



Learning from Las Vegas

Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour

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Here is a plea for proper architectural humanity and humility as well as a plan for accommodating the desires and values of ordinary people who are too often being dragged along on architectural ego trips and uplift programs. It is also realistic examination of the American vernacular environment-as-it-is and a reexamination of the goal of architecture and the role of the architect.

Learning from Las Vegas is addressed both to directly interested parties—architects and planners—and to the fragmented majority—the innocent bypassers who get gas at a nonpseudocolonial filling station in order to drive home to some architect's monolithic superbrutal apartmented self-monument. And whether they are producers or consumers of buildings and cities, readers will discover in this book a finely argued development of ideas illuminated by numerous and varied illustrations. The book is a delight which will induce either a burst of affirmation or a splendid rage.

Venturi, Ms. Brown, and Izenour write that the lessons of Las Vegas for architects of today are as relevant as those of classical Rome were to the past century. Their book is divided into three parts. The first is an illustrated study of the iconography and symbolism of Las Vegas, with special attention to the Las Vegas "Strip"—the road leading from the airport to downtown—which leads to a head-on defense of automobile dominance and what denigrators call "urban sprawl."

The middle part generalizes this viewpoint, showing by historical example how the Modern movement has led to an architecture of the Heroic and the Original. The authors prescribe what they believe is an urgently needed antidote: a new modesty, an architectural populism, and an acceptance of the Ugly and the Ordinary.

The last part of the book illustrates how the theory is translated into reality: it presents the projects undertaken over the past several years by the firm of which the authors are members, Venturi and Rauch.

Robert Venturi, writing about today's architect, states, "I feel the role of prima donna culture hero, even in its modern form as prima donna anticulture antihero, is a late Romantic theme as obsolete for the architect and for the complex interdependencies of architectural practice today as is the 'heroic and original' building for architecture. An architect strong on his own feet does not need this illusory support at the expense of other architects...." The challenge is clear and forthright. Articles based on earlier versions of material in this book have already caused a great deal of controversy and rethinking. In writing the lexicon of vernacular architecture with an American accent, the authors have been denounced by some established professionals as nonarchitects, even *anti*-architects. But at the present uncertain point in the development of the Modern movement, it's a useful controversy that could result in a firmer sense of future direction and closer accommodation to social realities.

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