

si(gh)te constructs

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abstract

This thesis begins with the premise that nature is a fundamental operator in the act of poetic and spatial construction and seeks to develop techniques and propositions for appropriating and reconfiguring landscape in the production of space.

To investigate this transformation, however, relies not only on a formal/visual interpretation of topography, but, more critically, on our construction of nature as both a physical and mental entity. That is, how we construct our knowledge of and through nature is fundamental to reconsidering terms of engagement and overlap, and for exploring potential relationships and affinities. Any investigation of the transformation of landscape, therefore, begins with its construction.

Consequently, this thesis assumes two si(gh)tes of construction. Theoretically, the investigation is sited in transcendentalist literature/thought, beginning with two essays entitled "Nature" by Ralph Waldo Emerson that address our relationship to the natural world and its role experientially (spatially) and poetically. Physically, the project examines the production of a series of spaces/interventions on Salt Meadow, Cape Cod, Massachusetts as a concurrent means of investigating the transformation of nature in the production of space. These two parallel investigations are not causally related, but mutually reinforcing modes of investigating and reflecting on space and spatial experience through the use of nature as a ground of investigation.

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a note to the reader on the structure of the work

The focus of this work has been the development of a series of spaces through a process of mapping and operating in the physical site. The resulting series of maps, models, drawings and collages serve as the primary text of the thesis.

This visual text is bracketed by supplementary texts, both visual and written, each of which explores and elaborates themes pursued in the architectural work. These are not descriptive of the constructions, rather they establish the intellectual and visual foundations on which the spatial work has been pursued.

*The eye is the first circle and the horizon
which it forms is the second, and throughout
nature this primary figure is repeated without
end.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Circles

*An exercise in viewing the world.
On the motive! But one looks at the sea
As one improvises, on the piano.*

*Wallace Stevens, Variations on a
Summer Day*



prologue
Constructing Emerson's Nature

"I only wish to indicate the true position of nature in regard to man, wherein to establish man, all right education tends; as the ground which to attain is the object of human life, that is, of man's connection with nature."¹

In the introduction to each of his two essays "Nature" (1836, 1844), Ralph Waldo Emerson established the necessity for the direct experience of nature as a means of articulating an original relationship to the world (through poetry) not bound by the constraints of the past. Nature was, for Emerson, a privileged site for this investigation not conditioned by (limited by) history, church or state, but operating instead as an experiential and experimental ground.²

Underlying his bias for the natural world as a site for experiential investigation was the belief in the *correspondence* between the natural and the supernatural (spiritual) worlds. This immediate relationship responded to the moral need to find meaning (purpose) in the material world beyond sensual experience (the surface of existence)³ such that "[e]very object rightly seen unlocks a new faculty of the soul."⁴ Correspondence not only articulated the natural in terms of the spiritual, but extended to define the relationship between the mental and the

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (1836) p. 51.

² In *American Fictions*, Frederick Karl clarifies the differences between the European and American search for (construction of) identity. European constructions of the self in works of fiction are often articulated by withdraw and interiority. "European search for self amidst a rooted "other" leads to phenomenology, the interior space where history is less of a burden." But in American fiction, it is unlimited space (nature) that is significant. It is not a search for identity through withdraw, but a search for "a place to attach the self [that] opens up all experience where the outer reaches are chaotic or disastrous." These differences are not only metaphoric (mental), but have immediate spatial (and therefore bodily) implications. Frederick Karl, *American Fictions 1940/1980: a comprehensive history and critical evaluation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983) p. 21.

³ Sherman Paul, *Emerson's Angle of Vision: Man and Nature in American Experience*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952) pp. 2-4.

⁴ "Nature" (1836), p. 31.

material. "The fundamental fact in our metaphysic constitution is the correspondence of man to the world, so that every change writes a record on the mind."⁵ According to this principle, sensual experience to transcends physical and material limits.

While this connection of the natural and the supernatural might be dismissed from a contemporary perspective because of its insistence on the spiritual as a necessary condition for meaning, it is critical not to overlook how such a construction positions the eye/body relative to nature, that is, how it constructs experience. For nature becomes a ground whose purpose is to be experienced and appropriated as a necessary condition for consciousness (because the mental and the material are immediately attached through the experience of nature.) This construction does not attribute essences to natural objects (construct the natural world as knowable *a priori*), but supposes a process of coming into relationship with nature such that this connection -- between mind and matter, between natural and supernatural-- is realized through experience. The act of going out and moving through are critical to this construction. Nature is not a passive site for the reception of (super)natural truths, but a ground for a dynamic experiential process of locating (positioning) the eye/I. In other words, it is picturesque.⁶ "The picturesque, far from being an inner movement of the mind, is based on real land; it precedes the mind in its material external existence. We cannot take a one-sided view of the landscape within this dialectic. A park can no longer be seen as 'a-thing-in-itself,' but rather as a process of ongoing relationships existing in a physical region--the park becomes a 'thing-for-us.'"⁷ Through correspondence, Emerson establishes nature, to borrow Smithson's term, as a thing-for-us, positioning the body

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶ I am using picturesque here not to denote a picture or a narrative but an experiential (kinetic) ground. Yve Alain Bois makes this distinction between two modes of constructing the picturesque: "What does Smithson say? That the picturesque park is not the transcription on the land of a compositional pattern previously fixed in the mind, that its effects cannot be determined a priori, that it presupposes a stroller, someone who trust more in the real movement of his legs than in the fictive movement of his gaze. This notion would seem to contradict the pictorial origin of the picturesque, as set forth by a large number of theoretical and practical treatises (the garden conceived as a picture seen from the house or as a sequence of small views--pauses--arranged along the path where one strolls)." Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara," *October* 29 (Summer 1984) p. 36

⁷ Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmstead and the Dialectical Landscape" quoted in Bois, p. 36.

and eye moving in space to experience ongoing relationships.⁸

This reading (construction) of nature as a thing-for-us is not only a conceptual one (based on the theory of correspondence, because it is spiritually ordained) but is physical (pragmatic), for nature offers a fundamentally different kind of sensate experience than the city. "Cities give not the human senses room enough. We go out daily and nightly to feed the eyes on the horizon, and require so much scope, just as we need water for our bath."⁹ There is an immediate physical attachment of the senses (the eye) to the vastness (boundlessness) of the landscape; the eye demands the panorama, the horizon. This significance of the horizon appears throughout his writings. "The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon."¹⁰ "We exaggerate the praises of local scenery. In every landscape the point of astonishment is the point of meeting of the sky and the earth..."¹¹ "People forget that it is the eye that makes the horizon."¹²

For Emerson, then, positioning the body in nature is more than just a change of scene, for it significantly shifts the operation of the eye. He diagrams this mode of perception:¹³ "The eye is the first circle; the horizon the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end."¹⁴ This connection of the eye to the horizon shifts attention away from nature as object(s) (as a thing-in-itself) and toward the productive capacity of the eye, to the visual field, and to the process (act) of seeing (heightens the awareness of nature as a thing-for-us, the position of the body). "There is a property in the horizon which no man has [owns] but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet"¹⁵ Nature demands a new

⁸ *In my room, the world is beyond my understanding,/But when I walk I see that is consists of three or four hills and a cloud.* Wallace Stevens. "Of the Surface of Things," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) p. 57. Stevens' eye/I, like Emerson's, is not contemplative, but voyaging. It is not inside but in motion that the minds' eye sees.

⁹ "Nature" (1844) p. 318.

¹⁰ "Nature" (1836) p. 14.

¹¹ "Nature" (1844) p. 312.

¹² Emerson, "Experience" (1844) p. 262.

¹³ Paul, p. 75.

¹⁴ Emerson, "Circles" (1841) p.179.

¹⁵ "Nature" (1836) p. 7.

(poetic) condition of the eye (vision) in which it is not a possessor of things but is instead an assimilator of relationships inclusive of and dependent on the eye itself. Ortega Y Gasset, described such a shift in vision as a shift from the proximate to the distant.

In distant vision we do not fix the gaze on any point, but rather attempt to embrace the whole field, including its boundaries. For this reason, we avoid focusing the eyes as much as possible. And then we are surprised to find that the object just perceived--our entire visual field--is concave. If we are in a house the concavity is bordered by the walls, the form of a hemisphere viewed from within. But where does the concavity begin? There is no possibility of doubt: it begins at our eyes themselves.

The result is that what we see at a distance is hollow space as such. The content of perception is not strictly the surface in which the hollow space terminates, but rather the whole hollow space itself, from the eyeball to the wall or *the horizon*.

This fact obliges us to recognize the following paradox: the object of sight is not farther off in distant than in proximate vision, but on the contrary is nearer, since it begins at our cornea. In pure distant vision, our attention, instead of being directed farther away, has drawn back to the absolutely proximate, and the eye beam, instead of striking the convexity of a solid body and staying fixed on it, glides into a hollow.¹⁶

This vision is analogous to the one which Emerson diagrams in his immediate attachment of the eye to the horizon.¹⁷ It is not fixed on objects, but dispersed into space, in this state of vision "everything is background, confused, almost formless."¹⁸ And the "formlessness" (boundlessness)¹⁹ of vision in the landscape is significant, for the body and the eye are not

¹⁶ Ortega y Gasset, "On Point of View in the Arts," *Partisan Review* (August, 1949) p. 825.

¹⁷ *I measure myself/Against a tall tree./I find that I am much taller,/For I reach right up to the sun,/With my eye;/And I reach to the shore of the sea/With my ear./Nevertheless, I dislike/The way the ants crawl/In and out of my shadow.* Wallace Stevens "Six Significant Landscapes," p. 74.

¹⁸ Ortega y Gasset, p. 824.

¹⁹ Formlessness (boundlessness), in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, separates the beautiful from the sublime. Whereas the beautiful "is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having [definite] boundaries...the sublime, on the other hand, can be found in a formless

positioned among (against) objects, but immersed in and moving through *space* such that the strict boundaries between "object" and "subject" dissolve, because they have become one in the same.²⁰

This oneness (collapse) with nature is evident in Emerson's description of himself as a transparent eyeball. "Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into *infinite space*, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."²¹ This is not only a spiritual, but an aesthetic and spatial experience in which the boundary between inside and out dissolves.²² Transparency is a condition of the erasure of

object, so far as in it or by occasion of it boundlessness is represented in it, and yet its totality is also present to thought." And this formlessness is directly attached to (mental) motion, traversing. "The feeling of the sublime brings with it as its characteristic feature a movement of the mind bound up with the judging of the object."

²⁰ This shift from proximate to distant (Ortega y Gasset) or from the object to the horizon (Emerson) is typically described as a shift from an objective to a subjective model of vision. But Emerson is not arguing strictly for the subjective, but the *trajective*. That is, it is not simply subject, but the act of experiencing that is critical. in his construction of vision (sight) in/of nature. The *trajective* does not preference subject or object, but operating (moving, traversing). The term is borrowed from Paul Virilio, who uses it to describe a state not only of vision, but of being in the world which operates outside of the objective-subjective model. "Between the subjective and the objective it seems we have no room for the 'trajective', that being of movement from here to there, from one to the other, without which we will never achieve a profound understanding of the various regimes of perception of the world that have succeeded each other throughout the ages...Historically, we thus find ourselves faces with a sort of great divide in knowing how to be in the world: on the one hand, there is the original nomad, for whom the journey, the beings trajectory, are dominant. On the other, there is the sedentary man from whom subject and object prevail, movement towards the immovable, the inert, characterizing the sedentary urban 'civilian' in contrast to the 'warrior' nomad." Paul Virilio, *Open Sky* (New York: Verso, 1997) pp. 24-25. Accordingly, Emerson's construction of nature can be seen as a resistance to the sedentary (contemplative) and a preferencing of the nomadic (active) mode of being/ knowing.

²¹ "Nature" (1836) p. 8.

²² Le Corbusier's described a similar aesthetic condition in *The New World of Space*. Whereas Emerson's described his experience in spiritual terms, Le Corbusier articulated it spatially. "We

distinctions, the dissolution of the boundaries between mind and matter; it is concerned with the synthetic relationship (physically, psychologically) of figures to grounds.²³ Roger Caillois' compared this merging of figures and grounds to the schizophrenic, who feels as if he is being devoured by the space around him. "The individual breaks the boundary of the skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from whatever point in space...He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar. And he invents spaces of which he is the convulsive possession."²⁴ What is critical to note in Caillois' description is not only the act of "breaking the skin," an experience of disembodiment which could be compared to the experience of transparency, but also that this experience occurs because of the recognition of the similarity between (resemblance of) two things. (the figure and its ground). Transparency, according to Emerson, occurs because of the recognition and experience of the similarity of the mind to nature.

This resemblance is fundamental to the structure of reality, to our being in the world. "It is easily seen that there is nothing lucky or capricious in these analogies, but that they are constant, and pervade nature. These are not the dreams of a few poets, here and there, but man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects. He is placed in the center of beings, and a

pause, struck by such an interpretation of nature and we gaze, moved by this harmonious orchestration of space, and we realize that we are looking at a reflection of light...This *just consonance* is not simply an affect of the subject chosen, it is a victory of proportion....A boundless depth opens up, effaces the walls, drives away contingent presences, accomplishes the miracle of *ineffable space*. I am not conscious of the miracle of faith, but I often live in that ineffable space, the consummation of plastic emotion." Le Corbusier, *The New World of Space* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1948) pp. 7-8.

²³ One might compare the experience of transparency to the sublime, for both are associated with the experience of 'formlessness'. Kant's describes the spectators' experience of the sublime: "For there is here a feeling of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the idea of a whole, wherein the imagination reaches its maximum, and, in striving to surpass it, sinks into itself, by which, however, a kind of emotional satisfaction is produced." Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, quoted in Bois, p. 60. Transparency, however, is not described in terms of the contraction of the imagination, but an expansion; this expansion is enabled by resemblance; the imagination doesn't realize its inadequacy, but instead its connection.

²⁴ Robert Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," quoted in Rosalind Krauss "Entropy," in *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997) p. 75.

ray of relation passes from every other being to him. And neither can man be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man."²⁵ This is not simply an act of overlaying a mental structure onto the material world, nor is it an attempt to decipher essences, but an act of operative appropriation and interpretation of relationships. This transcends merely looking, and becomes an operation of the reason²⁶ (imagination), transforming matter into idea through metaphor (analogy).²⁷ "Have mountains, waves and skies no significance but what we consciously give them, when we employ them as emblems of our thoughts. The world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind."²⁸ Resemblance (and therefore the experience of transparency) is not simply a belief in the connection of the material and the spiritual, but depends on the poetic condition of the eye and the act of poetic appropriation.²⁹

Wallace Stevens, a twentieth century American poet profoundly influenced by Emerson, argued

²⁵ "Nature" (1836) p. 25.

