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introduction

Regionalism in Rockville is an endeavor at discovering ways of making a building fit. The goal is as simple as that; the process has taken years. At some point in my fifth year I compared all my past projects and realized what they all have in common was their trial at ‘fitting,’ in some way or another, at varying degrees of success. The idea of regionalism offers not a predetermined architectural style, but a systematic body of knowledge, or body of questions, that help establish this idea of fit.

The term ‘fit’ is somewhat vague, and I use it loosely in reference to past projects. Typically one aspect has been isolated, like the fit of the image (the building looks like others around it), with little concern for other aspects of design. The purpose of this project was to identify these many aspects of design, determine which were most important for this particular building, and challenge them through a modern architectural language. The subtitle, “An Exploration into Local and Cultural Design,” suggested further parameters; that is, defining characteristics of locality and Indiana culture.

Ironically, my interest in this subject stems from my fascination with the exponential growth and consumption of modern technology. Kenneth Frampton contends that regionalism “is opposed...to the replacement of experience by information.” This statement does not reject the use of modern technology, or restrict an architecture for the impending “age of information.” Rather it demands a strengthening of the identities of our cities and cultures, and an architecture that creates the distinction of place. Cities, large or small, can offer unique resources that are best realized through firsthand experience.

Due to recent technologies, including computers and robotics, there has been a shift from an industrial production
society to an information and service based economy. Ideally such a shift would encourage a greater appreciation for art, architecture and music. The program of the thesis project also tries to encourage and appreciation for the arts and crafts, not as an abstract decoration, but in usable form.

The following thesis exploration will attempt to create a framework for a regional architecture, and suggest a possible solution to the many parameters found. It is not a singular conclusion to the question “What is Indiana architecture?” This is an “Indiana Architecture” only in its sensitivity and attention paid to scale, materials, solar orientation, programme, context and other elements of a regional design. In the remainder of this publication, one will find an architectural question, an architectural method, concepts that are repeated, but each time with a new layer of imagery or information, a balance of images and words, and an architectural solution.

(1) Critical Regionalism has to be understood as a marginal practice, one which, while it is critical of modernization, nonetheless still refuses to abandon the emancipatory and progressive aspects of the modern architectural legacy. At the same time, Critical Regionalism’s fragmentary and marginal nature serves to distance it both from normative optimization and from the naïve utopianism of the early Modern Movement. In contrast to the line that runs from Haussman to Le Corbusier, it favours the small rather than the big plan.

(2) In this regard Critical Regionalism manifests itself as a consciously bounded architecture, one which rather than emphasizing the building as a free-standing object places the stress on the territory to be established by the structure erected on the site. This place-form means that the architect must recognize the physical boundary of his work as a kind of temporal limit - the point at which the present act of building stops.

(3) Critical Regionalism favours the realization of architecture as a tectonic fact rather than the reduction of the built environment to a series of ill-assorted scenicographic episodes.

(4) It may be claimed that Critical Regionalism is regional to the degree that it invariably stresses certain site-specific factors, ranging from the topography, considered as a three-dimensional matrix into which the structure is fitted, to the varying play of local light across the structure. Light is invariably understood as the primary agent by which the the volume and the tectonic value of the work are revealed. An articulate response to climatic conditions is a necessary corollary to this. Hence Critical Regionalism is opposed to the tendency of ‘universal civilization’ to optimize the use of air-conditioning, etc. It tends to treat all openings as delicate transitional zones with a capacity to respond to the specific conditions imposed by the site, the climate and the light.

(5) Critical Regionalism emphasizes the tactile as much as the visual. It is aware that the environment can be experienced in terms other than sight.
critical regionalism

The term "Regionalism" does not suggest any particular style of design, except in those aspects that regional buildings tend to have in common. It should not be thought of as a reduction of traditional forms, nor a simulation of vernacular elements. Regionalism is a was of deigning that looks critically at many factors of the site, context, and history, and from that develops a new innovative architectural solution. This is what Frampton explains in his writings on "Critical Regionalism."

