Rural & Small Town Image Responses

the translation interpretations of a regionalistic expression

by

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This thesis is dedicated to a some very important people in my life:
to all of my professors, especially art schaller and stan mendelsohn, who have gotten me through
the past five years of architecture
to all of my friends who have kept me physically, intellectually, and emotionally strong
to my brothers jeff and charles

but most of all,
to my mother and father who have given me their guidance, moral support, and love
for which i am eternally grateful....... 

dedicated in loving memory of my mother,
Vesta Mae Bieghler
Abstract

Our immediate environment has become a lost refuse for a forgotten expression. The indigenous farm architecture that scatters the countryside is this expression that has been ignored. As the title of this thesis book suggests, my thesis is concerned with the rural and small town environments and their images. I'm dealing with the "visual personality" that I feel is inherent in these vocabularies. What are the visual qualities attributable to these forms? I believe that there is a traditional aspect represented within the architecture that has yet to be explored and/or translated into today's culture.

The other aspect of my investigation deals with the imagery expressed by the small town. What are the elements about a small town that give the community its visual personality? Together, the visual imagery and personality of the rural vernacular and small town environment, can establish a positive representation of the rural community and its culture.

The key objective in expressing these vocabularies is the step-by-step process of translating the forms, materials, and construction methodology into a identifiable, cohesive interpretation of these traditional ideologies.
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Introduction

There is a traditional spirit, found in the rural architectural forms that scatter the countryside, which has been lost. Not only do these forms possess a pragmatic character lacking in today’s architecture, they also lend themselves to architectural interpretation via a type of image personality that is representative of our traditional values. In addition, the American small town exhibits a certain visual personality that is rooted within our fundamental design precepts. What type of imagery is generated from traditional rural architecture? What forms and/or spaces are the most influential images expressive of the small town personality? Can these traditionally based statements of environmental design be synthesized to produce a positive architectural environment? The development of a refined architectural language translated from rural architectural forms, i.e. barns, sheds, and silos, that possess a fundamental objective upon which my thesis focuses. I am attempting to first interpret and then refine the aesthetic charge inherent in these rural forms; in other words, to establish an architectural character suggestive of the forms' traditional nature. Another primary objective that I hope to accomplish concerns the application of these form interpretations into a cohesive expression of planning based upon the visual personality of the small town. My thesis borders on the ideology of regionalism, but entails a more personal concept of interpretation. The subjective viewpoints that are represented in these interpretations are open to infinite responses, which is the fundamental criticism and interest that I hope to stimulate on these traditional design approaches.
If there was ever any one aspect of my life that I can attribute my design attitude and simplistic viewpoints to, that influential aspect would be my environment; in particular, the rural environment of my childhood. The simplicity expressed in the social attitudes and architectural interpretations conveys a spirit of tradition and romanticism. The experience of growing up in such an environment is an invaluable asset to my thesis, with regards to my subjective viewpoints of the architecture. The focus of my thesis deals with the visual personality expressed in the rural and small town environments of my childhood. An initial hypothesis that I intend to verify, deals with the coorelationship of rural architectural values and small town imagery and applying their enhancing architectural characteristics into a successful and positive representation of community identity and cohesiveness. My individual perception of these environments, both subjectively and objectively, has allowed me to consider alternative design interpretations of the architectural personalities. The architecture of the rural environment, in particular, implies a design reference which I am investigating. The rural archetypes of my investigation are: barns, sheds, silos, and elevators, which seem to possess a rustic and indigenous character that may introduce a design response. These characteristics are evident in the suggestive geometric nature of the forms, their material utilization, and rational pragmatism of the forms' organization. My investigation involves applying these referenced catalysts of forms into a collection of abstract and complex architectural interpretations that still possess their initial rural qualities and yet, generate further design responses. The symbolic, traditional, and romantic spirit of these architectural forms are the inherent qualities that I wish to express in my design interpretations and responses. This portion of this paper will focus on my analysis and interpretation of the rural vernacular architecture and it's implementation into my thesis, as a whole.
Through a command of limited materials and structure, the early American settler displayed an ability to satisfy climatic requirements and created a native architecture logically rooted. This somewhat simplistic sophistication of utilitarian building is symbolically reminiscent of the past and represents an attitude of optimism and romanticism; a spirit virtually nonexistence today. A distinct character is evoked by the rural vocabulary that reiterates it’s "sense of place". The impression of the forms: barns, silos, sheds, and grain elevators, provides and stresses the quality of tradition; rooted in our romantic imagery of our past.

