

On the Work of Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown  
**Two Cheers for Democracy is**

**One Too Few**

In the course of their career, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown have distanced themselves further from the kind of architectural criticism that deals not so much with the buildings themselves as with the philosophical implications of those buildings. For these architects, who have two of the most influential books on architecture of the latter half of the twentieth century to their credit, it has become clear that words always fall short of practice. In the course of their professional life they have found out that architecture is a *craft*, and that an architect's philosophy can better be one of action. This emphasis on the deed has kept them out of the centre of the theoretical arena in recent years. Nonetheless their appeal for an architecture that 'communicates', even if it dates from a quarter century ago, has become utterly relevant to today owing to the soaring growth of the communications industry. Communication – admittedly of a very specific kind – has meanwhile become a human right. Owing to this contemporary relevance Venturi and Scott Brown remain susceptible to criticism that goes deeper than the architectural object as such. The repercussions of the widespread tendency to equate architecture with language are affecting people all around the world. These repercussions are the subject of the present essay.

To apocalypticians, revolutionaries and other progressive types the status quo may well be unbearable, but there are people who frankly accept what it has to offer. Since *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), and especially since their inspiration by Pop in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown have been the most important representatives of the latter group within architecture.

100 In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Robert Venturi formulated a critique of post-war Functionalism, which he argued was characterised by a utopian attitude coupled to a contempt for historical structures. The homogeneous Cartesian grid, the purist formal principles of the International Style, and the rationalist principles of modern industry had, according to Venturi, brought us predictability and a monotony of form. In these circumstances Venturi was in favour of complexity and contradiction, as his title suggests, which he saw as representing a more humane approach than the rational humanism of the Moderns. In practice it amounted to a plea for a break with the moralising dominance of functionality. 'Architects can no longer afford to be intimidated by the puritanically moral language of orthodox Modern architecture. (...) I am for a messy vitality over obvious unity. I include the *non sequitur* and proclaim the duality. (...) Less is a bore.' A multiform and hybrid answer to the abstraction and uniformity of Modernism was anything but humdrum. 'I think life is so complex today you go essentially for richness of effect over purity of effect: any aspiration to clarity would be naive; viva ambiguity', wrote Venturi.

Venturi's plea for complexity met with broad sympathy within the architectural profession. It was not for nothing that Vincent Scully compared the influence of his book to Le



Guild House, home for senior citizens, Philadelphia, 1961



Gordon Wu Hall, dormitory of Butler College, Princeton, 1980

Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture* (1932). Venturi's ideas of the sixties were mainly about an aesthetic correction. This has made a lot of headway in architectural circles, since most architects have a better grasp of architecture's aesthetic dimension than of its social one. The architectural profession seemed perfectly happy with an aesthetics that goes along with the world the way it is.

**Las Vegas as a Perfect Parody of Living for Tomorrow**

*Learning from Las Vegas* radicalised the formal correction to Modernism by adding a social dimension. The effect of this book on the architectural world was therefore not so much liberating as controversial. Whereas form was Venturi's main concern in the sixties (in retrospect the author would have preferred the title *Complexity and Contradiction in Architectural Form*), he and Scott Brown used their research and photographs of the Las Vegas Strip to express a quite different, more fundamental critique of Modern architecture and its revolutionary and elitist pretensions. In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Venturi and Scott Brown (together with Steven Izenour) made mincemeat of the obstetric idiom of Modernism. The Strip, with its enormous billboards and neon signs, can be interpreted as the ultimate metamorphosis of the Enlightenment Utopia. Unburdened by the cultural pessimism of much contemporary philosophy, they saw the commercial vernacular of the American Main Street as the source of a bottom-up architecture that would be 'closer to the people' than the top-down strategy of the Modern Movement.

It was no longer necessary for architecture to be a forerunner of tomorrow's world, nor an impartial stage for the life of today's. Venturi and Scott Brown, richly under the influence of the relativising tendencies that had been at work in all aspects of culture since the sixties, wished to break with the habit of always taking a mortgage on the future. Instead, their point of departure was the world of the here and now – and what image could better express this world than the permanent makeshift of Las Vegas, which

Our design philosophy is based upon appropriateness of design to context, directness and economy of means, and careful tailoring of the architectural expression to the needs of the client, the program and the budget. Because each of our completed works responds to different natural, cultural, and architectural surroundings, each has its own distinctive identity. While our designs have been widely recognised as innovative and eloquent, it is also true that most of our buildings have been produced within modest budgets. Our firm has served corporate, commercial, institutional, governmental and individual clients in executing a broad range of building types. These have included offices and retail

showrooms, educational facilities, municipal buildings, museums, theatres, medical research laboratories, multiple and single housing units, libraries, and recreational facilities. In addition to the design of new structures, the firm has extensive experience in the rehabilitation and reuse of buildings of historic importance.

Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown

Today a family that chooses lower-middle class or low taste culture does not feel the need of an architect, an 'effete Eastern snob'.

Denise Scott Brown

Any architect who steps out of the elitist box today courts trouble from design review boards and architectural critics.

Denise Scott Brown

For whom shall the large civic building or the city-wide facility be programmed? In such projects, people must add their own symbolic meanings mentally rather than physically, and the architecture should be evocative rather than anonymous in order to enable them to do so. Here the something-for-everyone approach to values seems to be most suitable, although one balks at the task of defining the architectural equivalents of Archie, Edith, the Jeffersons, Gloria and Mike, in, say, the design of a city hall.

However, I suspect that cultural pluralism may be less of a problem in urban design than the social critics lead us to believe, and that further investigation into subcultural urban values in design will demonstrate that there are enough shared values to allow architects to find something for almost everyone in civic building and urban design.

Denise Scott Brown

Today the mass media have accelerated the flows and muddled the distinctions between cultures, but outrage still results if intercultural movements go in the wrong direction, if high culture turns toward low. Upper-middle culture saves its strongest salvos for those who debase its taste canons and retains its

lacked the least atom of metaphysical pretention and delivered the imagery which 'meant' the most in practice (both to the passer-by with a hunger for images and to the bank balance of the owner of Caesar's Palace).

The book *Learning from Las Vegas* is more than just a provocative gesture towards the architectural establishment. It is a monument of acceptance of the human condition, of liberation from the yoke of futuristic legitimisation. Las Vegas *is*, and that's all you can say about it. What Las Vegas ought to be, or what it will be in the future, are not of the least importance to its existence. From that point of view the city with the world's highest density of roulette tables per square mile is also the best extant metaphor for the acceptance of the now. Las Vegas earns its living literally from the myth of reckoning ahead. Where else could the authors find inspiration for an attack on this particular pretention of Modernism? Las Vegas is the ideal parody of the rationalist fixation on the future. In its sanctioned façadism, it is a first-rate source for cultural history.

If the now has become the criterion, then it is self-evident that Modernist experiential asceticism is no longer acceptable. The architecture that Venturi and Scott Brown stand for is no longer an alienating prelude to the future. The architecture of here and now is figurative, affirmative, literal and above all immediately gratifying. It is no longer concerned with a predetermined social deficiency that may potentially be overcome by architectural means, but with a *moment of recognition* that it can offer us. On the basis of the here and now, Venturi and Scott Brown have built up an oeuvre that can not be considered part of architectural Post-Modernism in a formal sense, but can in a moral sense. The world is the way it is, and nothing can remedy it – certainly not architecture. The world does not exist thanks to people but in spite of them.

#### Language as Context

A highly effective method for confirming the condition of the here and now and relieving oneself from the burden of looking after the future is to interpret architecture as language. This approach has its historical precedents and Venturi and Scott Brown have made a speciality of it. During Late Modernism the reduction of architecture to a package of standard solutions for a limited range of quantifiable problems resulted in the neglect of its social and historical context. From the late fifties onwards, a wider interest began to be taken in the historical transformations of the built environment, the demands of the topos, pre-existing social bonds, psychological needs and, above all, the communicative value of architecture. Alongside this, the autonomy of architecture was soon assailed by a host of sociological disciplines that specialised in such matters. Architecture risked being discussed to oblivion in an effort to redefine its cultural significance. The three-dimensional reality of architecture was being smothered by the textual discourse. But suddenly there dawned a potential way out of the predicament: define the essence of architecture as language. The discipline thus came to terms with language by turning the tables; that is to say, it started justifying itself more and more frequently in linguistic terms. If you can't beat them, join them.

