Mr. Anthony C. Antoniades' article appearing in the November-December issue of New Mexico Architecture, entitled: "Traditional Versus Contemporary Elements in Architecture" gives me a welcome opportunity to make a statement on my own architectural views while commenting on his article.

To begin with, his article implies that certain buildings on the University of New Mexico campus (the Fine Arts Building and Johnson Gymnasium) which he uses as examples, are intended to be "traditional" as opposed to "contemporary" in design. As the designer of the Johnson Gymnasium and many other buildings on that Campus, I can state categorically that the intention was to create a contemporary building, meeting all contemporary functional requirements, but using certain regional elements of traditional design in such a way as to recall the rich heritage of our Southwestern environment, including architecture and history. There is a vast difference between this approach to design and that assumed by Mr. Antoniades: "... many contemporary solutions try to appear traditional, through the exploitation of visual means by promoting traditional resemblance." The implication is that we are trying to fool the beholder into thinking he is looking at a real adobe, which of course would be faking.

An analogy to the use of elements of the past in contemporary work is to be found in the design of the Parthenon. As everyone knows, it is made of marble, yet the architects consciously or unconsciously, chose to recall details of the earlier traditional wood-

Church of San Estevan, Acoma Pueblo, begun in the 1620's.
en temples by using Doric columns which recall the earlier round wooden posts; and in the positioning of the triglyphs, which recall former wooden rafter ends. They were not faking, but remembering and adapting.

Further, in Mr. Antoniades’ article, he criticizes the Fine Arts building because its scale is not the scale of the Taos Indian Pueblo. But as most everyone knows, our architectural inheritance consists not only of aboriginal forms as developed by the Indians, but also those modified under the influence of Spain and especially in the early Franciscan Missionary churches. The architect of the Fine Arts Building was Mr. Edward Holien, my former partner and I happen to know that the inspiration for it was not Taos Pueblo, but the inspiring scale and mass of the Church of San Estevan at the Pueblo of Acoma (see the accompanying photo) of which George Kubler in *The Religious Architecture of New Mexico* says: “... responds to the spectacle of Acoma, dominating the gigantic boulder which is its pedestal, with the massive forms of a clean, simple style of building.” To arbitrarily exclude the use of such precedents from our contemporary design is to impoverish our culture.

The Johnson Gymnasium, designed by the writer, also comes in for criticism on the score that it is out of proportion, presumably on the basis of the scale of Taos. He calls it: “... a giant looking adobe which has grown in size without gaining anything in spirit” (see accompanying photo), and remarks that the interior spaces are supported by steel frames instead of vigas. Once again, one must repeat that this building was designed as a contemporary structure to meet the functional requirements of a gymnasium. It is not trying to imitate an adobe. It is recalling some of the latter’s characteristics such as flat roofs, sloped walls and earth colors as a reminder of the environment, and doing this in preference to hard straight lines associated with much of today’s design.

To deprive the architects of the emotional satisfaction of recalling the shapes and forms associated with the history and tradition of the region in which he lives is very much like disapproving of nature because she makes a son’s face to recall that of his father’s. Can it be that we architects of the twentieth century, in our devotion to the standards set by science and technology, are depriving ourselves of equally important requirements, demanded by man’s emotional nature?

—John G. Meem, FAIA