"Indigenous architecture has provided a heritage and an ideal beyond the generation of it’s originators.....it typically represents infinite variations within a consistent order and framework, warranting our particular focus and reexamination because, in our complex and multilateral society, we need to encompass infinite variations within a strong, consistent ordering framework....." (Rapoport and Sanoff, p. 37)

The infinite variations, mentioned in the quote, exemplify the authenticity and individuality found in the rural vocabulary. These variations, within a strong, consistent ordering framework and their individual micro-conditions of environment and site location, offer an ordered aesthetic and rational interpretation in our hectic culture. The overall impression of the rural vocabulary is, as previously mentioned, logically and traditionally rooted, and romantically appreciated. Our society seems comfortable with this recognizable architectural vocabulary.

The specific rural vernacular, that I am investigating, deals with the following archetypes: barns, sheds, silos, and grain elevators. These recognizable forms are expressed in numerous variations, and respond to the individual pragmatic issues of climatic and site conditions, functional intent, and design conceptions based upon tradition. This indigenous architecture has been intimately related to it’s environment. My analysis of each of these archetypes entails the study of form, material utilization, and structural integrity. This analysis is subjectively based and interpreted.
From an observer's standpoint, the barn is probably the most recognized and emphasized rural form. Because vernacular architecture inherently implies a response to a series of functional issues, the barn dominates the rural environment, with respects to its scale. The scale of the structure was directly influenced by the storage space required by the owner. The barn provided shelter for equipment, livestock, and agricultural products; such as, hay and straw. The different needs and available resources helped to generate the individual expressions and interpretations of the barn’s form. The spatial arrangement, within the barn, reiterates the pragmatic aspect of the form. The lighter and less utilized materials, like hay and straw, were stored in the loft region of the barn; while, the heavier and more utilized materials, like farm equipment and livestock, were placed at ground level. Anytime more storage area was needed, a shed or lean-to was constructed on the side of the barn. The materials utilized in this form were commonly indigenous to the form’s environment. Because wood was an easily accessible material and possessed fundamental structural qualities, most barns relied on it throughout their construction; for example, in its structural skeleton, on interior and exterior finishes, and any decorative features. Other materials like: concrete, field stone, corrugated sheet metal, and asphalt shingles, were also selected for their longevity qualities, and have enhanced the visual quality through their ability to withstand deterioration under climatic stresses. The structure plays an important in the form of maintaining its place in the total order of the building at the technological level of its originators. Because the technology of wood construction is relatively simplistic in construction and methodology, most barns utilize heavy timber construction. The structure is not concealed, nor does it become a dominate element in the barn’s expression. The rough-cut heavy timber members are represented as a complex as a whole; yet, simplistic in parts. It becomes a functional, yet decorative detail which enhances the rustic characteristic of the form.
The shed, or smaller barn, carries many of the same attributes as the barn form; yet, because of either scale or function, may be expressed differently in form. Characterized as a subordinate form, the shed may reiterate the barn form to maintain a continuity of architectural expression, or exhibit an entirely different quality representing an alternative function, such as; a shop or storage facility for equipment or agriculture goods.

Responding to its specialized functional characteristic, the silo is an exciting form juxtapositioning the rectilinear barn forms. The form of the silo, a cylinder, is probably its most dominating attribute. Based on both structural integrity and functional pragmatism, the silo is a purification of the principle that "form follows function". As for the utilization of materials in the form, structural integrity appears to be the dominating design issue. Predominantly used as a grain storage form, the silo utilizes many different materials like: reinforced concrete, corrugated sheet metal, tiled masonry units, and wire mesh. These materials both provided structural integrity and offered the flexibility of scale. As previously mentioned, the structure plays the dominating role of the form. The silo expresses the functionally pragmatic issue of storage in a relatively small area; the issue is resolved in a vertical motif. This vertical punctuation is a dynamic interruption of the seemingly flat landscape.

