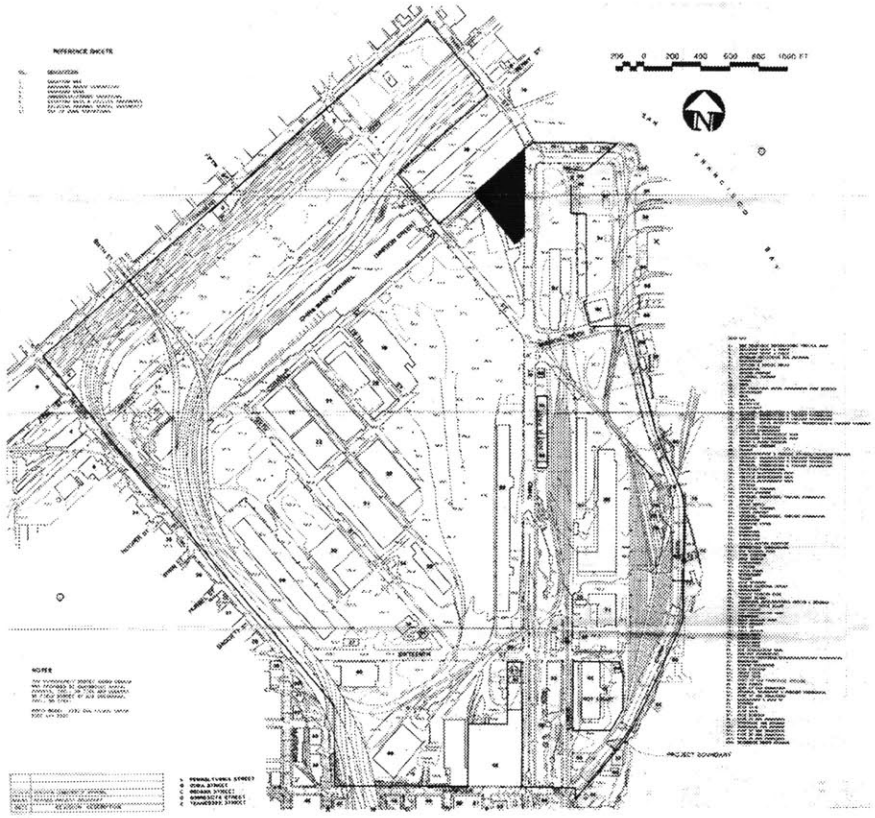
8 In this master plan rendering, the isolation of Mission Bay is concealed with even coloring and uniform building massing. The extensive open space plan consisting of linked parks and roadside landscaping does little to connect outside of the limits of Mission Bay. The freeway, channel, and bay are accepted as design restrictions and a more central, separate neighborhood plan is embellished; this is far from the stated intention.

Mission Bay, Existing



9

EXISTING

sionally incompatible, rotated grids which meet in the middle of the Mission Bay site.[6] The grids to the South and to the West are residential in scale (412 x 275 ft with appx. 68 ft. streets) while those to the North are more of the industrial scale of Mission Bay's past (825 x 550 ft.). In reality, the proposed plan 'resolves' the conflict by centralizing the plan of the new development. With a large central park as the focus, new blocks are created that triangulate between Mission Bay's order and the order of the surrounding grids. Rather than unifying the two opposing patterns, the new streets spiral movement off into the new district. In this way thru traffic is largely avoided and the separatism of the neighborhood is maintained. Disconnection is further emphasized by the convoluted street pattern which encircles the 'town within a town' without providing a sense of focus or direction. The few attempts to connect with the bay or with the city, such as in the parallel streets generated by the crescent park, are largely foiled by the port's industrial edge which blocks ground level views back to

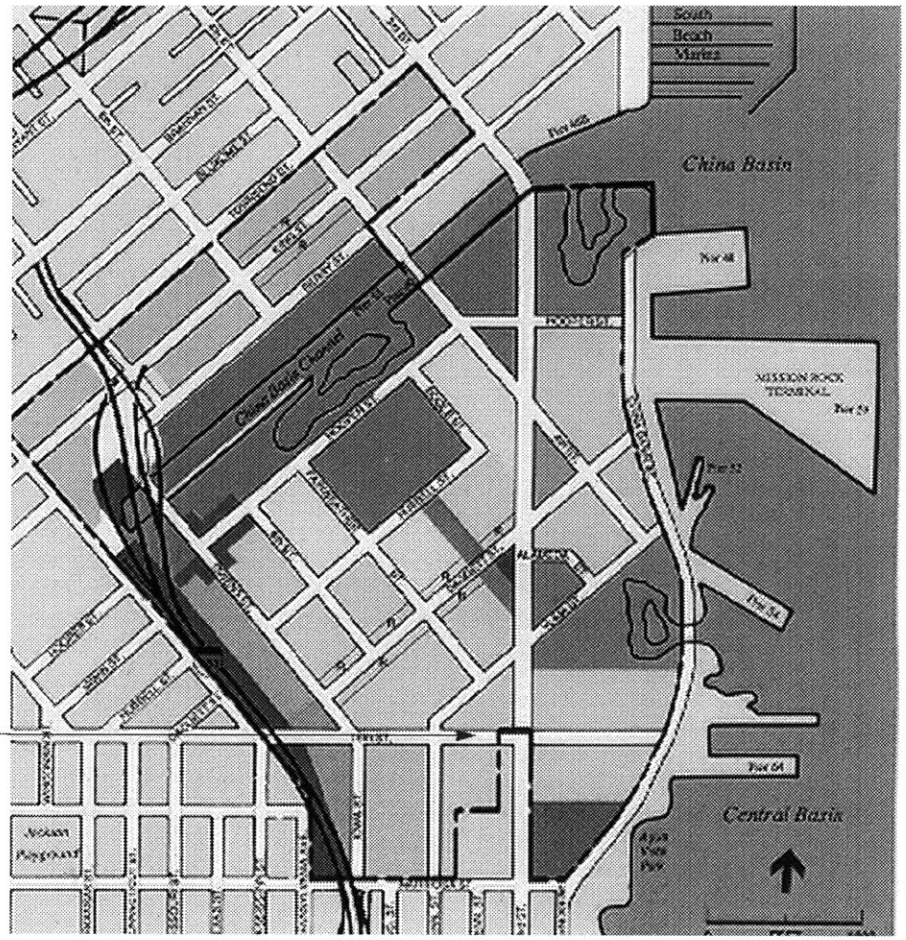
9 The demolition plan for Mission Bay reflects some of the older structures and older geometries which will be usurped by any new development. The Santa Fe Railroad (the main land owner) plans to retain the entire bayside edge for industrial purposeS. The dark triangular form is the site of the workplace. The plot next to it will be developed residentially and is reflected generically in future drawings and models.

the landscape. In short, the new street plan for Mission Bay furthers the isolation that it is purportedly trying to escape from by forcing a new order rather than accepting existing, established patterns.

LAND USE

The proposed land uses seem to be similarly ineffective at binding Mission Bay to its surroundings. At the most crucial points for adhesion to the existing city fabric, the Mission Bay plan proposes uses that establish even greater barriers. Their operational logic is apparent; determine a bordering use; copy it. Office matches office, industry matches industry, residence matches residence. From a zoning standpoint this probably makes sense; compatible uses. In Mission Bay, the result is not so beneficial. Such clear separation of uses and conditions forms more wall-like barriers around the site. To the North, offices line the city side of the channel; wall number one. To the west, transportation and light industrial facilities com-

Land Use (city proposal)



10

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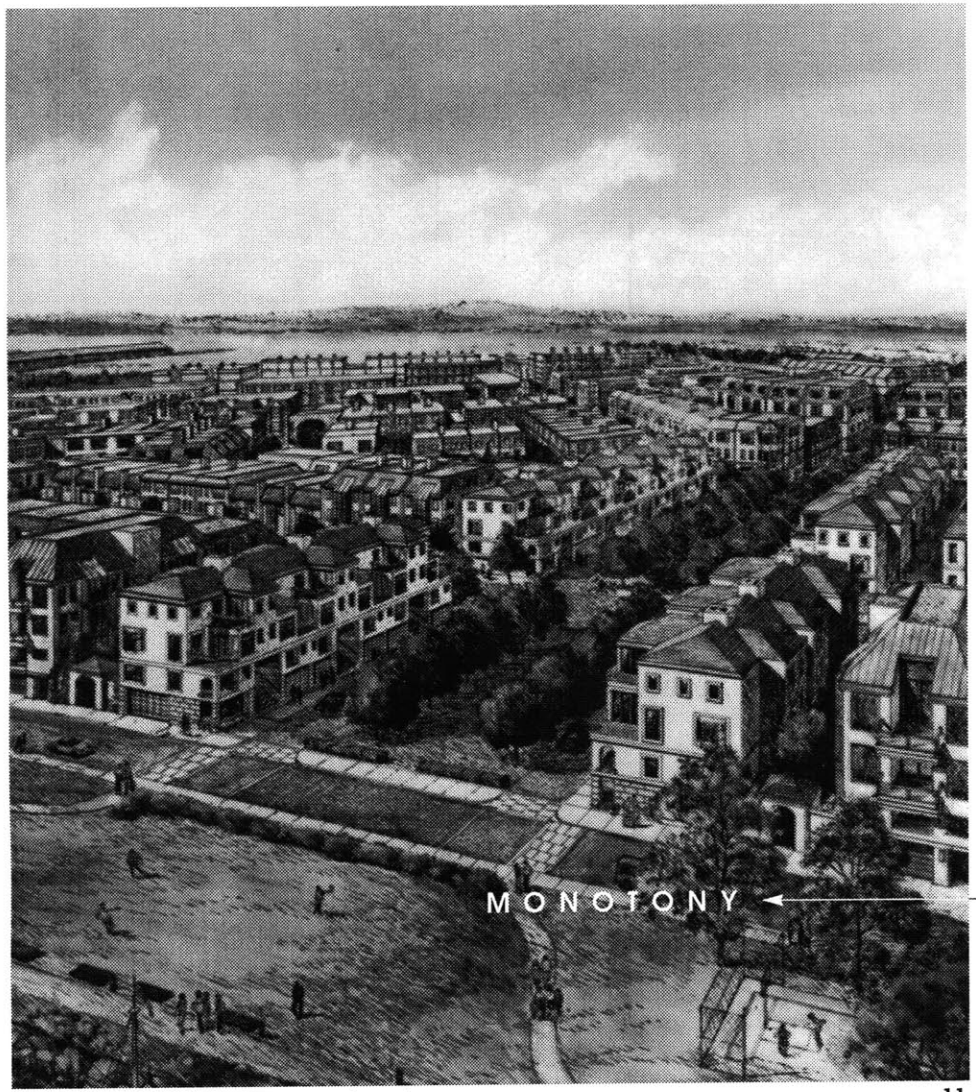
10 This scheme, proposed by the city prior to the final 'cresent' scheme, shows the distinct borders that are established by Mission Bay's surrounding conditions:

East: piers and shipping
West: new rail yard and freeway
South: Potrero Hill residences
North: the channel and offices



The 'idealized' neighborhood **11**

bine with an elevated highway to form a second wall. An island of residences are left in the middle. This strategy works in concert with the street plan to disconnect Mission Bay from the city.

The planning rhetoric is quite clear; 'we wish to create identity and connect to the city.' Perhaps in an effort to do both, neither goal is being effectively accomplished. The semi-classical plan of Mission Bay can hardly purport to connect to anything other than itself. It is a mirror of its surroundings that refuses to touch them. On the other hand, its identity, as yet unformed, is represented neutrally in renderings, an ignorance of Mission Bay's own historical character. A reversal of either condition could resolve the conflict; the inspiration can be found in a careful reading of San Francisco and Mission Bay history.

11 Perhaps it is a realistic assment of Mission Bay's future yet it is unlikely that the artist intended to capture such a montonous moment of that time. Unfortunately, monotony can be the drawback any design guideline that attempts to control design on a strict basis of past typologies. The minimal and most likely result is shown: block after block of continuous buildings, detailed to look like separated row houses.

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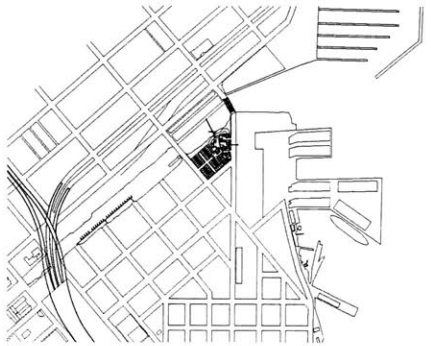


connecting

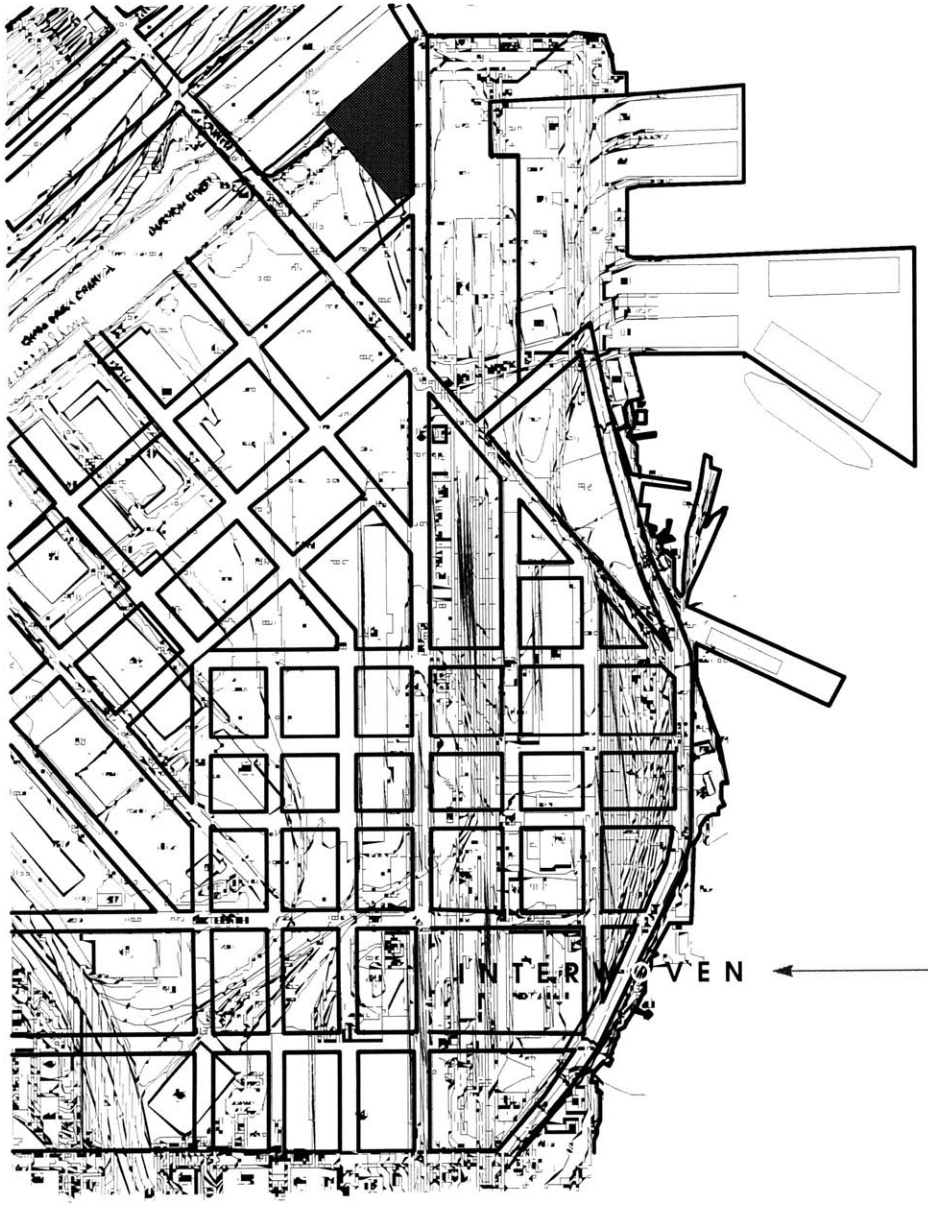
STREET PATTERNS

Although connecting Mission Bay to the rest of the city is not as easy as extending a regular orthagonal grid on to the site, a successful intersection of its two dominant border grids does achieve continutiy and interconnection at a variety of different scales. Several large 'thru' streets are maintained as dominant connections to downtown, Portrero Hill, and the Mission. At the more local level, discontinuous looping and curving road segments can be replaced by longer, more continuous stretches which tie views into the city and landscape beyond. In this configuration one end of each street contacts the neighborhood while the other reaches outward. Street size is established on the basis of surrounding use, the largest providing passage for thru traffic and the smallest set aside for pedestrians and an occasional car. This patterning is superior to the labarynthical scheme proposed by the planners as it creates heirarchy without separation. The future neighborhood will be defined by the novelty of its inhabitation, not its isolation.