Unfortunately, the potential impact of Regionalism is diminished due to its classification as an "ism." Designers seem to either cling to isms so blindly that their work becomes banal reproductions of previous built forms, or they reject isms completely, refusing to have their freedom captured by a limited set of design doctrines. Regionalism offers a pluralist view on architectural design. Style is not important, but how any one style is implemented with regards to climate, solar orientation, materials and many other factors becomes the focus. As I have found in studying a few Indiana downtowns, barns, and landscapes, many seemingly opposing concepts coexist. Downtowns, as I will discuss later, are amazing in their architectural diversity, and reveal many different layers of the city.

objectives of a critical regionalism:

- combat spread of universal space
- combat loss of identifiable place
- root buildings to site (physical, social, etc.)
- capture past, present and future in one
- use local commerce
- resist fashion / trends
- create differences / experiences
- make place rather than space
- resist domination of universal technology
- avoid destructive uses of technology
- liberation
summary of frampton:

(1) critical yet liberating; small over big plan.

(2) the comprehensive designing of place as opposed to object.

(3) architecture is tectonic, not scenographic

(4) stresses site-specific factors. openings are opportunities.

(5) architecture is tactile; experiential rather than just visual and informative.

(6) opposed to sentimental historicism. "regionally based 'world culture.'"

(7) idea of cultural center with surrounding dependancies is inadequate.
Architecture creatively combines art, industry, and technology in one multidisciplinary endeavor. This multi-disciplined nature of architecture allows it to borrow from other professions. (Deconstruction for example was a literary concept.) In searching for a method to address the thesis statement, "An Exploration in Local and Cultural Design," the question of what is local and cultural design arose. Mathematics offers a simple statistical method for collecting data: the random sample. A sample is defined as "a group of elements that is selected from the population and is smaller in size than the population." A population is simply "a group of elements that are alike on one or more characteristics." A random sample gives each potential sample an equal opportunity of being selected, in representation of the whole. In this case, the population is Indiana, and the sample is Rockville.

The process for selecting Rockville, IN was not completely random however. Certain characteristics were maintained, such as its general isolation and concentration within the landscape of Indiana, and a small to average sized population. One significant factor that makes Rockville different from the "average" Indiana city is Rockville Lake, the county reservoir built in 1971 to control drainage and flooding. This signifies Indiana's changing landscape, both natural and artificial, and gives this area an ironic allusion to Indiana's glacial history.

Another unique element to Rockville (rather Parke county for which Rockville is the county seat) is a collection of covered bridges; Parke county has more covered bridges than any other U.S. county. This was not a factor in the selection of Rockville as a sample. Instead it is an example of unexpected "surprises" one finds in searching for identity. However, the bridges are not a design focus, and replicating them dangerously fumbles with being kitsch. Contemporary
interpretations can give the architecture an abstract reference to the area's past. The architecture in turn gives clues about its connection with the history, landscape, and culture.

The physical site is along what I consider the northern boundary of the city. It is where building to a significant density stops, and therefore marks the transition out of the city. It may be considered then the point at which nature begins; the landform drops as it slowly turns into a lake. Dense, though young trees border the lake, and offer screened views toward the water. The site itself represents a programmatic response to creating a boundary, establishing a threshold, through architecture, for the north edge of Rockville.

The north edge of Rockville is this wooded transition to Rockville Lake. One small house is directly to the north and two more are further up the road, but for the most part any significant building density ends. The photo shows snowmobile tracks on the frozen lake, almost like scars from the uses of mankind.
image and boundaries

The idea of image often infers to some visual aspect, but in a tectonic architecture, as Frampton promotes, image becomes a broader state of perception. The image of a town or a community may be represented through visual means, like a photograph or a postcard, but includes perceived notions of culture, attitudes, and space. One’s image of a “New Yorker” is quite different than that of a “San Franciscan.” Therefore, image becomes synonymous with identity, and care must be given to altering or creating the environment with which one associates an “image.” The image of a building can be represented through a series of elevations or facades, but it ultimately reflects the identity of the site, community, and the culture in which it sits.

