AN ARCHITECTURE INVITING PARTICIPATION

A Schoolhouse and Town Hall for Paint Rock, Alabama
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An Architectural Thesis
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May, 1985
This book is dedicated to Mother and Dad for their constant support, encouragement, and guidance, and to Samuel for his unconscience inspiration and love.
CREDITS

Jack Wyman, Studio Critic
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INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT

There is a potential hazard in the architectural profession of becoming more concerned with personal achievements than with the well-being of the user. The architect, as with any artist, may easily become egomaniacal in the creation of his work. If the architect feels gratification and self-esteem through the achievement of an architecture which recognizes and responds to the needs of the participant, the ego can be a positive driving force in his work. However, the self-aggrandisement of the designer as a primary objective cannot be a part of humane architecture.

This thesis began with the goal of producing an ego-less architecture, an architecture concerned primarily with the psychological and physical well-being of the user. Over the course of the year I realized I was relying on my own intuitions and emotions rather than those of the participants because I had infrequent access to them and their reactions. Finding the design capturing the spirit of North Alabama and Paint Rock, this realization was disconcerting. Designing from my experience as a Southerner rather than that of the user's was apparently a contradiction to my thesis.

Upon reflection, I realized it was this shared experience that gave life to the design. Empathy with the participant is necessary, but for a design to possess vitality and excitement, the designer must give a part of herself to it. Trying to design only for the user, without self-actualization, would rob the design of the delight which comes from making it a part of oneself.

Thus, rather than proving a thesis, this is the documentation of the evolution of a thesis. Beginning the year with the goal of immersing myself in the experience of the participant, I discovered the excitement of participating myself. The realization of this shared experience between myself and the people of Paint Rock is by far a richer design than one lacking the inclusion of the designer.
From the conception of this thesis, the primary goal was to develop and document a process, thus it seems logical that the book should be chronologically structured. However, this format by no means implies completion or conclusion of either thesis or project; it is merely a record of a series of experiences, both emotional and architectural. I would hesitate to assume such a personal experience could be of considerable interest to anyone less involved in it than I. Thus, the purpose of the book, other than being a professorial requirement, is rather a selfish one. I feel that writing of my impressions and beliefs is perhaps the only way to achieve the clarity of thought I desire.
Prelude

Southern Influence

Questions of seamliness aside, there is perhaps a central fallacy in the exercise of any designer explaining herself as a way of introducing her work. Any idea, thesis, or design ought to be larger and more interesting than the designer herself. Although to have life, the design must be a part of the designer, perhaps more importantly, it should be hoped that the "person" of the designer will remain more or less subordinate to that of the participant. The teller is simply not that important. What she tells is.

Nevertheless, for accessory illumination upon the thoughts and emotions of a Southerner, and with an advisory to the reader that it is only after these several pages that the true business begins, I furnish this personal preface.

About seventy years after the War Between the States, a popular suspicion began to emerge that the South still remained incorrigibly unlike the rest of the United States in some elemental and darkly meaningful way. Central to this notion of the South's singularity has been a vision of the white Southerner as something like the lost and haunted "Ishmael of American history," and no one proved fonder of this proposition than certain cultivated circles of white Southerners themselves. Much of this vision was made up, no doubt, of that slightly haggard romanticism indigenous to the region. But it was no less a reality for that. However illusory by all exterior perspectives, romanticism nevertheless largely determined and directed the course of affairs in the South, both private and public. It was taken, and acted on, as the reality of things, and so by that measurement constituted the effective reality. This sense of comprising some spiritual order of the outcast and benighted -- a kind of perversely, left-handedly chosen people -- was all the more beguiling to Southerners because the rest of the nation seemed so ready to collaborate in the conceit.

But no matter how tatty a commonplace it became, the final truth is that the South did long constitute something like another country within the map of the United States. It amounted to something like America's Scotland, or America's Catalonia. For the last decade or two, as the South has industriously undertaken to alchemise itself into a replica of Pasadena, its old simple passionate definitions of life have begun to wane and diffuse except in those small, yet isolated, communities of the rural South.

While the rest of American history has
been most notable for an eager and nimble application to the possibilities of the moment, it remained the peculiarity of the South that it always seemed somehow vaguely adrift and lost in time. It was as if it had been overly memoried. The shades of other ages, not only of its own grave, gray, tragic Crusade but of even remoter periods such as Arthurian England, lingered over its sunstricken stretches like multiple overlays of nostalgia -- as if it were a region hung in some old abiding implosion of history. The first ransacking swarm of Anglo-Saxons left behind them placid villages named out of yet another past: Canaan, Bethany, Zion, Hebron, Moab -- the primeval geographies of the Old Testament reinvoked, four thousand years later, among red hills and gullies and broomssage fields on the other side of the globe. At the same time, vagrant filtrations from another antiquity eddied over the South's interior, with communities named Carthage and Troy and Corinth, and planters and barristers out in the obscure reaches of Alabama and South Carolina sitting on their back galleries the whole of a long hot Sunday afternoon, surrounded by a locust-stitching emptiness of loblolly pines and limitless level cottonland, reading Tacitus and Livy in the original tongue.

This habitual intercourse with the past no doubt partly accounted for that sense of the South as somehow older than the calendar counted -- older, in a way, than Philadelphia or Boston or even Plymouth Rock. To the rest of the country, it often seemed as alien as Syria or Afghanistan -- an insular territory of cave beliefs and shotgun violences and scruffy hills where, after dark, solitary horned cows wandered the mild dust of back roads under a calm mottled moon. It was as if, finally, the South belonged to a time before the Western hemisphere was even suspected -- was, at the instant of its emergence, already as profoundly old as Mesopotamia or Ur. And in a sense, it was.

For one thing, for over two and a half centuries, well before and well beyond the War Between the States, the South was, with slavery and then its sequel, absorbed in an interior, collective experience wholly outside the general American sensibility of innocence and rationality and optimism -- an experience belonging in fact to an older and direr script about the human situation. While the epic of the West was a physical experience as immense and furious as the South's providing the United States with its only approximation of a true national romance, still it was principally an exterior happening, a simple, single-minded exertion outward against exterior circumstances of earth and weather and
anonymous adversaries. But unlike the Western adventure, the South's experience was both an exterior and an interior happening. The convulsions of slavery and then the war and the hundred years that followed were matched by an equally turbulent inner conflict. It was an outer violence that simultaneously exploded inward upon a whole people's spirit and vision. In embarking on the kind of folk war it did over a century ago -- pitching into it so much of pride and risk, however inflationary and illusory that headlong investment may have been to the actual circumstances that occasioned it -- the South could not really afford to lose. But it did, in full measure to the extravagance of its commitment, cataclysmically. And it was in trying then to abide that insupportable defeat -- and the even more implacable irreconcilability that followed it, the incapacity to forget -- that the personality of the South was completed. In a nation that began as a foundling and wail of history and that still, after some three hundred years, had not concluded who it was and what it was for, the South -- dwelling in an ancient memory of itself, with an extra sense, an inner ear, for the long melancholy music of time -- became the one region of the country with its own active interior mythos, its own tragic legend of blood and fire and guilt -- most critically,
"Alabama felt a magic descending, spreading, long ago. Since then it has been a land with a spell on it — not a good spell, always. Moons, red with the dust of barren hills, thin pine trunks barring horizons, festering swamps, restless yellow rivers, are all a part of a feeling — a strange certainty that above and around them hovers enchantment — an emanation of malevolence that threatens to destroy men through dark ways of its own."

