

Designs should fit nature, California architect says

By MICHAEL KESTEN
Of the Emerald

"I don't always care as much as an architect should if you want to produce things that are called really good buildings. I'm more interested in what's happening to the shit that runs out of this really good building."

Sin Van der Ryn, California State architect, spoke to a group of students last week. He apologized for the fact that his interest is no longer confined to architecture. In fact, the last six years his primary concern has

been what he terms "whole systems."

Whole systems take into account the whole life support system, including food supply, energy supply, shelter, work, and life style.

Van der Ryn described his evolution away from architecture. "I spent a lot of time trying to define and look for and relate what I thought were healthy situations, healthy people, healthy social groups. To me, physical design is really inter-meshed with social design."

Consequently, when Van der

Ryn was appointed to the office of state architect, he struck a deal with California Gov. Jerry Brown to create an office of appropriate technology. Van der Ryn now also directs that office. He described appropriate technology as "any technology appropriate to the era of limitations."

Van der Ryn illustrated the term "appropriate technology" with a story to show "where things are and where they can go." The story was about apricot trees. His friend grows small, sweet-tasting fruit on trees with deep roots. The commercial growers in the same area

grow large, pretty-looking fruit on well-irrigated trees. Those trees have shallow roots and the fruit tastes bland.

"That's kind of a paradigm for the kind of cultural situation we find ourselves in, in a certain kind of way," the man said. "We have a shallow rooted culture whose survival is almost entirely dependent upon outside resources ripped off from other places. And then we have the possibility for a whole culture that's connected to something — connected to the cycle of natural limits that nature imposes on us. Even if we may go on for several centuries thinking that there are no limits."

Van der Ryn said people in Buffalo, (New York) who are freezing and people in Marin County (California) who are running out of water, are now discovering that there are some limits to our resources.

Defining appropriate technology more clearly, Van der Ryn noted three criteria used when designing a system with limited resources. He grouped adaptability and diversity as one criterion. He then talked about entropy, or energy diffusion, and evaluating the amount of work released from the energy cascading through a system, as well as the amount of waste heat given off.

The third criterion for appropriate technology he called

"coherence" and described it as "the extent to which any system cooperates with natural systems and uses the free work of natural systems." "Make biology and ecology work for you," he said.

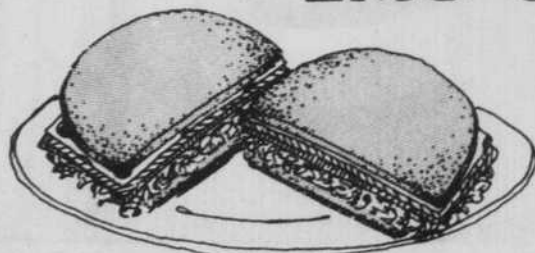
Van der Ryn used our present method of sewage treatment as an example of a system not in cooperation with nature. "You pollute the body wastes, which just happen to be excess nutrients, by dilution and then you spend hundreds of millions of billions of dollars trying to separate out these nutrients. You try to separate them out to keep them from polluting large bodies of water."

"And what is pollution? Pollution is just too much of what might be a good thing in the wrong place. The same way in which waste is nothing but a misplaced resource. There is no waste in nature."

Van der Ryn said there are now possibilities to integrate architecture and urban design with the concept of whole systems. He advised today's architecture students to prepare themselves by taking courses in natural science.

"My own education was totally deficient of education in any natural system, so I had to wait 20 years to find out how exciting it is. I don't think you have to wait that long. Our job — this generation — is to make some wise decisions about these resources we have left," he said.

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Liberal arts lose majors

Dante and Pirandello, Thucydides and Virgil have apparently fallen on hard times at the University this term.

According to the Registrar's list of designated majors released last week, no students are registered majors in any of three liberal arts programs: Italian, Greek or Latin.

Eight students are enrolled in the classics department which does encompass both Greek and Latin. Similarly, 110 students are enrolled in Romance Languages, which includes studies in Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Rumanian.

Comparison with past preference lists shows no shift in liberal arts students' preference of majors — most departments have roughly the same number of students ten years ago as they do now.

But the list does indicate strong student preference for professional schools as nearly half the students now signed up in a professional program.

This figure may underestimate the bias toward professional schools. Students listed as undeclared are assumed liberal arts students, though they may later enroll in a professional school.

Biology boasts the biggest major-designated enrollment for departments with 651 students engaged in either undergraduate or graduate work.

The business school posted the biggest quarterly figures for any professional school, enlisting 2,105 students.

Leisure and culture, a program offered through the Community Service and Public Affairs, as well as the program in weaving offered by the art dept. also were unable to claim any majors.

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