Complexity of forms is the first impression that these, seemingly contemporary structures, display. The observer is visually drawn to the conglomerate of vertical storage silos and their interlocking arms of grain chutes. This assemblage of forms is an interesting issue, with respect to design generation. This relatively large grain storage complex seems to have been generated by economics and technology. As the price of commercially storing grain increased, the farmer explored the concept of constructing a small scaled version of a storage facility for his own needs. The design is basically pragmatic in design. The facility has numerous storage silos which are interconnected by metal chutes which distribute the grain to the specified units. The material utilized throughout the complex is commonly corrugated sheet metal because of its plasticity and structural qualities. There is an seemingly industrial quality expressed in these forms that contributes the element of excitement to the static landscape; much like the more simplified silo enhances upon vertical punctuation.
The influence of technology in these forms is somewhat subdued; with the exception of the popular "pole barn", lacking both tradition and authenticity. The conscious economic attitude of today often generates this functional, yet sterile architecture. I am not advocating that all architecture based upon economic issues is bad architecture; in fact, much of the attractive aesthetic generated by these economic limitations are innovative design responses. The application of contemporary innovations may well enhance the my refinement and interpretation of the vocabulary.

Why is the rural architectural vernacular appropriate to design interpretation? I strongly feel that this traditionally rooted and romantically expressed architecture has not been fully utilized in architectural design to generate an interest in our built environment; as the eclectic periods of our past and present. Interpretations of past vocabularies, like the present Post-Modern movement, has produced interesting and stimulating products of envoirmental and form design. My reaction to the highly personal, rural context of my childhood is based upon this interpretive analysis. The primary intent of my analysis is to interpret and refine the qualities that I find intrinsic to the visual personality of the vernacular. My interpretation and refinement of these personality values will entail the abstraction, punctuation, and elaboration of such elements as: form statement, spatial definition, material utilization and expression, form juxtapositioning, and the elaboration of structural and form details. This refinement is highly subjective and involves individual interpretation, but is also influenced by the work of other interpreters of design like: Frank Gehry, Leon Krier, Michael Graves, and the firm of Jones & Kirkland. In my view, each of these architectural designers possess a romantic and pragmatic design interpretation, inspired by a previous vocabulary, or express a reaction to the impersonal and sterile architectural statements of today's culture. Gehry's material utilization, Krier's eclectic interpretations, Graves' form abstractions, and Jones & Kirkland's vernacular interpretation, are all expressions of a personalized architecture. The romantic quality, which seems to be inherent in their works, is a similar characteristic that I feel is intrinsic to the rural vernacular. My analyses and interpretations of these designs helps me to discover my own refinement techniques of the rural vernacular and investigate a more complex expression.
Interpretation and refinement are the fundamental attributes of my design responses. The qualities of traditionalism and romanticism are the impressions that I would like express in my interpretations of the vernacular. Because this seemingly anonymous architecture is increasingly becoming repressed and discarded by contemporary technology, attention and inspiration needs reiterated in contemporary design responses to maintain the preservation of this highly nostalgic architectural vocabulary. These forms are examples that are indicative of a creative statement in structure, environment, and form that provides us with an opportunity to assess our own idiomatic architecture, which must satisfy a more complex task concerning human response and behavior. (Rapoport and Sanoff, p. 39)
Why should anyone be concerned about the decay, destruction, and demise of the rural vernacular forms known and recognized as barns? Few rural cultural features are more distinctive than the great nineteenth century barns which dot the countryside. The few remaining give character to the landscape, and evoke admiration for the skills of earlier generations. The purposes for which they were originally built are now obsolete in today's economy and technology. The farming still being carried on in the agricultural regions seems to be only marginally profitable, and depends to a great extent upon specialization, or the farming of one particular product. The barns needed for this kind of farming: dairy farmers, livestock producers, or grain farmers, are quite different than their originators. These new barn forms seem to express an industrial, rather than agricultural, quality. The barns that are disappearing were traditional expressions of form and utilized native materials to construct these utilitarian structures. The barn is the best example of "function" governing the form of a building in American architecture. The builders, utilizing simple plans and unsophisticated tools, were able to construct these forms to shelter their livestock, goods, and equipment, with a sound, economical structure. The barns utilized contextual materials like: fieldstone and lumber, that they would clear from their fields. These materials would later become recognized as "indigenous", or native, to the barn. The barns were products of their own needs, industry, and imagination. Despite each barn's individual expression, there seems to be a symmetry and relationship in the barn's overall character. Scale and proportion seem to maintain this unity of an ever-changing form. There seems to be a certain "level of essential rightness" about the barn: it's relationship to the land, orientation to weather elements, structural proportions, and the manipulation and utilization of materials, that all contribute to a sense of "harmony". We seem to instinctively know that the elements of construction seem to create a structure truly appropriate to it's surroundings and it's functional intent. Although each appears to have the same degree of "sameness", each form possesses it's own idiosyncracies. Some are majestic in size, in form engagement, and attractive in execution of construction. Others are less pleasing aesthetically but no less functional, having reached their current form through individual modifications. This individuality, in terms of a barn's scale, design, and construction, is a major reason why they seem to charm us today. It is this level of individuality and mark of craftsmanship that we miss in today's commercial and residential architecture; thereby, justifying our need for the preservation of these vernacular structures. Maintaining our cultural heritage and traditional values is vital to our understanding of past experiences and future growth.
Old barns are landmarks in today's culture. They stand erect in the rural landscape presenting us with a nostalgic expression of form. Standing as reminders of a more simpler lifestyle; one less hectic than that of today's society. It's important to view the originators of today's barn structures to understand how this farm structure has been bastardized.