Carl Carmer
The Stars Fell On Alabama
PHILOSOPHY

My thesis, being a further evolution of my architectural beliefs and philosophy has been influenced by many events and experiences. The most evocative experience is, of course, my Southern heritage and childhood environment. I believe these have directed me in the path I have followed throughout my education.

Architecturally, the first project significant to my philosophy occurred third year. The program was a house in Muncie for which we had an actual client. My goal for the design was a home rather than merely a house. I wanted each space to become a "place." Each space was then designed with a concern for how it would emotionally affect the participant. It was a beginning.

The following spring I had the privilege of participating in a Studio Abroad in Florence, Italy. This is when I actually began to formulate beliefs about what architecture should be. We were given a site and a building type, but no program. This not only was the first time I had the opportunity to consider what spaces should compose a building, but also consider the needs of the society using the space. Before thinking about the functions and uses of the building, it was necessary to try to understand the Italians as a user group. This involved exposure to their social habits, history, religion, arts and literature, in short, an immersion of myself into their culture.

At this point, I began to recognize the assumptions architects make about their clients. Architecture should be the broadest of professions, however, it is most frequently the simplest of solutions to a functional problem, similar to those executed in school. The architect, even if considering the design with attention to form, space, and image, seldom acquaints himself intimately enough with the client to understand his social and psychological needs.

Shortly after the Studio Abroad, I served my architectural internship which served to reinforce these notions. Although working with a firm comprised of Southerners in a Southern city, I quickly realized the failure of the assumptions being made even concerning other Southerners. It was soon evident to me that even if one is generally acquainted with a society, gross misjudgements are likely to occur unless one can see past the economics of the "architecture."

As with any art form, it seems architecture is prone to develop, particularly in those of considerable talent, considerable "ego's." It is
understandable that the architect would want to incorporate himself and his own image into that which he designs, and in many respects this can foster a humane result. If an architect feels gratification and self-esteem through the achievement of architecture for people, his ego can be a positive driving force. However, the self-aggrandizement of the designer has no place in the realization of an architecture that the participants can make their own.
PROCESS

Over the past few years I began to acquire a set of beliefs that formed the cornerstone of my thesis. However at the beginning of the year it was merely a vague accumulation of feelings that suggested a direction I wanted to explore. I was not sure where the experiences of the year would lead me, and was excited by the idea of a spontaneous, thought-provoking process.

Believing that architecture is not for architects, but rather people, and whatever architects may assume or theorize, it is through the senses that people appreciate, that people feel architecture; I was in search of a sensitive, empathic process. During the summer, I became intrigued by the idea of inductive rather than deductive design. Since my thesis was to be intuitive, emotional, and subjective, the idea of a prescribed series of premeditated activities was intolerable.

Ideally, the process would not follow a deductive path, but rather an inductive one which would build up layers of detail or information in research, programming, and design simultaneously. The initial stimulus came from my own emotional response as a Southerner. I believe this freedom to follow an inspired thought ultimately results in all facets of the design becoming more intertwined, and thus the result harmonious and consistent. Using this process, there are actually no specific activities that can be defined as "research," "programming," or "design development," rather, all become integral parts of a holistic process.
PROJECT & SITE

I began to think about the relationship of thesis to project toward the end of my internship. I knew I wanted to investigate a process of becoming acquainted with the participant, recognizing and understanding his needs and expectations. The first task of identifying a vehicle for my thesis was the choice of user. I considered the alternatives of choosing a group with which I had shared experiences and common values or, as with the Italian studio, one which was foreign to me. Almost immediately I chose to use a North Alabama context, thus eliminating superfluous research.

Knowing the cultural influence of my Southern heritage, as well as the subjective content of my thesis, would likely affect my design in an emotional, intuitive manner, I wanted to choose a building type that should evoke an emotional response in the user. My conclusion was a schoolhouse. As A. S. Neil says in Summerhill: "In Education, intellectual development is not enough. Education must be both intellectual and emotional. In modern society we find increasing separation between intellect and feeling. The experiences of man today are mainly experiences of thought rather than an immediate grasp of what his heart feels, his eyes see, and his ears hear...the aim of education is to work joyfully and find happiness." I found the challenge and responsibility of designing an environment that would accomplish this goal immense.

The second part of the design, the town hall, developed with the selection of the site. I was doing my internship in Huntsville, Alabama, so in the evenings and on weekends I began to drive through the small towns and communities looking for an appropriate site.
The drive from Huntsville to Paint Rock gradually prepares you for the geographical and cultural differences in the two towns. Highway 72 leaves Huntsville over the end of Monte Sano mountain which marks the beginning of "the country." The mountains begin to rise on either side of the cotton fields in many blue layers.

Passing a few small communities clustering close to the highway, you begin to notice the hills rolling in closer to the road with each advancing mile. Occasional roadside gas stations and general stores advertise their merchandise and hospitality with red and white Coca-Cola signs. The road is frequently marked by concrete bridges spanning the Flint River and its many branches.

Leaving Gurley, yet another small town, you quickly enter the Paint Rock Valley, passing the road that wanders off to the left for such mountain towns as Trenton, Hollytree, Princeton, and Skyline. Immediately the road curves to the right, hugging the foot of the mountain that has now swallowed up the cotton fields. Ahead and to the left, the narrow, fertile valley moves between the foothills of the Cumberlands. Bounding the curve, the mountain steps back slightly, and a few white clapboard houses rest in its shadow. They are each amply shaded by a profusion of trees in addition to the inevitable lavender wisteria embracing the porches. Within the next mile, the density of the dwellings increases until, unless you have specific business there, you have passed Paint Rock in a quick flash of color.

The town is actually little more than a commercial strip to the east of the highway consisting of five or six businesses and a small residential community to the west. Each of the commercial buildings, with the exception of the brick factory producing candy and tobacco products, the commercial buildings are made of painted block. You pull directly off the road into the strip parking. There are the two or three inevitable pickup trucks with their lowered tailgates that serve as the "front porch" to the businesses. The general store, having the advantage of being the only air conditioned building in town, and the town hall, housed in an old service station, serve as the town gathering places in which to discover whether Aunt Clara got over the shingles or if Little Debbie really got that scholarship to Vanderbilt.