From this new point of view language was both the context and the content. Architecture could escape the stranglehold of the social-scientific context by defining

itself as part of that context, namely language. In the logic and terminology of the period, i.e. the late sixties and early seventies, if everything is language (Roland Barthes) and architecture is also language (Umberto Eco) then everything must be architecture (Hans Hollein). That is to say, by identifying itself with the one universally applicable contextual aspect, language, architecture could avoid being swallowed up by all those other aspects, especially the social and psychological ones (which after all could also be reduced to language). To this extent, the undertaking was successful and the mother of arts could breathe easy again: architecture was still alive. What is more, a whole new universe, that of language, opened up for it.

But an enormous problem soon emerged. By borrowing its new self-respect from the means originally used for conveying that self-respect, the linguistic sign (*signifié*), architecture sacrificed its third dimension. It was reduced to representation, and for that purpose its content, space, was no longer strictly necessary. The architectural design thus became a graphically manipulable object instead of a three-dimensional consequence of intellectual, aesthetic and technical considerations and choices (the *signifiants* of earlier times). In Venturi's words, 'We want architecture that deals with meaning more than with expression'. In short, the institution of architecture saved its skin by capitulating its historic strength as an unconscious metaphor for the rest of the world. Meaning is no longer a fact after the event but an *a priori* objective – and countless signs can be brought into play to guarantee that this objective will be achieved. Architecture thus rescued itself by semiotic disengagement, by uncoupling of the sign

from the content. Practically this meant erecting 'decorated sheds' (see the American pavilion at the World Expo, Seville 1992) and figuratively it meant consciously working towards a multivalency of meaning (Venturi: 'If you are designing City Hall, you have to appeal to a broad community like a successful T.V. show.').★ For that purpose a gripping iconography is sufficient. This strategy of disengagement could be seen as blasé: two-dimensional architecture leaves no latitude for the subsequent formation of a patina. Its meaning has already been assigned in advance. The user is confronted with a pre-programmed interpretation. The construction has the character of a stage set. Time loses its status as a determinant of meaning.

★ 'Choosing Richness', interview with Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Domus* 747, 1993, pp. 24-26.

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#### Less is a Bore, Language is More... of What?

Credit to whom it is due, it was Venturi and Scott Brown who gave the distinction between language and content, which had already been felt as a problem in the heyday of the neo-styles, the nineteenth century, a radical rethinking in respect of architecture. Their passionate interest in the value of the visual sign as an autonomous carrier of meaning, which was clearly present in their study of Las Vegas and in their launching of the term 'decorated shed', throws explicit light on the sign's arbitrary character (with which we have had to struggle ever since Ferdinand de Saussure). Their intention was to restore communication between architecture and 'the people', and for this to happen a consensus on the symbolic order was a necessary precondition. But unexpectedly this consensus started crumbling at exactly the same time as the 'natural' bond

choicest epithets for those in high culture who go 'slumming' in lower-middle culture: they are called supine, arrogant, and patronising; they 'sold out', 'betrayed their responsibilities as architects'; and they 'wouldn't live there themselves'. Upper-middle critics take Gans to task for spelling culture without a capital C, and us to task for learning from Las Vegas. The outraged tone of their reviews and letters to the editor sounds startlingly similar to the tone lower-middle culture uses when it encounters pornography. In matters of aesthetics, it is easy to épater the bourgeoisie. (...)

If one recommends nonjudgementalism as a heuristic method for architecture, it does not follow that one must therefore be nonjudgemental about social or economic conditions as

well. It is a poor reflection on the intellectual level of architectural critical thought in America that we find it necessary to point out that one can learn from suburbia and yet be in favour of social justice and civil liberties.

Denise Scott Brown

For all architects a broadening of the terms of reference to include more than their own personal tastes can be a means of sharpening and refining their aesthetic sensibilities. Ranging beyond the confines of one's own taste culture and conditioning provides an aesthetic jolt. It opens the eye to new possibilities of beauty and revives the creative energies. At least, it can help architects to understand the context in which they build.

Denise Scott Brown

The architectural autocracy of total design applied to all objects from ashtrays to company headquarters may suit the need for prestige of a giant corporation, but for large-scale architecture and urban design, it is often unjust, usually unbeautiful (to pundits and people), and an inadequate expression of our society and time.