Medium For Exchange

Thesis Street Plan **12**

12 By giving surrounding street patterns and scales the opportunity to merge within Mission Bay, the new neighborhood becomes more harmonious with its surroundings, natural and manmade. The most important change from San Francisco's proposed plan is the elimination of a true (classical) center within Mission Bay. In its place an integrated center is created; Mission Bay is viewed as part of the city not an island on to itself.



Old ghosted behind new **13**

LAND USE

Land use also plays a strong role. Unfortunately, the maintenance of strongly separated uses (as suggested by the planners) will do little to facilitate the binding of this new community as it develops. San Francisco's tradition of allowing mixed uses within its neighborhoods seems to define and unify communitiy more strongly than its primarliy residential exurban neighbors have; street level shops with flats above provide one example. Rather than rezoning the entire district (an act beyond the scope and necessity of this project), a small piece is asserted as a possible model for this mix. Surrounded by commerical, industrial, and residential uses, some present and some proposed, this appx. 100,000 sq. ft. site will be developed as a workplace that bridges those differences. It is an attempt to demonstrate how the workplace can act as a plenum for the new population.

13 The small shaded triangle on the north edge of the plan (the top) is the location of the site. Although a hotel was originally planned for that area, a number of alternative use proposals have been made in the last few months, suggesting that its final fate is far from determined. The proposal to place a workplace in this area is substantiated by local needs and an ability to moderate between the industrial and domestic realms that the site bridges.

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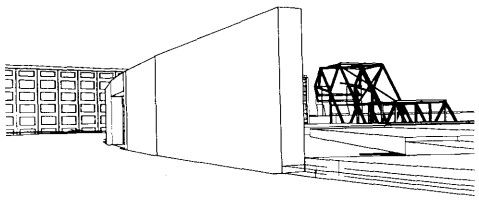
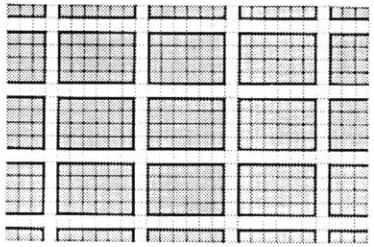


defining

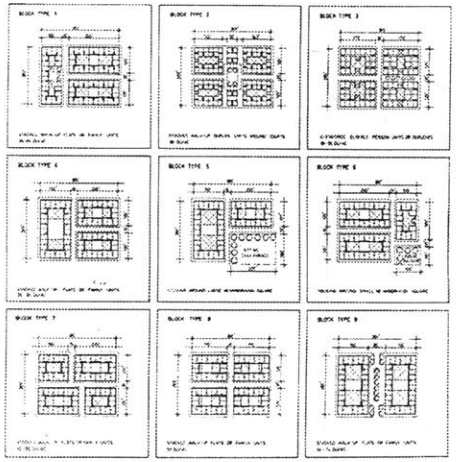
Both San Francisco and Mission Bay are rich with implicit and explicit traces of form, use, and order which can be used to inform the formation of the new neighborhood.

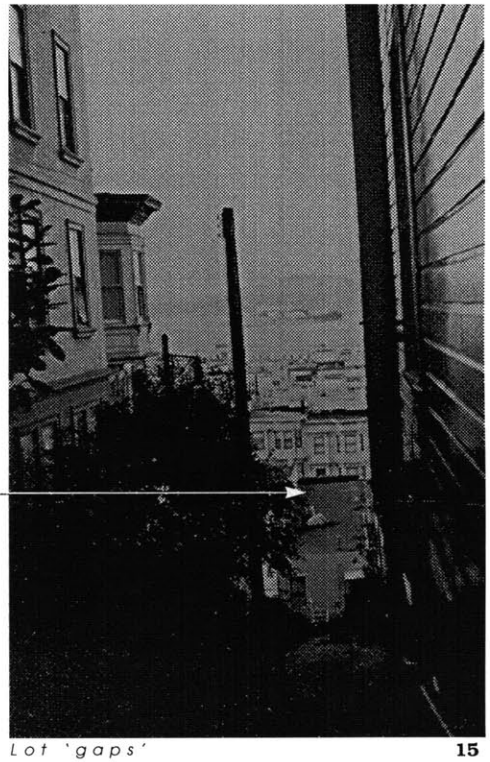
DIMENSIONS

Recognized by the planners is the vara dimensioning of the original Spanish settlement, a 33 inch unit which defines the increments upon which lots, streets, and, thus, the city, are formulated.[7] Many of the city's vara-based blocks have been broken down into 25 foot wide lots, the result of a maximum subdivision / maximum profit formula. The typical victorian row house, and, in turn, the emulative modern apartment, seems to respect this history. Today the issue is not left to 'respect.' Strict design guidelines in Mission Bay as well as the rest of San Francisco, insist on the physical recognition of these lot breaks.[8] Sometimes nothing more than superficial lines or arbitrary setbacks, the 'lot lines' work in conjunction with extending bays and on-



Vara-dimensioned block **14**





Lot 'gaps' **15**

Medium For Exchange

14 Although San Francisco's hilly terrain might have been interpreted with a more organic block layout, instead the Spanish vara, a classical colonial organizer, was implemented throughout the entire city.

15 The resulting fabric became an interesting combination of tightly packed victorians modulated by dramatic geographical vistas. Here, the space between two buildings focuses the view on the bay beyond.

street entrances to give perceptible, human scale to some of the larger, more modern buildings. In mixed-use and commercial areas, less strict rules are usually employed although the same dimensioning base applies.

Heights are also regulated. In Mission Bay this becomes more a function of density and view than of historic emulation. Where the turn-of-the-century row houses may have been limited by their wood frame structure, Mission Bay's guidelines propose similarly conservative elevations for less technical reasons. In non-residential zones, restrictions are looser allowing up to eight stories in areas of minimal visual impact.[9] The expected result is high-density, low-rise development.

Probably more significant to the eye than the underlying dimensional structure of San Francisco's streets is the seemingly endless combination of standard details which somehow characterizes each house or flat as unique. Windows, doors, cor-

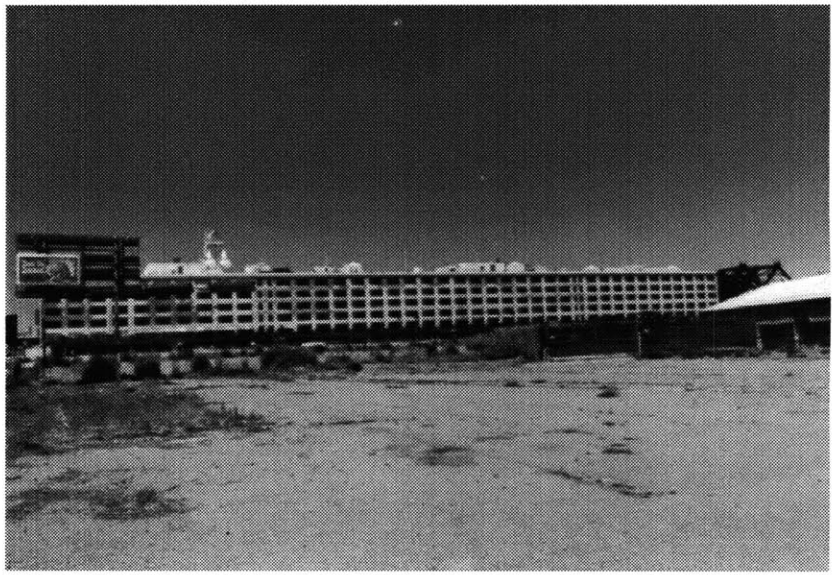
Proportional facade elements **16**

16 In this collage of typical victorian facades, the bays (extended window and roof lines) create a rhythm along the street front. Entries and rooms are also differentiated by the modulation of the building skin. Although all of the facade elements share proportional relationships, their variable forms and spacing provide a visually diverse street edge. Secondary elements, such as the central fire escape, fit easily into the format.

nices, porches, and steps are assembled within the tight confines of the base lot. But most importantly, the 'bay,' a several foot, window-wide extension from the facade, defines the San Francisco residential 'style.'[10] Where the porch and entry move into the building, the bay moves outward creating a dynamic rhythm on the street.

REGIONAL FORMS

On the other hand, the six story, 825' long China Basin Terminal, an office-converted warehouse, lies right on the edge of Mission Bay and hardly respects any of these modern design rules. It is more characteristic of the industry that dominated Mission Bay for more than 100 years of its existence. The pure embodiment of utility, this warehouse which now provides over 600,000 sq. ft. of high-tech office space, was once a streamlined storage and shipping facility, served directly by an equally efficient channel.[11] While the victorians on

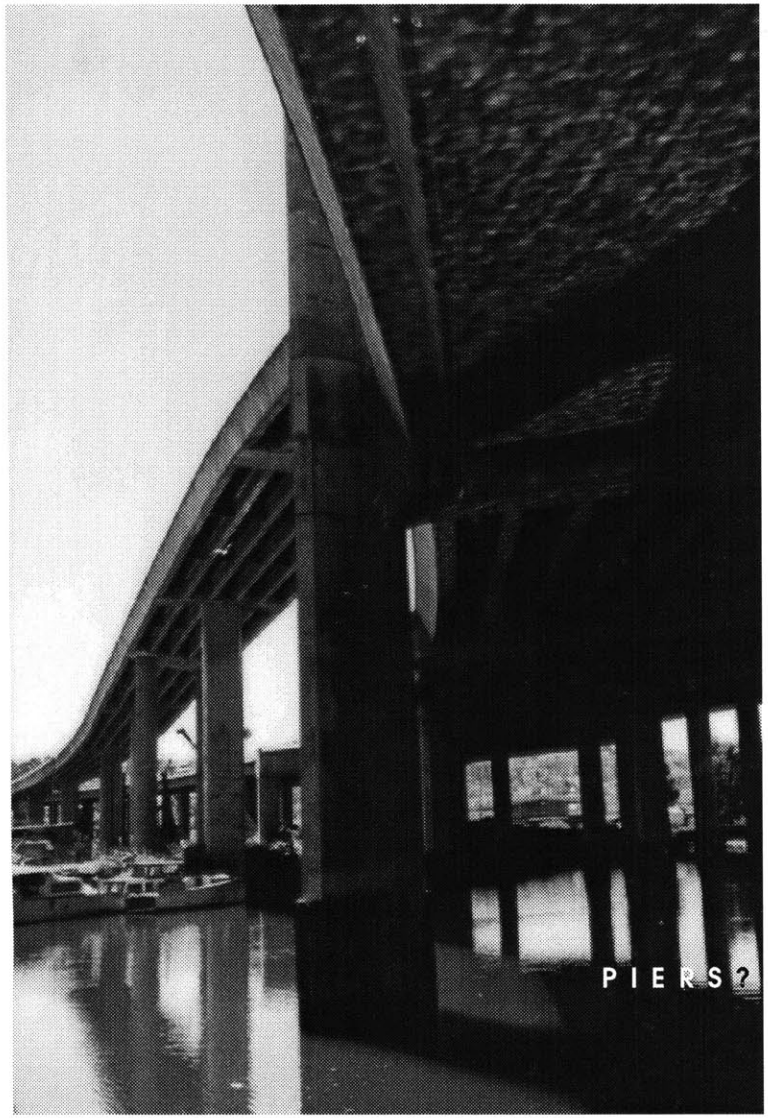


CBT's 825' facade **17**

CBT Dockside **18**

17 From the site (currently a paved lot), the awkwardly aging China Basin Terminal facade shows its utilitarian nature. The concrete structure, which is the basis of its demonstrated form, meets the water with wooden piers, the ground with concrete.

18 Today, CBT's pier is being rebuilt in an effort to draw activity to the channel; the iconography of industry is adapted for new use.



Pier-like freeway **19**

Mission Bay's other border, Portreo Hill, proclaim originality and individuality of inhabitation, CBT asserts capacity and simplicity as its main assets; a humble, horizontal, 'high-rise' of sorts. This industrial ideal and aesthetic carry on through several other structures dotting the Mission Bay site, not the least of which are components of the infrastructure which will continue to service the area.

The piers are one example of this infrastructure. Alhough many are now just severed piles jutting out of the water, the piers that once surrounded Mission Bay were symbols of its economic livelihood. These basic functional structures provided the primary connection between land-based industry and water-based transportation. Like the fill that transformed Mission Bay from water to land, the piers are just another method of constructing land over water. Today the presence is muted, yet the importance of the pier, historically and structurally, suggests the possible role it could play in defining Mission Bay's distinctive character.

19 The channel terminates just beyond the freeway in a set of quiet, shallow pools. It is at this unglamorous point, just beyond the site, where it is possible to reminisce with the real past of Mission Bay; its industrial underbelly that will most likely remain after the 'new' Mission Bay is unfurled. Oddly enough, it is here that the, the soft, reflected light, and the gentle rocking of the boats, rather than noise, dominate the senses.

The 'Lefty O'Doul' drawbridge, the final barrier between the China Basin Channel and the San Francisco Bay, is another remnant of Mission Bay's industrial past which will remain through the redevelopment.[12] The form is simple but imposing; its 75 foot stature just tops all of the surrounding buildings. Although mostly idle now (one or two calls a day for small pleasure craft to pass), the bridge has retained a frozen essence of motion within its suspended concrete counterweights and aging metal decking. And like the China Basin Terminal, its utility has not diminished over time, just changed. Today it provides the main connection back into downtown from Mission Bay, a crucial linking point (and figure) for the project.

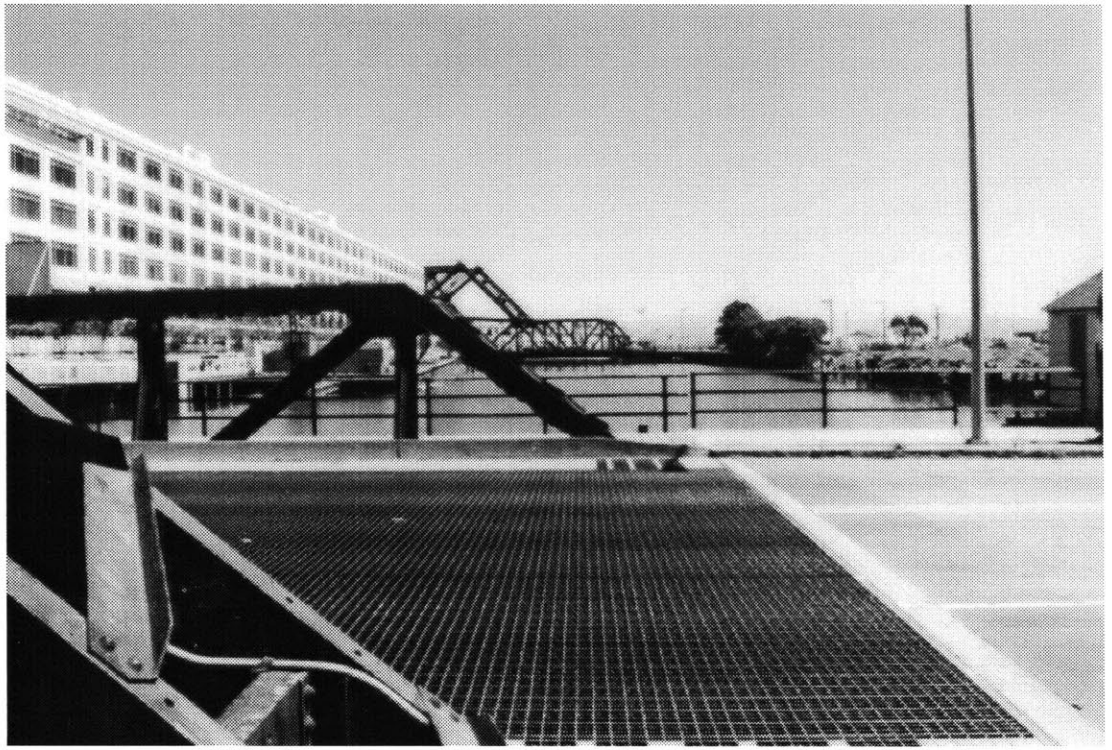
In short, it is observed that San Francisco's strong residential patterns and Mission Bay's equally strong industrial past have helped to establish an extensive palette which could provide inspiration for this new, distinct, connected Mission Bay neighborhood.