The dirt road leading east between the town hall and the candy factory passes the ruins of a once prosperous train station, crosses the rusty tracks being slowly choked by Johnson grass, moves down a shallow incline beneath a canopy of
willows, and halts at the bank of the Paint Rock River. At this point the river is shallow and clear, and flows over a bed of limestone, ideal for wading. This is the most popular place in town for the children and teenagers, whether it's for an energetic battle with a large mouth bass, or a romantic evening in the moonlight. With the trees' branches entwining over the river, the cool, green banks are a refreshing respite from the summer heat.

To the west of the highway, a narrow band of grass, and occasionally woods, isolates the houses from the traffic. You can enter the neighborhood from one of three streets, among which there seems to be no special hierarchy or relationship. Driving west along any of the three, there barely seems to be room for your car, so there is a constant apprehensive anticipation of meeting another car. The east/west roads lead directly up to the foot of the mountain with the last row of houses actually perching on the hill. Driving through the area, the initial impression is of the generosity and extravagance of nature, with the profusion of blooming azaleas and rhododendrons, pecans and oaks stretching their branches over each house and the road, and the wisteria or roses embracing the columns of almost every porch. Through the abundance of vegetation you gradually become aware of
Knowing the local elementary school children must bus over twenty miles to school, this community was ideal. It possessed the need, but as important, Paint Rock exhibited the spirit and independence of the rural South, the participant I was looking for. My choice was made.

The site is adjacent to Highway 72, directly across from the town hall and commercial strip. It is a long site consisting of a knoll above the highway sloping down to a flat meadow. It stretches back into the neighborhood, defined by a fence row of maples, oaks, and crepe myrtle. Looking in any direction from the site, one sees the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains. To the east lies the Paint Rock River valley.

Spending time in Paint Rock, talking to the inhabitants and becoming familiar with the community, I felt the town suffers from a lack of image. There is no space or structure that symbolizes or represents the community. This is most evident in the town hall. Traditionally, town halls occupy a place of prominence in a community and through classical forms and rich materials present an image of which the community is proud. In Paint Rock, as mentioned previously, the town hall is housed in an old gas station. Talking to the citizens of Paint Rock about government buildings, I realized they never refer to their own town hall, but rather the courthouses in Huntsville and Scottsboro.

The awareness of this need for an image, as well as the functional need for a new facility, resulted in a decision to include a town hall in my project program. With the inclusion of the town hall, I was essentially involving the entire community.
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FALL QUARTER

READINGS

My first goal was to become intimately acquainted with Paint Rock and develop an emotional involvement with the community. Fall quarter I read a variety of books ranging from scientific behavioral studies to Southern folk tales.

Initially, my interest led to readings concerning theoretical and empirical perspectives of the relationship between humans and their environment. These books ranged from educational and environmental psychology to cultural anthropology. I was in search of a beginning point, a familiarity with existing behavioral studies. Although I discovered data that applied to my thesis such as Irwin Altman's Children and the Environment and Paul Insel's Too Close For Comfort, I realized the hard data I was absorbing had little relationship to the goal of designing for a specific participant.

I then approached the problem from the other extreme. I began to study folk tales and music of North Alabama as well as some local primitive art. Immediately I recognized Paint Rock in these songs and stories. There was an expression of the same independence, sense of the past, and overtone of mystery. The most informative of these was Carl Carmer's The Stars Fell

On Alabama. This documentary of the people of Alabama has a cultural anthropological basis, although its main goal is to tell the story of "a strange country...a land of enchantment."
PRECONCEPTIONS

A concern expressed at the beginning of the quarter was what my preconceptions were and to what extent they would bias my design. I decided the best course of action would be to define these and evaluate them immediately. I felt the best manner in which to recognize my preconceptions would be through design. At that time, the most pressing questions were generally formal and contextual. Should there be one building or two? How should the new building(s) relate to the Post Office and the commercial strip? What is the best way to arrive at flexibility and variety in the schoolrooms?

My initial decision was to design the schoolhouse and town hall separately. I felt this was necessary to present a strong identity for both children and government. In addition, two buildings could begin to form a positive exterior space. This presented the consideration of the inclusion of a fire station as well. Some of the concerns included natural lighting and ventilation, imagery, and the individual's interaction with the spaces. Both the schoolhouse and the town hall became buildings organized around central spaces.

The schoolhouse had a central auditorium/lunchroom cum activities space which was volumetrically a cube. Naturally lit by clerestories and ventilated by a cupola, this space was flanked by the two schoolrooms. Since each schoolroom would accommodate three classes, the primary objective was variety. Each schoolroom was composed of an entry, a large central space, a teacher's alcove, a reading room, and a porch. Through manipulations of doors these spaces could virtually become one.

The dominant space of the town hall was naturally the meeting room. The mayor's office, clerk's office and support spaces became saddlebags along the perimeter. To support the Paint Rock tradition of "tailgate-sitting," a gathering space was needed facing the highway. This was manifested in the porch which wraps around the east side, terminating at either end with the mayor's office and the clerk's office.

The design came so quickly it was almost disconcerting. My understanding of, and comfort with, North Alabama folk architecture was evident. The majority of my preconceptions seemed to involve form, materials, and details. Although, to this point, most of my decisions were architectonic, the design stimulated my interest in another direction. One of the spaces in the schoolhouse was a reading
room which immediately attracted my interest. I went back and tried to re-design it considering the child's perspective and interest. This in turn initiated a form of presentation that was to prove most effective, the perspective. It seemed the only way to graphically evaluate space from the participant's view, the goal of my thesis. Although I realized this design was by no means final, I felt comfortable with it and confident the people of Paint Rock would as well.
FIELD TRIP WEEK

Field trip week came at an opportune time. Happy with my progress, I was anticipating the communication with Paint Rock. The first trip out after arriving in Huntsville succeeded in re-immersing me in the spirit of the community.

Immediately after parking my car by the town hall, I crossed the highway to the site. The Johnson grass reached my thighs and the trees along the fence row were still a vivid green. I sat in the grass to sketch and found myself inclosed in a warm, living world of sound and smell, out of sight of the curious farmers lounging on their tailgates across the street. To my wonder, I felt a childish delight at my seclusion and decided some of the site must be left in this charming state.

My specific goals for the week centered around interviews and observation, hoping to discover some answers to the questions raised by the initial design. I quickly discovered the citizens of the town had little time (or was it desire?) to talk to a student concerning an "imagininary" project. My best resources became the old folks who simply wanted some one to talk to. From them I realized Paint Rock was not nearly so typically Southern as I imagined.