The examples of New York and San Francisco use a city as a defining boundary for identity. Political boundaries can often encourage identity because they make a distinction between positive and negative, between what IS and what ISN’T. The city is important in the landscape of Indiana because it is usually considerably denser than the surrounding agrarian fields. It is an isolated pocket of population, (in form, not influence) with a small and delicate sense of urbanism. Ignoring a few metropolitan areas, and the recent trend for suburban sprawl, the city IS, the countryside ISN’T.

A city’s border does not necessarily define a completely unique image, neither of building nor culture. It merely suggests the limitations of a locality and help retain a common boundary for a designed response to certain common features. In some cases, being within a boundary makes the architecture susceptible to local codes and regulations. Rockville, in particular, requires painting and general upkeep of the downtown area.
rockville, in:

By looking at aerial photographs of rockville, one can extract varying levels of information. With simple drawings, complex concepts are more easily understood. This set of Rockville maps reveals a few different design ideas, including some responses to city density, and straightforward attitudes toward design.
midwest space

Roads: Roads in Rockville, as in many Indiana cities, are the result of a strong organizing grid. Diagrammatically, the grid divides land into equal pieces. Downtown streets are lined with 2 or 3 story buildings that create a corridor, then open to the central square and courthouse. Further from the downtown, roads become narrow, and the grid is less dense. Curves result from newer subdivision, or natural phenomena in the land. Roads to the north are vaguely orthogonal, but are affected by the contours of the lake and landscape.

Structures: The structures mimic the roads in density, and its growing sparsity farther from the downtown. Buildings obviously serve their programmatic role, but especially in downtowns, they create an 'urban wall', and a corridor for traffic. From above, adjacent downtown storefronts appear as one building, framing the boundaries of the downtown square. The courthouse sits on a hill, isolated in the center of the city. This is a departure from European cities, marking American Democracy as the new social order.

City and Water: The rigidity of an organizing grid falls victim to various natural land deformations. The curve in the road as one travels north from the downtown is caused by a creek that feeds from Rockville Lake. A simple bridge was built in the simplest manner to cross the creek, perpendicular to point at which the road crosses. Of course, roads at the north of the city are forced to follow the perimeter of the lake.

New Building: The new building establishes a more solid boundary for the city. It is to suggest that further development occur to the south of this boundary. It marks a transition from Rockville, to Rockville Lake. Although it is a corner lot, the primary axis runs east and west, further defining a civic boundary.
previous pages:
extracting different layers from these parts of rockville. Figure seven shows a more free circulation system, as the functions of everyday life cannot be met by the civic grid. Figures 6 and 12 compare open space (white). It is more significant in the downtown drawing because it is less prominent. The Indiana landscape represented in the square becomes as important as the courthouse.

collective individuals

As previously alluded to, the individual shops along a downtown street collectively compose one entity, one wall that frames the open courthouse square opposite it. The buildings create a boundary, and that is just as important as each individual business for the success of the downtown square. The concept that downtown buildings effectively create an outdoor "room" coincides with the idea of making place. The buildings and business are important, but the definition of the square is equally important.

Buildings also display elements of differentiation, in an attempt to identify them as an individual business. Elements like cornices, windows, awnings, exterior materials, paint colors, sidewalk materials, and storefronts, while common, vary from each business in order to mark it as unique. Rockville's "Square" is relatively uniform, and the horizontal alignment of windows keeps a formal order to the city. Still, building colors range from brick red, to white, green, light blue, maroon and yellow.
local as rockville

With Rockville, IN determined as the basis for local, representing the whole of what might be an Indiana architecture, a number of factors were developed to help define the parameters of a local design. Regionalism inherently encourages site-specific factors that are quite literally of that region. Vernacular, what I would call the undesign, becomes one vehicle for understanding local design. The factor most easily found in vernacular building is the choice of materials. Design issues that were studied for this project were, in no particular order:

- climate
- solar orientation
- cardinality
- water levels / drainage
- microclimates
- shade and vegetation
- topography
- building materials