Medium For Exchange

Under the bridge **20**

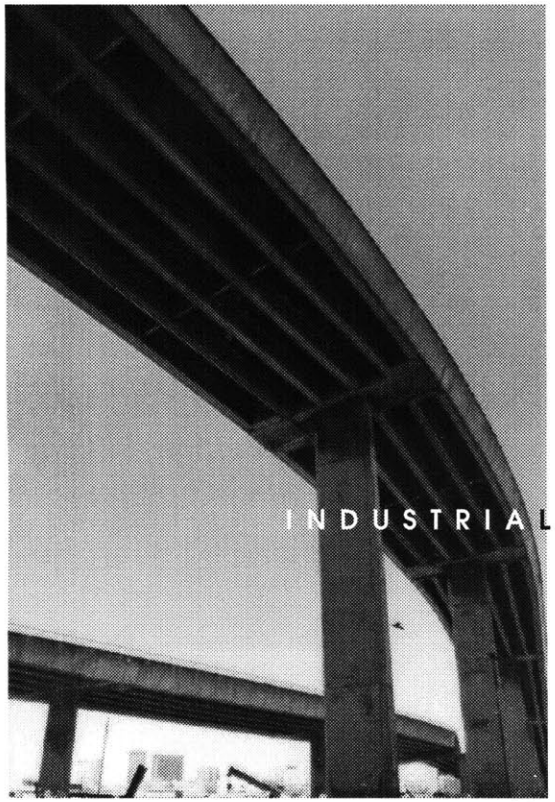
20 The Lefty O'Doul drawbridge commands an amazing presence, even during its static moments. The bridge is a relatively simple structure yet its size, (counter) balance, and location make it an unavoidable part the Mission Bay experience. It can be seen as forming a gateway to the city from the South. Thankfully, its importance has been recognized by the city. its future protection assured as a historical object.

21



Two lasting drawbridges

Looming freeway ramps



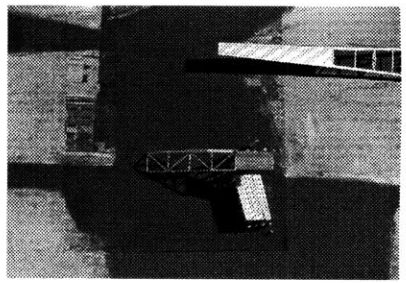
22

INDUSTRIAL FORMS

21 Standing on the Fourth Street bridge looking East toward the San Francisco Bay provides a fairly representative view of the lasting remnants of Mission Bay's historical character

22 Even after Mission Bay's completed development, integration into the city fabric will be hindered by the freeway ramps on the western edge. But they, like the bridges, speak of the past while ushering in the future

Medium For Exchange



connecting

DIMENSIONS

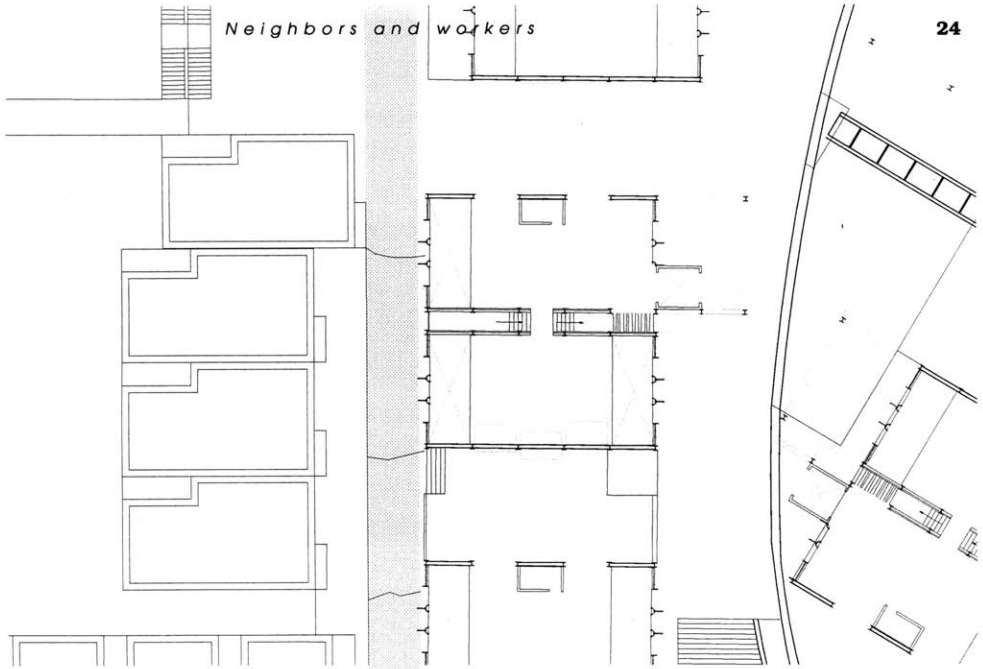
Although primarily associated with domestic architecture, the vara-based 25 foot lot/building divisions can help to provide visual relief and physical access along what would otherwise be an overwhelming 350 foot stretch of Third Street. In earlier schemes, the proposed buildings were longer and more internal, much like the warehouse across the channel. Developing a more dispersed plan allowed a more direct physical expression of the dimensional logic of the site. This, in turn, led to a stronger relationship with the abutting residences. The more traditional continuous-building streetscape is replaced by a penetrable edge, publicly scaled and accessible.

Further proportional relationships are revealed in the connected building pairs. Bays and access points are still represented in the external skin, but the language is more industrial than domestic; fins

Respecting the vara

Medium For Exchange

23 From the earliest models, the vara's strong dimensional 'law' dictated the proportions and placement of building mass. Although program was loosely being considered, it was primarily the bordering relationships which asserted influence on the site plan. The subdivision of larger building masses into smaller, more integrated units was assisted and structured by the presence of this overriding system.



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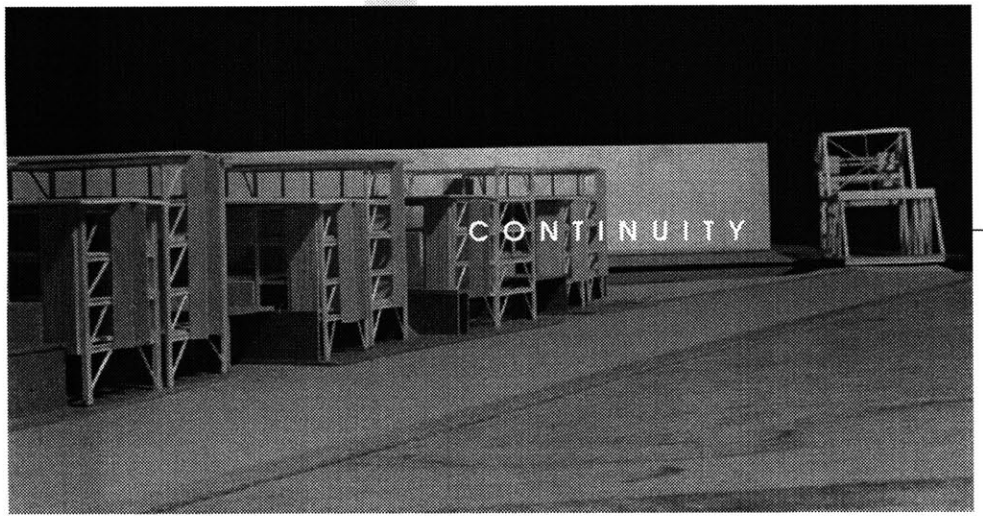


Third Street 'movement'

25

replace bays and access from the street is only visual. Internal building zones are also characterized externally through detail and displacement; 'room' is clearly differentiated from circulation. All details are tightly constrained by the vara.

FORMS

Other contextual concerns predominat in the orientation of the structures. Along the Third St. edge, the new office buildings shift back and forth reflecting the powerful topological forces that exist in the wetland and bay beyond. As a result, access points are created between them for cars, trucks, and people while visual variety is added to a somewhat repetitive street facade. The south facing edge, a formal front to the campus-like setting, is established as a gateway to the community. This gateway began literally, as a four-story operational door, but was quickly scaled back to a subtler passageway that moved underneath the front-most building. In the end, a simple gap is used to reveal

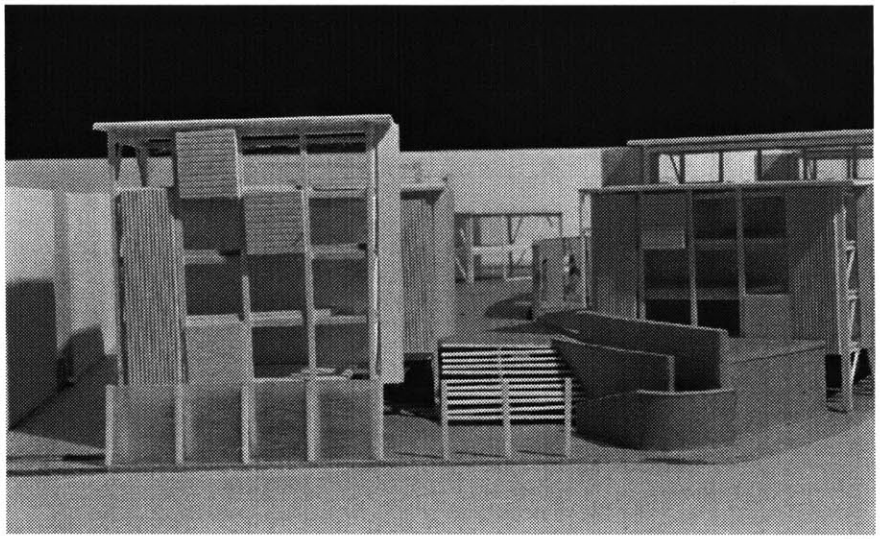
24 The odd closeness of the work buildings and the residences next door is a deliberate act to unify them. A sloping passageway that runs inbetween the houses and offices becomes a shared 'street' as the houses front on to it and the workplace beyond (shown in grey).

25 Across Third Street from the site, a proposal to restore the historic wetland would create a landscape buffer between the port and the workplace.

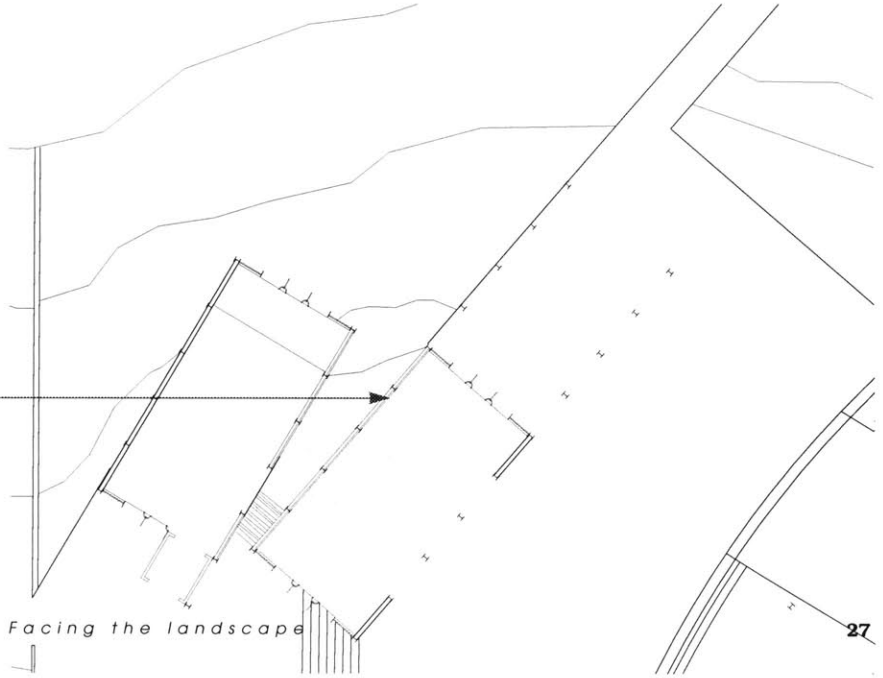
the main entry point. This creates a view corridor which, at the plaza level, continues on to the southern edge of the bay while providing access at the street level to the public space above.

To the West, the relentless rhythm of the residential rowhouse takes over again. The buildings respond by paralleling a march along a shared walkway that acts as a buffered space between them. The north edge butts up against a re-created natural landscape, a public park which forms a continuous strip along the channel. This is the only point where the paired buildings are allowed to splay outward, expressing an openness to the landscape as well as their intended public nature (unlike the other buildings in the complex, these are intended for public use).

Rather than providing literal references, the wide variety of materials and forms present in and around Mission Bay inspire adaptive and creative



Formal entry **26**



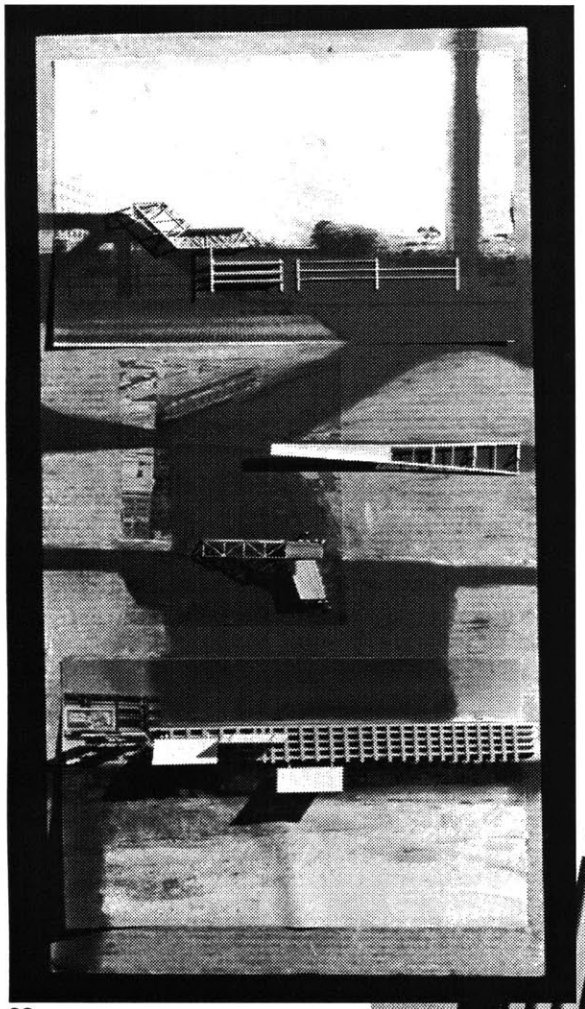
Facing the landscape **27**

Medium For Exchange

26 Although the site has deliberately been designed to be penetrable from all directions, a formal entry to the 'campus' is still retained. The large stairway and ramp combine with the compression between the buildings to mark the passage.

27 The regular workplace structure is slightly altered to accommodate for different functions and topographic conditions,

interpretation. The pier is one of these. Its influence can first be seen in the exploration of structures extending from an anchoring or base building. The cubic wood form was imagined to intersect with solid, concrete base walls. Over time, that model was replaced by an open, totally flexible steel structure, the result of a frustrating struggle with the inflexible, idiosyncratic timber frame. Like the nearby bridges, the steel forms a strong framework able to support a variety of future demands. In the final buildings the 'base' is defined by its infilled walls while the 'pier', a less dense extension of the same structural system, is defined by its openness and its suspensory infill. Other influences are explored less concretely on early concept boards.



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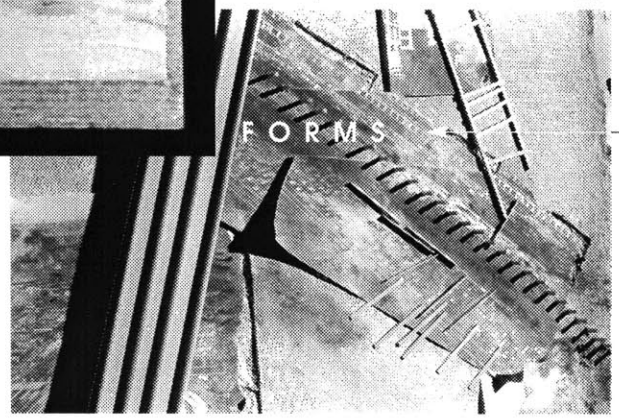


28 An early exploration combined rough site photos with pigment and model fragments to investigate the intersection (connection) of unlike forms 'read' from the surroundings: facades, bridges, billboards, piers, rails.

29 In a later board, a focus on 'form structure' helped to generate a deeper reading of the previous discoveries. The freeway, the railroad, and the two drawbridges were analyzed for content beyond form (structure, materiality)

PROGRAM

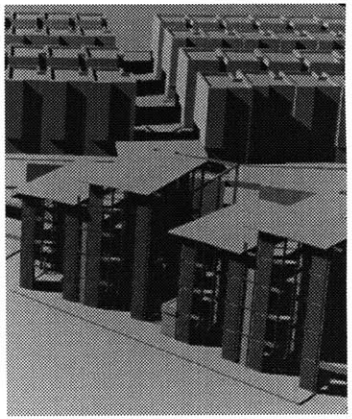
The concept of a "media company" emerges from the increasing interconnectivity of media arts, architecture, fine arts, publishing and communication technology in contemporary American culture, even more dominantly in San Francisco culture. The tools that they all require to succesfully execute and maintain their status, power, and position as effective forms of communication and expression have converged as the reach of mass media and the computer have broadened. While the number of avenues for exchange may have grown considerably both in number and in type, especially with the explosive growth of cable TV and the internet, the skills and knowledge which are now required to infiltrate a particular medium seem to have become far more universal.[13] Cooperation becomes the key to success.