Traditionally being an economically depressed community, the inhabitants of the Paint Rock valley refused to participate in the War Between the States. They had always been dirt farmers and few, if any, owned slaves. The people of Jackson County went on record in Montgomery as saying "they reckoned they would stay out of the fuss." After the war started, Confederate soldiers shot and hung many men from the Paint Rock valley as deserter. In retaliation, many others joined the Union army. This action seems typical of Paint Rock's determination and independance. This became an issue to deal with when I began to design the town hall.

In response to questions concerning schoolhouse imagery, the concerns of the folk I talked with seemed to deal with the land, vegetation and age. Their descriptions of a "schoolhouse" usually concentrated on the views out, the connection with the land. Their descriptions also included many adjectives describing age. The preoccupation with age was also prevalent in any discussion of architecture. Paint Rock apparently was not anxious to move into the Space Age along with Huntsville.

My last day in Paint Rock was an especially beautiful one. The sky was a deep blue, a light breeze was blowing, and autumn was in the air. I decided to take a vacation from the interviews and sketch book
and took a blanket down to the river for a picnic with my three year old nephew. With a cane pole along for inspiration - or maybe it was the fresh pecan pie - we immediately attracted the attention of a small group of boys who were endeavoring to catch their dinner. Lying in the sunshine watching the antics of the children, I felt again the timelessness of those mountains. Although universally human, these were a people with an awareness and reverence of their past. This, then, was the essence of what I wanted to achieve in my design.
CONCLUSIONS

Winter Quarter began with the designer's equivalent of writer's block. Unfortunately my comfort with the initial design resulted in a sense of complacency. Changing or developing the design became a real chore. In an effort to break loose of this tentativeness and generate new ideas, the studio participated in a four hour charrette of my project.

Although the results were surprisingly similar, there were a few whimsical, innovative schemes. The charrette stimulated ideas that enabled me to make some final resolutions before Christmas break. The first of these was to have multiple buildings rather than one or two. This was to be a clustered arrangement similar to the relationships between Cumberland houses and their outbuildings. The connections would be both built and suggested. This solution would accomplish many things. It eliminates the static plasticity of independent structures. Since all buildings were located on the front portion of the site, their proximity to one another increased the importance of the relationships between the respective occupants. With the functions partially separated by outdoor spaces and/or community spaces, privacy lacking in a single building solution would be provided to both government and school activities. With each function located in an individual building, identity would be strengthened, however, the close connections would reinforce the sense of community.

A conclusion was also reached concerning the site. All buildings were to be located on the front portion of the site for two reasons. This would eliminate the feeling of isolation for the school children and also reinforce the imagery through visibility to the road. The entry would occur from Knolton road rather than the highway to create a sense of ritual, arrival, event. In addition, this would be safer than direct entry from the highway. For further safety, as well as to slow traffic down to recognize the town, a traffic light would be located at the intersection of Knolton and Highway 72. Some type of barrier, "wall," would run the length of the site to recognize the commercial wall opposite, determine a boundary, provide seating and a barrier between people and cars. The options considered included a low stone wall, hedge, or picket fence.

Other concerns included the importance of the visual link between interiors and the land, the representation of Paint Rock's image to the public, and the versatility, variety, and personalization potential of the schoolrooms. By this time, my interests
had reached beyond the "architectural" into the behavioral. This was largely a result of the field trip to Paint Rock as well as the days spent there over Thanksgiving. Any time spent there redirected my thoughts to the people, their rituals, customs, expectations, and dreams. It seemed Paint Rock was indeed an emotional inspiration.
CHRISTMAS

During Christmas I did not visit Paint Rock officially. One day I drove out and sat on the site simply to reassure myself. The townspeople were busy with Christmas rituals and quests and I did not feel it an appropriate time to intrude. Reaffirming my subjective, emotional responses, I could feel the building on the site. Clustered near the road and leaving the meadow as it was seemed like the only solution now. Feeling confident, I returned to my own family celebrations.
Following Christmas, I immersed myself in design once again. Following the resolutions made previously, the design seemed simple. Facing the highway, the buildings clustered around a courtyard of sorts. The town hall became the central piece with the school and administrative functions on either side.

There were, of course, the functional and perceptual problems to work out, but the most enjoyable part of the process became the studies of the individual spaces. Continuing the use of the perspective as an evaluation method, I considered many of the spaces, including entries, schoolrooms, town hall, and courtyard.

The goal for each space was an abundance and variety of natural light, places that were flexible enough to be what the user most needed, special places within the spaces to consider the individual as well as the group, and the use of natural materials as much as possible such as wood floors, exposed wood deck, and wood windows. Following the construction of each perspective, I could better see the space from the view of the participant which facilitated improvements.

Because of time constraints some of the spaces became more developed than others. Following the process I implemented in the beginning, the time spent on different rooms was generally proportional to my interest in that room. However, as my excitement was highest when dealing most directly with the most used spaces, this attitude was valid. The meeting room of the town hall, the classrooms, and the children's entry onto the porch were the most completely designed.

By the end of the quarter the general organization and form was settled. My goals for Spring quarter included re-evaluating many of the interiors, considering details of materials and construction and the finalization of design.
INTERIM

SPRING BREAK

I returned to Paint Rock over spring break anticipating the image of my design on the site. Although uncertain of the validity of my thesis because of seldom contact with the citizens of Paint Rock, I was confident the design "belonged."

My nephew, Samuel, roommate, Athene, and I went out one sunny afternoon. The intention was to sketch some typical details and reassure myself of the appropriateness of my solution, as well as to let Samuel stretch his legs. We strolled up the dirt track between the Post Office and my site in search of details and a place to run. The sun was hot, and after a long winter, the wildlife and livestock of the community collectively decided it was a fine day to be out and about, much to Samuel's delight. While I sat on a large sun-warmed rock and pretended to document the construction details of Paint Rock, Athene and Samuel played hide-and-seek in the tall Johnson grass. The discovery of a complacent old hound dog willing to have his chin scratched by a small boy and the tiny creek running along the edge of the meadow were the highlights of the afternoon.

Paint Rock was as I remembered.
Spring quarter consisted of detail design, final design revisions, and writing and more writing. Initially, I drew the details that had been growing in my mind all year. Actually, I believe I knew what they were in the beginning.

The construction and materials utilized methods familiar to the region. The buildings were designed in such a manner that they could be built by local labor. The prototype for that area of the Valley consists of a fieldstone or brick base supporting the floor two to five feet above grade, wood siding or stone veneer on wood construction and simple pitched roofs with roofing varying from asphalt to slate, depending on the age of the structure. Once again, it was amazing how easy these details were to design. I believe this was a product of continual thought rather than instant design.

Some of the final design problems included the playground, which is not yet complete, the parking, and the proposed pavilion. The parking, located between the buildings and the meadow, occurs in a small copse of redbud. From Knolton Rd. the cars will be unseen and the copse also will be a wonderful shade in the summer.