²⁶ "The Imagination may be defined to be, the use which the Reason makes of the material world." Nature (1836) p. 45.

²⁷ "To the senses and the unrenewed understanding belongs a sort of instinctive belief in the absolute existence of nature. In their view, man and nature are indissolubly joined. Things are ultimates, and they never look beyond their sphere. The presence of Reason mars this faith. The first effort of thought tends to relax this despotism of the senses, which binds us to nature as if we were a part of it, and shows us nature aloof, and, as it were, afloat. Until this higher agency intervened, the animal eye sees, with wonderful accuracy, sharp outlines and colored surfaces. When the eye of Reason opens, to outline and surface are at once added, grace and expression. These proceed from imagination and affection, and abate somewhat of the angular distinctness of objects. If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them." "Nature" (1836) p. 43.

²⁸ "Nature" (1836) pp. 28-29.

²⁹ *Air is air,/Its vacancy glitters round us everywhere./Its sounds are not angelic syllables/ But our unfashioned spirits realized/More sharply in more furious selves.//And light/That fosters seraphim and is to them/Coiffeur of haloes, fecund jeweller--/Was the sun concoct for angels or for men?/Sad men made angels of the sun, and of/The moon they made their own attendant ghosts,/Which led them back to angels after death.* Wallace Stevens, "Evening without Angels," p. 137.

that "metaphor" might be more accurately described as metamorphosis. "This word [metaphor] is used as a symbol for the single aspect of poetry with which we are now concerned—that is to say, the creation of resemblance by the imagination, even though metamorphosis might be a better word."³⁰ Metamorphosis perhaps more accurately describes the process of appropriating and manipulating the material world in the production of ideas, in the (re)making of a world through poetry. This (poetic) reality is constructed not of matter, but of ideas culled from the relationships in/to matter.³¹ This does not negate the existence or the importance of the material world or sensate experience, for the purpose of experiencing nature is to "make friends with matter which the schools teach us to despise."³² Rather, it asserts that material experience is not merely an act of reception (an ends), but one of practical transformation (a means). This idealistic construction of nature renders it not as a solid, determined objects, but as a ground of potential relationships; as fluid and ductile. "The greatest value of any method has its power to set the perceivers world in motion, to set him thinking idealistically"³³

But motion is not only conditioned by perception and the process of ideation, but is a property of nature itself. Much of Emerson's writing in "Nature" focuses on its visible and material aspects, on nature as a ground for (phenomenal) experience through which he articulates (constructs) the relationship between the eye/I and the natural world (*natura naturata*). But throughout his essays, specifically in his second essay "Nature", he addresses the natural world not only as an experiential ground, but as a "system in transition" (*natura naturans*).³⁴ According to this construction, "[t]here are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God, is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid."³⁵ It is consequently not only the act of mental

³⁰ Wallace Stevens quoted in David Michael Hertz, *Angels of Reality: Emersonian Unfoldings in Wright, Stevens and Ives* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993) p. 195.

³¹ *Thus the theory of description matters most./It is the theory of the word for those//For whom the word is the making of the world,/The buzzing world and lispig firmament.//It is a world of words to the end of it,/In which nothing solid is its solid self.* Wallace Stevens, "Description Without Place," p. 339.

³² "Nature" (1844) p. 318.

³³ Emerson quoted in Paul, p. 112.

³⁴ "Nature" (1844) p. 323.

³⁵ Emerson, "Circles" (1841) p. 179.

appropriation that renders the world ductile, but it is in fact a property of matter itself which is in constant flux, in constant motion. The perceived world is only the (momentary) identity of a system in dynamic change.

This motion connects all things through a chain of causes, through the 'transparent law' that organizes all matter (things). According to this construction of nature all material beings are united through systems, through a nature composed of motion and rest in which "all changes pass without violence by reason of the two cardinal conditions: boundless space and boundless time."³⁶ Consequently, every act has its context in a system of causes, and it connected to all others through a dynamic system. This world is no longer strictly substance, but a series of processes.

Like the poetic transformation of nature, this system connects us to the natural and renders it transparent. "The guiding identity runs through all the surprises and contrasts of the piece, and characterizes every law. Man carries the whole world in his head, the whole astronomy and chemistry suspended in a thought."³⁷ To construct the world as processes is to construct the world as an idea and therefore immediately attach it to the mind, through mental processes in which phenomena are realized as systems.

As in the experience of transparency, this positioning within a moving world asserts an immediate connection to nature and causes us to radically rethink boundaries; to rethink interiority. "[T]he new molecular philosophy shows astronomical interspaces betwixt atom and atom, shows that the world is all outside: it has no inside."³⁸ But this is not only a material connection, for the system of organization, the ideal construction of the natural world as a system, does away with the dualism of body and nature, for it is in this ideal construction "that we traverse the whole scale of being, from the center to the poles of nature..."³⁹

Re-cognizing the world as a system of motions connects the mind/body to nature not spatially, but temporally. It is time here, not space, that unites. In this construction, the primary concern is not to assert the connection of the mind to the natural world but to establish stability within

³⁶ "Nature" (1844) p. 322.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

³⁸ "Experience" p. 255.

³⁹ "Nature" (1844) p. 331.

a system in flux. Here the problem is not the apparent separation of man from nature, but the inability to grasp and to position oneself in a moving world.⁴⁰ It is in this recognition of motion and change, both in the material world and in ideas, that we realize that "[t]here is no outside, no enclosing wall, no circumference to us."⁴¹ "There is throughout nature something mocking, something that leads us on and on, but arrives nowhere, keeps no faith with us. All promise outruns the performance. We live in a system of approximation. Every end is prospective of some other end, which is also temporary; a round and final success nowhere. We are encamped in nature, not domesticated."⁴² Yet Emerson maintains that the ability to comprehend such instability is fundamental. "This incessant movement and progression, which all things partake, could never become sensible to us, but by contrast to some principle of fixity or stability in the soul."⁴³

The poetic construction of nature thus not only connects the mind to nature through the act of appropriating and transforming, but operates as a significant referent which renders the world legible.

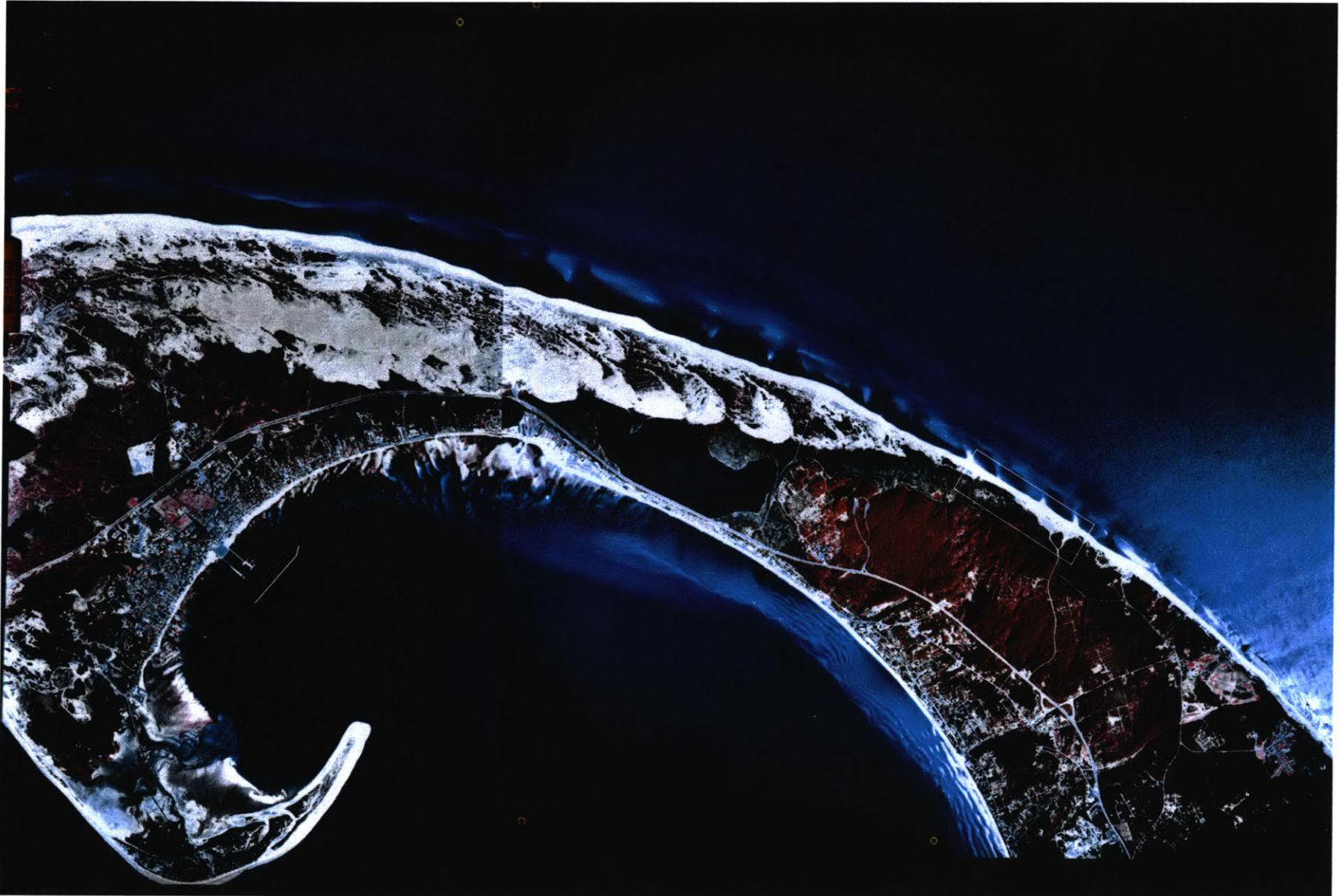
⁴⁰ The problem of motion is philosophically significant, for it is this recognition of movement, in Melville's *Moby Dick*, for example, that leads to "the existential frustration of trying to grasp a world in motion, a world whose movement condemns the movement of the mind to 'the everlasting elusiveness of truth'." Unlike European existentialism, which grows out of the paradoxes of phenomenology (the gap between objective and subjective, the irrationality of the sensate world) Melville's American 'existentialism' stems from the recognition of change. Herbert W. Schneider, "American Transcendentalism's Escape From Phenomenology," in *Transcendentalism and its Legacy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966) pp. 227-8.

⁴¹ "Circles" p. 181.

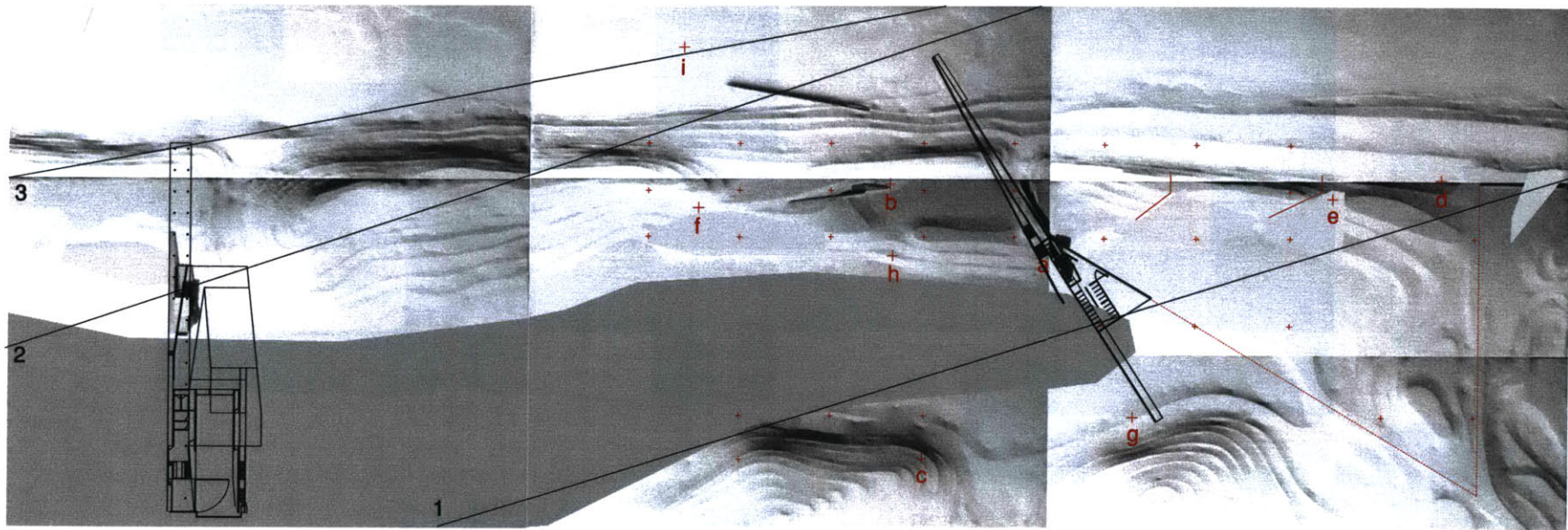
⁴² "Nature" (1844) p. 328.






⁴³ "Circles" p. 188.