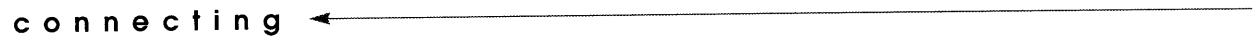
The company is envisioned as a collective of sorts. Although the organization is managed and administered centrally, project ideas are generated by individual employee suggestion. A group consensus is required to move ahead on any particular idea that will encompass the time and resources of the entire company. Ideas that are more independent in nature (i.e. only requiring the skills of one or two disciplines for its development) can be approved by an overwhelming majority (2/3's) within that or those discipline(s). Time and resources required for these semi-independent projects may not infringe on the needs of the whole organization.

Employees are video/film technicians, fine artists, computer programmers, graphic artists, animators, modelers, writers, marketers, and administrators. The workers are 'grouped' by discipline: infrastructure and utility of spaces are conserved and maximized in this way. Alternatively, different projects generate the mixing of groups across discipline. Disciplines cross actively and passively; all of the ongoing projects in the company will be tackled by multidiciplinary groups. Although specific project groups will be housed in individual buildings, they are all within visual and physical proximity of each other. The work is 'combined'; i.e. artists working next to each other may be engaged in very different projects. Solutions or inspiration for a single project can then be focused across disciplines but informed more informally within that discipline.

It is anticipated that 45,000 sq. ft. will be sufficient for the support of well over 200 employees. These people are responsible for conceptualizing, promoting, testing and producing all work. Necessary facilities include parking, lobby, bathrooms, library (reference), day care, dining/cafe, print rooms, disk transfer rooms, distribution area, screening space, sound room, material storage, file rooms, sales area, etc. The centralization and cooperative use of facilities will occur wherever possible.

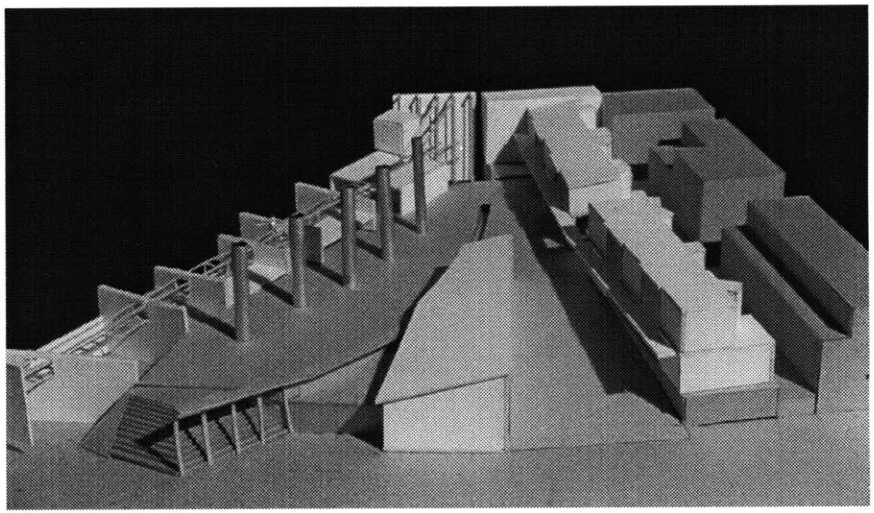
Medium For Exchange



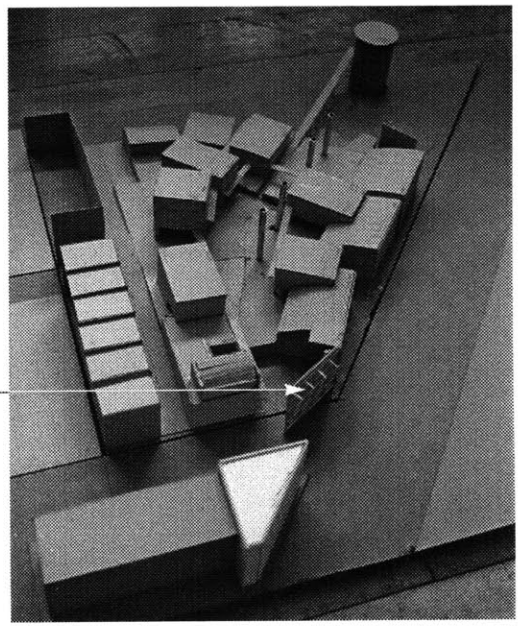

connecting

As presented, this program actually became a point of departure for the project. Ironically, pursuing such a specific building program did little to shape the architectural decisions being made. Flexibility, reuse, and adaptability began to take priority over serving the needs of such a company. Perhaps the inability to settle on a real-life 'client' (rather than the imaginary one delineated here) was an indication that the client was not crutial to the investigation. As the project progressed, the program remained as a skeleton around which to structure more connections. Still, to act effectively as a binding element, the public nature of the business had to be defined architecturally. Similarly, the space beyond the 'offices' was in need of some built clarification.

Early models show an attempt to organize the functions of the workplace internally, providing only a few deliberate points of contact for the public. The communicative message of the work was



Insular buildings **30**



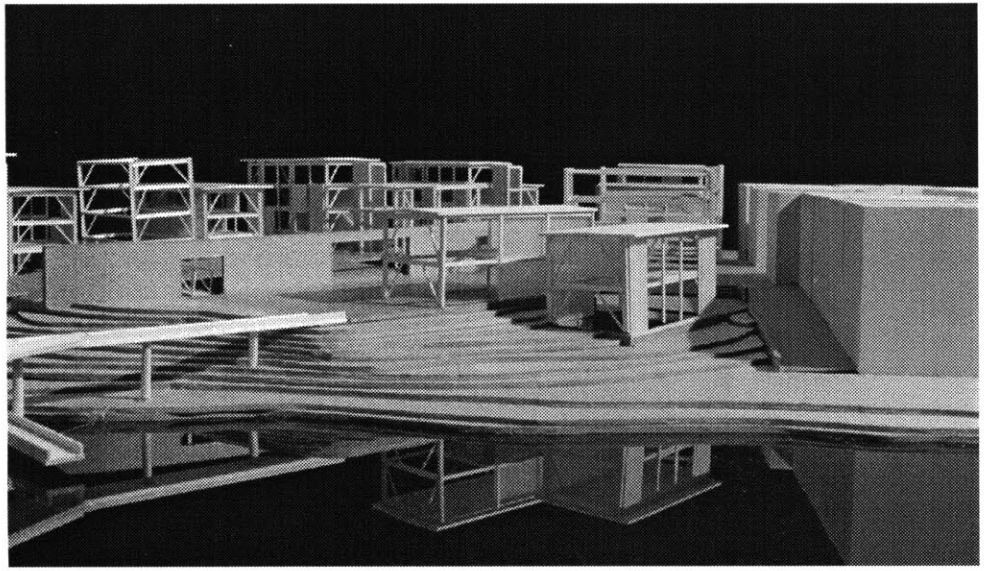
Insular courtyard **31**

Medium For Exchange

30 Thinking about the organization of the workplace initially produced very inward-looking buildings suggesting that the interaction between workers would take place *within* these spaces..

31 Realizing this limitation, the next solution literally exploded the segregated work areas into each other. This generated exchange between workers of different disiciplines and began contact with the public.

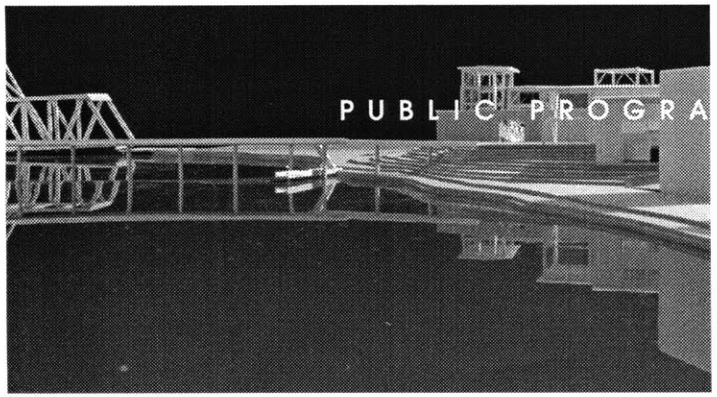
Public infrastructure 32



expected to be developed internally then brought to the public for feedback or display. The courtyard that was present from the initial scheme was always publicly accessible but never really designed as a public space. In fact, the courtyard seemed to be emerging as a residual space.

By reformulating the inner, raised courtyard as a usable, occupiable, public space, its value and definition began to grow. Three primary elements, byproducts of the loosely defined program, help to achieve this definition. The first, and most direct, are the facilities which are, quite literally, public. One of the building pairs, opened as a gesture to the landscape and the public, houses day care, dining facilities, and can double as a screening room or performance space. These functions also have the potential of becoming a draw at night, a time when most workplaces, and the space that they occupy, remain idle.[14] More importantly they provide neutral, interior spaces where the workers and public can mix (unlike the territorial office spaces

Public park edge 33

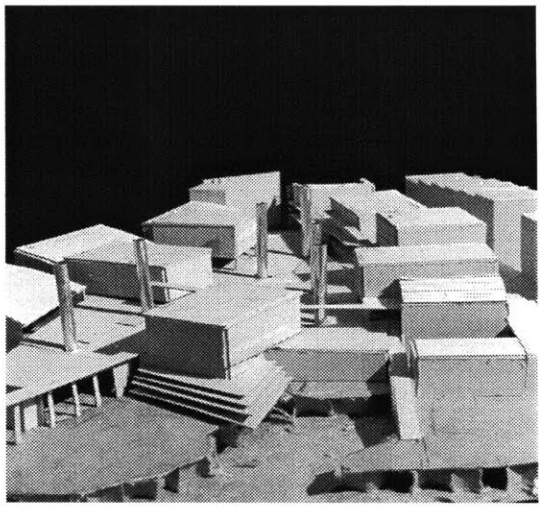


32 From the channel, the channel-side park, or China Basin Terminal, the public spaces are obviously open and accessible. The V shape of the site naturally lends itself to an expanding, outward reach.

33 This public gesture is extended even further by the footbridge which connects the plaza directly with CBT. An absence of a safe and accessible pedestrian crossing would severly limit the exchange between old and new.

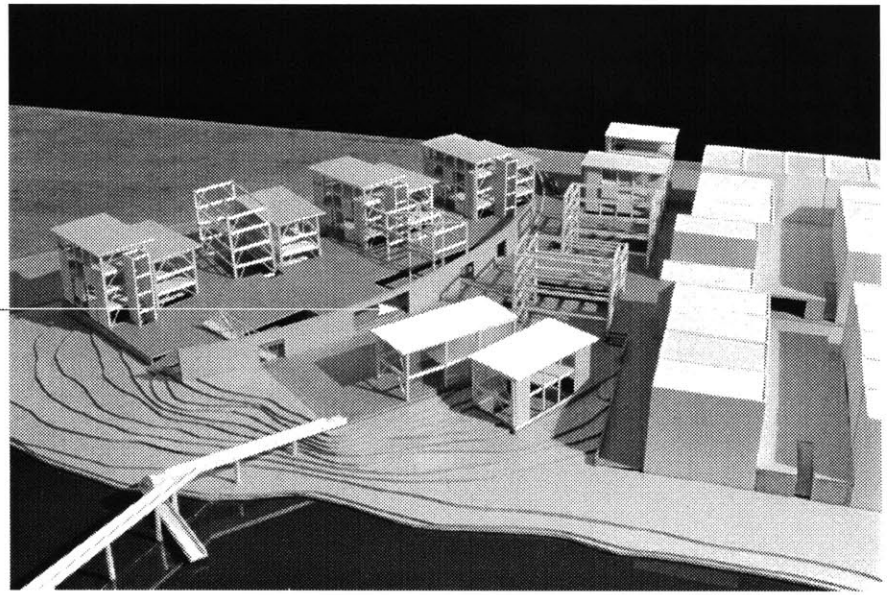
themselves). Although the public was strongly considered as an important part of the dispersed fabric of the workplace, it was actually more private, internal demands that created the initial layout; the first incarnation of the courtyard was almost completely separated from it surroundings.

After soliciting a collection of workplace narratives from friends across the country (a strong emphasis on the west coast), a recurrent complaint had to do with the sense of isolation experienced within what was usually a huge, internal office environment.. The cubicle and the path to it seemed to be all that was known about most workplaces although many were located on one continuous floor. The dispersal of building parts and functions in this new workplace is an attempt to solve that problem. At the very least, the total work environment can become more comprehendible by making it more visible, more connected. It starts with the path from the parking or pedestrian



Severed connections **34**

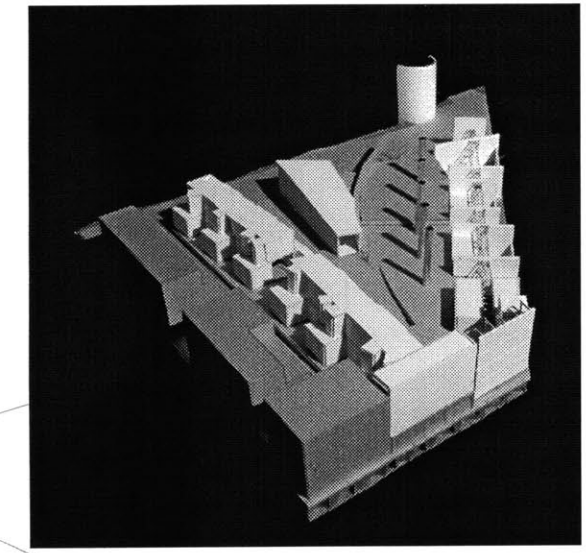
Dispersed building pieces **35**

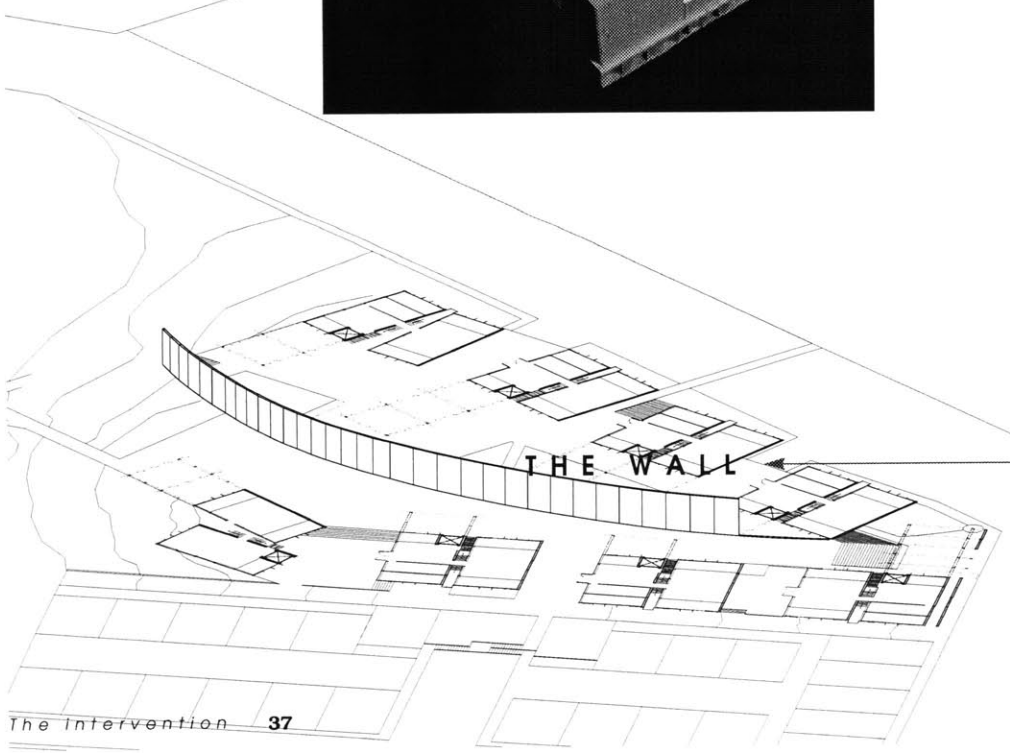


Medium For Exchange

34 The focus on the campus as a self contained problem was leading to other problems: the separation of the plaza from the landscape and the severence of the landscape itself. The workplace was becoming 'selfish' with the site.

35 In the end, the plaza found its definition in a third element (the wall), allowing the buildings themselves to lighten up and move back toward the edges of the site.





entrance to the interior of the building which encourages visual (and often physical) contact with the whole company. This is achieved by the dispersed, exterior placement of functional building units, a completely reasonable proposition on San Francisco's mild eastern side.