Initially I intended the front corner of the site to be held by a pavilion or gazebo or tower of some sort. I felt it was needed as both "front porch" and monument to Paint Rock. After struggling with the decision of what this should be for two quarters, I came to the conclusion that any form I designed would be entirely ambiguous. Finally, at the suggestion of a classmate, I realized the best "front porch," the best monument to Paint Rock is a live oak with a porch swing hanging on it.
AFTERWORD

Having reached the end of the year and this academic exercise, I suppose I am obligated to organize my thoughts and experiences into some kind of conclusion. This is probably the most difficult and tedious task of the documentation, however I will make the attempt.

With the experiences of the year ranging from personal and emotional to technical and intellectual, the most meaningful and influential were the personal ones. Discovering the necessity of allowing my intuitions and feelings to strongly effect my design was perhaps the most important experience. The realization that the inclusion of my own personality is a mandatory part of my design process, and accentuates my concern for the user rather than detracting from it was the most significant and satisfying conclusion I reached.

This resulted in the need to discuss what my heritgage and that of Paint Rock was as a way of explaining the spirit of the design. The act of writing of my impressions of the South and the Southerner was surely the most personal activity I have undertaken. This self-evaluation forced me to take a close look at myself and my values as reflected by the South in general and share this personal revelation with the unidentified reader. Although not literally architectural, the act of writing this crystalizes many of my concerns for, attitudes toward, and reactions to architecture.

Finally, this year has been made memorable through the experiences with and influences of the members of Jack's studio. I would like to express my appreciation to those who criticized, sympathized, and encouraged when it was most needed. I also feel my choice of studio and outside critics was the best possible one. I would especially like to thank Jack and Sonny for giving so much of themselves to this thesis.
APPENDIX
PROPOSAL

After graduating from Ball State, I intend to work until I become registered, then return to school to do graduate studies in anthropology. Originally, I planned to graduate from Ball State with my Environmental Design degree and pursue my Masters in Architecture with a specialization in programming, as this is where I feel my experience and knowledge are severely lacking. Since my plans have changed, I would like to pursue this interest in programming through the thesis studio. To this point, my only pertinent experience in this area are the Spring 1983 Studio Abroad design for which we developed our own program, and working closely with a client on internship concerning a house addition.

I feel there are two poles in architectural design which are successful and worthwhile. The first of these has been implemented by man since the beginning; it is the vernacular solution by the layman in response to his basic needs, both physical and psychological. The other is that resulting from education and research. Both approaches involve not only the recognition of user needs, but also an understanding of why they exist and how to fulfill them in the best possible way.

There is, however, a potential hazard in the architectural profession of surpassing the first approach but remaining on the threshold of the second. This occurs frequently as a result of concentration in school on the design process, the theory and practice of problem solving, and building sciences. The intensity and duration of the programs, however, do not allow for much breadth of study, especially in social sciences and humanities. This often results, unfortunately, with a tendency to discount vernacular architecture as being "uneducated," and thus insignificant, and yet lacking a knowledge of such things as sociological interactions, religious and domestic rituals, psychological responses to the environment, and social and personal institutions, which is necessary to incorporate within a sensitive and successful design process. If one does not take it upon oneself to develop an awareness and basic understanding of these issues, the effect can be, and often is the production of inhumane architecture.

Having reached this threshold, I now find it necessary to move into the second approach. I want to use the thesis studio as a tool for developing a working knowledge of the factors effecting human needs that should be an initial concern in the design process. Programming, with an awareness of the many subjects it should encompass, is to
be the major thrust of my thesis. I feel the ideal approach to programming would be similar to that implemented by Charles Moore with the St. Matthews Parish Church; that being the "Take-Part" workshop developed by Lawrence Halprin and Jim Burns. However, since the thesis is hypothetical, it would be impossible to involve the interest of an entire community in something that would never materialize, thus, their process would be ineffective. The actual method or process is not yet defined, and is actually the goal of my thesis; but it will likely be more hypothetical in nature, similar to the theses of Seong Chung, Richard Hebard, and David Allen. I hope to develop for myself a process with which to implement thorough programming, including both an index of resources and a set of constructs dealing with the often ignored user needs, that could be used in the future.

At this point, I plan to design an elementary school and town hall for Paint Rock, Alabama. I can prove the need for the project: I already have a basic understanding of the society and culture, thus eliminating superfluous research; and I feel the combination of the two functions are an ideal test for which to develop a detailed responsible program.

As A. S. Neil said in Summerhill:
In education, intellectual development is not enough. Education must be both intellectual and emotional. In modern society we find increasing separation between intellect and feeling. The experiences of man today are mainly experiences of thought rather than an immediate grasp of what his heart feels, his eyes see, and his ears hear... the aim of education is to work joyfully and to find happiness.

The challenge and responsibility of designing an environment that evokes emotional responses in children, and encourages the educational experience to be a joyful one, is, I feel immense.

My original thought for a project to test my thesis included only the townhall. The reasons for my choice were based on the ideas of a public building and community space. Since the town of Paint Rock is so small, the townhall would of a necessity include many functions. Government buildings must fulfill not only a community's functional needs, but also the symbolic expectations. Particularly in such an isolated, traditional community the importance of imagery is extreme. There is also the necessity of considering the town's social hierarchy in designing the meeting hall. As I began exploring the town of Paint Rock I was impressed with the wonderful opportunity of including the whole
family on one level, and community on another, with the inclusion of a school.

The objectives of the project are based on quality not magnitude. I am purposely selecting a small scale project so that not only is there an overall scheme, but also individual spaces and sub-spaces are analyzed and designed with consideration to their effect of human response. I want to keep it small enough to consider details so carefully as to almost develop working drawings. Nonetheless, the primary goal is a working environment for both children and adults that is creative, positive, productive, and exciting.

Paint Rock is located in northeastern Alabama, in the Paint Rock River Valley at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The community is sharply defined by U. S. Highway 72 and the mountain range. The population is approximately 275 and there are 42 elementary school age children. The two functions I intend to address, town hall and school house are both sorely needed. The present town hall is housed in an old service station, along with the volunteer fire department, and has inadequate space for both offices and town meetings. The town presently has no school, and while the high school children bus only seven miles, the elementary children bus twenty-three miles. For the past six years the county has been petitioning the state legislature to build a school in this area.

Ideally, the schematic design would be presented to the community, and if approved, could be considered to have a high probability of being successful. However, since the problem and solution are both hypothetical, the criteria for evaluation will involve, more specifically, the actual thesis. As stated previously, the goal for the thesis is a process for future implementation of programming; the success depending on finding a balance of freedom and detail.
ADDENDUM

Item 1. Scope - See proposal paras. 7 & 9

Item 2. Social Preconceptions - The site was selected for a number of reasons which are: interest in and understanding of Southern culture; familiarity eliminating superfluous research (proposal para. 4); desire to practice in the South; because of understanding of and proximity to North Alabama, I can more easily identify a community in need of me than I could in any other region of the country.