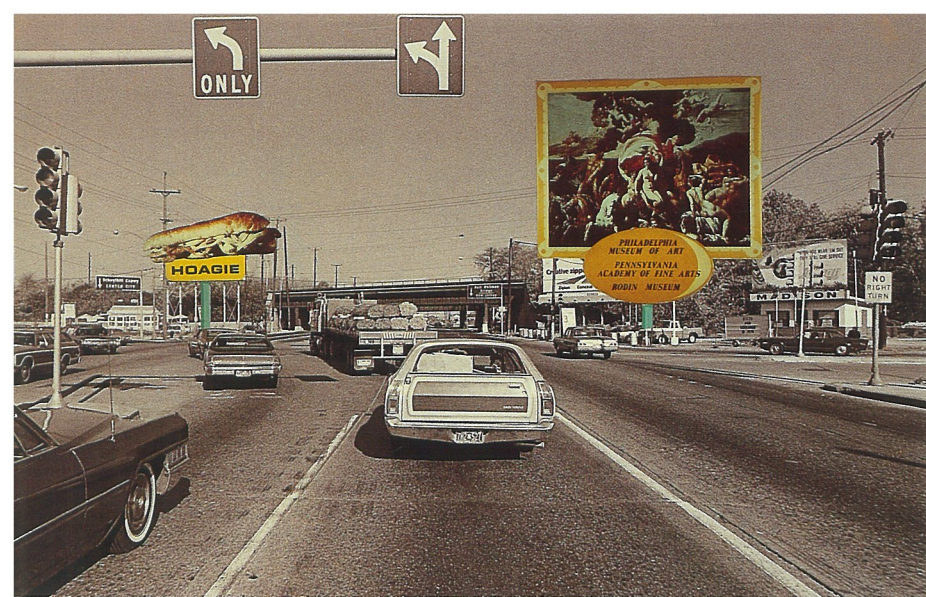
Denise Scott Brown

Although most architects are destined to remain the creatures of a limited number of taste cultures, they should take the wider view, if only to make themselves and the influential taste publics they serve more sympathetic to the needs of others. Designers who hope to plan with and for the American city need to take a wide-eyed nonjudgemental look at it first.

Denise Scott Brown

We Americans, like other former colonials, are xenophobes, yet in some areas of life, we clutch the apron strings of our mother cultures. We are proud of our indigenous styles, yet at times we still require European endorsement to validate them in our own eyes. The United States is artistically both precursor and follower, and the pendulum swings quite rapidly. But in architecture, discovery by latter-day European 'colonisers' – a Reyner Banham for Los Angeles, an American-born Charles Jencks for Post-Modernism – is still needed to dignify, for Americans, those artistic forms that originate in America.

Denise Scott Brown



City edges study, 1973

between words and things. If architecture, in particular the façade, is seen as a 'means of expression' then the question of what is to be expressed inevitably arises. And that is where the trouble starts; for architecture had barely been recognised as a medium of meaning when it began to lose hold of the intrinsic meaning for which the medium was traditionally meant. In other words, once we know how language is organised, we lose our simplicity of communication. Our expression becomes forced, out of respect for the Organisation.

Although it is no longer obvious *why* and *what* has to be meant, it is at least clear *that* there has to be meant, if only out of biological necessity. Everyone who has wished to enrich the architectural language for this reason has developed an idiolect of signs with which the façade can be dressed up, as though in a two-dimensional variant of *horror vacui*. Signs, conscious and abstract, are on offer at all levels of perception and intellectual development. Not one square millimetre in the field of view or in the analytical capacities is left unexploited; after all, such an empty patch might evoke reminiscences of Functionalism. Everything is filled up with ornament, symbol, colour – in short, with anything, for it is sure to mean something.

The miracle drug which people tried to use to revive the communicative powers of architecture was no longer a totally consistent historical style, as in the nineteenth century; now it was a consistent pluralism, an awareness of the systematic (and obligatory) many-faceted nature of reality, which led to the open use of a motley of Classical, modern, exotic, kitsch, serious and ironic elements. The critical distance needed to temper Modernistic Functionalism and to pillory an architecture that had become one-dimensional could only be obtained by identifying the meanings of architecture at a meta-level. Thus the introduction of semiotics has made an extremely important contribution to the enrichment of architectural culture and has enlarged its versatility and pluriformity.