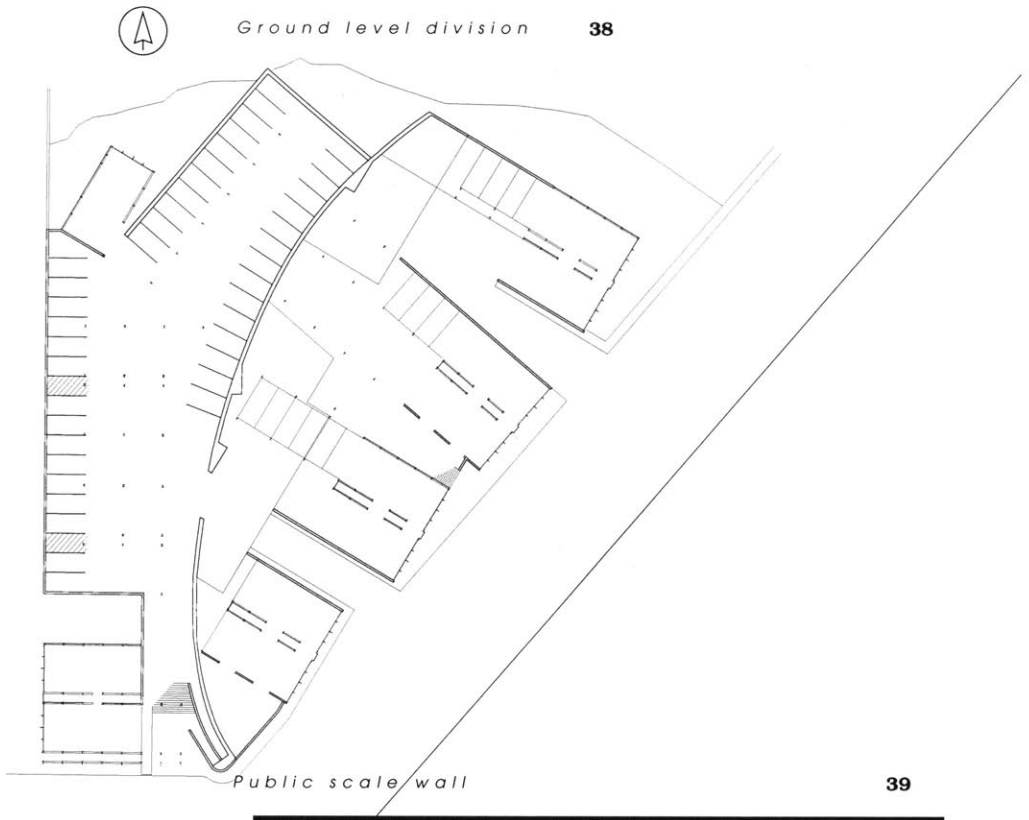
The curving wall, a later development in the design process, also plays a strong role in the public definition. By referencing a scale, form, and movement that exceeds the confines of the workplace, the wall establishes itself as a significant feature. In earlier schemes, more subtle attempts were made to define a public scale; a shallow curving ramp, repeating vertical ventilation stacks, small concrete walls and benches. While none of these attempts seemed to carry the force of a public gesture, they did leave the space open, visibly clear. Unfortunately, this 'clarity' is not what was needed. The wall, derived as an extension of an actual division underground, marked the first successful attempt to connect to the public sphere without

36 In the early stages of design, the plaza space was only minimally defined: the desire to maintain the open connection between sides was imparing its development. The ramp and the ventilators (modeled as metal tubes) acted more formally than spatially.

37 The curved wall sprung from the earlier investigations, the consolidation of a number of smaller idiosyncratic moves into one bold gesture.

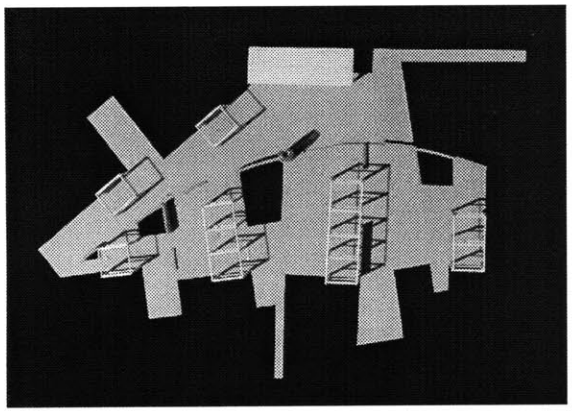
severing the visual links established across the courtyard by the dispersed building configuration. By keeping the wall somewhat low and making it penetrable at several points, visual and physical accessibility were maintained across the court. At the same time, a strong promenade was reinforced through it. Where the wall curves outward and the space begins to expand, it becomes a backdrop for outdoor public events, the plaza a stage on the edge of the landscape.

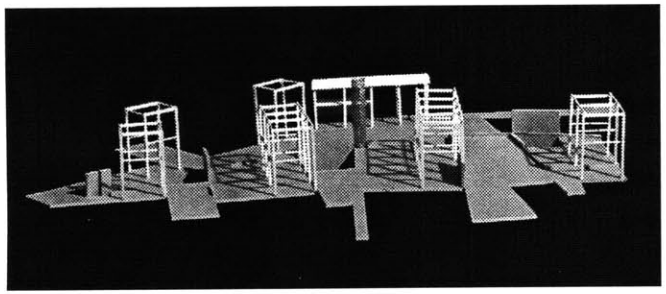
The wall also marks a very important distinction in the programmatic understanding of the workplace; it is the line between real and virtual production, the line between intangible information and tangible product. At the plaza level and above, the work buildings are similar in their minimal spatial/use definitions. Below the plaza this is not the case. To the East (and closer to the port and rail lines), lower level production is physical; space is accommodated for large machines, large trucks,

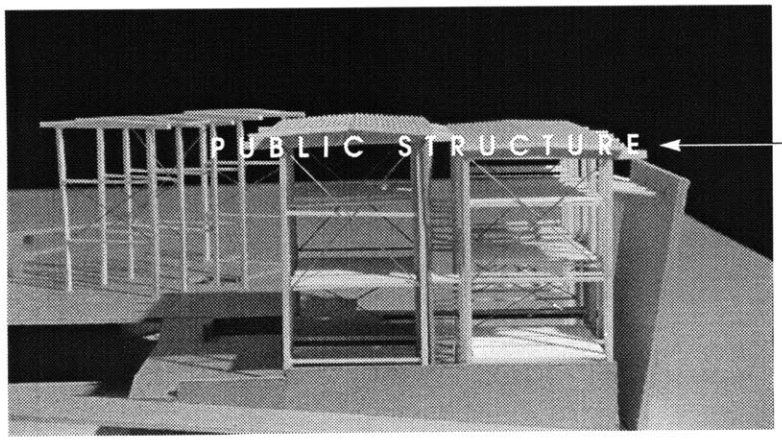


38 The ground level plan shows the dominance that the wall has below the plaza. To the West, the parking area conforms to the curve; it is further subdivided by the steel i-beams which penetrate from above. In the east, the buildings (which appear to be separate) are connected through a network of drives and walkways.

39 Above 'ground,' the wall suggests a division or separation yet it is quite penetrable; bridges allow easy X-ing







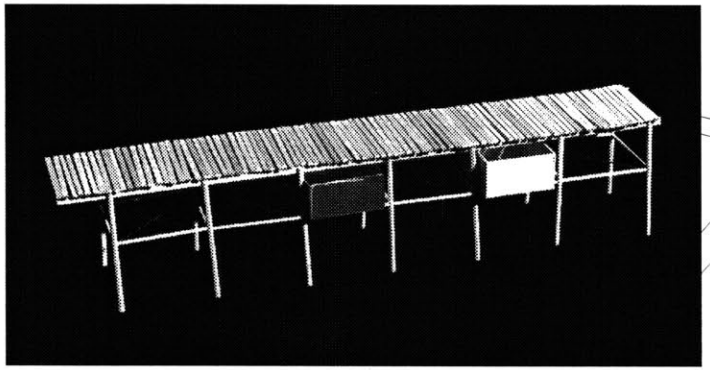
and storage of products. To the West (and nearer to the future neighborhoods of Mission Bay), lower level spaces are given over to parking. It is in these buildings that 'idea products' could be produced; therefore, their physical impact is minimal; they take little space . Beyond the wall, the plaza is cut away, emphasizing the distinction.

The third 'public element' is the exposed structure, the building 'piers' which extend outward into the courtyard. Several small models show the studied impact that these open structures would have on the courtyard. This impact/definition is really only half of the story. The intention is that each department or subdiscipline will be able to inhabit the structure as is demanded over time. More office space, meeting space, or display space are all possibilities. In reality, any use of the space becomes a 'display,' a deviation from the regularity of the existing buildings. This may only provide a visual affect but it is also possible that displayed products could be sold or tested in these parts of

40 Although the plaza may just be a sectionalized, elevated ground plane, it is still strongly impacted by the structures which surround it. So, in addition to the topographic models which helped most in exploring movement through the site, three dimensional structural study models were built to test the impact of the open-frame extensions on the plaza. They were also very beneficial in revealing the site's sectionality.

the site. A glass atrium, an opaque box, or suspended work 'pods' mounted as flexible adaptations to the basic structure can turn these extensions into dynamic displays of 'work.'

The literal pier **41**

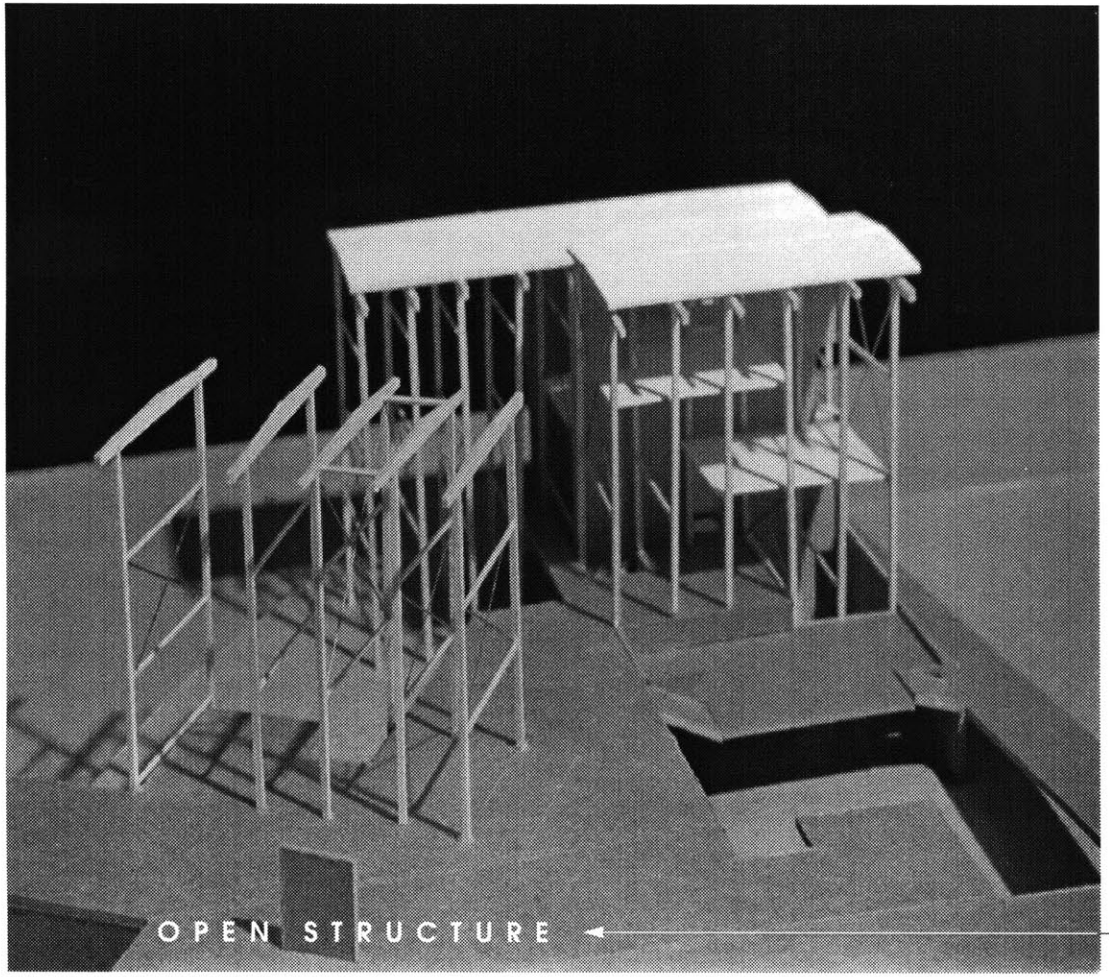


Medium For Exchange

Extended structure **42**

41 The suggestion is for a new way to inhabit the pier; in this example small boxes reside in the space underneath. The possibilities of how to build on and around such an austere, utilitarian structure are virtually endless.

42 The pier-like, bridge-like structures which extend out into the plaza are both referential and useful. They are visually light yet physically strong.



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43 Although this model has been left incomplete (unsheathed) in order to reveal the underlying structure of the buildings, it is hoped that in the larger scale (i.e. reality) that the raw structural quality could be maintained, even with enclosure. At this intermediate stage, arrangements for support and cross bracing are still being tested.

BUILDING

The word 'building' rather than office, factory or warehouse is used to describe the basic unit of the workplace because it is a term which is not colored by the history of a type. Each of these more traditional building types bring ideas and inspiration to the process of formulating and inhabiting a 'place of work' but not one is single-handedly capable of satisfying all of the demands of an idea and product based company. Humanity, efficiency, economy, and flexibility are just a few of the qualities that they can collectively embody.

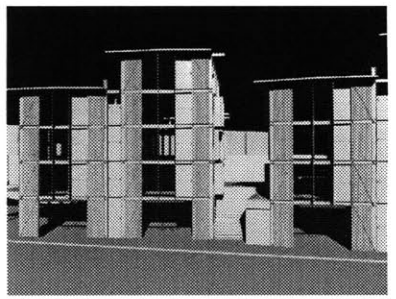
Various organizational and architectural models of the office have been tested throughout the last century. Apparently the workplace can masquerade as a huge dinner table (Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Building, 1904), as a pristine museum (SOM's Lever House, 1952), as a socialistic swimming pool (Burolandscaft plan for DuPont, 1967) as a modular city (Herman Hertzberger's Centraal Beheer, 1972), as a city street (Neils Torp's SAS Gatan, 1976), and as a phone booth (Frank Gehry's Chiat Day Headquarters, 1991).[15] Joking aside, office design has been approached from the inside and the outside, the program and the image, the pocketbook and the psychology book. The final result always seems to be inconclusive. Post-occupancy evaluators, fueled by curious executive and architects alike, offer feedback and guidelines which can be loosely applied to future constructions. Still, it is very difficult to draw absolute conclusions around terms as subjective as efficiency (presumably the biggest concern of most businesses and business executives). There is some reason that the most prevalent office structure is the undifferentiated slab building; there is no real convincing economic argument against it. The argument against it is social.

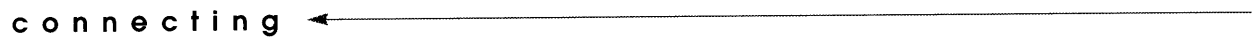
The China Basin Terminal is the anti-social

monolith directly across the channel from the site. Actually a converted warehouse, it accurately simulates (even exaggerates) the conditions of a typical office building. The continuous 825' floor slab has been walled off into multiple office spaces, most of which are then subdivided again. Building access is primarily through one of several elevators or stairs which occur every 100' off the hallways. Once a particular office or group of offices is entered, the outside world is cut off. Windows to the outside are not continuous and in many cases are hoarded by the more senior occupants. The four story twin constructed next to the original warehouse 'helped' to create a relentless (and dark) courtyard space which has become home to smokers and tumbleweeds. Underground parking and elevator access make the path to the office short and direct; no interaction. The overwhelming size of the original structure led to isolation and compartmentalization of its pieces.

In buildings with little spatial definition, elements such as circulation, natural light (windows), power, and ventilation often begin to suggest or even dictate uses, organization, and hierarchy.[16] The stairs and elevator establish a hub of activity, a possible point of interaction. The windows provide light, sometimes air, and are coveted by everyone. Power and ventilation are rarely 'global' positioners yet they have been known to restrict total freedom of movement; desks are positioned together in groups to share 'wires' and ducts. The structure and the infrastructure begin to define use before partitions are ever (if ever) put in. No shocking architectural revelations here, yet such basic ideas are commonly overlooked so that walls, partitions, and hallways are left to restructure the 'implied' uses of many buildings. In the evolving world of business, the answer does not seem to lie in the tediously specific or the overly general building. It can be found in a structure that capitalizes on the assets of its site and on the dual social/private nature of its user.

