

A Meeting of Land and Water

Vernon Anthony Hall

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Jim Jones
Committee Chair

Kay Edge
Committee Member

Robert Schubert
Committee Member

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Abstract

What is the opportunity afforded by a distinction in geography? Can a building respond to a threshold, or meeting point between two distinct geographical conditions? In particular, the duality of land and water and the moment when these two elements meet, could indicate and influence form and structure. What is a potential response to such a condition in geography, what are the mechanisms and means by which a building could respond to such a condition? This project seeks to highlight and celebrate the distinction between land and water, a meeting point where land ends and a river begins. The building's form, structure, and material are a reaction to the geographic condition.

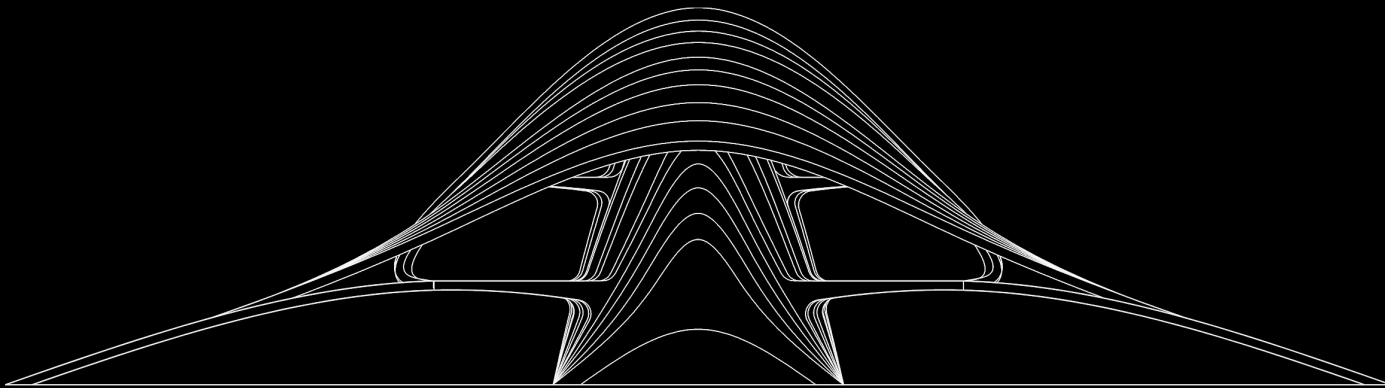
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Acknowledgements

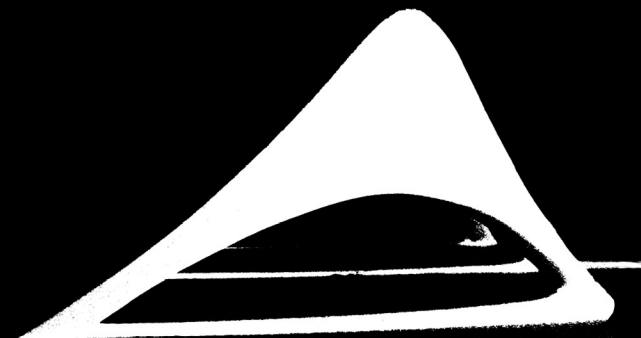
I would like to first thank my wife, Jennifer, to whom I owe an infinite amount of appreciation for her unwavering support, love, and belief in my dreams and convictions. I would not have completed this thesis without her support. Also, I am grateful to my family, in particular my mother and father. Their love has given me and my brothers the ability to succeed at our dreams. I'd also like to thank my committee. Amidst a very harrying thesis year, they guided me and helped me realize my project. I hope to one day comprehend architecture at the level of their understanding.

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Of Water and Land





formal

considerations

To build near water is a primary consideration for this project. Without a site determined, I knew that I was interested in exploring how a building could respond to a change in geography, specifically land to water. How could structure indicate and react to such a dramatic threshold? What would be the conditions in the building through material and form that could emphasize or celebrate this meeting point: the moment when land is enveloped by water?

After considering the characteristics of these two elements, land and water, it seemed apparent that there was a component of symbiosis in their interaction. One is perpetually dependent on the other. The process of the sea pulverizing shells to create sand or the act of rock and soil being slowly eroded by the tide versus the expulsion of magma from below the sea, which becomes igneous rock once cooled by the ocean, expresses a giving and taking that is cyclical in nature. There is an understanding that our condition is not permanent; it is in a perpetual state of ebb and flow, personified by the oceans' tide. It is this condition of movement, of change, of the meeting of two elements, that I was initially interested in. The question was how to relate this to the study of form and material.

