

SPECIALIZATION IN ARCHITECTURE —

A DISCUSSION

By George C. Pearl

In Architecture, specialization is desirable and in some cases, even necessary. It is unavoidable, but also dangerous. Allow me to qualify "dangerous". When specialization is achieved at the sacrifice of adequate general orientation, the productions of the specialists are apt to be disoriented when viewed in their total contexts.

Here is one definition of specialization: "a narrowing of the boundaries of one's efforts, and a concentration upon a subdivision of activity, usually causing loss of orientation with the overall purpose".

The obvious advantage of specialization is that it permits a greater depth of analysis within a particular category.

The dangers are less obvious. As we become more and more specialized we have increasingly greater difficulty in seeing our particular category in its larger context.

If we are able to maintain a constant awareness of our specialization through larger and larger categories; if we are able to trace it to a totality involved with human purpose and human good, then only can the specialist hope that his work will pertain to human purpose and good by design, rather than by accident...or the precarious guidance of an overworked and unreliable intuition.

This big awareness of problem in the totality of its context becomes more difficult as society becomes more complex. In three words: complexity engenders specialization. As the demand for specialization increases, so does the element of danger.

Since complexity engenders specialization, and since our society is enormously complex, one would assume that great specialization has already occurred. Architecture itself, as we define it, is a fragment which has existed as a specialization for so long that only occasionally are we able to see the larger category of which it is a part.

Only occasionally, when we visit a potter, a cabinet maker, a sculptor, a blacksmith or a planner of cities, do we get a suggestion of a larger and more valid category of form-givers to which we belong. The very words **Architect** and **Architecture** are fragmentary.

Artificer is adequate as the phylum of which **Architect** is a sub-phylum. But **Artifact** has become so specialized that it no longer describes the great category of objects which man has deliberately and consciously constructed to pertain to a particular purpose.

Five minutes at the potter's wheel, or with a trowel and mortar, is enough to make one lament the now-antique specialization which separated thinking from doing. But the clean hands, the white shirt and the weak back are ours, more as the obvious response to the pressures of complexity, rather than the conscious pursuit of Veblenian conspicuous consumption.

Nevertheless, we have found in a lower stratum of the European Bronze Age, hand ornaments which cover all of the joints of the fingers. These ornaments cause the fingers to be held apart and rigidly stiff. The wearer can be visually recognized as one who has risen so high on a value scale that his activities are administrative, rather than manual.

Architecture has been defined by Goldwyn Goldsmith as the art of ordering . . . ordering in a Sears and Roebuck fashion rather than in a Jehovan form-giving sense. I am not criticizing Toscanini for not playing the cello. I am saying that the symphony orchestra is a vastly complex medium which, from the standpoint of economy of means, is apt to suffer in a comparison with a solo Segovian performance.

Specialization causes us to rely more upon our intellects rather than upon our intuitive and reflexive command of the medium. Unfortunately the designers of automobiles rarely begin their

work with a consideration of man's nature and his need for transportation.

They begin with last year's models. Of course, last year's models were based upon the year before, and so on. We should be able to trace the situation back to some remote time when human needs were considered. One glance at the vulgarity and impertinence of the newest models is enough to tell us that the designers have not maintained their orientation. Depth alone is not enough.

It is essential to the validity of this example that we be aware that the designer's program was more involved with manufacturers' aims than with human aims. Private enterprise becomes a dangerous specialization of interest when the decay of cohesive social forces permit a distinction between these two aims.

I do not mean to suggest a universal equation between complexity and the decay of cohesive forces. But within a culture where the participants are bound together by common traditions, a common economy and a common theology . . . and where the media of form are limited and understood, the form-giver may specialize to any extent.

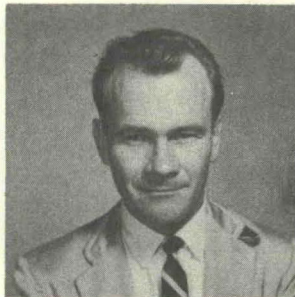
The cultural aims are omnipresent; irrelevance of form will not be long tolerated. A system of control is in force which is analagous to biological natural selection.