But it only proves possible to step back from an analysis in the meta-language of semiotics, to real building in the object language, by decoupling the façade from the build-

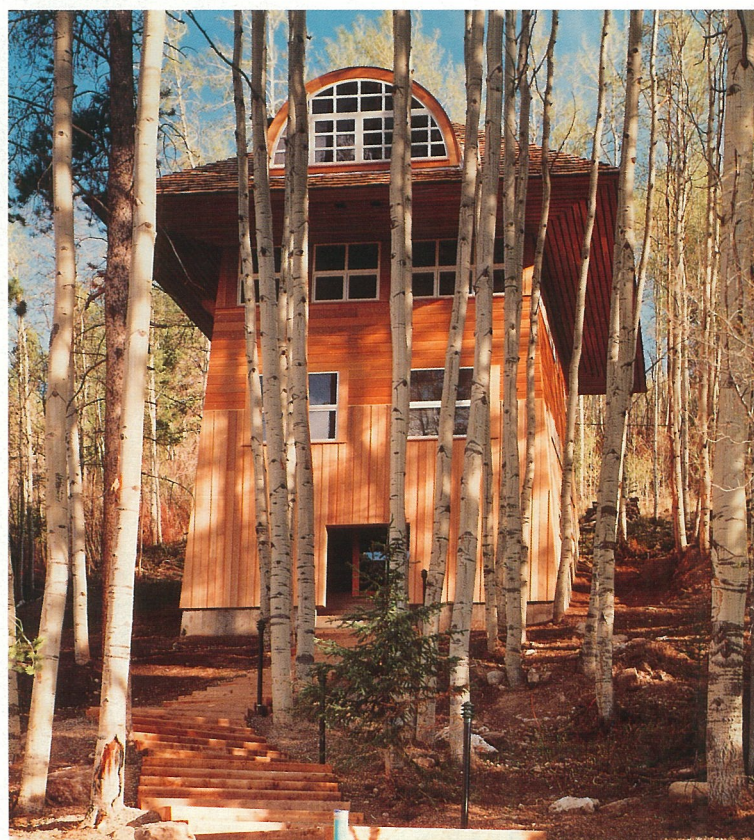
ing. The 'decorated shed' resembles a materialised semiotics and the design process becomes dominated by linguistic considerations. Thus heuristics descend into dogma and architectural complexity into linguistic abstraction; the remedy becomes a new debilitating factor and architecture declines into a packaging industry.

This unpleasant outcome of a discussion that was started on good grounds, must also be a reason why Venturi and Scott Brown are no longer keen to get involved in the public debate about their 'signs'. They have long noted that this debate remains incurably theoretical. They prefer to concentrate on the further professionalisation and refinement of their craft, i.e. designing. It appeared, after all, that there was a great deal of three-dimensional design work to be done behind the billboard façade. Even with Venturi and Scott Brown, ascending a museum stairway is not a graphic but a spatial sensation.

#### Democracy as Totem and Taboo

Once language becomes so objectivised that it changes from being a medium into a formal objective, it is no longer possible to attend to anything other than how the process of meaning operates as a mechanism. For example, the gold-anodised television aerial on the Guild House (Philadelphia, 1962), the polyvalent signs in the House in Northern Delaware (1978), the flat ornamentation above the entrance of the Gordon Wu Hall (Princeton, 1980), and the fading of the Classical ornamentation of the main

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Ski House, Vail, Colorado, 1977

What we perceive as chaos in the urban and suburban landscape may be an order that we do not understand; that simple nostrums to complex problems may make the problems worse; and that the concept of 'organised complexity' should be understood by architects and planners working in the social and physical realms.

Denise Scott Brown

Something in the air caused these parallel inquiries by separate individuals [Venturi, Wolfe] to be undertaken and brought to fruition at the same time. In my opinion, the common influence was social change. Shifts in American society spelled a shift in sensibility among perceptive scientists and artists.

Changes in sensibility induced changes in perception. These in turn called for a reassessment of tenets and philosophies, particularly in disciplines concerned with urban life. The social turmoil of the sixties demanded the reinvention of American architecture. (...) In the arts, change in sensibility signals impending changes in aesthetic perception and preference, which are in turn, a precondition for innovation and invention. When the time is ripe for aesthetic change, a chance perception, even a side glance at the familiar, can set the process in motion. At first sight, the new and meaningful may not appear beautiful. It may appear ugly. But we feel it is important.

Denise Scott Brown

Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and I selected Las Vegas and Levittown for study because they were archetypes of the landscape of suburban sprawl that surrounds all American cities. Analysis of the extreme forms would be easier than analysis of more typical ones, which were usually overlaid upon earlier patterns. However, the intention was to throw light on the everyday. We aimed to document the characteristics of American place that were alluded to by the writers of the sixties and also to teach ourselves, as artists, to be receptive to the mandates of our time.