The early barns of seventeenth century were adaptations of European types and were designed primarily for the storage of grain. The building was low and expanded horizontally as more space was required later for domesticated animals. Roofs were steeply pitched to accommodate the "thatching" that was universally used as roof covering. This type of construction soon was abandoned as the American farmer began to design barns that were better suited to the more rigorous climatic conditions of this relatively new untame frontier. Thatch gave way to slate and wood shingles, and barn heights were raised to enclose a greater space within a more compact, less spread-out structure. The time in the eighteenth century, when barns with an elevated profile began to appear, was also the period when farm livestock began to be kept in increasing numbers. The original settlers, farmers, were concerned mainly with raising crops of corn and grains, and the labor was almost entirely manual. They simply hunted and trapped, which was a plentiful resource, for their food. As the domestication of animals became more prevalent, the farmer began applying the newly developed labor resource; the oxen and the horse. Pulling plows and hauling heavy loads was now a more productive farm chore. The barn structure was now utilized as a shelter for these animals, as well as a storage building for grain and other goods. Because these animals were so vital to the early farmer, the sheltering of these essential livestock was crucial. Their well-being often superseded the immediate comfort considerations of the farmer's family. The animals were often housed in the lower level of the barn; thereby, allowing the upper level to remain grain and fodder storage. The upper level was often divided into three bay areas, with the central space boardered by two storage areas. This central bay was often designed as an unobstructed area to facilitate the threshing of grain; also known as the "threshing floor". The loft area above the these bay areas was often used as the hay storage space for the animals. When hay was fed to the livestock, it was a simple matter to pitch the hay into an opening, or stairway, and let it fall to the floor below, where it could be distributed. These two story barns were commonly built into the side of a hill, so that both floors were accessible from ground levels. This permitted wagons to be driven directly into the upper, or threshing, floor to facilitate loading and unloading. As can be found in this adaptation, the farmer can be characterized as an innovator of pragmatism; he responds rationally to
functional design issues. These generated responses imply infinite variations of a theme, as can be seen in the many adaptations of barn styles. The English style barn is a very common barn type found in the rural environment. Derived from New England antecedents, it is frequently termed the three-bay barn from its basic rectangular floor plan of storage bays, or stables, on either side of a central threshing floor. Other features of the English barns are a gable roof of medium pitch, vertical wood siding, open hayloft, and large double doors centered on one long side of the barn. Ventilation was generally accomplished by a louvered cupola, or windows placed at either end of the barn's gable ends. A major sub-type of the English barn is the "raised barn". The primary difference is that the raised barn is raised upon a stone, tile, cement, or brick foundation. These barns are very recognizable because they will often have some type of ramp or barn bridge, either earthen or some other structural material, which leads up to the double door entrance of the threshing floor level. This barn was an evolutionary symbol of barn design, expressing the change in farming from a general grain producer, to a more specialized emphasis. Another factor involved in this change was a general expansion of farm production, and an increase in the average farm size.