As social organization moves into a system where the individual is bound to other individuals primarily by a largely recreational theology, economically stratified amusement clubs and labor organizations, the form-givers are faced with a task which is enormously more difficult and important. More difficult because the form-givers are called upon to express, in a vastly more complex and unproven medium, functions which are new and fluctuating and

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George C. Pearl joined the firm of Ferguson-Stevens and Associates in 1950, immediately after graduating from the University of Texas. After serving his apprenticeship, Pearl received New Mexico license in 1953, and was named chief designer at Ferguson-Stevens in 1954. On December 1, 1958, Pearl became a partner in the firm. A bachelor and a gentleman farmer, Pearl resides on his 60-acre farm at Tomé, 30 miles south of Albuquerque.

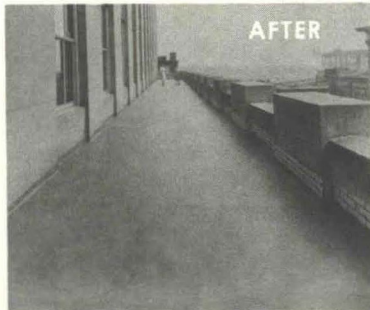




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often unconcerned with long-term social aims.

More important because the system of controls comparable to biological natural selection is no longer in force. Even the one factor of the rapidity of change has overthrown the old system. The unprecedented necessity of a conscious and deliberate shaping of environment, a "laying on of hands" upon our culture, is staggering. Who but the form-givers are to fill the need?

"But for him (man) it is no longer mere natural circumstances with which he must cope. It is the restless, explosive inventiveness of his own brain that challenges him and confronts him with utterly new conditions. To these new technical situations he must adapt himself with preternatural speed.

"No natural automation over biological ages will serve now. He must intuitively and consciously conceive and build his own world and his future . . ." (Wright, Frederick S., *Richard Neutra — a Philosophy of Design, Arts and Architecture*, January, 1959.)

In order to perform this new function the form-giver's primary obligation is to be adequately oriented toward long-range social goals. Specializa-

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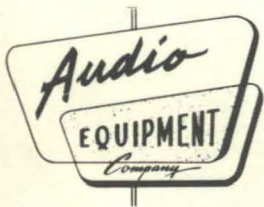
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ELLIS TO SPEAK AT NEXT CHAPTER MEETING IN SANTA FE

Santa Fe will be the site of the next Chapter meeting to be held on March 7 at the Town House, located on the Las Vegas highway, one-half mile east of the Albuquerque cut-off.

Program speaker will be Bruce Ellis, of the Museum of New Mexico, who will present an illustrated lecture on "Archaeological Discoveries Relating to Early New Mexico Architecture".

Mr. Ellis presently is associated with the Museum's History and Public Relations Departments. While with the Museum of Anthropology, Mr. Ellis did extensive archeological excavations throughout New Mexico. Slides will be used with the lecture.

Itinerary of the meet:

Executive Meeting—12:00 A.M.

Business Meeting—3:00 P.M.

Cocktails—6:30 P.M.

Dinner—7:30 P.M.

Cost of the dinner will be \$3.25 per plate. Over-night accommodations are available at the Town House, and advance reservations are desirable.

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tion is an obstacle in achieving and maintaining such an orientation.

Whether increased specialization will lead to increased profits for the specialist is a subject about which I have neither ideas or interest. I leave this to those who specialize in profits. For, in order to be consistent with my lamentation of specialization, I have kept my remarks severely generalized.

The essence of my point of view is that specialization tends to sacrifice breadth for the sake of depth of experience. This tendency springs from quantitative human limitations. In discussions with specialists of all sorts, particularly those within our general category of form-giving, I have been aware of the remarkable depth of knowledge which specialization has made possible.

But at the same time, the knowledge is usually so limited in scope that the productions which emanate from it are irrelevant or intellectually provincial.

The reader will probably be able to cite some conspicuous examples to the contrary. I know a few, also. But in general I feel that specialization tends to produce small areas of splendid analytical precision, floating in a chaos of disconnectedness.


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