Item 3. Land as Image - Geographically and topologically, as architecturally, symbology and imagery must be defined concerning the expectations and ideals of the community. With a history as an agrarian community, the seasons with the rituals of planting, tending and harvest, play an important role in both the economics and the symbology of the community. With the proximity of the mountains and the river as definers of the town limits, the land plays a very dominant role, not only in the community and its effect on the society, the economy and the architecture but also in many rituals, both communal and individual. The images retained through the rituals should be discovered and used in defining the community's needs.

Item 4. Values - The differences in community and universal values and where they coincide or complement one another must be determined.

Item 5. Preconceptions - The emphasis of the thesis is placed on freedom from preconception concerning social and individual behavior, and an effort to find a direction that is appropriate to the community of Paint Rock.
DIARY

The intensity and duration of undergraduate architectural curriculums results in a concentration on the design process, the theory and practice of problem-solving, and the building sciences, which are the foundation of our knowledge and skills. However, this often does not allow for much breadth of study in the humanities and social sciences, thus resulting in a lack of knowledge and understanding of such things as sociological interactions, religious and domestic rituals, psychological responses to the environment, and social and personal institutions, all of which are necessary to incorporate within a sensitive and successful design process. If one does not take it upon oneself to develop an awareness and basic understanding of these issues, the effect can be, and often is the production of inhumane architecture.

Thesis Statement
Susan Mouzon
1 October, 1984

October 1, 1984
Meeting with Arno, Jack, Doc, and Sonny

Concerns:

Address both sides of the street. If something is being taken from the old side (the town hall) then something should be given back. Spend no longer than a week or so. Just something that should be considered.

What are the racial problems and how should they be dealt with? Would black children be afraid in Paint Rock? Can siting help solve that problem? How will the citizens of Paint Rock react to integration?

Should I consider programs that will level off population decrease, or increase it? Is that a part of what I am trying to do? If so, consider increase of tax base, a highway food service, a liquor store, revival of hosiery mill. How will Paint Rock deal with the teacher cost? Can that be absorbed by the country with a transferral of teachers?

Rather than satisfying all behavioral patterns in Paint Rock; which ones should not be reinforced. Look from citizens point of view.
Design for the stereotypical person. Not enough time to do hard research, besides that isn’t what I want to do. Choose someone during fieldtrip week who fits the bill.

Talk to the County Board of Education.

October 3, 1984
Preconceptions in flight

the town hall occupies front portion of site to present image of Paint Rock to the road, is also a buffer between the children and the road
two choices: one building sharing large space, auditorium/lunchroom, meeting room two separate buildings, each with definable identity materials - townhall - wood structure, field stone veneer, ashlar foundation, schoolhouse - wood structure, wood siding, ashlar foundation
October 8, 1984
Questions raised by charette

One building vs. two buildings

One building is much more economical, something Paint Rock could actually afford. Community spirit is reinforced. Everyone actually has some claim to the building. Is more efficient in use of space; auditorium can also be town meeting room, bathrooms and kitchen don't have to be duplicated, office spaces may be adjacent. However, does it raise a problem with a lack of identity for both children and government?

Two buildings is the extravagant solution. However each represent a strong identity. Obvious difference between school and government. Probably more enjoyable for both adults and children. Two buildings begin to form positive exterior spaces. Community green?

Possibility of the third building, fire department. The third building actually completing the exterior space. How to make a decision concerning which is best?

It is important how the house next door and

more importantly the Post Office are dealt with. With the Post Office, the North side of the road is beginning to become the "other half" to the commercial strip. Can a relationship with the Post Office actually form a Community Green? What is the relationship with the house? What can the house function as?

Carefully consider the environmental systems implications? How does this effect the form and materials, and is it a question considered by the people of Paint Rock? If not, how important is it?

In the school house, the flexibility and variety of spaces in the school rooms are of utmost importance.
October 17, 1984
Information from trip

Paint Rock Valley is in the western part of Jackson County and extends from the town of Paint Rock to the Tennessee State line. The Paint Rock River is formed by the junction of the Hurricane and Estill's creeks, and a little lower down is Larkin's creek. All these creeks rise in the mountains near the Tennessee-Alabama line. The river flows in a southerly direction, gradually increasing in size by a number of creeks. Lick Fork Creek flows into Paint Rock River near Princeton, on the west; then Dry Creek also on the west; next is Guess Creek on the east, near Trenton; then Clear Creek on the west near Carth, with a number of big branches or small creeks that flow into this river along the way. This river is 65 miles long and empties into the Tennessee River fifteen miles below Guntersville, at the Painted Bluff, so named by the Indians for the colorful rocks they found at this location. In its lower stretches it forms the boundary line between Marshall and Madison counties. It gets its name from the Painted Bluff at its mouth.

The Valley gets its name from the river. We shall first describe the Valley and then the people. On either side of the river are a number of Coves, varying in size. These coves nestle in this valley between the river and the mountains, like the parts of a jig-saw puzzle. As the land in the valley and on the sides of the mountains was so rich, it was covered with a very dense forest of large trees of many kinds. If this timber were here now, it would be worth a fortune of more than a million dollars.

When the first settlers came, they made their homes up in the Coves and on the sides of the Mountains. Down near the river, there were so much big timber, vines, canes, ponds, laquoons and lakes, the climate was unhealthy and the land was difficult to clear for cultivation. The land in the coves and on the hillsides was more easily cleared and very rich and loose. It is said that in the spring of the year a man could bend over a dogwood sapling large enough for a good hand spike - a stick used to roll logs, and pull it up by the roots, because the ground was so rich and loose. The foregoing conditions account for most of the old graveyards
being located up on the sides of the mountains.

As the first settlers had small fields or patches of corn in cultivation, some years the squirrels, coons and bears would eat up nearly all of it. It was the habit of the bear to go into the field at night and gather 40 or 50 ears of corn, pile it up, and sit down to eat all he wanted. The women did not need to raise turkeys for there were great flocks of wild turkeys in the woods near. When they wanted a turkey for dinner, the man would go out and shoot one, or if the ammunition was scarce, he would build a pen to catch them alive.

Agriculture was the main industry of the people of the valley. It was hard to clear the land and dispose of the great amount of timber. Before it could be cultivated, they cut and rolled logs for many days before planting the crop.

excerpt from *History of Jackson County*
pp.136-39
white and full, the moon looms above
the deep, misted pines
silvering the cotton fields
docile in their wait for picking
high, untamed grasses waver
with every seldom car
dusting the heavily pooled spider webs
with evening dew.
long silent miles of polished blacktop
are serenaded by humming crickets on
the laughter of a stream as it
falls playfully over the polished stones.