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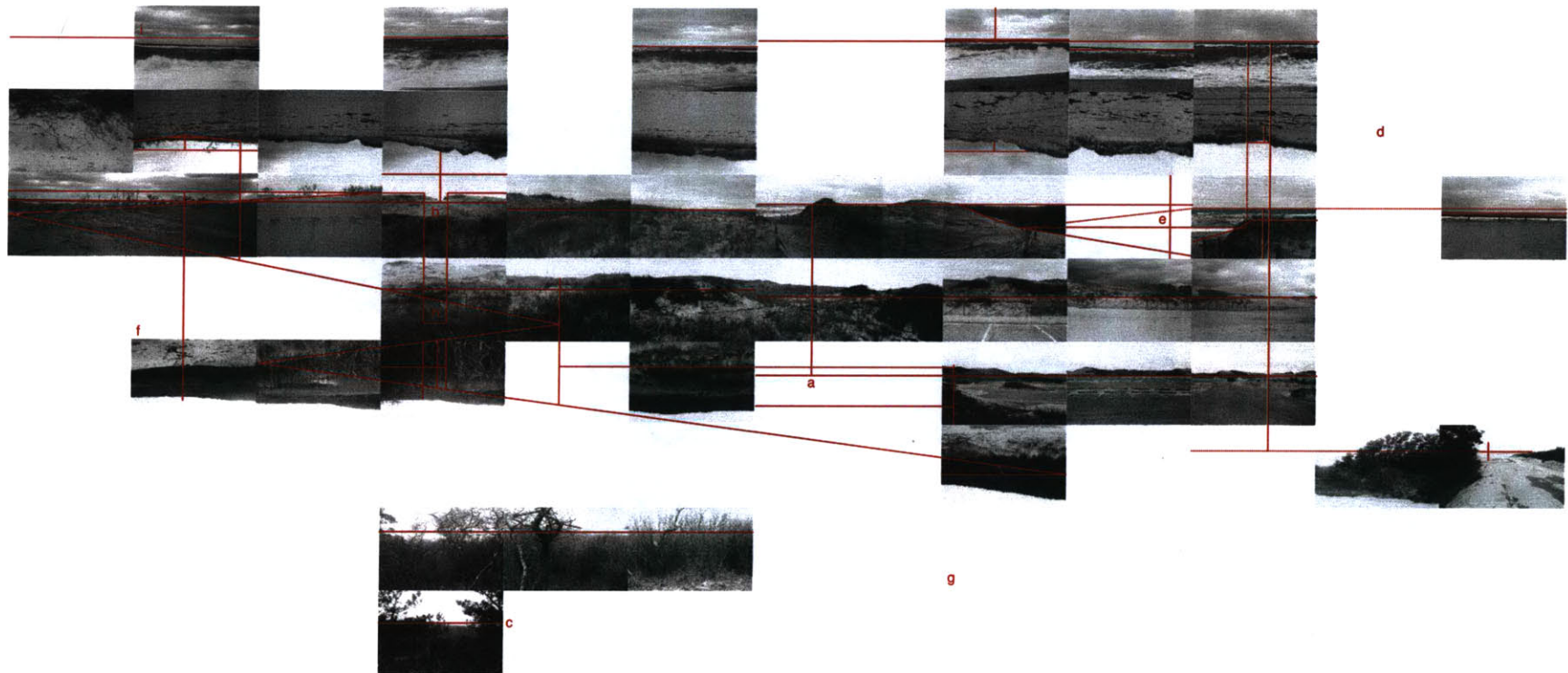


usgs aerial map, cape cod, massachusetts

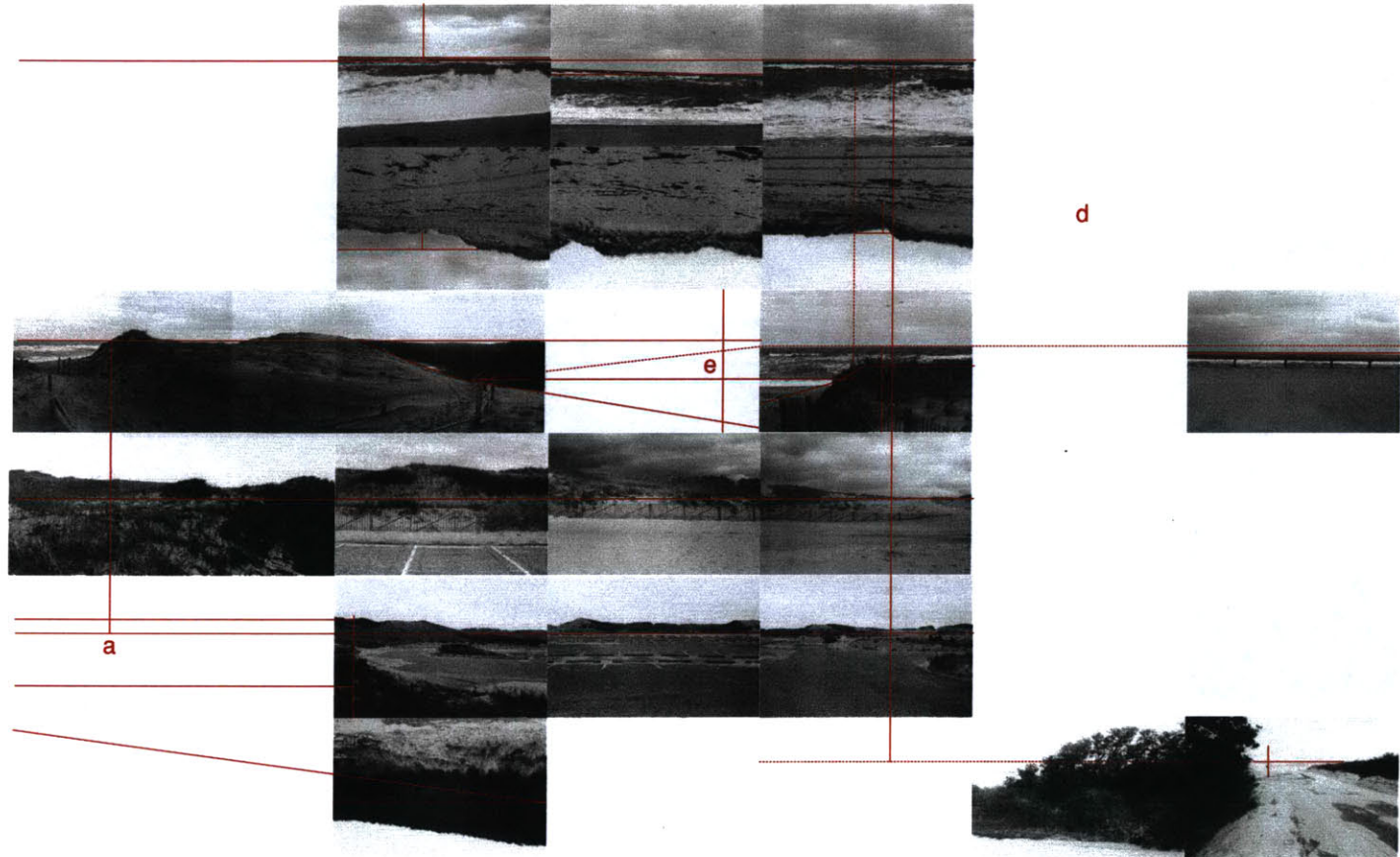


-  active sands
-  salt marsh, previous location of salt lake
-  successive positions of shoreline
-  +n operational models
-  points of photographic mapping

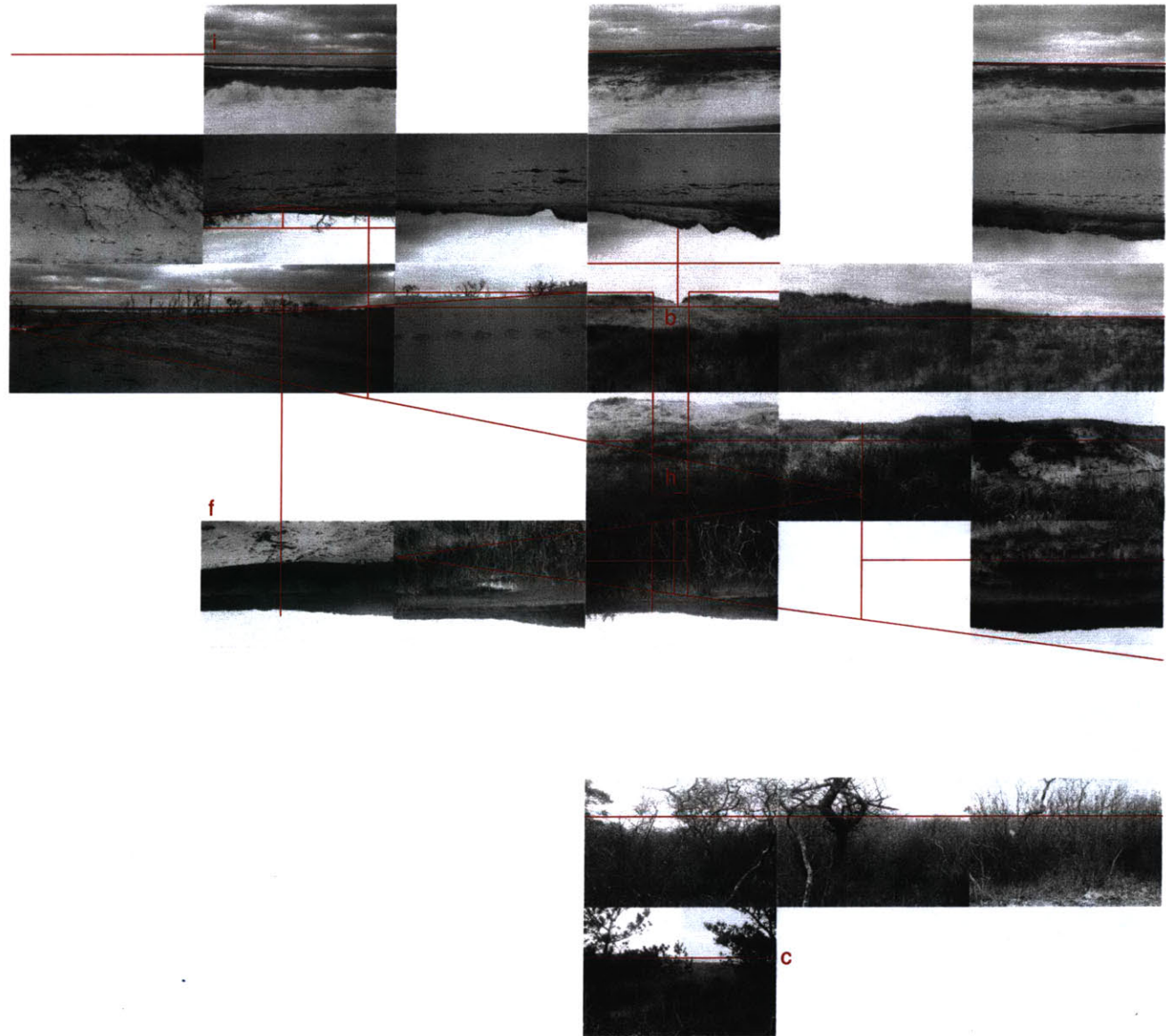
composite mapping



photographic construction
lines map the unfolding/registration of the horizon
line across the dune edge as one moves through
the landscape.



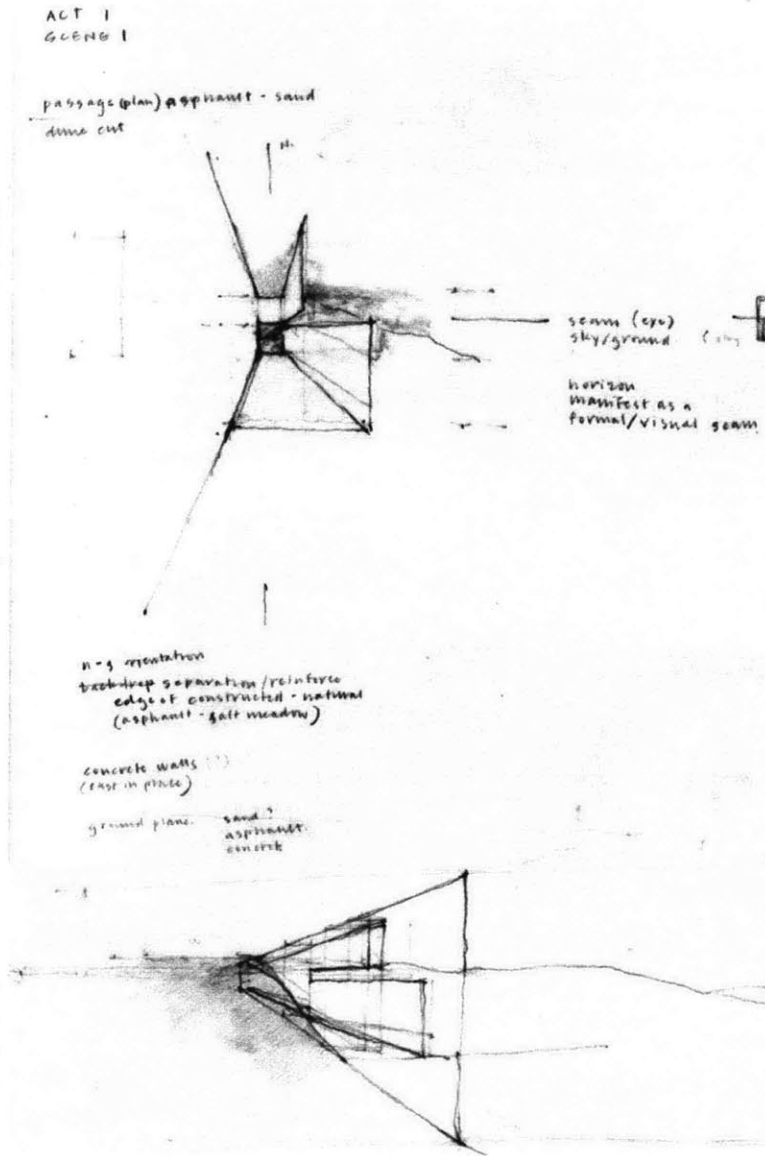
photographic mapping (detail)



photographic mapping (detail)

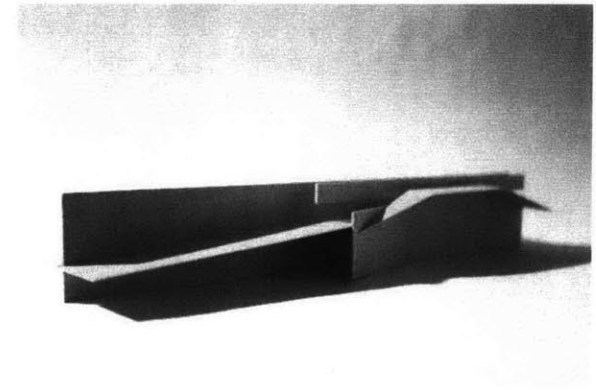
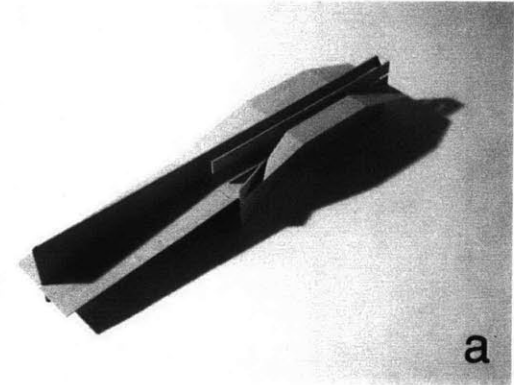
operational models

nine studies (tests) which explore the structuring of ones relationship to the landscape through the insertion (construction) of surfaces that simultaneously address ground conditions (moving/standing) and visual phenomena (looking). Each piece operates as an intensification of the topography and a deliberate extension or delay of the horizon line of the sea.



incisions

absolute surfaces constructed through and on the topography as a means of registering the horizon line on the meadow side of the dune (allowing the horizon to physically operate on the topography).