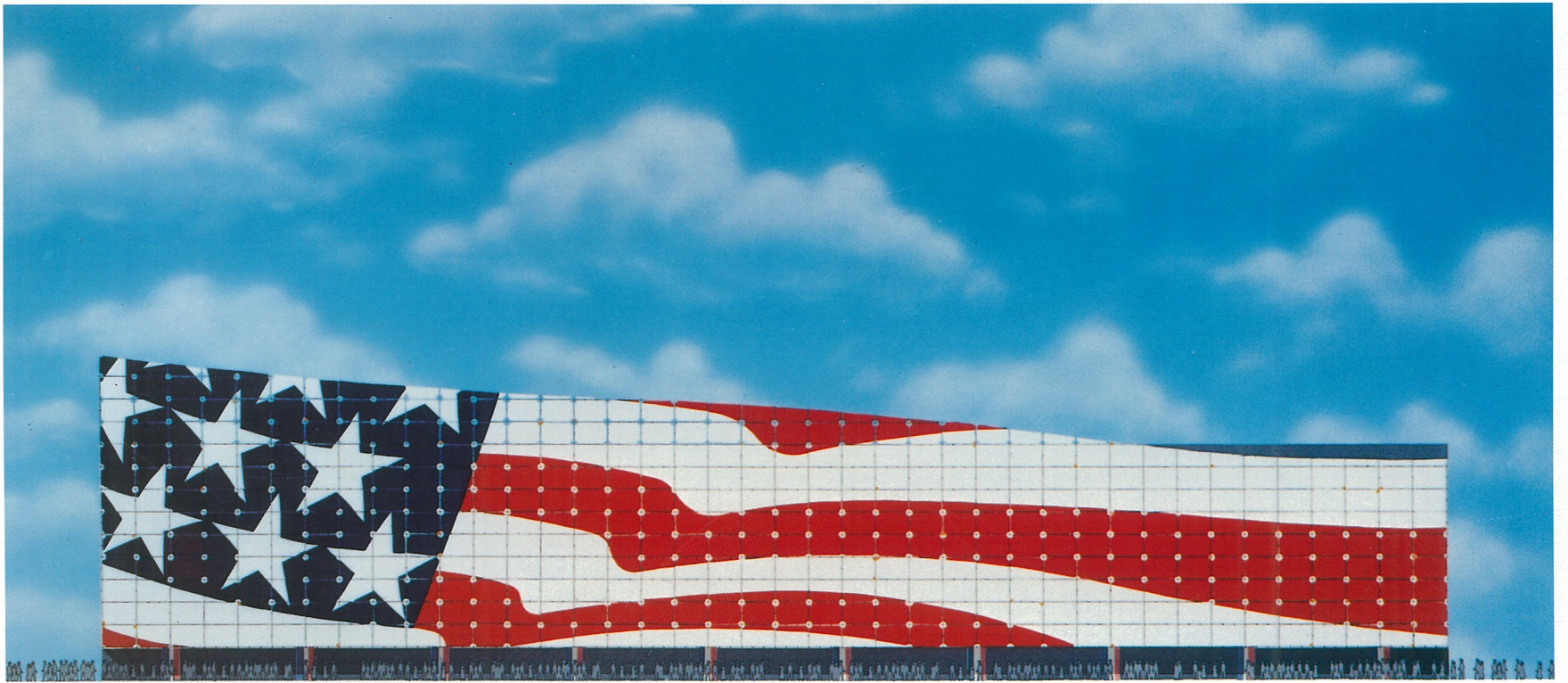
Denise Scott Brown

Symbol dominates space. Architecture is not enough.

