Architecture is seen by means of a series of single frame images. The size of the image is controlled by the visual cone (approximately 45°) and the depth of field. As a viewer traverses around and through a building, the various single images, through a panning action, are unconsciously recorded. This visual experience might occur within several minutes as it does when one looks at a house which he is interested in buying, or it could occur over a long period of time as it does when the interest in a building is not visual.

This element of image phenomenon and time requires the viewer to recall and reorganize the images into a sequential series in order to comprehend the plan and elevations. The fact that the viewer can put the images together does not guarantee a favorable reaction toward the building, for his familiarity with the image tempers his reaction.

I believe we can incorporate these observations into an architectural hypothesis: the reaction to architecture, be it good or bad, is based on the viewer's understanding and familiarity of the building in function, plan, construction and form.

Unfortunately, the above statement is not as simple as it sounds for the degree of understanding varies with the individual and with the standard the architect wishes to establish. Therefore, one cannot accept Tolstoy's belief that "Architecture must speak a language which all can understand," but must consider Arthur Koestler's statement, "Natural taste like natural intelligence requires a laborious education."

This only establishes a base for valid criticism. It does not mean that every time one sees a building with which one is unfamiliar or unable to comprehend, that the reaction will be negative. On the contrary, one may still react favorably to the architecture through a pre-conditioned response or a sculptural frame of reference.

To react architecturally a coherence of all the parts to the whole with a clear expression of each is essential, and this is the responsibility of the architect. Wright refers to this as "Organic."
The problems presented to the architect then, are how to vary the parts to add interest without destroying the unity and how to raise the standards of architecture, knowing that by changing familiar patterns, both visual and sociological, that only a minimum audience will respond.

The limits of architectural expression are now clear. At one extreme where a great number of progressive ideas and complexity of the parts occur, the architect reduces his audience to a point where only other architects with the same frame of reference are able to understand the image. At the other extreme where existing, well-established ideas are used in a recognizable form, the architect increases his audience to the greatest number due to familiar and repetitive images.

Now the problem becomes more complex, for the visual image is involved with the moral and sociological attitude of the architect. In the first instance he is establishing a new way of life. In the second instance he is interpreting the existing way of life. Very seldom is his approach this absolute and most architects practice somewhere within these extremes.

It, therefore, becomes apparent that the function of the University is to make the student aware of his moral and sociological responsibilities to society, as well as the visual aspects of architecture.

advertisers' index

ALBUQUERQUE BLUE PRINT CO. ........................................ 7
ALBUQUERQUE GRANITE PRODUCTS CO. .......................... 7
ALBUQUERQUE LUMBER COMPANY ................................. 19
AMERICAN MARIETTA COMPANY .................................. 19
BLUE STREAK REPRODUCTIONS .................................. 9
BUILDERS BLOCK AND STONE CO. ............................... 17
BUILDERS SPECIALTY SERVICE .................................. 3
CERO Block Company .................................................. 2
DESERT CERAMIC CORPORATION ................................ 8
EVERSTONE PRODUCTS, INC. ....................................... 5
GORDON W. LAURSEN & SON ........................................ 6
JAY GREAR, INC. ....................................................... 18
JOHN BARNES COMPANY ........................................... 3
KINNEY BRICK COMPANY, INC. .................................. 7
LAVALAND HEIGHTS BLOCK CO. .................................. 20
MARVEL ROOFING PRODUCTS INC. ............................. 8
MILLER & SMITH MFG. CO., INC. ............................... 2
NEW MEXICO MARBLE & TILE CO. .............................. 18
SOUTHERN UNION GAS COMPANY ............................... 9
SOUTHWEST BUILDING BLOCK .................................... 6
STRYCO SALES, INC. .................................................. 5
TEWA MOLDING CORPORATION ................................. 17
VANGUARD WEATHER FEND COMPANY ......................... 8

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university—continued from page 9

NMA, December '59