ACT I
SCENE III

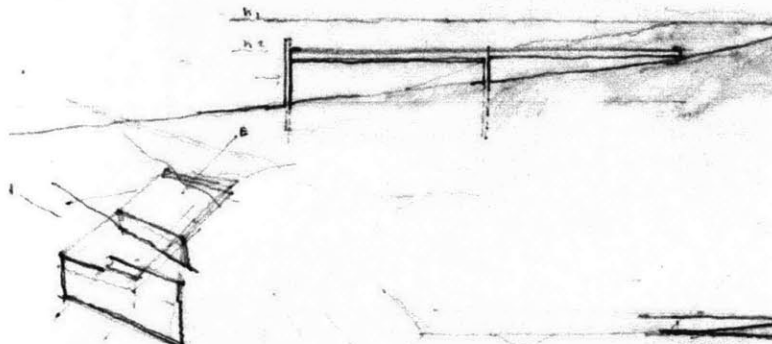
glass platform
(horizontal slice)

adjacent to
dune. (one
edge supported by/on
dune.
(glass doesn't rest directly on
sand but is separated by a concrete
support along its edge // to other
supports

support
wood +
concrete

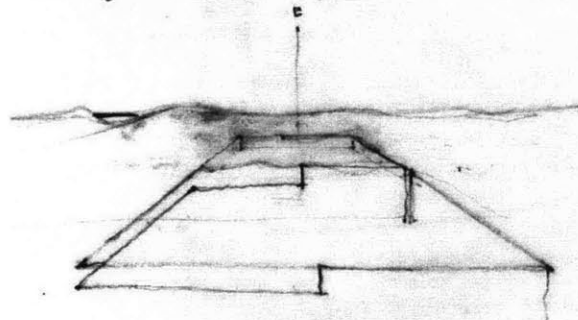
plane: structural glass sand/glass
(plastic)

E-W

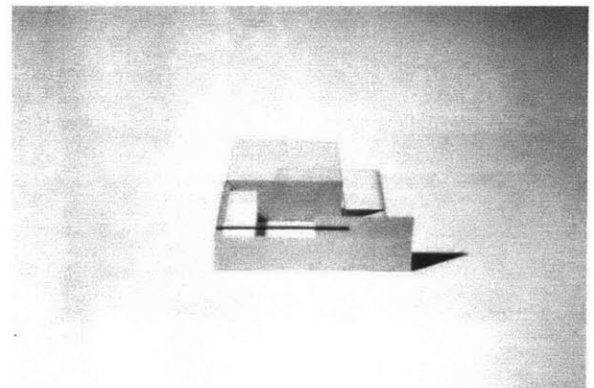
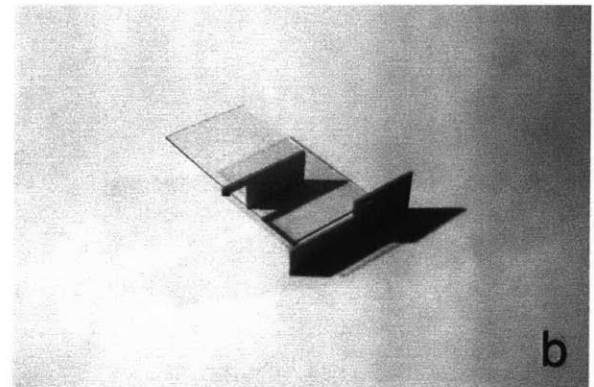


Sand moves over surface
dune reflected in surface (miniaturization
of landscape)

standing under glass → dune edge marks horizon (eye level)
standing on glass → glass marks horizon level



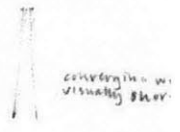
scam
man/hu
visual p
edge of



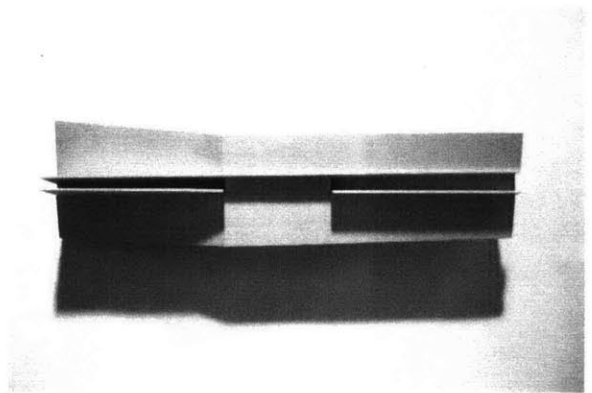
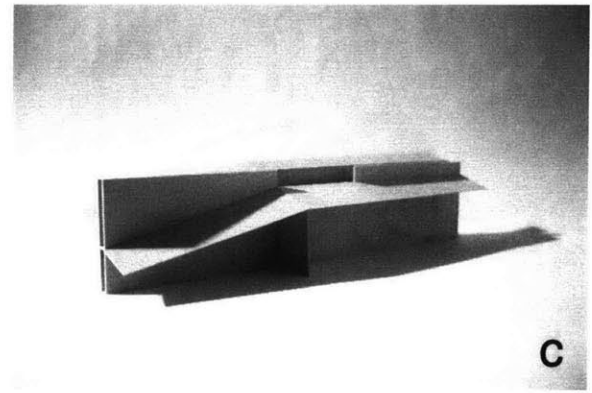
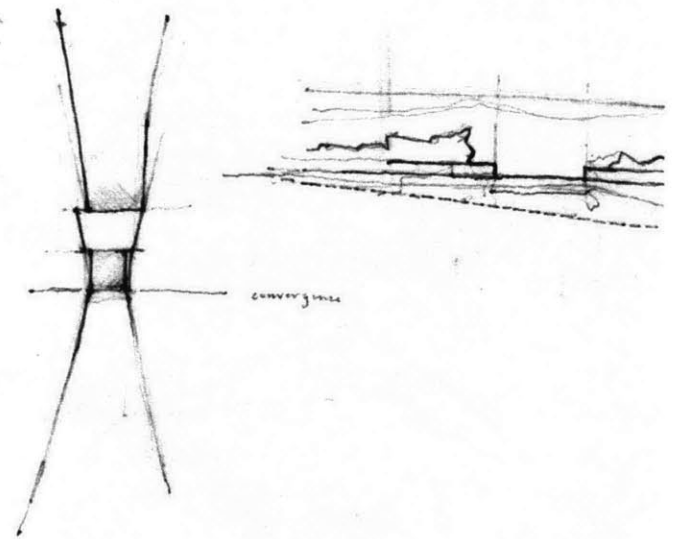
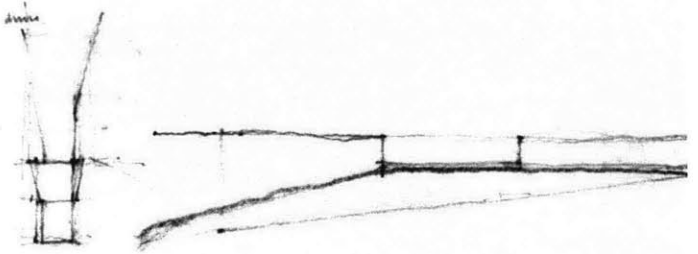
ACT I •
SCENE II

hill cut (ingland cut)
passage
(elevational)

walls cast in place concrete (below horizon)
concrete masonry above?
platform (wood) (material transformation)



10' to 12'



ACT 2

SCENE 1

VESSEL

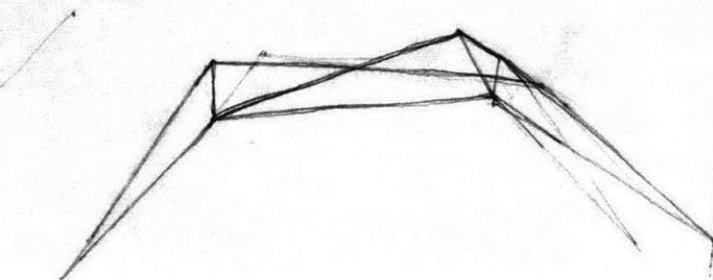
beach side of dune.

channeled wood
(boat channel)

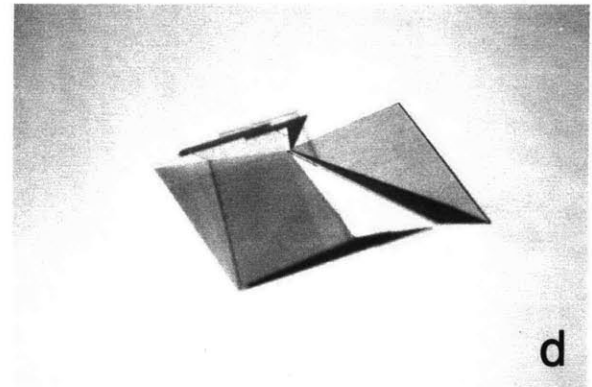
or

pneum. clutch
(thin plate)structural glass/
plastic roofstabilized on/by sand (rests against edge of dune between parking lot)
roof weights structure downsand intended to accumulate
around vessel

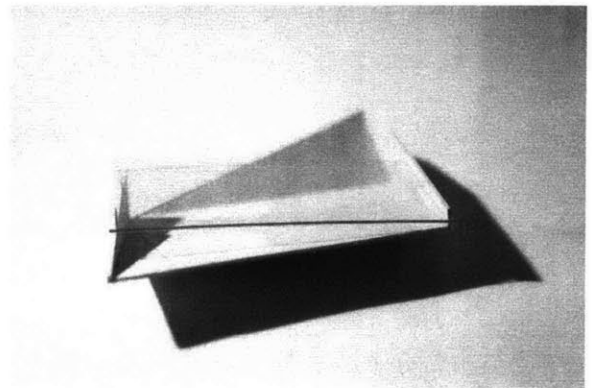
dune partially occupied.

mimics ground plane
front edge displaces dune*folds*

draped surfaces which rest on the dune, stabilizing the surface while registering/resisting the shifting sands. Each intensifies the act of crossing by folding together ground and sea as one moves from one side of the dune to the other, functioning as constructed seams along this mobile edge.



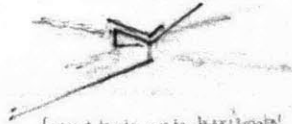
d



ACT 2
SCENE 2

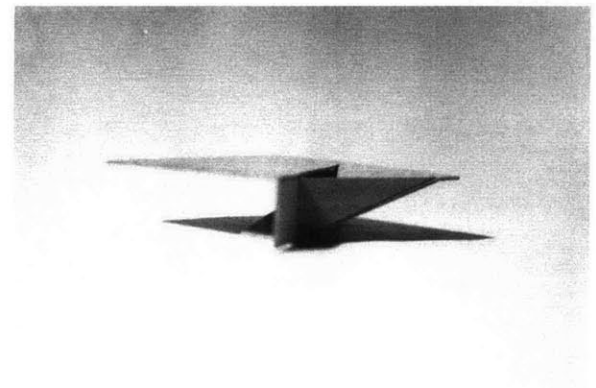
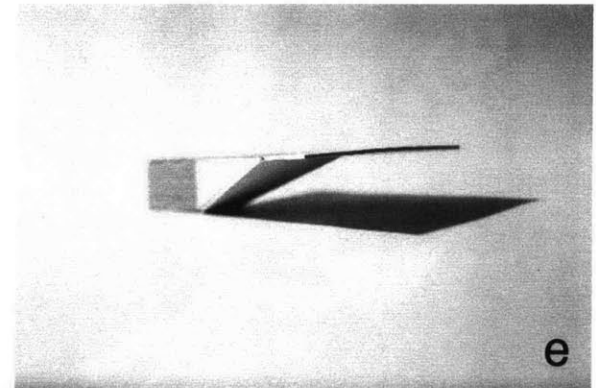
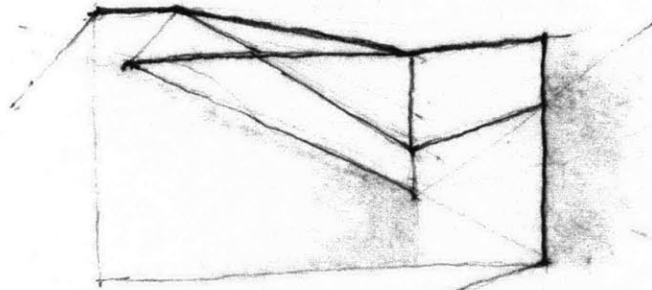
lookout
wooden surface perched on dune at
an existing crossing

diverts axial movement into the
bench



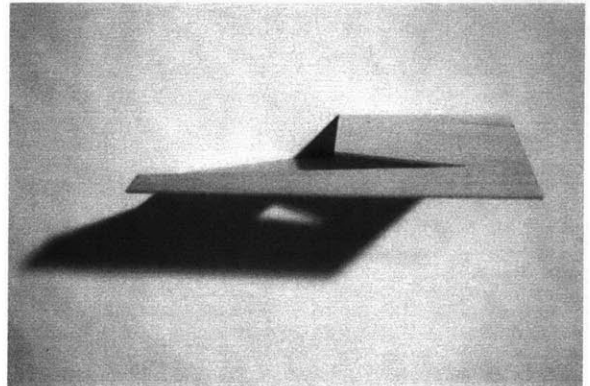
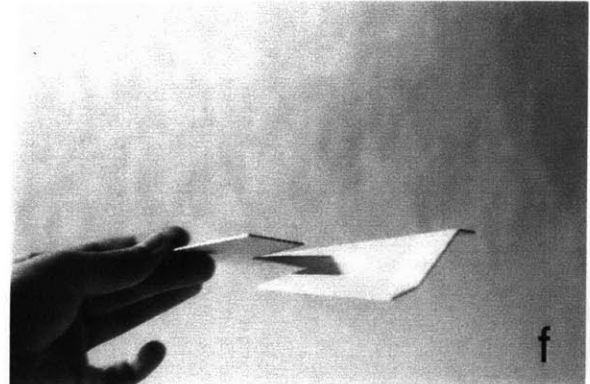
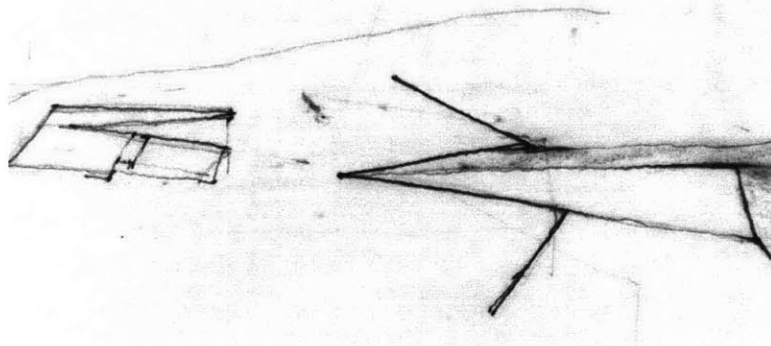
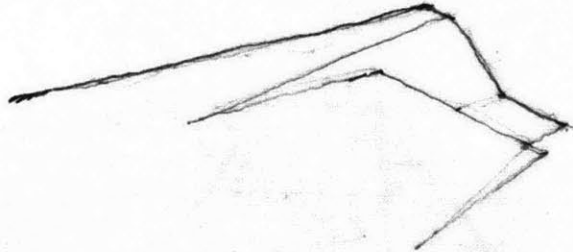
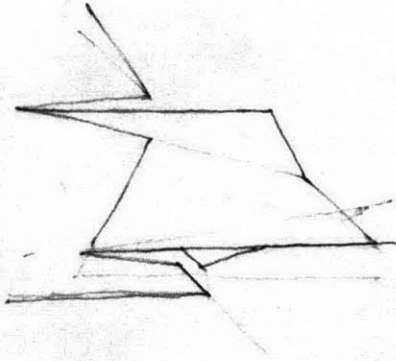
forced body onto horizontal
as a means of seeing
the ocean (horizon)