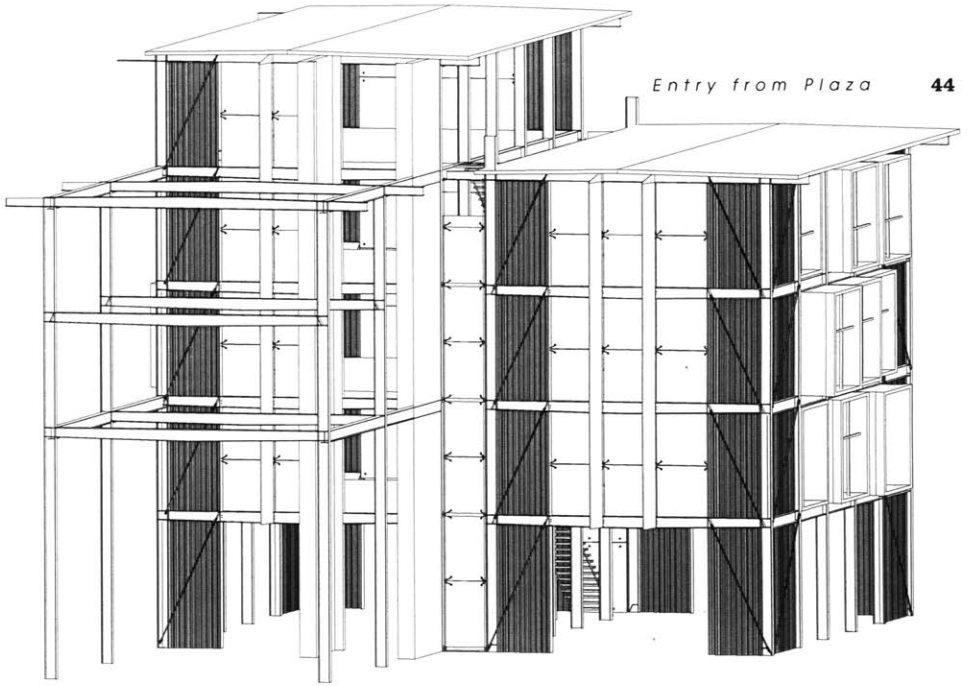
Medium For Exchange




connecting

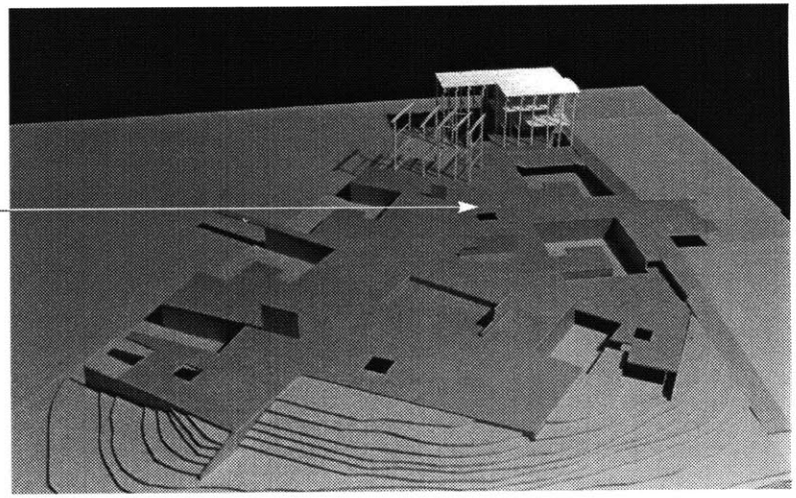
guide inhabitation. Rather than complicating (and limiting) the workplace by creating specific buildings for each discipline, the structures needed to be designed with future accommodation and general use patterns in mind. But before the interior of the building could even be considered, its approach and entry had to be resolved. These sequences needed to further reinforce the connections being established between workplace, plaza, and city.

The approach to each of the buildings is from the plaza level; the elevators and smaller stairs which service the buildings internally do not feed directly from the parking. The plaza provides an equivalent plane which ties the buildings together and visually connects with the surrounding conditions. Distant views are framed between the buildings giving them scale and presence. Unlike a traditional office lobby, the plaza is a public space; a promenade, a square, and an open lobby all in one. Workers can connect with each other and



Entry from Plaza **44**

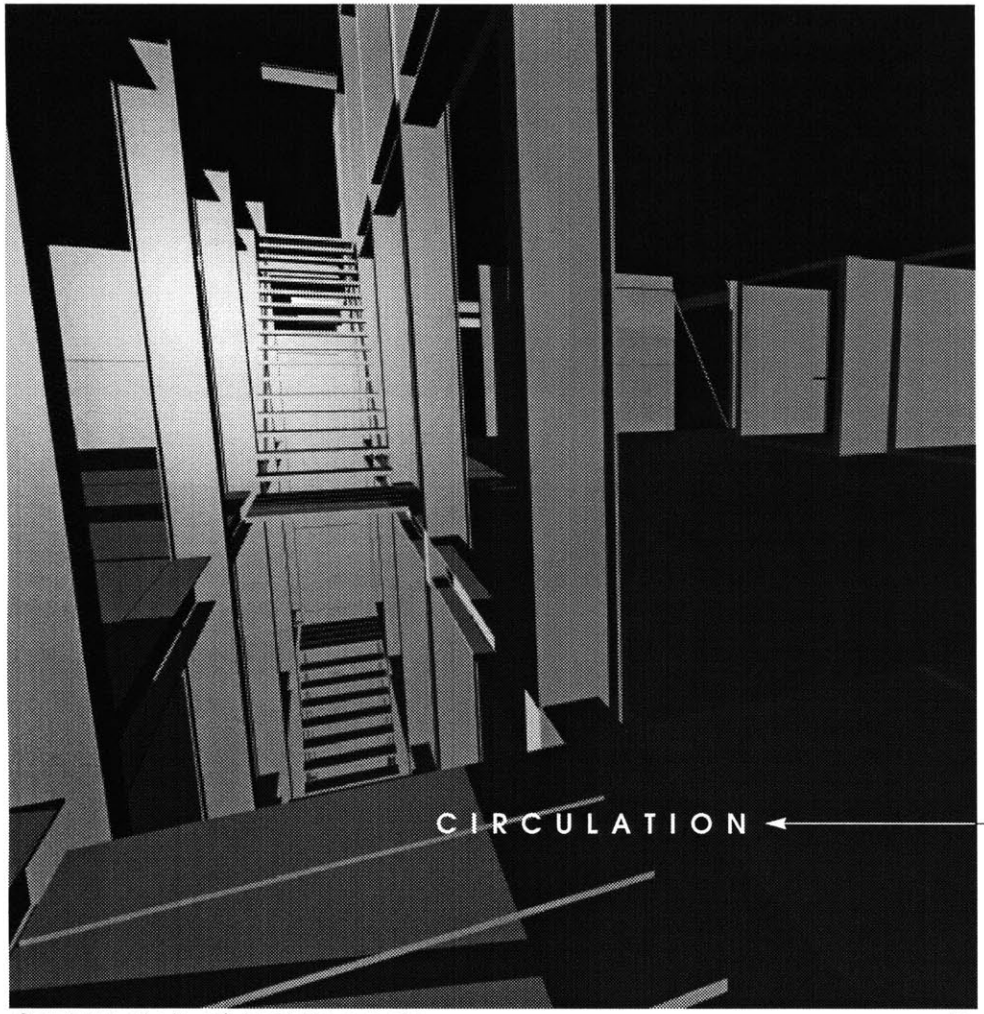
Plaza in development **45**



Medium For Exchange

44 The building entry emulates conditions found in the rowhouse model mentioned earlier; the tight space between the two connected structures produces a focused view of the landscape and city which exists beyond the workspace.

45 With the rest of the buildings removed, the plaza shows itself to be a geometric topography with minor shifts corresponding to shifts in the actual landscape.



Central stair of building pair **46**

their surroundings in this informal setting.

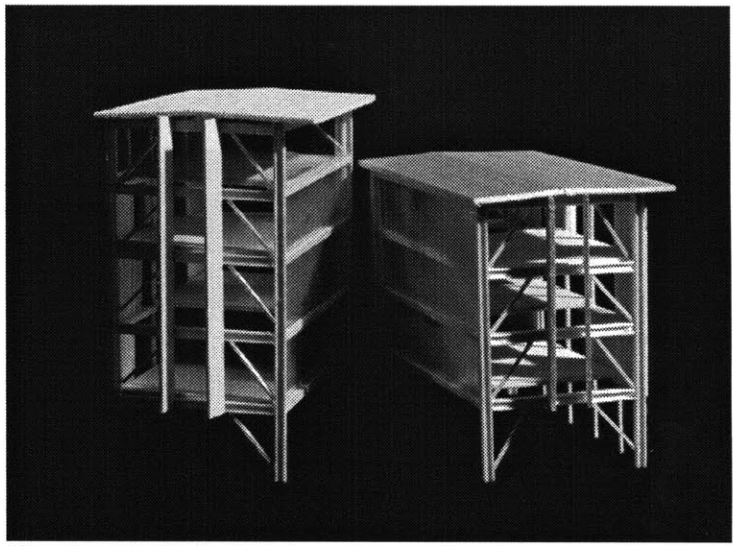
The formal building entry is subtlety indicated by the invagination that occurs between the paired frames and is reinforced by the elevator tower that stands to one side. The translucency of the East and West facades also suggest a more 'penetrable' surface than those found on the North and South faces. The frontal entry into the building's primary circulation shaft immediately focuses the visitor beyond the site. Light filters in from above through open-rise steps, illuminating the frosted glass panels which fill the structure from the roof to the ground. From this point, and from any other step or landing in the shaft, the whole building can be perceived. This path then leads to a plaza level room within the building, a space that could be termed 'lobby' but which functions more like a living room or a lounge. A desk, bathrooms and several couches define the interior but it is the large side doors which open back on to the plaza that 'make' the space. These outdoor areas are like pen-

46 With the frosted glass removed for increased legibility, this view shows the depth of the building that can be perceived from a single point. Layers of stairs, crossing structure, distant walls, stacked floors, and the facades of buildings beyond are all encompassed within the interior realm of the workplace. Insert people into this picture and you have a connected environment, an infinite overlap of the workplace spaces.

insulas, connected to the plaza but separate enough to act as semi-private extensions of the interior.

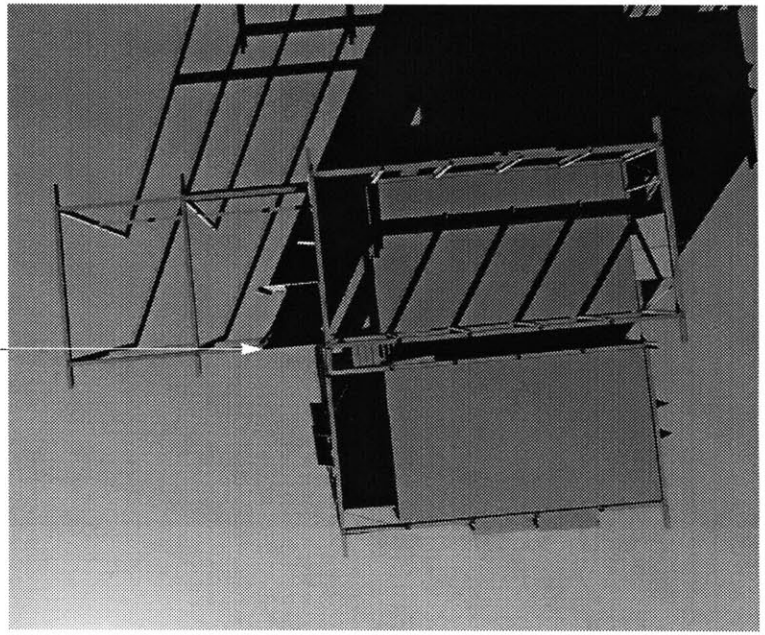
Interior spaces within each 25 foot wide 'bay' are laid out with a few simple organizing principles in mind. Each floor is pulled back from the east or west wall (or both) to create a chain of mezzanines which connect with each other vertically. The strong directionality of the building forms, reinforced by the translucent, glazed ends (generally facing East/West) tend to further that connection. More direct, physical horizontal connections are maintained through landings which cross the circulation shaft at opportune moments. Working together, the buildings use these contradictory physical and visual connections to bind them as a pair.

The main width of each floor plate is presumed to be for somewhat shared or open uses, as reinforced by its exposure and its accessibility. The



Opened building pairs **47**

Top floors **48**

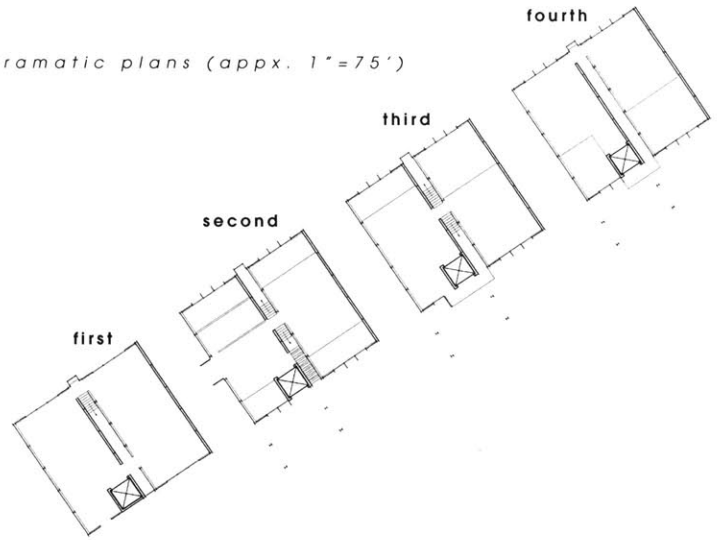


Medium For Exchange

47 With the interior stairs removed and the buildings twisted apart, the central circulation/light well becomes much clearer. The frosted glass has the ability to transmit light and motion into the working areas. Unlike this model, the actual buildings would have doors to allow passage between bays.

48 From the top, the primary circulation and the recessed floors are visible: appx. 25' wide floors and 5' wide entry.

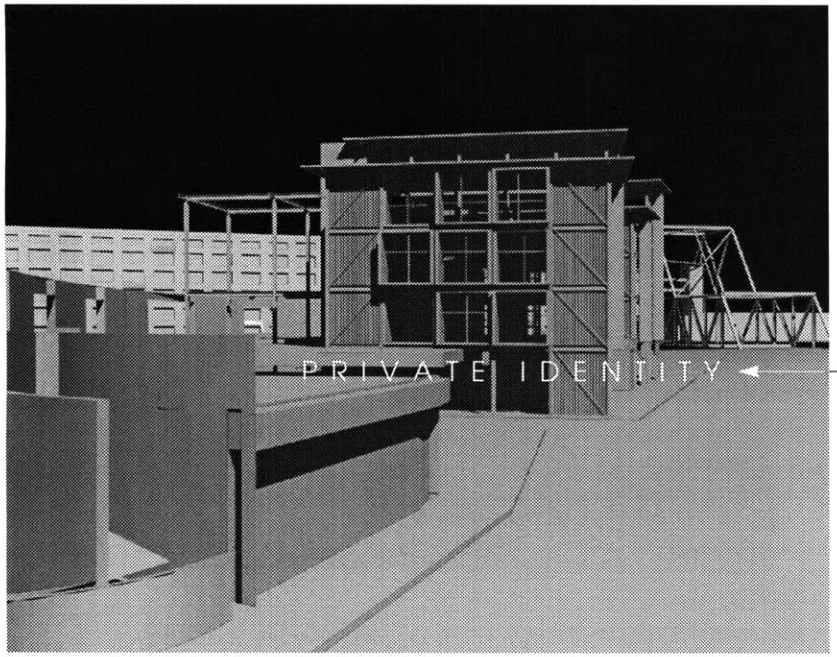
Diagramatic plans (appx. 1"=75')



49

Private modules

50



need for defined hallways is eliminated by the use of narrow room widths and multiple sectional changes; once on a floor, workers can circulate through the shared spaces. Individual office spaces are also provided but unlike traditional private offices, these are much smaller spaces. Each occupies one bay of the 10' x 10' grid (elevational) and reflects personality through its finish. The result is a quilt of private cubes which cantilever over the plaza from the north and south facades. Being on the periphery, individual office views favor a connection back to the more distant public space while shared spaces hold a more internal perspective. The uppermost floor, with a 360 degree clear view, is reserved as a company-wide meeting and working space. In this way the best view from each building is universally shared. No matter where or how work is completed, a connection to the 'other' is always maintained.