(memories of a homesick college freshman)
The surprising discovery of the trip is that the inhabitants of Paint Rock and the entire River Valley succeeded from Alabama when Alabama succeeded from the Union. They were called the Tories of the Hills. It seems that, probably because of their economic situation, these mountain people equated themselves with the slaves more than they did with the plantation owners. They were poor dirt farmers and looked upon slavery as an evil sinful thing. In addition to this, they firmly believed in the United States as a nation, feeling they fought too recently to win the union, now was certainly not the time to destroy it. I have a really quit feeling that this should effect the architecture, but I am not sure how. If, in fact, the architecture should be representative of and effected by the people, maybe my grossest assumption to this date is that I am dealing with a traditional Southern community. If their roots are in a more Republican sort of past, perhaps I need to start from scratch, particularly where the town hall is concerned. Also there is the need to reconsider the racial problem, and the angle I was viewing it from. I knew that the community was historically as well as currently economically depressed, but I didn't realize that was an exclusive. Not a single plantation ever existed in the valley. There were of course, the upper middle class merchants, etc., particularly after the War Between the States. Surely all this is subtly represented in the architecture, so I must begin to look at it from a new perspective. Are the ideals and beliefs still evident in both politics and religion? How should that be translated into the architecture? Or is it important at all? Am I still viewing the problem as a sentimental, traditional Southerner?

Pragmatic questions answered

Volunteer fire chief - Mr. Keel, lives next door to the Post Office, thus Fire Station could possibly be moved.

Why the road through the site? Sorry Jack, nothing significant, there used to be a trailer sitting on that lot.
The Image

Through the open doorway of the white washed school house one glimpses pink myrtles framing a rickety front porch and, beyond a box-boardered walk, bending over a sagging gate weighed down by bloom. Honeysuckle vines interlace the mis-matched palings of an old, unpainted fence as if one last effort to bind together the batched, decaying wood. Crowding close to the porch on both sides of the steps, the thick, glossy foliage of cape jasmine screens the lace-curtained window on either sied of the open door.
October 19

Here's the rub: reading in Carmer's The Stars Fell on Alabama, apparently as late as the 1930's and most likely even today, the people of North Alabama's mountains hate all "niggers." This is the problem that Jack suggested concerning the sitting of the school house and the reaction of the black children that will be attending the school. I didn't sense the bigotry in Paint Rock at all, but then again, who's going to advertise? Well I know a lot of people that do, but maybe not to strangers, especially ones going to school in the North. It seems that the reason is basically an economic one. Before the War Between the States, the hill people apparently resented the blacks because they were free labor for the rich plantation owners, thus eliminating jobs. The hills were evidently not an easy place to raise crops (obviously, Susan), and as a result, the mountainous counties were all very poor. The attitude is one similar to that of the Southerners toward Mexican labor. It seems that this is also the primary reason so many hill people refused to become involved in the War. They called it a "rich man's battle and a poor man's fight." It would seem obvious that one wouldn't fight for an institution that was depriving one of jobs and a better lifestyle. Thus, it's an issue.

Next question, does the present location of the school house have an isolated feeling? Need to look at that closely through plans and sketches.

Another question, how does the fact that Paint Rock has always been relatively poor effect the image of the town hall? Obviously, the people are not going to identify with the Southern Plantation image. (or is that obvious?) Take a closer look at the existing buildings in the Valley with this thought in mind. Remember, you aren't as much like them as you thought you were. Reevaluate the reactions you got to the county courthouse at Scottsboro. It seemed as if the people of Paint Rock have more of an association with that building as a government structure that they do with with their own town hall. Perhaps that is because their town hall is not much to identify with. Give them something they can identify with as an image or representation of themselves and their town.
October 28

"Alabama felt a magic descending, spreading, long ago. Since then it has been a land with a spell on it - not a good spell, always. Moons, red with the dust of barren hills, thin pine trunks barring horizons, festering swamps, restless yellow rivers, are all a part of a feeling - a strange certainty that above and around them hovers enchantment - an emanation of malevolence that threatens to destroy men through dark ways of its own. It is difficult to translate this feeling into words, yet almost every visitor to this land has known it and felt in some degree what I felt with increasing wonder during the six years I lived there.

What the strange influence is or when it began is a matter for debate... But those who really know, the black conjure women in their weathered cabins along the Tombigbee, tell a strange story. They say that on the memories of the oldest slaves their fathers knew there was one indelible imprint of an awful event - a shower of stars over Alabama. Many an Alabamian to this day reckons dates from "the year the stars fell" - 1833.

Let those who scorn such irrationalities explain this state-that-is-another-land in ways they prefer. They may find causes economic and sociological quite as incredible as these fables and much less interesting. But few of those who know this ground and those who live on it will deny that the curious traveler will find his journeying amply repaid here. So I have chosen to write of Alabama not as a state which is part of a nation, but as a strange country in which I once lived and from which I have now returned."

Excerpt from Stars Fell on Alabama, Carl Carmer, 1934.

When they had the war there was some kind of meeting down to Montgomery and Jackson sent a man down there, name of Sheets; his olks still live around here. He told them they was only three slaves in the whole sounty and they weren't worth fighting over, so he reckoned he and his neighbors would stay out of the fuss. Well, when the war started up, the Confederate soldiers came up in here and shot and hung a lot of the men for deserters. That made the rest of them mad and a lot went north and joined the army up there. Some of them hid up in the hills though and kept on making their corn liquor same as usual. Hurst Mouldin told me all about it once. His grandpap was one of those that got caught by the

xviii
soldiers.

County's still over two-thirds Republican.

Interview with Henry Bowers, October 1984.

Remember they aren't what you thought they were, and they certainly don't consider themselves to be similar to you.

October 31, 1984
Notes from Children and the Environment
(See Index)

"There is a special period, the little-understood, prepubertal, halcyon, middle age of childhood, approximately from five or six to eleven or twelve - between the strivings of animal infancy and the storms of adolescence - when the natural world is experienced in some highly evocative way, producing in the child a sense of some profound continuity with natural processes and presenting overt evidence of a biological basis of intuition."

pp. 9

Begin to consider the importance of the natural environment as an emotional and educational experience. In what ways is a rural environment an asset? How do the children of Paint Rock relate to the outdoors? I remember being very impressed by the sheer number of children outside that Saturday I was there. It was a beautiful day, and those narrow roads were filled with children on bikes, the yards with smaller children, and the site being used for an impromptu football game. What interests children between the ages of six and twelve? How do those interests vary? In
what way can those interests be focused into a learning experience? Talk to Robie about the possibilities for the site as for water, gardens, playgrounds, etc. Visit Macdonalds on McGalliard.

"The natural environment, however varied and stimulating, does not in itself inspire the children to learn. Nature is an inarticulate teacher - or one might say that its messages are too subtle to be understood by the immature mind. Children must be taught by adult human beings. They show a natural curiosity about the world, but this curiosity is easily repressed when adults fail to nurture it."

pp.25

How can the environment surrounding the school be developed in such a way as to stimulate or "nurture" the child's interest and curiosity in nature?