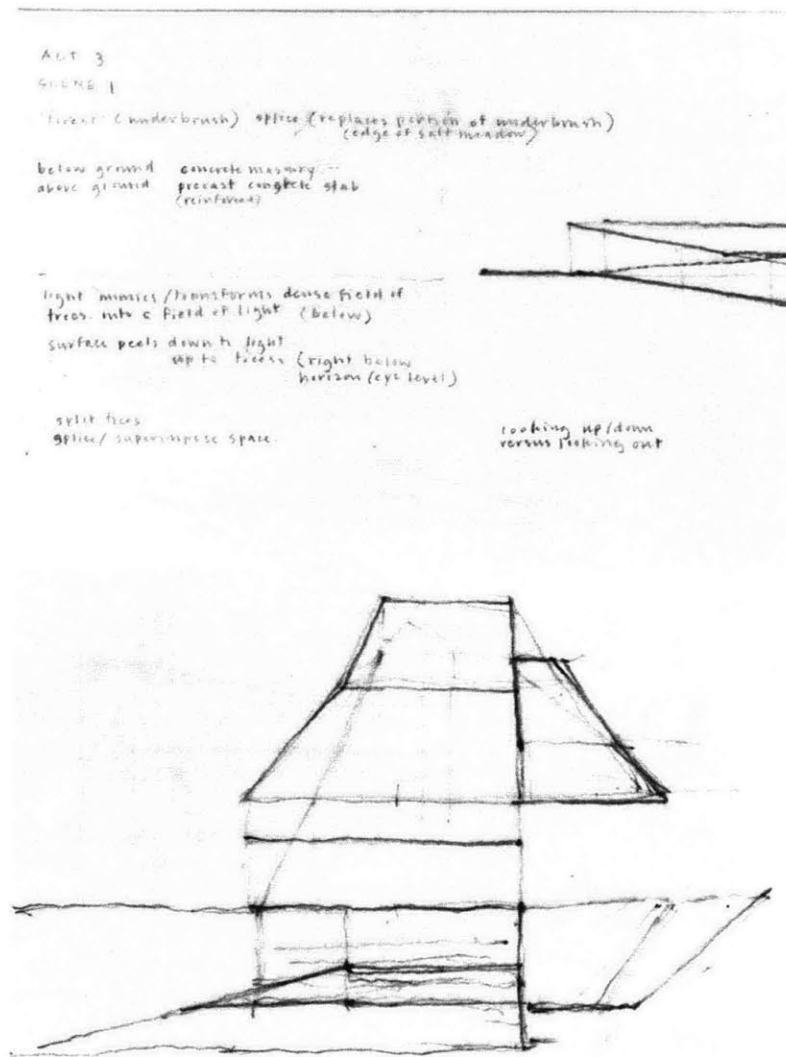
congregates folded / slipping along dune,
while reconfiguring vision.



ACT 2
SCENE 3.

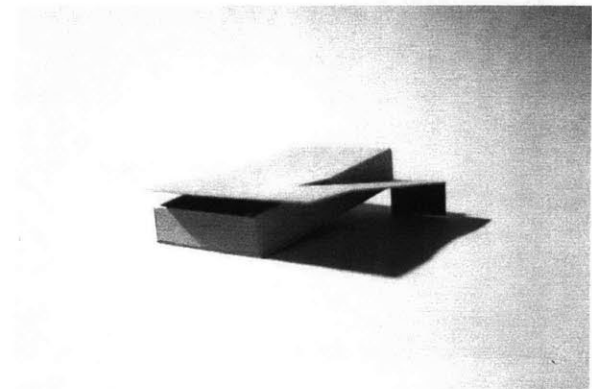
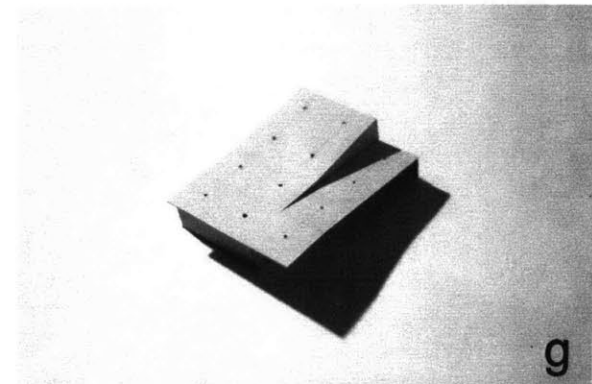
Edge between sand
and salt meadow
Exaggerate edge/difference.
supported/stabilized on sand
split between as a means of
measuring/spatializing
through displacement.
mimes relationship between
horizon and dune edge.





hybrids

absolute horizontal surfaces which unfold to meet the ground. Partially constructed and partially draped on the landscape, these surfaces set up an internal spatial dialogue between the undulating space of the topography and the horizontal extension of the ocean's surface.



ACT 3
Scene 2

wetland - dense edge (along path, forest)
 sandtrap
 visual bridge (alternatively sited in the wetland)



upper layer height of dense
 (looking out to sea)

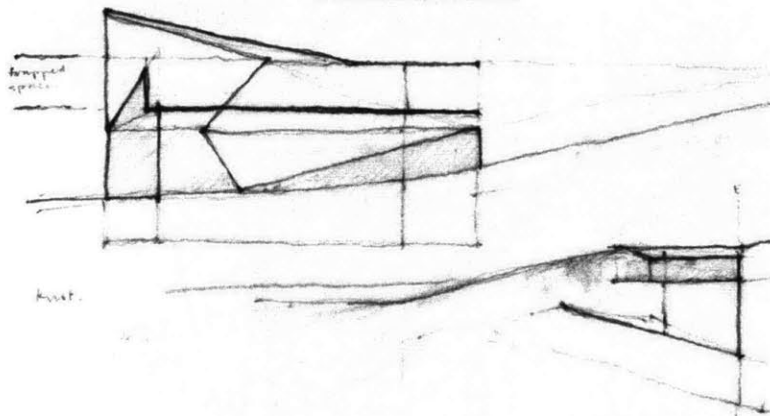
Perceptualizing horizon (sea level) as
 a visual plane that is torqued/twisted to
 meet the ground.

the bridge level (at which the eye can see the sea)
 between surfaces (stepped surfaces) play with the
 body (not only the visual) displacement of level.

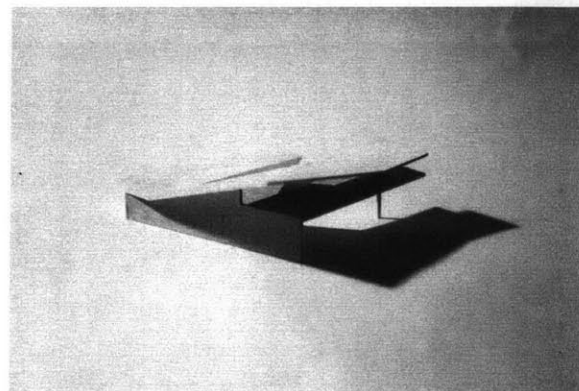
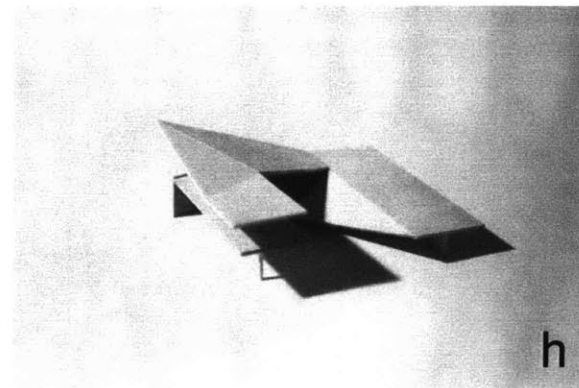
lower surface supports the upper one
 and traps space beneath it (floating between
 near and far)

gaze trapped in the courtyard as it is
 beams across landscape

from above, surface seems to
 mimic hills across meadow.



materials
 stone, wood, concrete



ACT 3
SCENE 3.

0.100
beach - ocean (tidal plane)

2. surfaces

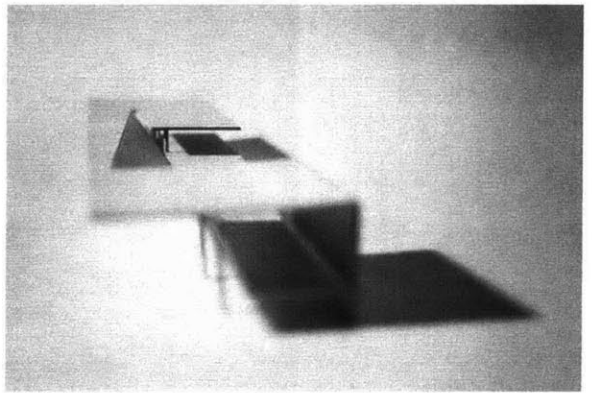
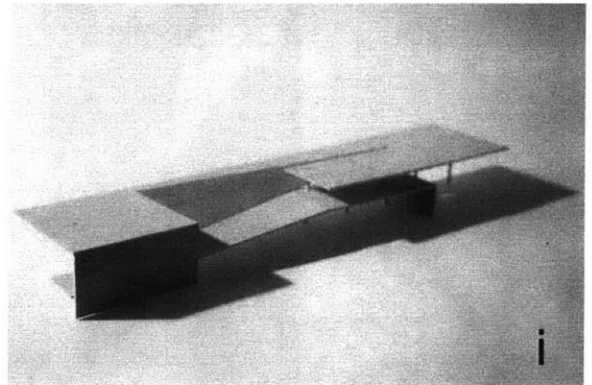
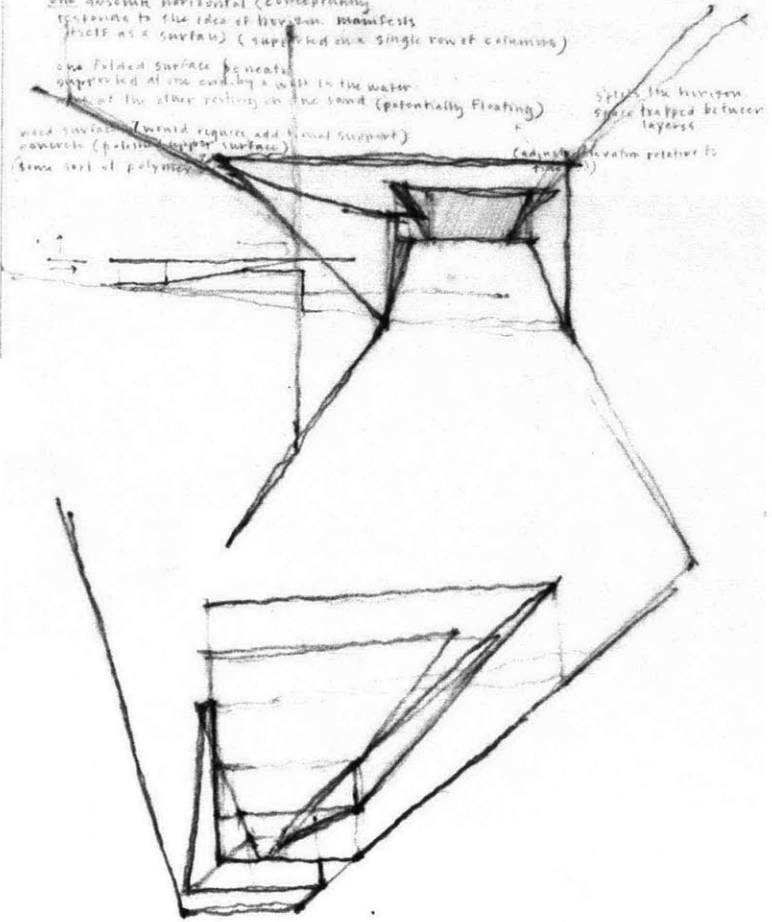
one absolute horizontal (conceptually
 relative to the idea of horizon. Manifests
 itself as a surface) (supported on a single row of columns)