These are local, site-specific factors that helped determine the form of the design project. Some were focused on to higher degree than others because of the priority and significance they seemed to offer to the final design. Topography was decided as the key determiner of form, since it was the one element that was completely unique to this site. In that way, the building becomes local because it responds a specific landform that is found only in Rockville. Cardinality was focused on to relate the building to the grid of the city. The other factors became design issues, but not determinants of form. Patterns of scale found in the city also suggested design ideas in the form of the design.
climate:
Rockville's climate is much the same as central Indiana, that is, it is temperate, with clearly noticeable seasons. Winters are cold and summers are hot, and there is a fair amount of rain in between. This suggests having various ways of controlling heat loss in the winter, and providing cooling and ventilation in the summer. Though the lake prevents flooding at a regional level, the steady amount of precipitation throughout the year requires proper drainage solutions. Overhangs are typically used to protect facades from the weather. Wind was considered to lesser extent. Prevailing winds come from the west, and the dense vegetation surrounding the lake prevents other directions of airflow.

cardinality:
this refers to specific functions, both solar and perceived of each facade. Each facade is identifiable as it's corresponding cardinal direction, because it explicitly and implicitly serves as that facade. North and south facades are largely climate-related. Northern exposure should be kept at a minimum, to prevent heat loss. This is something that my design slightly contradicts; the north exposure is to the lake, providing serene views for the users. South facades of course should be shaped to control admission of sun. East walls receive the sun in the morning. Though the sun is up, it is still cold from the night; we protect the east entrance. It can also be thought of as the beginning. It is small because it has all day to grow. The west signifies dusk, and though the sun is setting, it is still warm from the day. The west facade opens; it is the result of the building transitioning from morning to night.

solar orientation:
exposure to sun can efficiently warm or cool a space, or create troublesome heat and cooling load problems. South facing portions of a building can collect warming winter sun, but should avoid direct rays in the summer. East and west sun is sometimes distracting, but the facades should also respond to related ideas of cardinality. Typically north facing walls should have little glazing to prevent heat loss in by winter winds.

reservoir, about six feet, mainly to prevent damage to decks and piers. The flooding level is considered 652; the county restricts building below that level. My building will have two levels: entry is at 690', the studios are at 680'.

microclimates:
The design of the building takes advantage of intersclial spaces, which provide outdoor opportunities to enjoy the views, breezes, smells, and sounds of the nature.

water levels / drainage:
Due to precipitation in this area, drainage from the building is a concern. The site occupies a valley that leads surface runoff to the lake. The elevation of the lake is 644' above sea level. The lake is drained in the winter months, since it is an artificial
materials

red brick limestone painted brick wood metal/aluminium iron cloth/canvas glass/curtain

VARIETY
defining culture?

It is has been extremely difficult to answer the question, “What is cultural design?” To answer such a question, one must have a definition of culture. People have tried to define the word, but some element always seems to missing. Dictionaries refer to a medical definition first, and then a vague generalization when it comes to people-oriented culture. Culture is often used with reference to older civilizations. Perhaps this suggests an origination of a particular set of ideas, ethics, and technologies. It would have been impossible to avoid contact with other groups of people, who inevitably exposed new ideas. Therefore, an older description of culture as an original system of knowledge can no longer be used. I don’t think that in this region there is or can be a single isolated group of people. A modern account of what culture means is simply the process of life. Culture is a learned set of values that provides a framework for future events.

Finding the culture of Indiana, in the sense of finding the origination of ideas, religions, and building form, may give insight to certain histories, but it is not a relevant measure of modern-day culture. We should not deduce that barns come from German immigrants, for example, and so Indiana architecture should be entirely germanic. A more accurate account for defining or describing present-day culture is to extract certain ideas, and use them in modern architecture.

A few ideas that have guided the design and construction of my project are:

• simplicity. However, simple does not mean uneducated, or without sophistication. It is a straight-forward approach to design.

• conservative. Unlike coastal cities, the midwest avoids competition with global commerce. Called the “Heartland,”


cul•ture (kul•cher) n. mental training and development; refinement; civilization.
- Webster's Dictionary

“I call culture, that balance of inner and outer man, which alone can guarantee reasonable thought and action.”
- Adolf Loos
the midwest may be thought of as the body of a bird, remaining in a relatively constant state, while the wings alternate up and down.