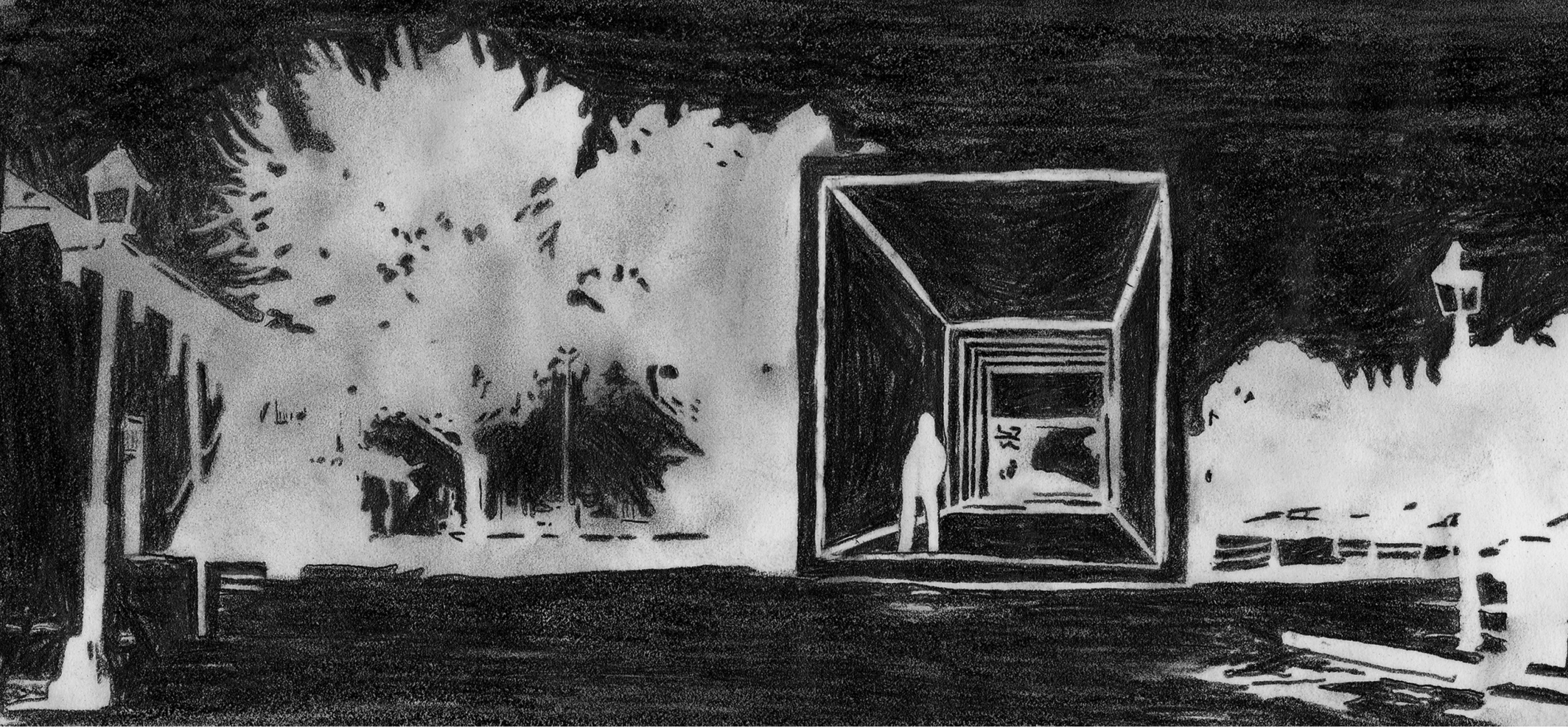
Should architecture respond to its immediate environment, and if so how should the response occur? Could identity in structure be more intimately tied to environmental conditions? For me, as a student attempting to make sense and find a position on the derivation of form and structure, I found myself strongly encouraged to explore this question.

A meeting point between two things may be considered a threshold. A threshold is often used to indicate or symbolize the entrance to something novel or distinct. Hence, it is the obligation of my proposal to express the relationship we have to the built world and the natural world: an approach to architecture that can elevate peoples' awareness of both conditions.

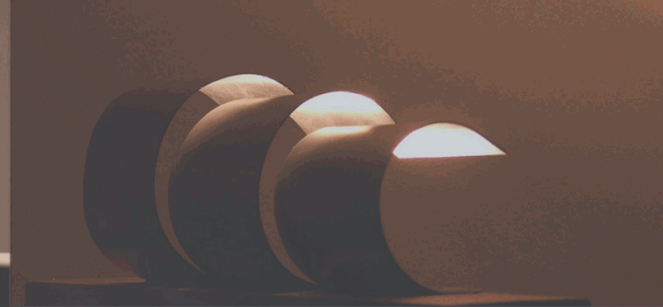
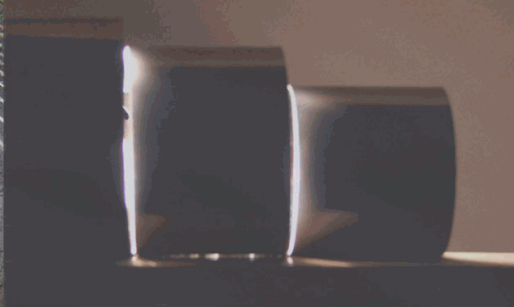
Water: fluid, amorphous, translucent and perpetually moving; land: static, dense, and opaque. My question is how to reconcile the two through mutual exaltation.

The Potomac River runs along the edge of Alexandria, Virginia, demarcating the edge of Virginia and Maryland. The waterfront of Old Town Alexandria has a strong presence in the fabric of the whole town. As a historic port city, its relationship with the river has been inextricable due to commerce and industry. I chose this location because it offered a good opportunity to not just respond to land meeting water, but also a historic town meeting a modern building. It afforded two thresholds: land to water and historic to modern. A building could be used as a node or a chance to transition people from land to water and colonial to contemporary.





King Street terminus as a node, a portal from land to water.



After deciding to build next to water, I began considering the formal expression and conditions of a fluid medium. One characteristic which was vividly evident was the tendency of water to ripple after being agitated. The ripples form concentric circles and ellipses. I knew that a building which was intended to respond and represent its immediate environment should contain this formal characteristic of growth through repetition and augmentation.

Also, the translucent nature of water indicated a need for transparency in the part of the building which would be over the water. The fluidity of water demanded a curvilinear form, in sharp contrast to the traditional rectilinear format of historic Alexandria.

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