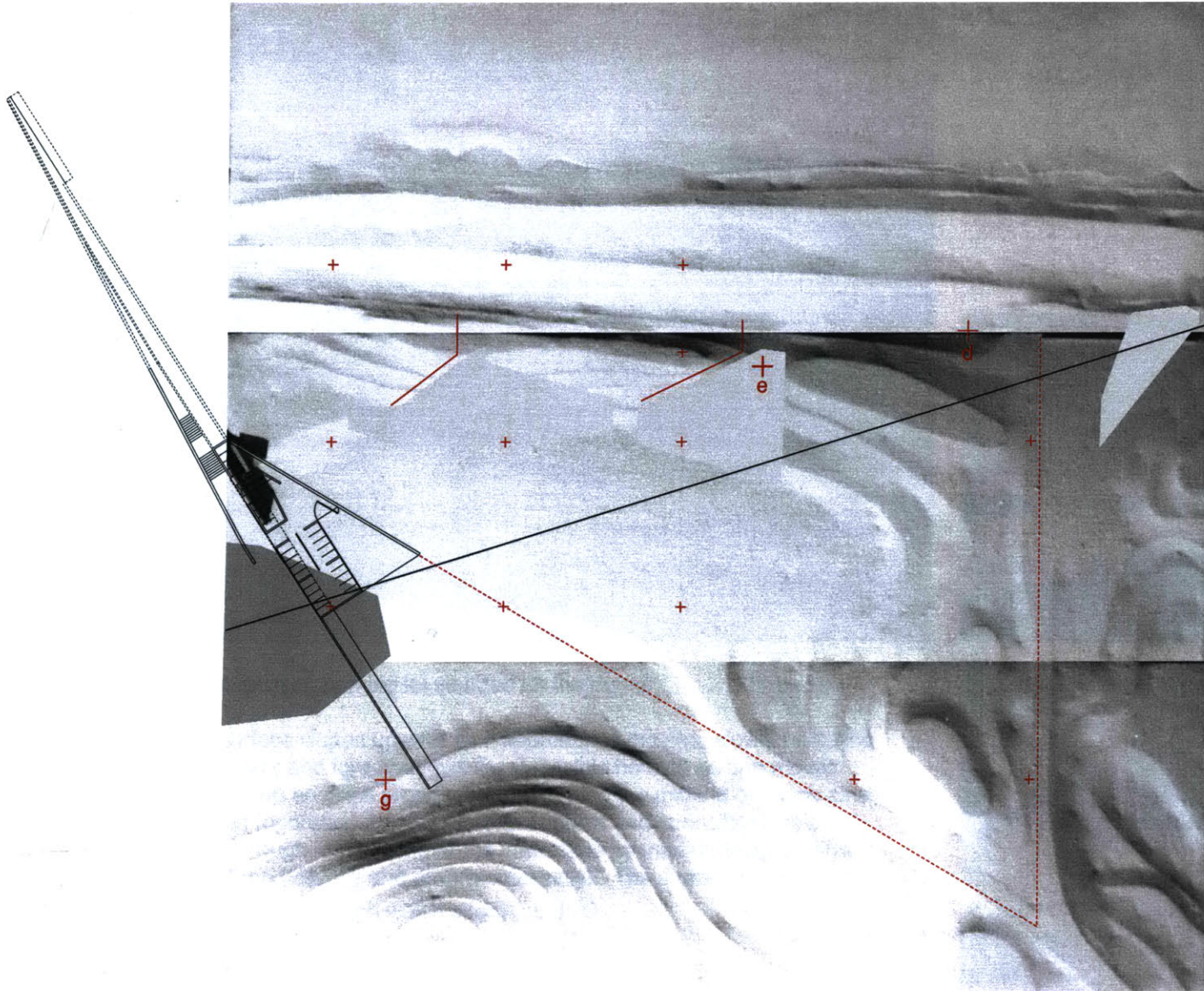
one tilted surface beneath
 supported at one end by a wall in the water
 and at the other resting on the sand (potentially floating)

wood surface (would require additional support)

concrete (potentially upper surface) (adjust elevation relative to
 some sort of polymer)

system the horizontal
 space trapped between
 layers





crossing

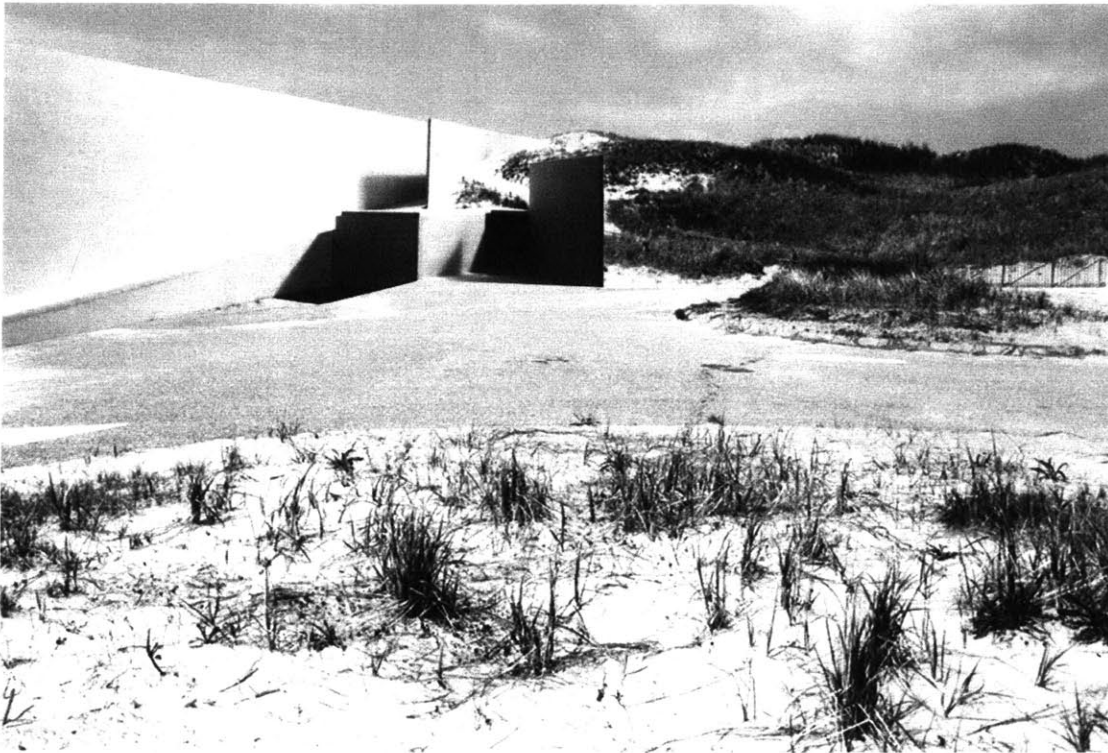
horizon theatre



horizon theater : an existing parking lot situated on the dunes

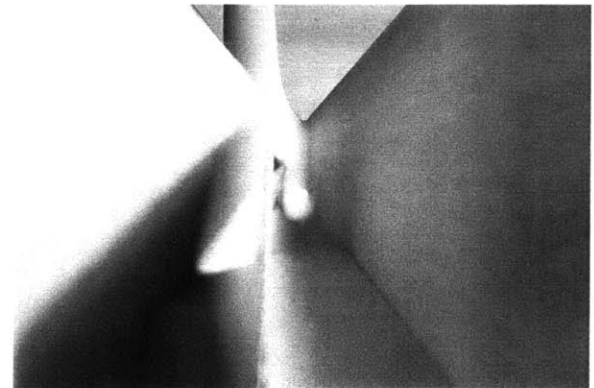
The absolute horizontal surface slopes upward as it approaches the sea, slowly revealing the horizon. A railing registers and fore-shadows the (in)visible horizon as one moves toward the beach. This sets up an initial proposition concerning the making of space as a minimal intervention within (operation on) the site that enables and intensifies one's understanding of moving through and looking at the landscape by manipulating/qualifying the relationship to the horizon (visually and programmatically). The surface establishes the first mark in a relational field through which si(gh)te unfolds.

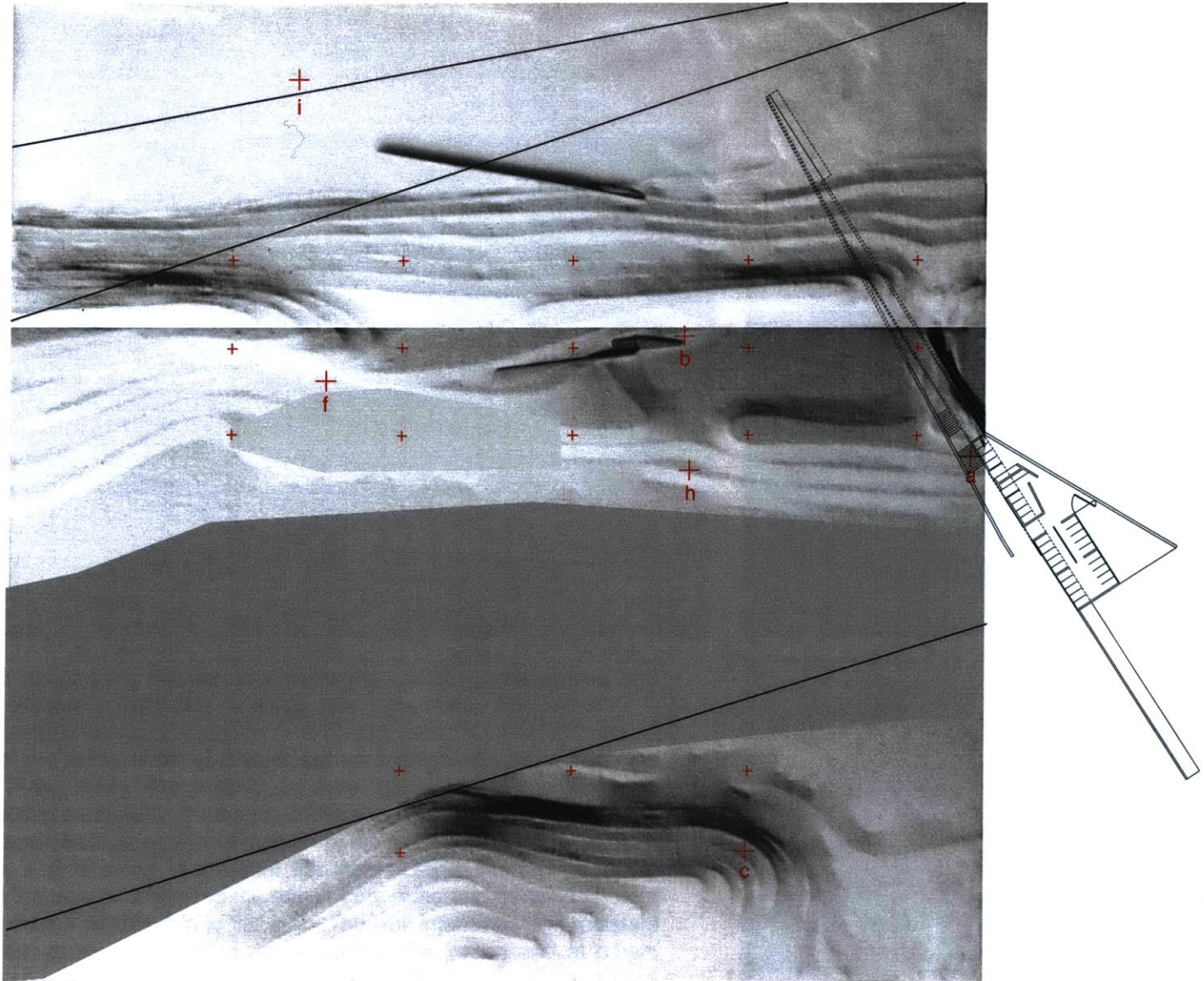




crossing: a constructed passage sited at the western edge of a second parking lot behind the dunes

Two converging walls cut through the dune, each unfolding to form two paths, one which leads directly to the beach, and another which passes through showers and changing facilities. This vertical cut separates the constructed surface of the parking lot from the marsh, and marks the shift from morning to afternoon through the shadow on its surface. The wall sets up a primary horizontal datum line in the landscape, extending the line of the horizon across the edge of the dune. From within, however, it visually delays one's vision of the sea until the point of arrival on the beach, an interruption, a cut, between one side and the other.





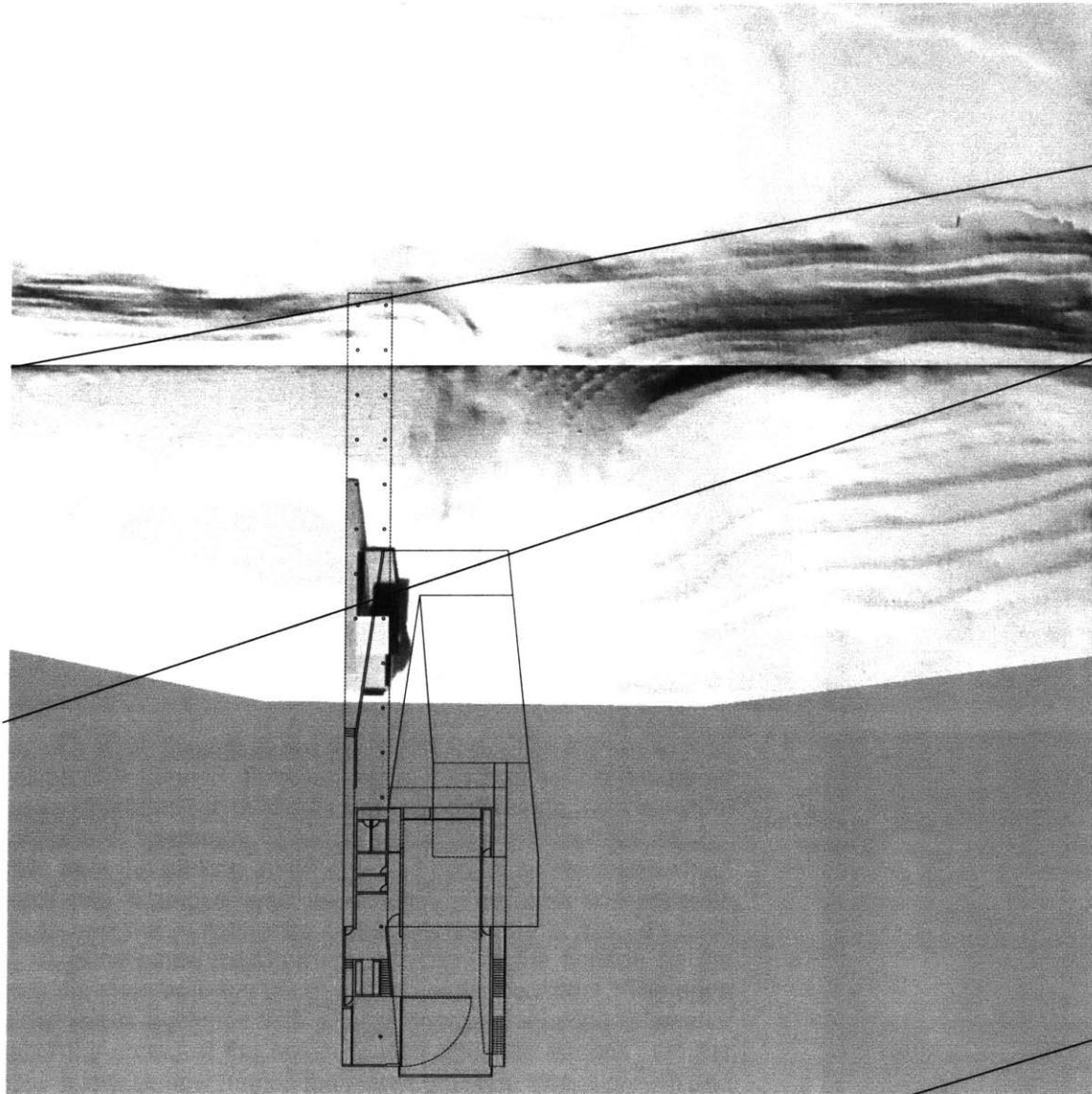
lines of measure



lines of measure: proceeding through or around the crossing, one arrives at a series of retaining walls situated in the sands on either side of the dune.