- overall lack of pretention. This relates to a straight-forward thinking about facades, structural systems, colors, etc.

- a balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar. A perfect example would be an internet service provider occupying space on the square. It is not a traditional business that would require storefront exposure.

- innovating the ordinary. This is not so much a description of the culture, but a condition of a regional architecture.
ROckville Community for the Creative Arts

The building type and program become part of the design project. What I proposed was an art center in such a way as to have studios that would focus on regional of historical factors. Furniture made in the wood studio, for example, relates to the fine furniture exports of a young Indiana when most the land was still covered with hardwood forest. The facility is a public resource, where local residents would pay a semester fee and take a course in some medium over a period of a couple months. It is not a school setting, nor does it offer a degree. Faculty are local artisans with the exception of a guest resident artist, who may have traveled many miles to take advantage, if for only a few months, of the serene setting of the lake.

Furniture is used as an example because it relates to another aspect of the nature of the work to be done. The idea that most art produced would be useful hints at a certain straight-forwardness. Ordinary objects can become art, when they are created with a level of craft and design. Therefore the wood-working studio would focus largely on the design of furniture. There are three other craft-based studies that, again, relate to regional aspects. The pottery/throwing studio is appropriate because soils in the area have a high clay content. Metal-working relates to metal and steel industries and glass-blowing because soils rich in sands can also be found in certain parts of the state. Again, the focus is usable art: furniture, stoneware, metal light fixtures, iron railings, glassware, though pieces of a more decorative nature are not forbidden.

There are three other studios that help to encourage design arts through multiple media. A painting studio and a drawing studio face the lake; a photography studio with a dark room is on the lower level, tucked under the galleries. The galleries give students and faculty an opportunity to display their work, in an effort to sell it, during a monthly open-house. In this way the facility encourages all public to experience and be enlightened by the art.
evolution of plans

The overriding concept of the structure was a deformed grid. As noted in the study of Rockville, the rigid grid is imperfect because it doesn't account for natural features. Since this site is on the lake, the grid imposed is deformed and deteriorates as it reaches the edges of the water.

The building itself acts a transition from the city to the landscape of Indiana. The transition is slowly experienced in a series of lateral, or east-west movements. Coinciding with the deforming grid, the plan stays orthogonal on the south, but walls start to undulate, and the controlled spaces become less and less regular.

The lateral movements through the building is designed to present layers of interaction with the art, artists and community. The first pass may be thought of as in a car, coming from the west. The perception at this point is largely visual. As one enters from the east, some art work may be displayed in the exhibition hallway. The involvement is still largely visual, but some textures or tactility may be introduced. The third leg travels toward the east again, through the galleries. The involvement with the art becomes more personal; vision is no longer the primary sense. The final pass leads one down a set of steps into a common area that each of the four craft studios open to. Here one is introduced to a new set of layers, and may experience new senses, the sounds of the wood tools, the heat of the kilns, in relation to the art. The wall to the south in this space is for the storage of art, though frosted glass doors hint at the contents. The studios themselves have a deep threshold where a common citizen may converse with an artist, become even more involved in the functions of the building, and perhaps sign on for a few classes.
the village

The art center is meant to be a place where people can gather, spend some time, and work together. It is not self-sufficient, however, and requires some support spaces to serve the needs of the artists. In turn it becomes another resource for the neighborhood, providing an art supply store, the painting and drawing studios, a bookstore, and a jazz cafe. These services are not independent of each other; they are combined in a familiar/unfamiliar relationship, in a similar way that modern commercial bookstores have combined books and coffee.