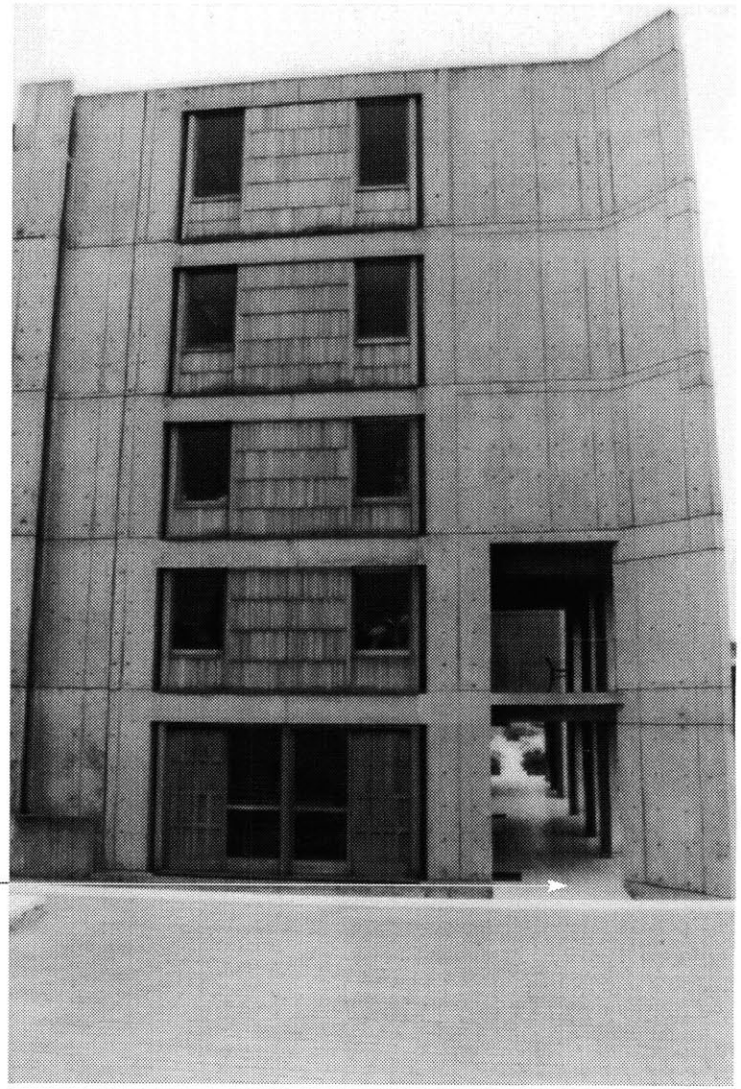
49 In this earlier simplified version of the plans, the elevator was situated internally and the particualrs of each floor had yet to be resolved. Still, most of the main building characteristics are represented here.

50 Looking up Third St., the south-facing, individual office bays provide the dominant view. Crossed mullions within the 'boxes' provide a framework for infill to augment the pure utilitarian nature of the buildings.

STRUCTURE

At the most general level, Mission Bay dictates the structure that can exist in its territory. Loosely packed fill, high seismic activity, and restrictive building heights don't afford much latitude when it comes to how a building will touch the ground. Great distribution, lots of reinforcement, and long piles seem to be the only reasonable answers to the question. But once above ground there are many possibilities.

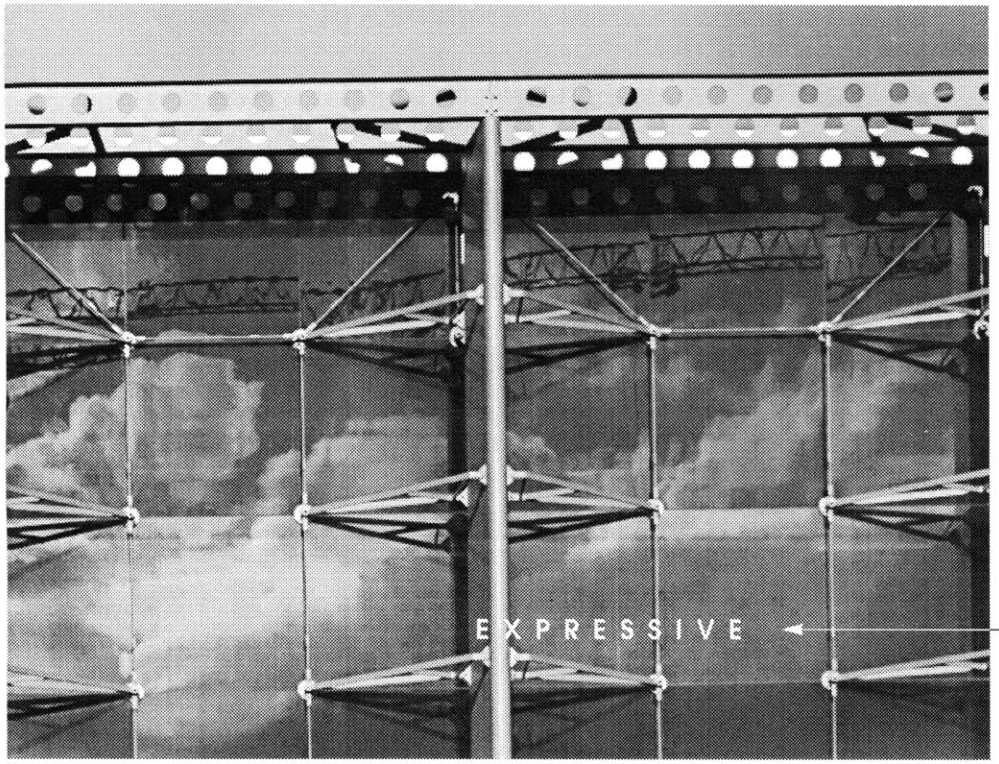
As with the office 'research,' the investigation of structural precedents also revealed many options but provided few clear solutions. James Sterling's *Braun Factory* (1994), Foster and Partner's *Willis, Faber and Dumas Headquarters* (1975), Thomas Herzog's *Wilkhahn Factory* (1994), Louis Kahn's *Salk Institute* (1967), Behnisch and Partner's *Bundestag* (1992), Grimshaw and Partner's *Financial Times Print Works* (1991), and Stephen Holl's *D.E.*



Salk Institute 51

Shaw and Co. (1991) were able to inform the discussion as examples of narrative, precise, energy-efficient, austere, collaged, ebullient, and textual structure, but overwhelming contextual concerns (as delineated in earlier sections) continued to drive the investigation back to the site.

Grimshaw's 'Print Works' **52**



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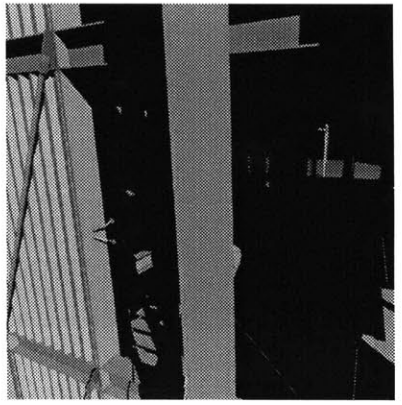
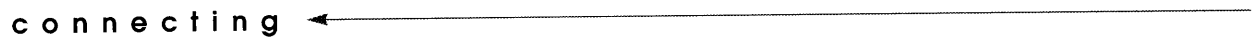
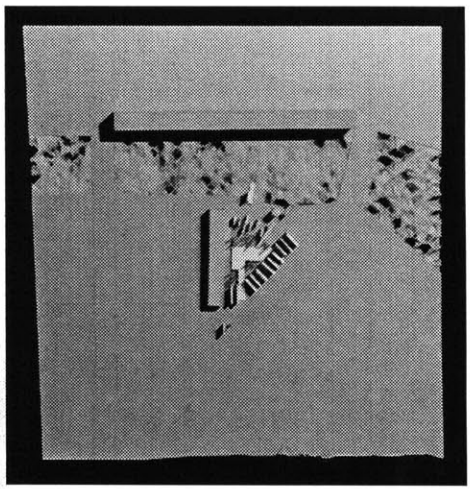
Medium For Exchange

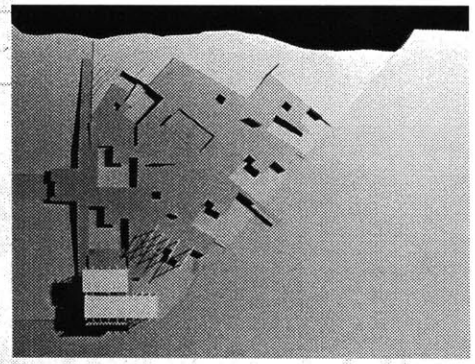



connecting

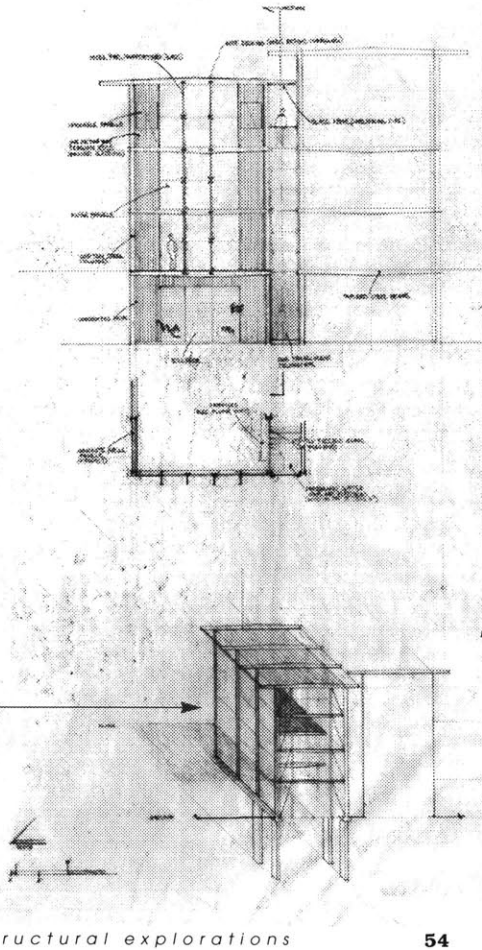
The first representation of the building parti, a small diagrammatic model (appx. 1:200) already seemed to contain several topologically based structural ideas that could carry on through the project. The large, planar fins that surround the triangular site were thought to be concrete walls that could anchor and contain the interior of the site without visually severing it from its neighbors. The large horizontal surface that floats between them could be of the same material, unifying the loose planes together in a group. Small pieces of metal rod placed in clumps throughout the site created another order and scale and introduced the possibility of another material and, with it, another building system.

While the project progressed through more figural and organizational models and sketches, structural ideas were pursued independently. The pier and cube are examples of this. Eventually a larger scale model saw the reintroduction of clear





Parti development 53

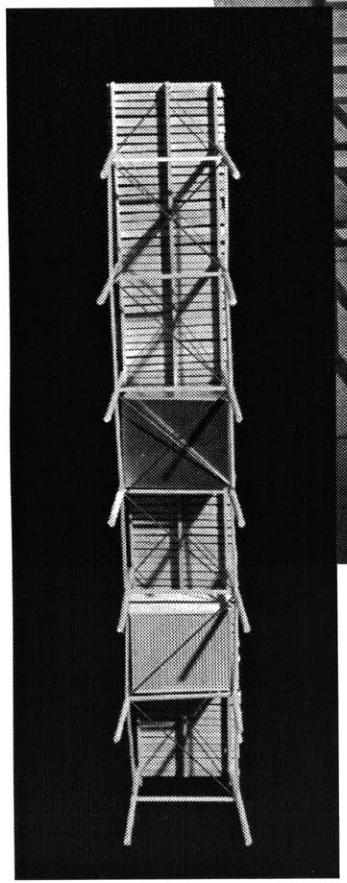


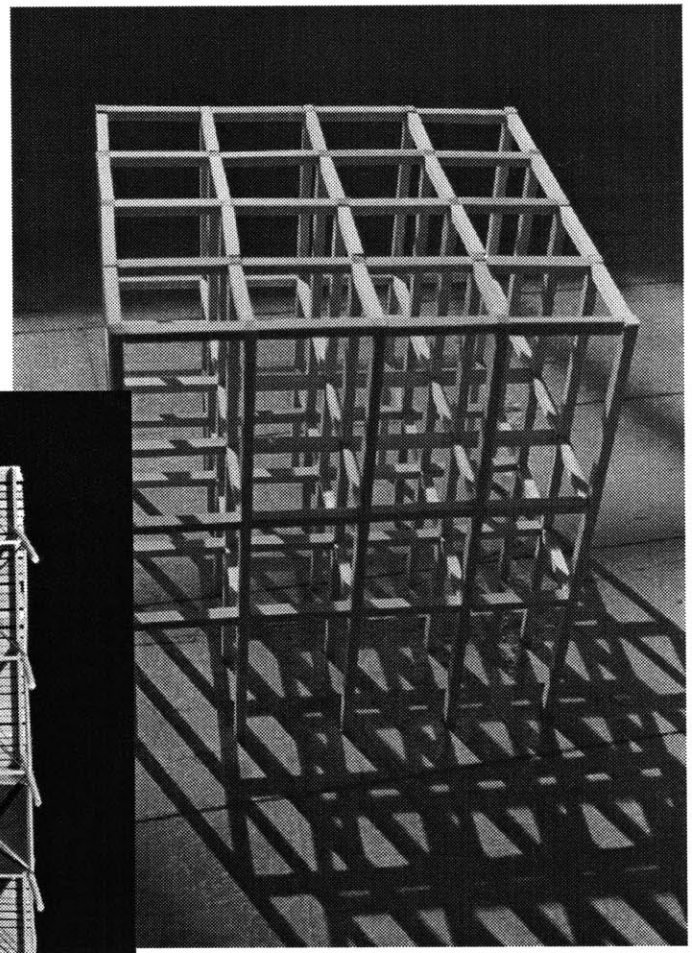
Structural explorations 54

53 Organizational and structural principles were never far apart, even from the earliest schemes. Elements that provide divisions, focused views, places of collection and places for private repose seem to be most conveniently embodied directly in the structure of the building.

54 Individual buildings received the greatest structural focus because they, as a collective, have the greatest effect on the project.

55





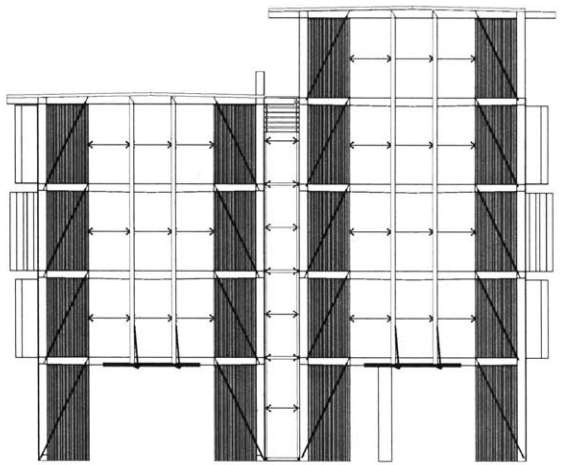
Early structural inspiration

structural ideas to the parti. The vertical planes and rods from the earlier model found their translation in paired concrete anchor walls and light timber framing. Unfortunately, this translation failed to take into account the overriding concerns of the site; at the larger scale the concrete walls were unwieldy, unnecessary. Attempts to convert the poured-in-place concrete walls into a steel column precast infill system were unsatisfying; incomplete solutions to self-defined problems.

Steel was finally selected as the most appropriate material, its industrial imagery providing a tie back to the past of Mission Bay and its strength supportive of almost any future possibilities. The differences previously expressed by planes and rods (then by walls and columns), would be handled through enclosure and density. While the plaza is met with an open frame, loosely spaced, the street and the neighborhood are confronted with a more dense, enclosed envelope of steel and glass. On the street and on the plaza, the curtain walls of the

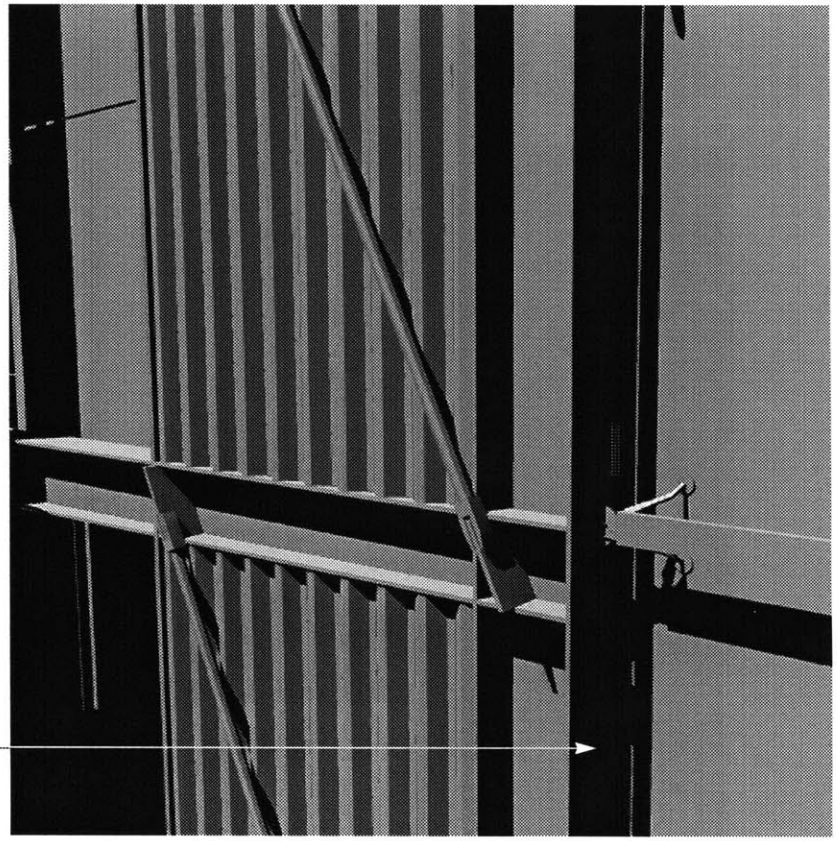
55 Early structural models took their inspiration from direct and indirect references to examples present on and around the site (see *regional forms* pgs. 22-25). The pier and the rigid, timber frame that emerged from it, are two examples of these. Their economy and their openness were just as attractive as their regional appropriateness. Unfortunately, when applied literally, they both failed to create successful buildings.

anchoring buildings actually hang inward, further emphasizing an engagement with the outer world, the public. All of the other details are simple, the connections strong: unpretentious and open for display.