On the meadow edge of the dune, a set of 2 walls set up a diagonal path through the dunes to the ocean. These walls, one resting on more stable sands and the other constructed in a more active sand field, support a surface which allows the inhabitation of the dunes as a room and establish a point of stability in the shifting sand. On the other side of the dune a sea wall situated in the tidal flat introduces a interruption in the otherwise flat surface of the beach, reiterating the edge of the dune and creating another stratification that structures the relationship to the sea. The wall intensifies and registers the operations of the tide, at times extending the surface of the beach and at others creating tidal pools--reaching toward or reflecting the horizon.





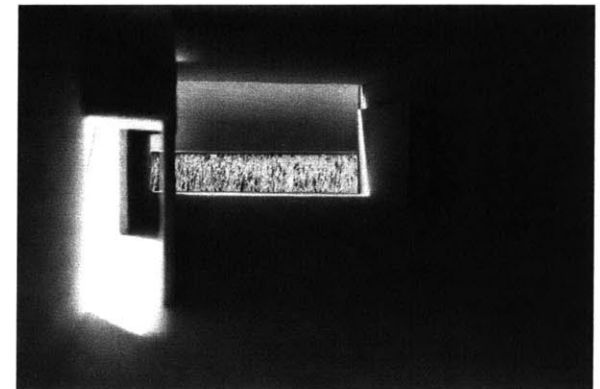
room

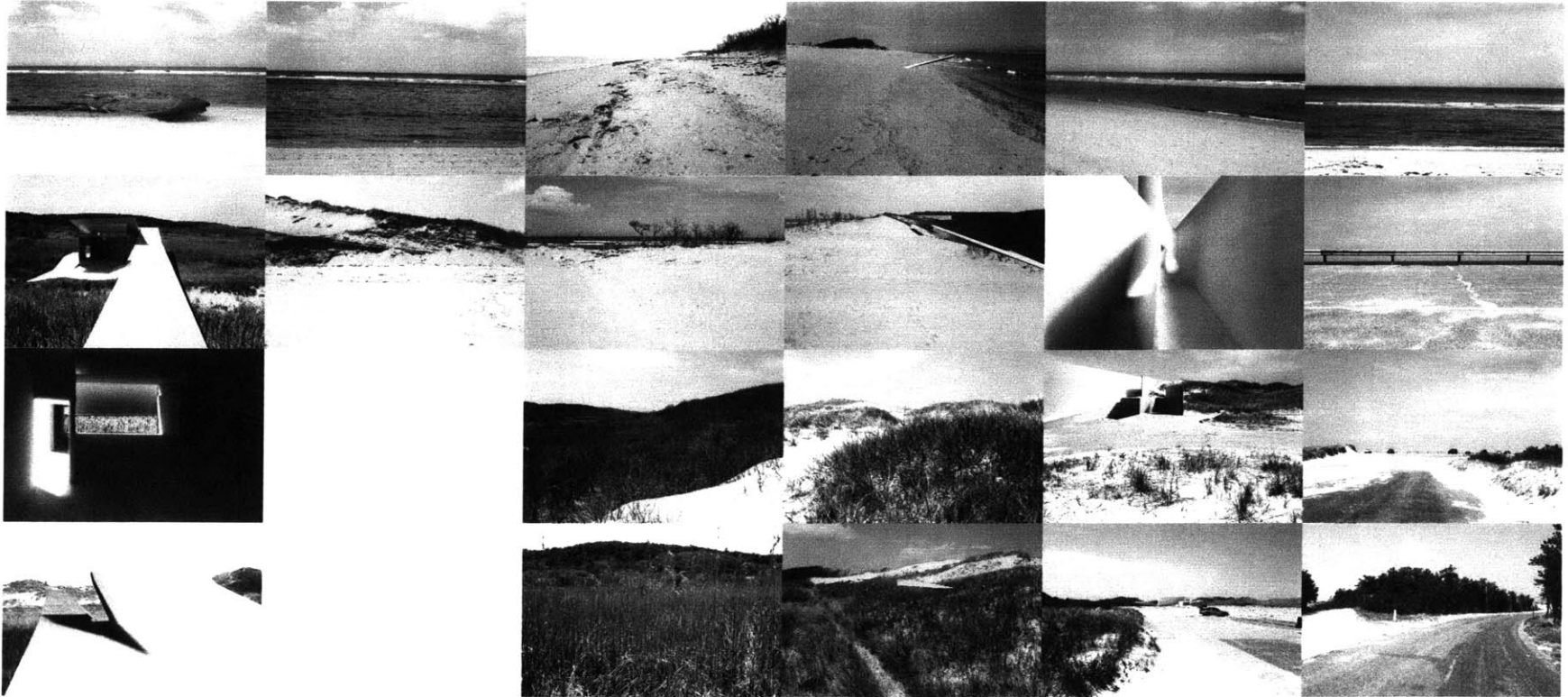


ROOM: on the meadow edge of the dune.



A platform peels off the top of a dune, floating above the landscape, while a lower surface drapes over the shallow slope of the dune. Between these, 2 vertical walls structure an interior and an exterior room, intended for public and private gatherings, with adjacent spaces that house a caretaker's apartment, a visitor's loft, and a rehearsal space. Although the room is visible from the parking lot on arrival, it cannot be reached without first moving onto the beach and around a large sand dune. The room consequently addresses the removal from and the transference of the phenomena of the sea back across the dune's edge. A glass plane captures the reflection of the horizon on the building as one moves from the dune onto the upper surface of the construct. The edge of the room which faces the sea is equipped with a large door and a series of smaller operable panels that enable the sound of the ocean to filter into the interior. On the opposite edge of the space, a low window frames the marsh grasses, whose growth and response to the wind evoke the changing horizon and the motion of the waves.





appendix
qualifying horizons

Site-ing the Eye:
the cinematic landscape of Il Grido

When someone quoted to Edgar Degas Henri Frederic Amiel's romantic phrase "A landscape is a state of mind" the French painter retorted "No it's not. It's a state of eye!"¹

The relationship between landscapes and eyes, according to Degas, is a privileged one, for the landscape conditions (constructs) a certain state of vision (eye) and, in turn, a specific state of body (I). The vast space the landscape, as a site, shifts the conception of sight from one concerned with objects, with the eye possessing tactile things, to one which privileges a visual field (the scene) and therefore heightens the constructive position of the eye (the seen). Ortega Y Gasset described this shift in vision from object to field as a move from proximate vision to distant vision. In proximate vision, the eye is focused on a center, on objects to be consumed and internalized. Distant vision, however, constructs a "state of eye" in which the lines of sight do not possess but are dispersed, in which the eye traverses space.

In distant vision we do not fix the gaze on any point, but rather attempt to embrace the whole field, including its boundaries. For this reason, we avoid focusing the eyes as much as possible. And then we are surprised to find that the object just perceived—our entire visual field—is concave. If we are in a house the concavity is bordered by the walls, the form of a hemisphere viewed from within. But where does the concavity begin? There is no possibility of doubt: it begins at our eyes themselves.

The result is that what we see at a distance is hollow space as such. The content of perception is not strictly the surface in which the hollow space terminates, but rather the whole hollow space itself, from the eyeball to the wall or the horizon.

This fact obliges us to recognize the following paradox: the object of sight is not farther off in distant than in proximate vision, but on the contrary is nearer, since it begins at our cornea. In pure distant vision, our attention, instead of being directed farther away, has drawn back to the absolutely proximate, and the eye beam, instead of striking the

¹ Paul Virilio, *Open Sky* (New York, Verso, 1997) p. 41.

convexity of a solid body and staying fixed on it, glides into a hollow.¹

This is a spatially complex model of vision, for the distant and the near, inside and out collapse.² The eye no longer sets up a dialectic (mediation) between the interior space of the mind's eye and the world of objects, but rather occupies and moves through the space constructed by the interaction of this eye with its object (scene). The eye constructs and moves through space, repositioning sight not only from object to subject, but from static (passive) to trajectory (active).³

Landscapes are privileged sites for this trajectory vision. "With the decline in volumes and in the expanse of landscapes, reality becomes sequential and cinematic unfolding and

¹ Ortega Y Gasset, "On Point of View in the Arts," *Partisan Review*, XVI (August 1949) pp. 825-826.

² Jonathan Crary discusses this shift in vision that occurred in the nineteenth century from the camera obscura model of perception, where the a passive "eye" is positioned between the object of vision and a distinctly interior space (of the mind), to a model of subjective vision that recognized the body as a visual producer, one in which the eye/I was active in the construction of its site, its world. This shift fundamentally repositions the viewer and vision not as something between or mediating, but as something which connects and collapses, as well as an act which creates rather than receives. "Once the objects of vision are coextensive with one's own body, vision becomes dislocated and de-positioned onto a single immanent plane. The bipolar setup [between inner and outer] vanishes." Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994) p. 28.

³ The term trajectory vision is borrowed from Paul Virilio, who uses it to describe a state not only of vision, but of being in the world which is outside of the objective-subjective model. "Between the subjective and the objective it seems we have not room for the 'trajectory', that being of movement from here to there, from one to the other, without which we will never achieve a profound understanding of the various regimes of perception of the world that have succeeded each other throughout the ages...Historically, we thus find ourselves faced with a sort of great divide in knowing how to be in the world: on the one hand, there is the original nomad for whom the journey, the being's trajectory, are dominant. On the other, there is the sedentary man for whom subject and object prevail, movement towards the immovable, the inert, characterizing the sedentary urban 'civilian' in contrast to the 'warrior' nomad." Virilio, pp. 24-25.

finally gets the jump on whatever is static and on the strength of materials.”¹ It is in the vastness of the landscape that the eye re-vises reality not as solid and determined objects, but as a space which is in constant flux relative to its position, one in which subject and object collapse and in which vision becomes mobile.

It is precisely this use of landscape as a ground to investigate the repositioning (shifting) of the eye/I relative to the scene/seen that Michelangelo Antonioni explores, both philosophically and compositionally, in *Il Grido*. The film maps the landscape through Aldo, a refinery worker who, after being rejected by his fiancée Irma, leaves town with his daughter Rosina to travel the Po river valley in search of a new place. He is forced into a state of traversing, and the landscape operates as a visual ground for exploring this trajectory of eye through a distant vision which collapses eye and si(gh)te and continually drives the body into motion.



One of the first scenes of the film visually depicts his depositioning and collapse with the space of the landscape. Aldo is working in the refinery tower when Irma arrives to deliver his lunch. He descends the tower to meet her, but she quickly runs away. As he leaves the refinery to look for her, a long shot frames him in front of the (distant) tower, a reminder of his previous position above the ground. He moves across the landscape, the camera tracking his movement. The refinery tower disappears from the frame to be replaced by a road. When Aldo arrives at this road the camera ceases to track as he continues to move (disappear) into the background. The scene maps a physical repositioning of his body from a point above the landscape (a static point above) to the road (a moving body within); Aldo shifts from being a spectator to being a voyager.



The film later cuts to another long shot of figures silhouetted (flattened) against the horizon. One of these figures moves toward the camera, descending what appears to be a slight slope in the land. He disappears into the fog as he moves through the landscape, reappearing (emerging) in the middle ground of the frame. We now recognize the figure as Aldo. He is no longer sited on the horizon but is framed against the ground, having shifted from the top to the bottom of the frame, from deep to shallow space. He continues to move parallel to the frame, the camera tracking left to reveal a house which he then enters. This sequence continues to map Aldo's changing position within the landscape, from being above the surface of the landscape

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26-27.

in the refinery tower, to being on the road (a cinematic image flattened against the horizon), and finally to a position against the surface of the ground itself. The sequence maps not only a shift from static point to a mobile line, but a compositional collapse of his body against the landscape.

But this changed physical condition is not just a mapping of a body within a topography, but corresponds to (foreshadows) a changed psychological position, from one of stability to one of uncertainty and search. When Irma reveals her desire to leave Aldo, his estrangement forces him (mentally) into a position of flux, displacing him into the landscape to search for a new place (position). The visual repositioning of his eye(1) in the landscape thus operates as an index to understanding his own (psychological) state of being-in-the-world.

Now imagine a linked series of breakings' apart that take us out of ourselves, that don't even leave 'ourselves' the time to re-form behind them, but rather throw us beyond them, into the dry dust of the world, onto the rough earth, among things; imagine us thus thrown back out, stranded by our very nature in a stubborn, hostile, indifferent world...This is all it takes to finish with the cozy philosophy of immanence in which everything happens by arrangement, by protoplasmic exchanges, by a tepid cellular chemistry. The philosophy of transcendence throws us onto the open road, in the midst of dangers, in a blinding light. To be, says Heidegger, is to be in the world. Understand this "being-in" as a movement....We don't find ourselves in some retreat, but on the road...¹

Aldo is both literally and figuratively located "on the road." His 1 is located narratively between a condition of traversing (searching) and a desire for stasis (place). The film maps this paradoxical state through his changing position within in and vision of the landscape, which fluctuates between horizon (sky) and ground, the fixed point and the moving line.

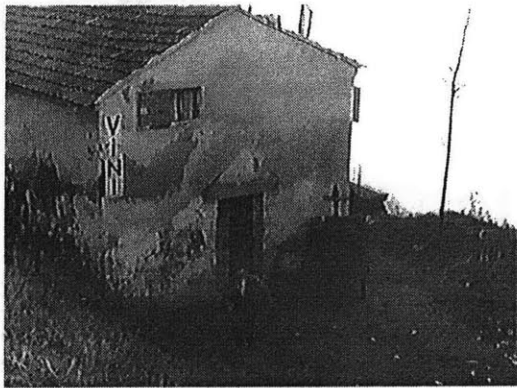
Antonioni is thus not strictly concerned with the romantic or nostalgic conception of the landscape as a picturesque sight, but rather as a spatial ground through which to explore the (changing) condition of the modern eye(1), that is, as a ground which structures physical and

¹ Jean Paul Sartre, "Intentionality," in *Zone 6: Incorporations* (New York: Zone Books, 1992) p. 389.

psychological relationships and as a topography through which to map the deposition of the eye though its collapse with the scene. The Po valley presents a ground of subtle topographic shifts between higher and lower surfaces. Roads are situated on higher ground that slopes away at either side to a lower plane of fields with scattered houses. This edge positions the body/camera either on or below the horizon and juxtaposes horizontal vision (out to a distant horizon) with locating the body/camera in a state of looking up or looking down. This is evident in the previous sequence when the camera, sitting in the lower plane of the landscape, records Aldo's changed position from being-on (the horizon) to being-against (the ground) as he moves through the landscape. The body and the frame oscillate from deep to shallow space in this perpetual movement from horizon to ground.