Another major barn style is the German bank barn. Like the raised English barn it consist of two floors, rectilinear in plan, beneath a gable roof. Derived from Pennsylvania origins, German bank barns are built into the slope of a hill to provide direct access to both floors. Thus, the need for an entrance ramp is reduced or eliminated. One of the most notable features of a German bank barn is the second story projection, or overhang, on the downslope side of the barn. This attribute, called a forebay, partially covers a feed lot offering protection for stock in bad weather. Other distinctive features of this barn type include gothic windows or louvers, pent roofs, vertical wood siding, and ventilator cupolas. Probably the most predominant barn found today, the gambrel roof barns extensively cover our rural countryside. Considered a twentieth century development, it has been the predominant recent barn structure constructed. This development was related to a more professional, or scientific, approach to farming characterized by: improved farm practices, new machinery, emphasis on commercialization, the spread of information through farmer's periodicals, establishment of agricultural schools, and the perfection of agricultural experiment and extension work. (Pioneer America, p. 14) The gambrel roof barn is similar to the previously mentioned barn styles, with respects to basic size,
floor plan, and roof detail, but it is the method of construction which separates this barn style from the rest. The gambrel roof barns utilize a frame of overlapping trusses, arranged to eliminate cross beams and thus increase the unhindered use of interior spaces. Such innovations as dimensional lumber for hewn timbers enabled for such adaptations of traditional construction methods and designs.

A barn style which seems to draw more attention than any other is the round barn, or polygonal shaped barns. In 1793, George Washington's sixteen-sided barn, for his Dogue Run Farm in Fairfax County, Virginia, was the first recorded barn of this type. It was felt a round barn was little more than an eccentric form gesture, and it wasn't any more practical then the traditional rectilinear barns of the time. In fact, Elliot W. Stewart, who helped create a fad for the octagon barn construction during the 1880's, saw that the polygonal barns actually had more advantages than the rectilinear barns. First of all, the round and polygonal barns were actually cheaper to build. This was because a round shaped barn could, with fewer materials, contain more storage capacity than could a rectangular barn with walls of the same height. The true-round barn could hold even more than the octagon shaped barn, but because the true-circular barn was more expensive and difficult to build, the octagonal approaches the circle in economy and construction methodology of the rectilinear barn.

The round barn forms, compared to the rectilinear forms, also offers shorter lines of travel than the oblong barn; in an age when the farmer moved everything by hand, convenience counted. The predominant age of the round-type barns was periodical. First gaining notoriety in the late 1870's, the round barn had two large growth peaks; the 1880's and later in 1910. Whether due to the inspiration of the "Industrial Age", or because farmers were increasingly looking for new and innovative designs for their barn structures, the geometric form difference of the round-type barns and their pragmatic organizational attributes helps to illustrate the diverse qualities of this architectural form statement.

The infinite variations of these barn types one of the intriguing aspects about this rural architectural form. Because they possess a fundamental cohesiveness as a wholistic form statement, these individualistic variations and adaptations, like subsidiary wings and lean-to additions, create diversity and individuality.
Many of these nostalgic forms have managed to survive because they were so well constructed. The choice of location, where the barn was to be placed, was the first consideration. Ideally, the ground would have an elevation above the surrounding terrain to facilitate drainage, and to make any excavation easier in case a basement was included. The orientation of the barn was another primary consideration. The front of the barn was traditionally oriented away from the prevailing winter winds; thereby, preventing blowing snow from piling up in front of the barn entrance. Clearing the site for a new barn was one of the more rugged tasks entailed in its construction. It meant the clearing of trees, pulling stumps, and the removal of loads of stone. If the barn was to be built into a hillside, enough excavation had to be done to provide for the front elevation. With nothing but pickaxes, shovels, and crowbars, earth and stone were removed. The foundation was always built-up from the always present stone that was removed from the site. The stones in the foundation were often so carefully fitted that often no mortar was used. That is probably why one can still find remains of these foundations long after the barns they supported have disappeared. Cemented foundations will in time crumble as the mortar, which is not as durable as stone, deteriorates.