Simple facade details **56**

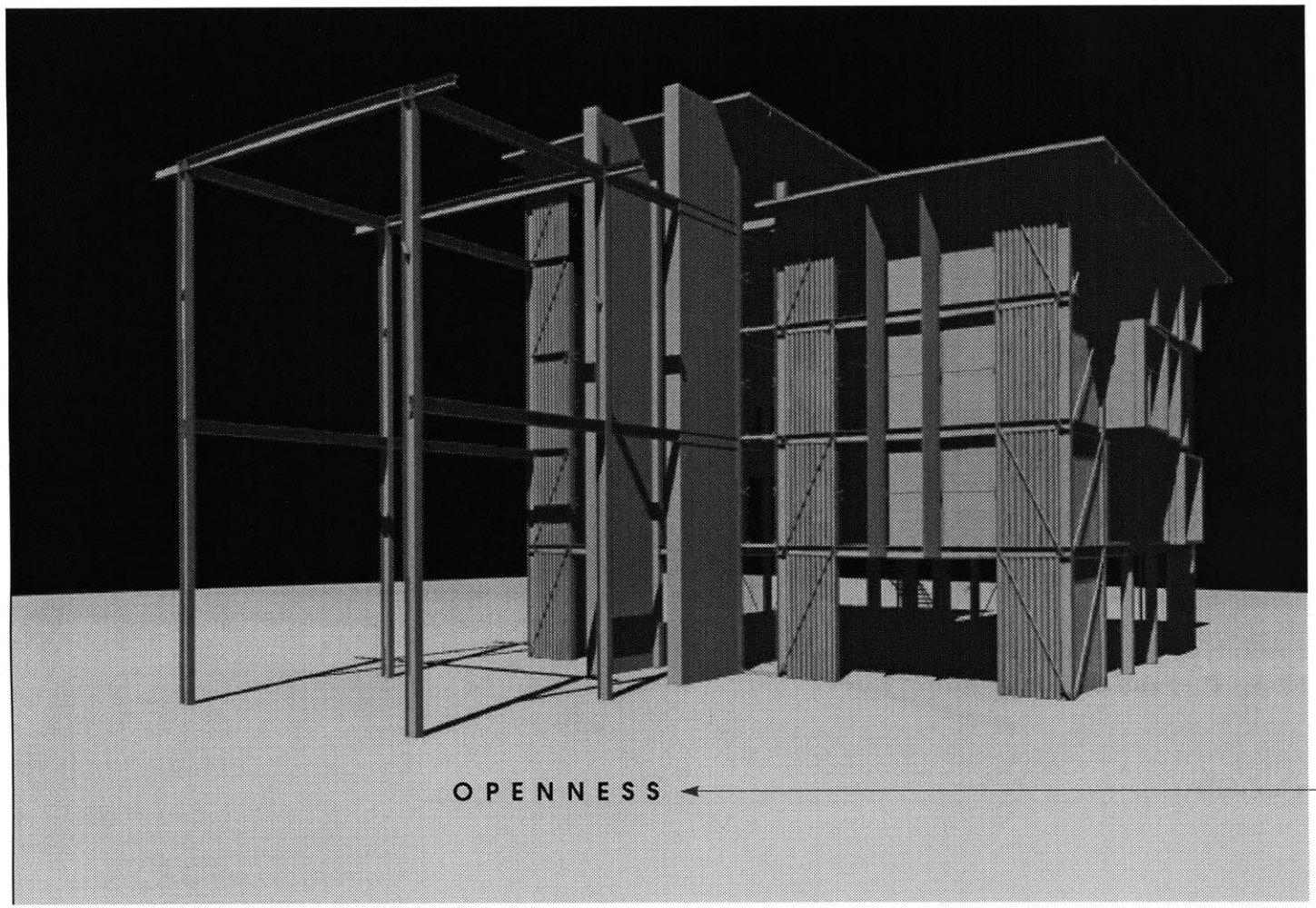
Materiality and bracing **57**



Medium For Exchange

56 The buildings are as expressive of their structure from the outside as they are from the inside. All of the connections are expressed: beam to beam, beam to panel, panel to fin, fin to mullion, mullion to glass, etc.

57 This deliberate demonstration of parts and their connections is futhered by the thoughtful combination of materials which correspond with them. The 'texture' of the pieces help to acceuntuate their detail.



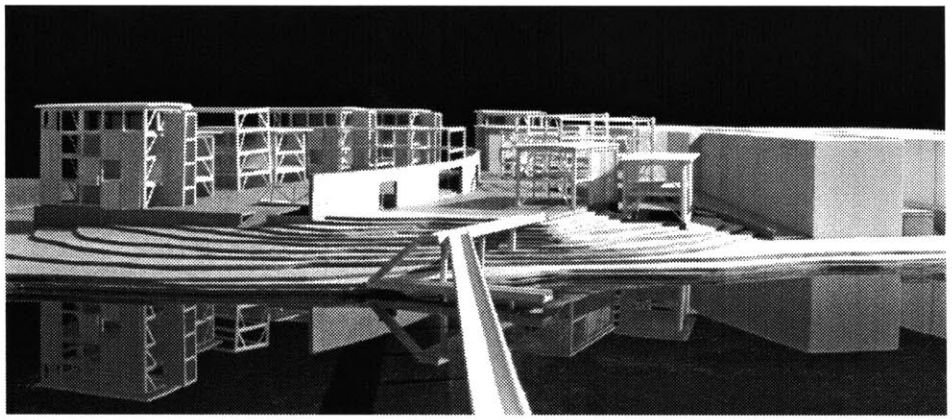
58

58 The final assembly appears to be a vertical warehouse of some kind; basic in its support, unresolved in its finish, and prepared for any type of future inhabitation. All of the essential needs of the workplace are sated by the single system.

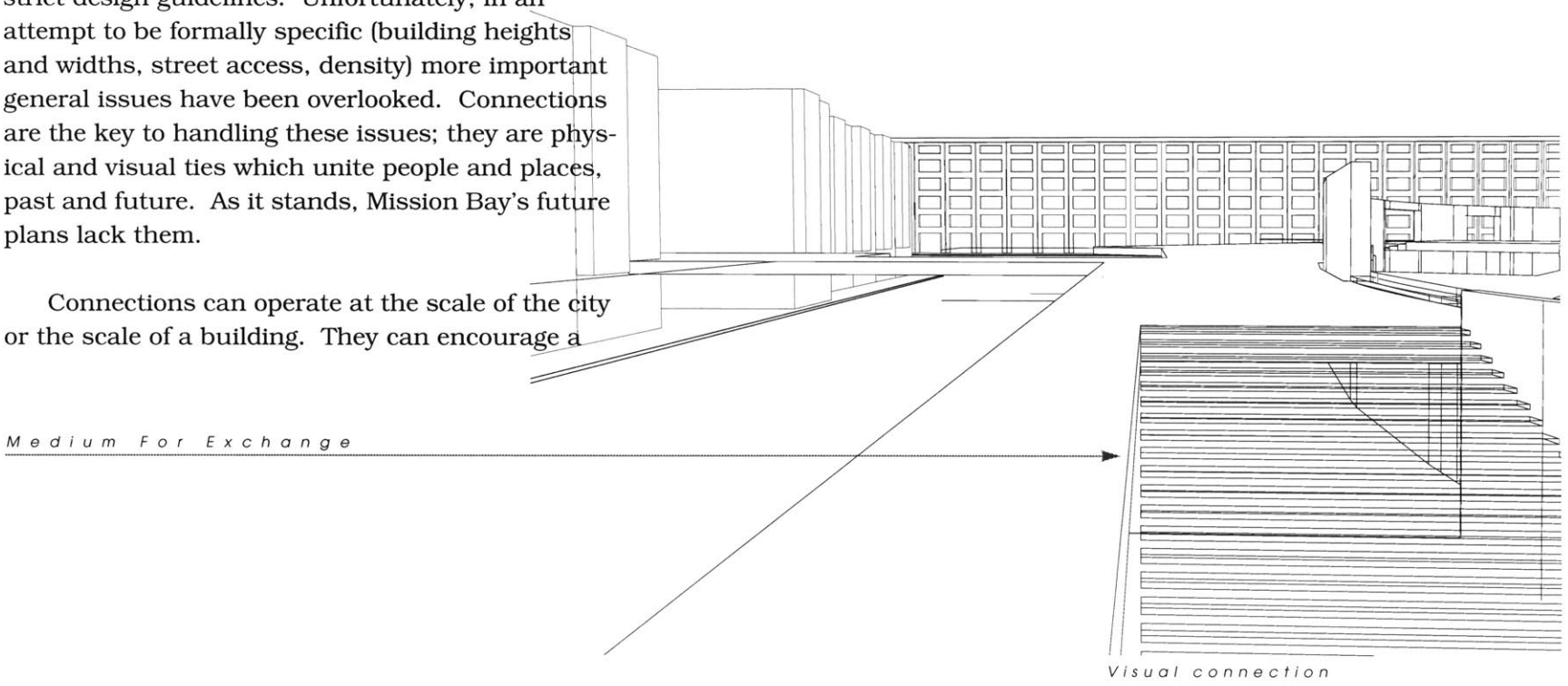
CONNECTION

In an emerging community (and in any community, for that matter) buildings cannot just exist for themselves. They must be conceived with a role that extends beyond their own obvious and immediate needs. They must forcast a future, yet take a strong stand in the present. They must create a template, or a model, for others to follow. In Mission Bay this process has been idealized through strict design guidelines. Unfortunately, in an attempt to be formally specific (building heights and widths, street access, density) more important general issues have been overlooked. Connections are the key to handling these issues; they are physical and visual ties which unite people and places, past and future. As it stands, Mission Bay's future plans lack them.

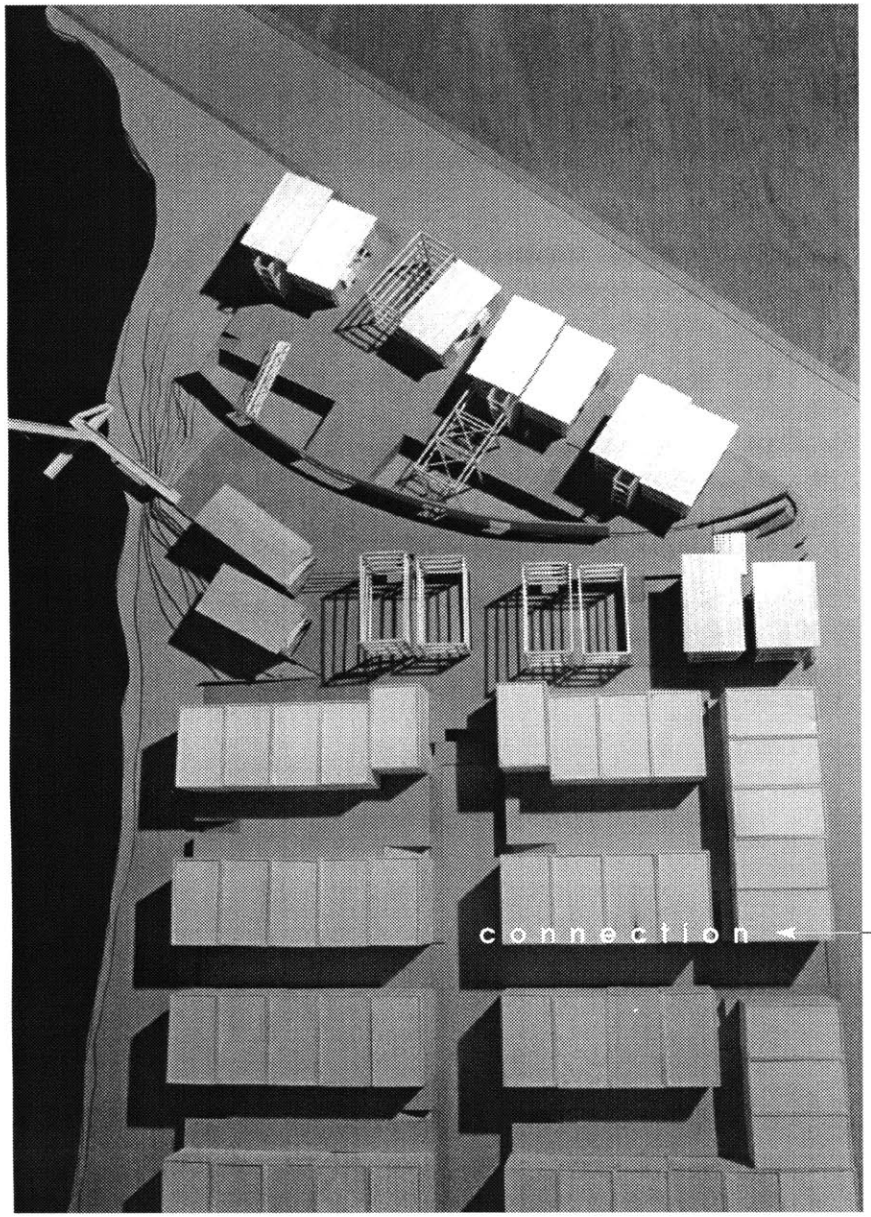
Connections can operate at the scale of the city or the scale of a building. They can encourage a



Physical connection



Visual connection



conversation or elicit a memory. They can facilitate a crossing or provoke a glance. Connections can lead outside of the body, outside of the building, outside of the site. They can create links to new places, new knowledge. On a social level, connections establish freedoms, borders which can be crossed. They foster responsibility, accountability. Connections help to make community.

As the only outstanding proposal for Mission Bay's 300 + grassy acres, this workplace carries a great deal of responsibility in setting a proper example (and environment) for the buildings that will follow it. The multi-media workplace is an ideal starting point beacause of all of the connective potential that it contains; large groups, working across disciplines, in a progressive field, to create public products. Still, the relevance that it, or any other proposal, will hold in the future can only be strengthened by the connections that it extablishes today. If only the Mission Bay planners would take note...

ENDNOTES

1 **Kiell, Matt** *Amenities For The 1990's* pg. 20-21

2 **Oshima, Dianne** *Mission Bay: Draft Environmental I mpact Report, Vol 1. pg. 11.2-11.3*

3 ibid pg. 11.1

4 **Woodbridge, Sally** *A New Plan For Mission Bay pg. 37-38*

5 **Polledri, Paolo** *Visionary San Francisco* pg. 119

6 ibid pg. 148

7 **Moudon, Anne Vernez** *Built For Change* pg. 52-53

8 **San Francisco Planning Dept.** *Mission Bay Plan: Proposal For Adoption pg. 3.35*

9 ibid pg. 3.66

10 **Hille, Thomas** *Understanding and Transforming What's There pg. 100-101*

11 **Bash, Alec** *Collaboration At Mission Bay* pg. 69

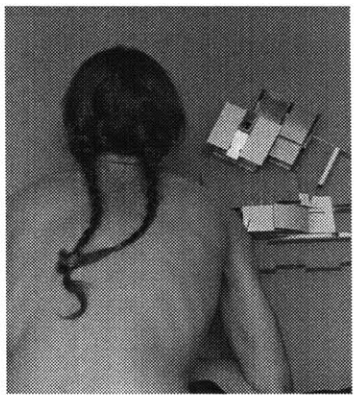
12 **Oshima, Dianne** *Mission Bay: Draft Environmental Impact Report, Vol 1.* pg. 11.74-75

13 **Howard, Robert** *Brave New Workplace* pg. 5

14 **Kiell, Matthew** *Amenities For The 1990's* pg. 106-107

15 **Gater, Linda** *The Office* pg. 39,95

16 **Brand, Stewart** *How Buildings Learn* pg. 178-179



3 **Moudon, Anne Vernez.** *Built For Change: Neighborhood Architecture in San Francisco.* MIT Press: Cambridge, MA 1986

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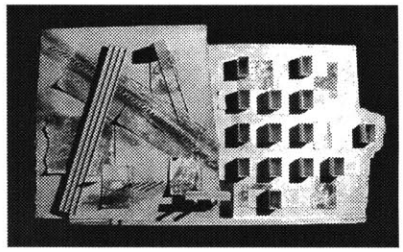

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