Synopsis of October Diary

ISSUES

Address both sides of highway
Slow traffic down
Racial repercussions
Economic concerns/population trends
Siting of building/s
Townhall as buffer for schoolhouse
One building vs. two buildings
Fire dept. as third building
Public bldgs. as "other half" of commercial strip
Environmental systems implications
Use of natural site in education

IMAGES

One building vs. two buildings
Townhall presents image of town to highway
The interviewed reactions - associations w/old schoolhouse, County Courthouse, Townhall reflecting Republican history/"Tories of the Hills"
Buildings "completing" the road
Agriculture/aigrarian image (association with mountains/coves)
Mystical image - "the year the stars fell"
Economic situation effecting desired image
Types and use of materials
Memory of site as Paint Rock Hotel
Isolation of schoolhouse
Systems effect on imagery

BEHAVIORAL FACTORS

Townhall reinforcing community spirit - one building?
Porch as town gathering place
Townhall as a buffer for children from the road
How will siting of school effect black children?
Effect of lighting on human behavior (children)
Educational philosophies - open plan
Children's reactions to environment (playground, gardens, etc.)

ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

One building vs. two
Systems implications
Choice of materials
Flexibility and variety of schoolrooms
Resolutions
December 20, 1984

Siting

Buildings located on south portion of the site.

1. Hopefully will prevent racial tension caused by remoteness.

2. Image of both functions important - high visibility from road is mandatory.

3. Entry on Knolton Rd.; no direct access from street to create a ritual, sense of arrival, event.

4. Traffic light at Knolton and 72 for safety purposes as well as to slow traffic down to recognize town.

5. Some type of barrier, "wall," as rise begins from ditch to recognize facade wall opposite; determine boundary, provide seating maybe, barrier between people and cars. Possibly low stone wall, hedge, or picket fence.

One Building VS. Two Buildings

Neither; multiple buildings

Arrangement clustered, having a strong relationship between each other. Consider configuration of outbuildings and houses.

Many connections, built and suggested, linking buildings.

1. Eliminates plasticity of two independent buildings.

2. Since both, or rather all buildings are located on front portion of site, proximity automatically increases importance of relationship between buildings. Encourages connections.

3. If functions are partially separated by outdoor spaces and/or community spaces, will provide more privacy to both government and school activities.

4. If buildings are actually independent structures, functions will be more easily recognized and will give stronger identities.

5. However, if buildings are closely connected, gives a sense of a "community."
November 30, 1984

Ideally, research, programming, and "design" are inseparable. If one begins with research and proceeds in a linear fashion through programming and design development, this process frequently results in an unimaginative, stilted product. It is my opinion that a more mature design process is a cyclical one in which one may begin at any point provided all the essentials are ultimately included. For example, perhaps one becomes concerned with the image the client desires as a starting point. His in turn may stimulate specific directions in research and/or programming. Or the process may start at any other point of inspiration; perhaps something as simple as a detail is the initial source.

As stated previously, the process need not, and perhaps should not follow a linear path, but rather a cyclical one which builds up layers of detail or information in each area as the design progresses. Needless to say, research and programming are essential, but rather than having a specified position at the beginning of the process, should be incorporated as the need becomes apparent throughout the design. If this process is used, it seems that all facets of the project become more intertwined, and the design result is more
harmonious and consistent.

Using this process, there are actually no specific activities that can be defined as "research," "programming," or "design development," rather, all become integral parts of an holistic design process.

February 19

I am not sure if I have succeeded in my goal for the project which was to immerse myself in Paint Rock so as to gain an understanding of, or empathy with both people and place. My thesis being to acquire an understanding of human behavioral sciences in general and determine how that relates to the people of Paint Rock. At this time, I feel very positive about the project and think the spaces and forms would be the type appropriate for Paint Rock. However, I know that is more a result of my previous knowledge and feeling for North Alabama than so much a knowledge acquired this year. So, in fact, have I not done exactly the opposite of what I set out to do? Perhaps then, if the project is indeed successful, the solution was achieved through the first of the two initial acceptable methods I stated in my proposal, that is, a vernacular approach. Although many decisions concerning matters such as lighting, structure, landscaping and systems, were made from an architectural point of view, the spirit of the project is a manifestation of my involvement with the south, the mountains, and the people of North Alabama since childhood. I still maintain that the thorough understanding of the user must exist, but perhaps the
architect that has an understanding prior to the project must then simply be empathetic as well. If one has spent enough time in a place to be aware of and understand the vernacular architecture, perhaps that in itself can be the basis of understanding the needs of the users.

Theoretically then, I have neither proved or disproved my thesis because I did not carry through my intentions, and yet I am confident the design is appropriate. What is the point?

The two options were: vernacular or having achieved a sophisticated level of education on which to base decisions. My process seems to have come from another direction. I spent first quarter doing some superficial research on the subjects of education, symbolism, imagery, basic psychology and the history of Paint Rock, as well as reading some Southern folk stories and looking at some primitive Southern artists. That quarter I also spent some significant time in Paint Rock, which I felt actually was in line with my thesis and was very productive.

Based on knowledge gained and new found emotions from that quarter, the second quarter I began designing. Initially, the design just seemed to pour out. It all came incredibly easy; which I feel was more a result of my existing "Southernness" than any acquired knowledge. It seems I have a file of materials, details, and textures that I associate with the area, and all I needed to do was to assemble them. After evaluating that design, I made a series of decisions that were indeed partially based on human behavior, albeit of a generic variety, but largely as an architect makes decisions. Based on those conclusions, I continued the quarter by thinking of things in an architectural manner. However, the spirit of the design came from that intuitive Southernness in my soul, which is, I suppose, vernacular in nature.

Thus, I am beginning the final quarter by re-evaluating the design through a series of perspectives which will help me to see the spaces from the user's point of view. I suppose to accurately evaluate the design I would have to take the drawings to Paint Rock for feedback. The distance separating me from the people I am designing for is actually what led me into an invalid approach. The time actually spent in Paint Rock was quite fruitful and resulted in new directions and insights that helped to mould my initial design. If I had more access to the town, I feel my preconceptions would have both evolved and strengthened the process rather than becoming my major source of inspiration.
So then, how can I attempt to validate the thesis, or is it too late or unimportant to try? One option, of course, is to spend some considerable time in Paint Rock at the beginning of the quarter in an attempt to re-evaluate and get a response to the design thus far. If this is not feasible, then I must continue the project, and document how it differs from the thesis.

March 17, 1985

Perhaps the greatest snare for the architect lies in the fact that he has been taught to regard the practice of his art or skill as a fulfillment of himself, and it is all too tempting to see people as an obstacle to the realization of schemes which are the projection of his power of reasoning.
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