Extending across the center of the foundation and spanning its longest dimension, a girder was placed in a niche left in the stonework foundation walls to receive the member. This allowed the top surface of the girder to remain flush with the top of the foundation. The girder, often supported by a few guide posts of stone or timber along its length, was the main bearing member supporting the floor above and a great deal of the superstructure. Since great strength was required from this particular member, oak beams up to twelve inches square were often utilized. Around the top of the foundation, wooden beams called the sill plates were placed. These beams were notched, or morticed, so as to accept both horizontal floor beams, which extended across the shorter dimension of the foundation, and vertical beam members.

Most of these heavy timbers, ranging from six to twelve inches square and upward to thirty feet in length, were commonly fashioned at the site without the resource of a sawmill. The skill of the craftsman was evident in the highly complex manipulation of the "mortice and tenon" construction. This method of construction can be best expressed in the actual barn frame; in particular, the "bent", or main section of framing extending up from the sill. Instead of installing the upright posts one-at-a-time into the sills and then tying them together with bracing, this heavy framing was done in sections on the ground. These framing sections are comparative to the ribs of an animal. This would be an early example
of prefabricated building methods. The bent was a complete unit of framework, fully braced and extended from the sill to the point where the roof was attached. The bent was commonly the width of the barn and varied in height from eight to sixteen feet.

As previously stated, the construction of these bents called for the only real skill and precision throughout the whole barn building process. Distances had to be accurately measured and the mortices carefully made to receive adjoining members. All of the joining of these heavy timbers was done by fitting one member into another with a chiseled-out mortise and tenon, or tongue. The members were then locked together by driving a wooden peg into a hole which was bored through both timbers. This method of connection was much stronger and less costly than using iron spikes or nails. Most of the old barns still standing today were built in this fashion.

The erection of some of these heavy timbers took some manpower, so it was common for the "barn raising" to become a community project. Men would come with their wives and children, bringing their own tools and tackle. With this manpower donated as a free communal effort, the owner of the new barn would be obligated to provide food and drink for the families. Although much hard work was involved, the barn raisings were considered a party and a break from the monotonous routine of day-to-day farm life.

Once the frame, or bents, were up, the neighbors departed, and the work of fastening the siding and making a roof was left to the farmer and his sons or hired men. The siding was usually made of pine, which could be easily sawed into boards at a local sawmill. Because the sawmills of the time were usually vertical saws driven up and down by water power, distinct striations were left on the face of the boards. Later on, the vertical saw blade was discarded for the circular saw. Other methods of determining a barn's approximate age are the inspection of the roof construction and its covering. Early roof rafters were joined at the peak in the same way as the bents; where they met at the peak, they fitted together with a mortise and tenon, and a wooden pin was driven through the two rafters. The rafters were then fastened to a ridge pole which ran the length of the roof.

The early roofs were covered with shingles provided by bark stripped from trees, preferably cedar. These were laid in an overlapping pattern with one shingle with the bark side up and the next with the bark side down, very much like the roof tiles in Spanish architecture. Later, shingles were produced by simply splitting a two or three foot section of pine, oak, or
cedar logs into wide, thin sections. Some of these hand-riven shingles still exist. The quality of wood used and the care that went into it's seasoning, was testimony into the longevity of the project. The considerations of grain characteristics when the wood was sawed, and method of seasoning the wood were all carefull selections to consider. Whether it was soaking a log several days or weeks in water, and then letting it dry in a vertical position, or letting the wood dry naturally by stripping away the bark from the tree, letting the tree die, and then harvesting it several months or years later, many feel that these somewhat crude methods of seasoning were far superior to today's kiln dried methods.

