Mellon Initiative in Urban Landscape Studies

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Mellon Fellows – Final Reports

Spring 2016

**Alpa Nawre, "Adaptive Land-Water Edges in Indian Cities"**

Assi Ghat at Varanasi, India. Photo by Alpa Nawre, 2015.

The Mellon Fellowship in Urban Landscape Studies at Dumbarton Oaks has been a remarkable experience that has allowed me to advance my research on developing a better understanding of the flexibility and socio-cultural performance of urban land-water edges in India. Very few opportunities exist for landscape architects that simultaneously provide time and space for reflection and inspiration to pursue research that can inform better designs. During my fellowship, I studied data that collected during my field studies and developed three papers. The first paper compares the ponds (*talaab*) and river edges (*ghat*) in India to synthesize aspects that enable them to act as vibrant social spaces; the second essay analyzes the role of religious architecture at the *talaab* water edges; and the third explores the dual role of *ghat* infrastructure as a hybrid object and subject in the landscape. The

Mellon Midday Dialogues, combined with my conversations with other fellows, offered multiple new perspectives on my work. Through one of the Midday Dialogues, I was also able to connect with a practitioner with whom I am collaborating on a joint presentation on water landscapes for livable cities at the 2016 American Society of Landscape Architecture Meeting. The fellowship has helped to further my understanding of urban water infrastructure as a social landscape, and to develop a broader perspective on better water management strategies in urban development.

Kara Schlichting, "The Nature of Urban Coastal Resiliency: Twentieth-Century Governance, Environmental Management, and Design"
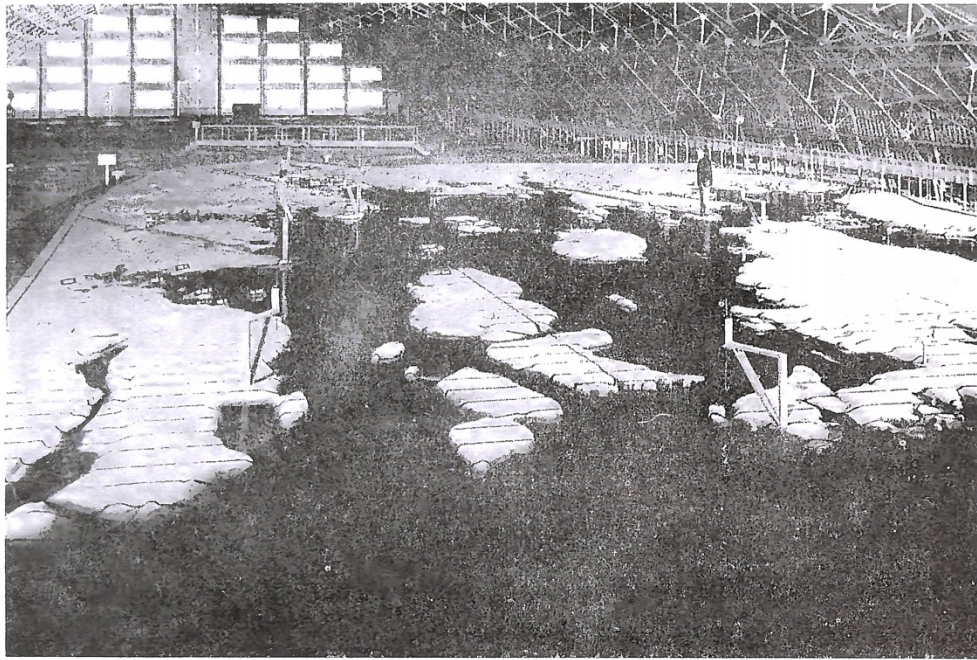
Hydraulic model of Narragansett Bay constructed at Waterways Experiment Station, Vicksburg, Mississippi. Looking north from mouth of bay toward Providence. The model was a valuable tool in studies of tidal conditions in Narragansett Bay and the effectiveness of barriers in reducing hurricane flood levels.

United States Army Corps of Engineers, New England Division. *Hurricane Survey, Interim Report, Narragansett Bay Area : Rhode Island, Massachusetts*. Boston, MA: The Division, 1957.

While the coastal zone can be defined by landscape and its dynamic system of morphology and hydrography, it is also a construct, an idea imposed on a landscape to delineate governance powers. As a fellow I investigated how the concept of the coastal zone was first developed in federal legislation in the 1970s, framing the littoral as a public utility in need of management and the location of substantial

economic investment in need of protection. Through my research I realized that to understand how governance intersected with the material nature of the littoral, it is necessary to reframe the chronology of the coastal zone. The 1930s-1950s underscores work in environmental studies and coastal engineering that 1970s governance initiatives overshadow: hurricanes and the Corps' efforts to protect coasts from them. This history, in other words, is defined not by legislation by but the environment. In studying hurricanes the Corps first conceptualized the particular vulnerabilities of southern New England's coastal zone. As a result, in 1957, the Corps embarked on an ambitious hurricane unique comprehensive survey of Narragansett Bay, R.I. My research led me to two realizations that will frame future work. First, the Corps' 1930s-1950s work was frequently based upon a conceptual binary that problematically disconnected the littoral's land-water environments. Second, different frameworks developed around two definitions of coastal hazards: short-term, violent hazards (such as hurricanes) and long-term incremental hazards (such as sea level rise or beach erosion). Due to these differing evaluations, government agencies saw different things as being at risk and inspired different modes of protection.