This shifting of position relative to the ground plane recurs throughout the film, and we again see it when Aldo is leaving his mother's house. After seeking advice about his situation with Irma, he ascends the slope from the house onto the road (a reversal of the previous scene). The camera, positioned on the road above, frames his figure against the (lower) ground. As Aldo climbs this slope, the camera tracks left to follow his movement, revealing the road and the deep space of the horizon. We are no longer looking down, but looking out. The space of the frame, in this one tracking shot, has moved from shallow to deep space. Aldo stops before he reaches the road, staring into space. A static camera frames Aldo between the slope and the road, his eye aligned with the line of the horizon.

Paul Virilio, in *Open Sky*, has described the horizon as a kind of horizontal gravitational force pulling the eye into the distance. "Rather as light from distant stars is deflected by an imposing mass, favoring the illusion of gravitational optics, our perception of depth might well be a kind of visual plunge, comparable to the fall of bodies in the law of universal gravitation."¹ Perception becomes a free fall into space, distancing and dislocating the eye and pulling the I into motion. By aligning the eye with the horizon, distance is immediately attached to the eye and the far comes to prevail over the near as a means of escape. Aldo's distant vision dislocates the body into space, a free fall driven both by the infinite horizon and his own malaise. It is this distancing of the eye in deep space (actually and mentally) which compels the I into a state of motion. The whole film might be consequently be described as a mapping of this fall into the space of the landscape through an eye(I) which is perpetually distanced in an attempt to reposition himself



Aldo

¹ Virilio, p. 29.

Thus the horizon does not just demarcate being above or below (on or in) but also being here or there; Aldo is not only moving from the ground to the road, but from a state of being here to one of being (mentally) elsewhere. His body is neither located on the road nor below in the field, but is situated between these two spaces, gazing on the horizon. Above and below, the distant and the near all collapse into a single space around this precariously positioned eye.

Rejected by Irma and pulled by this distant vision, Aldo begins to move through the landscape along the Po river with Rosina. They first travel to stay with Elvia, Aldo's previous girlfriend. Again, when he arrives, he descends from the road into the house, moving from horizon to ground. While he attempts to reposition himself by returning to a previous relationship, to a secure position within a vast uncertain space, he is still driven toward separation (distance), toward motion. At one point, he withdraws from Rosina and Elvia to be alone along the banks of the river. A long shot down the river frames a warehouse at the river's edge. Aldo is walking toward the structure, his back to the camera. A reverse (long) shot frames Elvia and Rosina walking toward the camera (toward Aldo). Rosina leaves Elvia's side, running toward Aldo and disappearing from the frame. Elvia stops walking, now positioned in middle depth, her eye aligned with the horizon. As she turns to walk away, the film cuts to a deeper shot of Aldo leaning against the door frame of the warehouse, looking out onto the river. His eye is (initially) aligned with the horizon and, in the distance, we see Elvia walking away. The horizon occupies a significant role in both connecting eyes (compositionally) and in creating the distant vision that separates them. That is, the landscape is qualified by mental space, the horizon assuming different meanings (roles) relative to each eye. Clearly the horizon for Elvia operates not as a distancing but as a means of connecting her (literally) to Aldo. But this deep space of the horizon is paradoxical, for while it connects them compositionally, it also divides them. Aldo's distant vision is not fixed on Elvia but is dispersed into the deep space of the landscape, a space which mirrors his own emptiness. While he desires stability, which he seeks not only geographically, but in women, he is pulled by his own restlessness.

The landscape consequently becomes a paradoxical ground in which Aldo's body is constantly at the threshold between opposing psychological and spatial conditions (far-near, depth-surface, motion-rest). This fluctuating ground of the landscape is critical in exploring the relationship between Rosina and Aldo as they continue to traverse the landscape after leaving Elvia. The movement and position of each in the space of the landscape articulates the differences

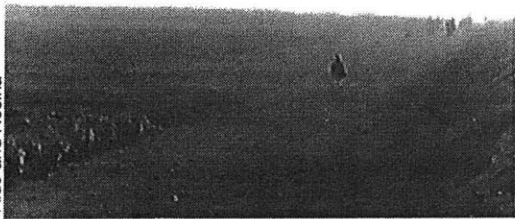


Aldo and Elvia



between them. In one scene, Rosina runs from her father, who has embarrassed her in front of a group of schoolchildren. The camera is located at the edge of a road, low to the ground, and we see Rosina's solitary figure against the sky (on the horizon) in medium-long shot, moving across the frame. Aldo appears at the edge of the frame and the camera begins to track his movement. Rosina glances back and runs out of the frame. The film then cuts to a long shot looking down the road. The camera is now situated slightly higher, and we see Rosina not against the sky, but against the surface of the road. She is still running, not across the frame, but toward the distant horizon. She stops at the edge of the road and runs down the slope to a lower field; the camera tracks slightly to keep her in frame (she almost disappears from the left edge of the frame). Rosina withdraws into (hides in) the space of the landscape; the tone of her coat blends perfectly with that of the ground, causing her to visually disappear into its surface. Through the changing camera positions (the changing position of the horizon line in the frame) and her changing relationship to the topography, Rosina is absorbed into the ground. This is an escape not only from Aldo, but from the horizon. It is an act both of her body and of the frame which negates depth by asserting (withdrawing into) surface, a shift from the distant to the immediate.

Aldo and Rosina



This paradoxical construction between flatness and depth, ground and sky continues once Aldo catches up with Rosina in the field. A medium shot frames Aldo kneeling next to Rosina, the horizon high in the frame and the two positioned against the ground. Rosina points to a city barely visible on the horizon and asks her father if they will be traveling there, her gesture to the horizon reinforcing the gravitational pull of this deep space. Aldo stands, and the camera tracks his motion. He is now positioned above the horizon, Rosina below; the frame locates each in a separate space of the landscape, one shallow and one deep. He tells Rosina that cities are too expensive and that they will find another place.

But place, as a definitive space, no longer exists for Aldo. Place in this landscape is not a destination (a static point) but merely a pause in his perpetual motion, a moment in an ever dispersed sight of undifferentiated space. The city is a destination but his distant vision (trajectival sight) has no such object. The space of this flat, vast landscape is fundamentally different from that of the city not only physically, but mentally, for place is no longer mathematically quantifiable but instead has become temporal. "We just have to accept it," as Einstein said, "there is no fixed point in space." There is only the inertia of the real moment which gives shape to the living present - a psychological timespan without which no

apprehension of the world would exist, no worldly landscape."¹ The landscape is the spatial manifestation of the state of non-fixity and this new understanding of place.

Rosina and Aldo next stay with Virginia, a woman they meet while Aldo is looking for work. She owns a petrol station, and it is this place which comes to signify the changed understanding of space that accompanies distant vision and this mobile eye(1) in the landscape. The gas station is not a(final) destination, but a (momentary) stoppage (pause) of motion. And even though it is situated at a (static) point within the landscape, it is dependent on motion and conditioned by travel. This space is qualified by another. We see this when a driver stops with a map to ask directions to Bologna and a distant space is quite literally traversed from this 'stop' in the landscape (this time it is not the distant space of the horizon, but that opened up to the mind's eye by the map). This is the nature of space for the trajective eye.

This new mode of being-in-the-world is Aldo's predicament, lived out in his fluctuating position within the landscape and cinematically constructed through his position relative the horizon and to the ground. Even in states of pause, he is distanced, elsewhere and in motion. The landscape operates as a ground for exploring the difference between bodies that results from the physical and psychological positioning of eye relative to space, as evident both in his relationship with Elvia and with Rosina, and lastly with Andreina. Aldo meets Andreina after sending Rosina home to live with Irma, as he continues to look for work. Again the landscape functions as a ground for exploring the difference and distancing between the two. In one sequence, Andreina had gone to look for Aldo. She finds him in a poor village and the two move out into the landscape together. A long shot of a foggy landscape establishes the si(gh)te, the horizon cutting the frame at midpoint. Andreina enters the middle ground from right, followed by Aldo, both figures framed below the horizon. They stop in the center of the frame, their backs turned away from the camera. The film cuts to a reverse medium shot of the two, revealing the Po river behind them; the horizon line now appears in the upper portion of the frame. Aldo begins reminiscing about Ferrara (another place) and the first time he met Irma (another woman, another time), and as he does so, he moves forward such that his eye is again aligned with the horizon. The literal distant vision of the horizon is collapsed with a mental distancing (of another). He has separated himself physically (through his position



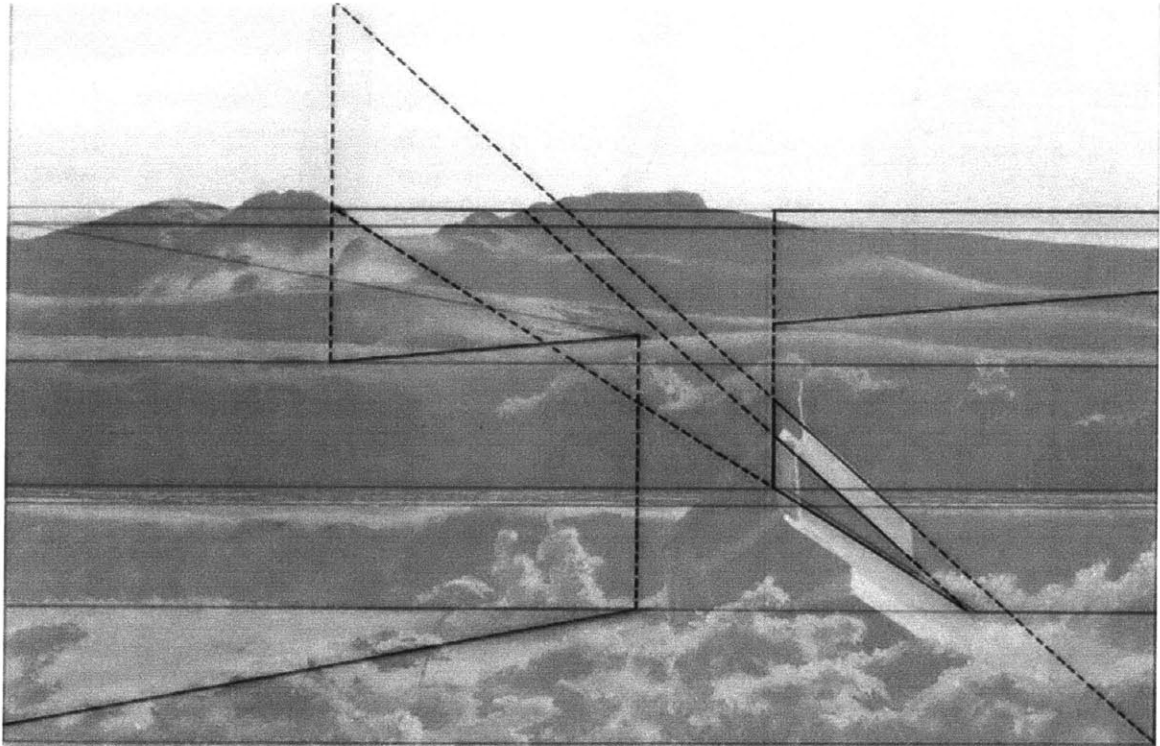
Aldo and Andreina

¹ Virilio, p. 32.

relative to the horizon) and mentally from Andreina; his mental separation is enacted through his positioning relative to the landscape of the frame. The fall into space (distance, traversing eye) associated with the horizon is connected with the wandering mind. Both Andreina and Aldo turn away from the camera and the film again cuts to a reverse medium shot of the two. Aldo moves left and the camera tracks his motion, Andreina disappearing from view. Again, Aldo is withdrawing into his own space, away from Andreina. He talks about his job at the refinery and remembers that from the refinery tower he could see the river and his house. Again a previous si(gh)te (a distant vision) is collapsed within the landscape in which he is now situated. This returns to the beginning of the film and to another position of vision in the landscape, to another position of the eye(l) both literally and figuratively. Aldo's eye has since changed from focusing on things (his house, the river) to a dispersed vision of deep space; to a traversing of space in an impossible attempt to reposition himself. The final shot of this sequence repeats the initial shot of Aldo and Andreina, with the two figures dwarfed against the vast surfaces of the landscape, heightening the loss of the body as a center in this empty space.

This passing description of the refinery tower is significant, for the entire film maps this positioning of his eye(l) in and through the landscape. If we recall Virilio's description of the horizon as a gravitational force, the film explores Aldo's literal fall from his position on the tower (the secure and static eye) to one on the ground, pulled by the deep space of the horizon. The landscape, in this state of fall, becomes a kind of continual play between juxtapositions (up-down, here-there) that structure and reveal his mental space as well as his relationship with other bodies. The landscape itself thus comes to spatially construct and embody the conditions of in-between; the juxtapositions of this moving, searching, wandering, falling eye(l).

Shortly after this Aldo returns home, to the initial scene of the film, to his position on the refinery tower. Perhaps this is an act to regain the previous state of eye, a state before being thrown into a state of perpetual trajectory. Or perhaps it was just to realize this state of free fall in the landscape in another way, one with definitive end.



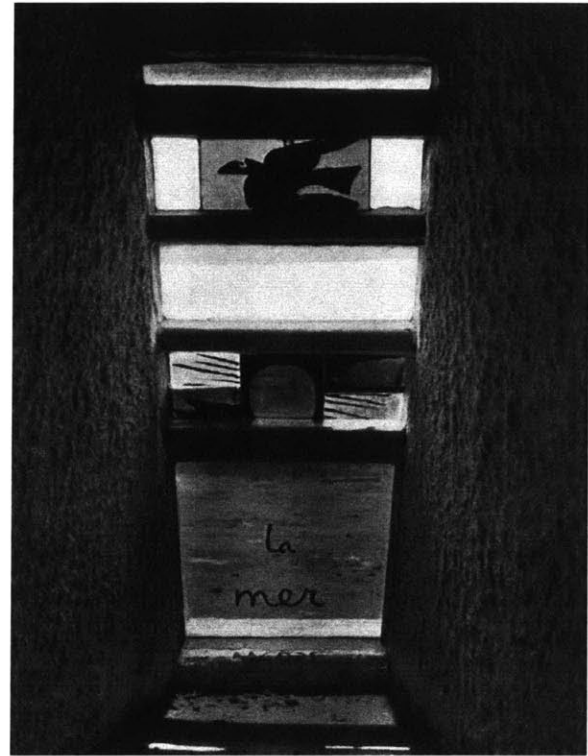
Edward Hopper
Hills, South Truro, 1930,
from *Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonné*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995. volume 3 p. 203.



59th Street Pier
Ocean City, New Jersey



Villa Malaparte
Capri, Italy
from *Curzio Malaparte "Casa come me"*. Napoli: Arte Tipografica, 1990. p. 42.



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Ronchamp, France
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Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1957. p. 21.

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