A painted barn is usually indicative of later nineteenth-century construction. Less attention was paid to the seasoning of wood as paint-making knowledge developed. It was common for the farmer to produce his own paint by mixing skim milk, red iron oxide, and lime. Later, with the addition of linseed oil, the paint was found to have better penetration into the wood. These ingredients made for the durable, red-toned finish we often associate with the barn structures.

The wonderful variety of buildings found in rural North America is a source of delight for both world and local travelers and commentators. Continually presented at home with a view of a synthetic, disposable society through films and television, these visitors seem to be surprised to find the past so alive in our small villages and along secluded back roads. As we do so many things in today's society, we tend to take our country architectural heritage for granted, giving it so little thought and even less care. We simply seem to forget the richness of this manmade landscape that surrounds our cities and towns, and have stood the test of time. Barns help to evoke that honest architectural expression that is lost in much of today's architecture, and should be respected as a part of our heritage and cultural tradition that is lacking in our hectic, throwaway society.
Vertical Small Town Images:

1. Prominent skyline
2. Slender in nature
3. Structurally revealing (most often)
4. Often geometrically pure/expressive

Water Tower
Church Steeple
Elevator
Courthouse
Commercial
Small Town Imagery

As I stated in the previous section, the environment of my childhood has been a major influential factor in my design attitude. This environment is not only restricted to the rural context, but is strongly rooted in the small town. My entire life has been rooted in small town life and it's fundamental outlook of the environment. Like it's neighboring counterpart, the rural vernacular vocabulary, the small town expresses fundamental solutions to environmental issues based upon tradition and pragmatism. These fundamentally rooted design precepts offer simple concepts, but generate an infinite variety of solutions and interpretations. This simplified, yet ambiguous urban response is what gives each particular small town it's inherent character. Just as Robert Venturi states, "architecture should express complex and contradiction at all levels of urban experience," (Venturi, p. 9) the small town, though simplistic in urban response, expresses a more deeply rooted social logicality. There seems to be a blatant expression of simplification in the small town's imagery; yet, as an element of community, there is a complexity that exist which enrichens the social fabric and visual personality. In the following pages, I will attempt to discover what elements are inherent in a small town that justify these assumptions.
TOWN ATTRIBUTES:
1. Layout
2. Landmarks
3. Arks and boulevards
4. Individual identifiability
5. Community Homogeneity
6. Un-longeted (Spatial Standards)
7. Simplification of ideology (Straightforward)

SCALE:
1. Room/Space
2. Room juxtapositioning
3. Building
4. Poly-Form (Many Buildings)
5. Neighborhood/Campus/Complex

- Rooms reflect town personality and identity
- Building is organized as a whole to reflect town personality
- Poly-Form Complex is organized to express the small town image, personality via form character and placement

Main Street

Individual statement within community, neighborhood, public view.

Rural rur urban

Arts and culture

City}

< Vertical inclination >

Downtown

As you travel deeper into the community, the town/Building appears to increase vertically.
TRANSITION / NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY

BOUNDARY ELEMENTS/MARKERS

PLANNED/DEVELOPED COMMUNITY
*SENSE-OF-ORDER*

IMAGE MARKERS:
- Water tower
- Main street
- Transit lines: R.R. / and Vehicular

INDIVIDUAL PERCEPT/ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (SPACE)
"What images are viewed through child's eyes.....?"

This is an interesting question regarding environmental perceptions. The honest and unpredictable viewpoint of a child is a refreshing alternative to the seemingly predictable, or conditioned responses that I've received from the mature classes. A child seems to view their surroundings at a "micro" scale; the world is immediate and simple. They tend to express the fundamental images of their surroundings in an honest interpretation of form and space. I was fortunate enough to take part in an interesting investigation that was strongly related to my research of small town images. The investigation, "New Palestine.....a day in the life", involved the application of a poster contest to fourth and fifth grade elementary students in New Palestine, Indiana. The role that I played in this investigation was the one of judge, or interpreter. Each student was asked to submit a poster that illustrated their interpretation of what they felt was characteristic of New Palestine's image.