These support spaces comprise an independent structure, that runs north and south, along a small street that creates the west boundary of the site. This secondary building, known as the "Village," is modelled after various horizontal developments, but specifically suggests the downtown image.
The west facade of the “village” reads with a base, middle, and top, a traditional detail lost to simplistic modernism. The base is glass to reveal the interior at a pedestrian level; the middle is a solid wall of brick; and instead of a cornice, the thin roof overhang protects clerestory glazing. The canopy becomes a device to create continuity; it is the common element that ties the divisions together. It twists as it extends beyond the edges of the city, almost as if it was at some time damaged by a storm.
One can clearly see a transformation in imagery, a morphing of one building type to another, a juxtaposition of different geometries, a successful interaction between familiar forms and unfamiliar connections.
cardinality

Facades have different functions. Whether it is a street presence, or an artistic statement, the facade presents the building to the public. As presented earlier, each facade of the building relates in some way to it's corresponding cardinal direction.

The previous page shows the west facade; the morphing roof opens to this end. The village building faces the west, as it supplies both the artists and citizens of Rockville with daily needs. The jazz cafe is open throughout the day, but music is performed at night so a west entry is appropriate.

The east facade is a simple entry that begins the artist or the tourist on their impending journey. It is small and protected from the coolness of the morning. East and west walls of the studios are solid to prevent distracting light from entering the workspaces.

The north facing walls of the studios try to strike a balance between retaining heat loss, and allowing views to the lake. Typically windows are tall and narrow to mimic the mesh of
trees that provides glimpses to the water. The woodworking studio is mostly glazed, but has another layer of wood structure outside to protect the glass. The views here are not controlled; there is an overall outdoors feeling associated with this studio.

The south facade repeats a form-void relationship found in the area, both residential lots, and in the spaces between the downtown windows. This simple repetition is treated for opportunities to allow light to enter. The roof protects some of the glazing during direct summer sun. The walls in the openings are angled to receive morning and evening winter sun, and are high mass masonry to retain heat.
piece of west facade

the imagery is of a downtown, having a repetitive bay, and a lower storefront register. The permanent awning ties the village building with the art community building. Columns inside mimic the forest that surrounds Rockville Lake.
piece of south facade

imagery used is an old barn, whose sagging roof takes new life in a contemporary art center. Structure is exposed in areas to give a sense of tectonics. The outside walls on the south facade are concrete block to absorb the heat of sunlight, and balance interior temperatures.
The village became a second building, recalling the many buildings found on rural farms in the area. The structure is heavy timber, and the columns blend the inside space with the wooded topography to the east. The east facade is mostly glass, with operable vertical louvers, not shown on the model for clarity.
A way to help the building physically fit is to carve out some of the landform. This sectional model shows the common area and the studios on the lower level. These become the final path of the lateral movement previously discussed and are consequently buried, both figuratively and literally, into the processes of the building.

The stick-framing of the roof may suggest residential or barn construction. This gives the facility a familiarity, while at the same time is unfamiliar in its form. Challenging ordinary ideas of local building form gives the community a contemporary sense of place, through the context of a regional architecture.
The section model reveals many of these experiential layers that I have discussed. The building drops with the landscape toward the lake to the north. To the south, the simple face reflects the low density housing across the street. It's height is not overpowering to the south, exciting spaces are created when the building drops into the ground.
view down exhibition hall

view down commons • studios on the right
identity of studios

In the fashion that downtown buildings paint their facades to become identifiable from the context of the surrounding businesses, the north facing facades have varying shapes and materials that suggest the nature of the studio. Generally glazing is vertical to give artists brief glimpses of earth, water and sky.

The interiors of the studios also reflect the primitive qualities of the materials or media in that studio.

glass • delicate, elegant, toward the sky.

metals • fiery, hot, elastic

woods • natural; may induce ideas of home.

pottery • from the earth, ancient connections
conclusions and reflections

Regionalism strives to establish critical factors in aiding building design, and creating local instances of a liberating modern language of architecture. It seems architecture should be about relating a human need to the resources of the land. This includes physical space as well as local materials. My project touched on a general outline of a lot of issues. I don't think a "regionalist" building has to do everything that anyone suggests for regionalism; there is no magic checklist. It is a way of thinking critically about what is being built, and giving that building a deeply rooted connection with place, as opposed to a transplanted idea of design that has no relevance to local communities.