The many variations of these categories were the subjective viewpoints of each of the students. Each perception may of had some form of bias attitude due to the child's home atmosphere, i.e. a farm, but were largely expressive of the community's attributes as seen through the eyes of the child. The buildings that were represented were very clear form interpretations, and spaces were fundamentally expressed with specific focuses, and the community possessed very specific qualitative form and/or spatial distinctions. These distinctions seemed to deal with function, scale, form, and location. Like their elders, the children placed great importance on forms and spaces based upon their function. Because a child seems to express a creative consideration to environmental analysis, they tend to focus on those forms or spaces which offer an alternative impression. The child understands the basic changes in environmental issues, and manipulates the realistic qualities of the form or space so that they become more recognizable, i.e. distorted vertical punctuation that reiterates the building's scale.
Being an interpreter of design, I found myself looking at the environment from an alternative perspective. I was simplifying the illustrations into interpretive responses of environmental conditions. The posters were becoming abstract gestures, rather than literal interpretations. With respects to my thesis, the contest allowed me to realize the simplistic gestures that the surroundings demonstrate. This simplicity and abstract interpretation of reality should complement the literal conclusions that I've made in my questionnaire.
Structure: very deliberate, seemingly rhythmic, straightforward. Primary and secondary systems fundamental expression.
It seems difficult to draw conclusions upon the research analyses and discussions completed to date. There is a level of quantitative analysis that could exhibit conclusive findings, but the actual development of concrete conclusions and decisions seems to be too early in the research stages of my thesis. As I stated earlier in the paper, the research element of my thesis is an ongoing investigation and entails both empirical and design analyses. I can, however, make some conclusions on the first stages of my investigations.

As I had assumed, there are visual qualities inherent in rural vernacular forms, and their impression upon the environment is expressive of traditional and pragmatic attributes. These attributes are stimulating representations of a visual personality rooted in our culture, and exhibit a character that is often excluded in contemporary design responses. There also appears to be definite images, within the small town community, that exemplify the town's identity (i.e. the town square and main street). These images represent a visual simplicity in urban design; yet, intrinsically possess a sophisticated and complex layering of visual and cultural expressions.

The next step of my thesis will be to analyze and interpret these visual images, both of the rural and small town vernacular, into forms which reflect the initial visual personality, yet express a level of abstraction and sophistication to respond to contemporary issues. As far as this section of my thesis is concerned, I have learned much from the investigation and research stages and attempt to exercise their principles of investigation throughout the remainder of my thesis studies.
Experimental Transitions

The long hours of reading, writing, and investigating are, for the most part, behind me. The next step of my thesis involves applying what knowledge I’ve gained from my research into a meaningful expression of interpretation. The rural vernacular has provided me with the foundation for design exploration, but now I must decide on a means of creative release for my interpretations of this vocabulary. An area of design that I had yet to become involved with was the facet of furniture design. Like architecture, furniture design requires an in-depth look at form, materials, and construction methodology. The intimate level of detail, material variability, and design flexibility in furniture design would allow me to work at a level of simplified interpretation, so that I may better understand the expression and methodology of the catalyst of architecture that I was investigating.

I chose some very stereo-typical furniture pieces to express these interpretations: a wall mirror, stool, chair, and table. My intent in designing, and actually constructing some of these pieces, was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the regionalistic architecture that I was dealing with through a hands-on design approach. The end result that I hoped to achieve was the development of furniture pieces that echoed a familiar language; yet, expressed both a cohesive and rich character that I felt could be achieved through interpretations of this regional architecture.

The wall mirror became my first designed piece. Drawing inspiration from the literal vernacular expressions, forms began to evolve via my abstractions and subjective interpretations. The forms were abstracted into mere geometric notions, materials were elaborated upon, and details were modified and enlarged. The wall mirror design, like most furniture pieces, has an inherent functional quality that provides guidelines for its design. Like the vernacular forms themselves express, form follows function. The mirror must exhibit a straightforward, functional pragmatism; yet, express an interpretation that is rich and innovative in design. The design, for example, utilizes the practical aspects of function and scale; yet, standing on its own, exemplifies a sculptural attitude that relies on the interpretation of form and the expression of material rawness. My initial intent of the design was to develop a series of sketches that expressed my ideas, but I later realized that the actual construction of the pieces would offer me an alternative design approach for