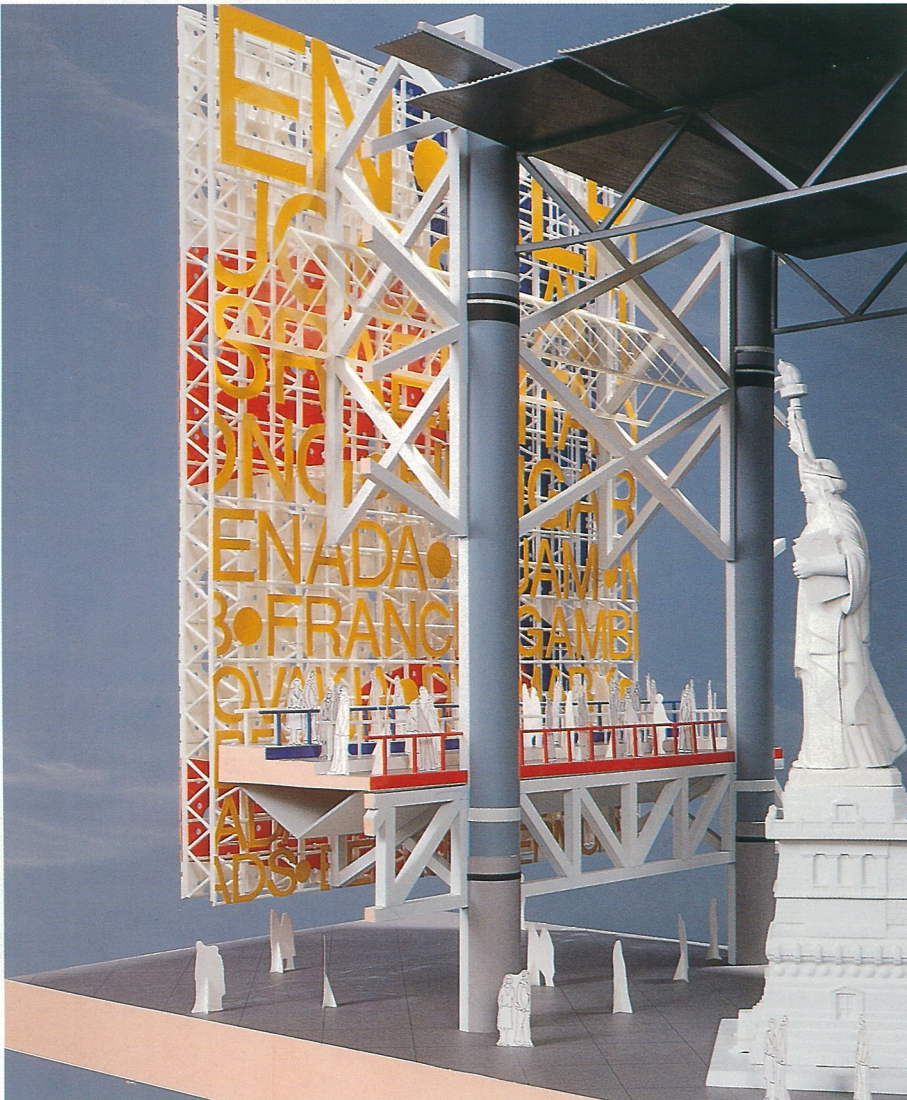
Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown

The primary lessons that we learned, as architects, from Las Vegas and Levittown were about symbolism. We started our study with investigations of the character of the symbols that could best communicate over the vast space of the American strip; we continued with analyses of the buildings behind the signs and what they could communicate symbolically at different scales. Finally we turned to symbolism at the traditional scale of architecture for pedestrians. Here, ornament and decoration became a major interest.

Denise Scott Brown



United States Pavilion, Sevilla Expo '92, competition entry, 1989



Duane Hanson, Tourists II, 1988



Italian Village, tea and coffee service in porcelain, 1984

building into the façade of the new extension to the National Gallery (London, 1991) are more in the nature of references to the elements of which the users (local or otherwise) already avail themselves in their cultural communication, than of a self-conscious choice of a desired new usage. The meaning itself changes from a penetrating force, an unconscious metaphor, into a readable message for whoever cares (perchance) to take an interest in it. The meaning of a sign has become the sign's own responsibility. Those who were once creative artists – architects, authors, speakers et cetera – turn into arrangers and co-ordinators of semiosis, minders of the established language machine. At this point, criticism, the criterion for a flourishing democracy, becomes out-moded. There is no chance of bringing anything into 'crisis' or doubt because the grounds on which criticism takes place have also been transformed into impartial signs. Left or Right, Radical or Conservative, each avails itself of its own kit of signs and everyone is heartily welcome to do so. The only surviving metaphysics is the meta-language that we employ to speak of the processes of meaning and the structures of language.

The architectural symptom of this situation is the continual substitution of new signs in a linguistically idolatrous architecture. One can hardly be surprised at the architecture of 'ironic references', 'double coding' and 'polyvalencies' when public space has lost all connection with a democratic conception of what is public. Even in the designs for Franklin Court (Philadelphia, 1972) and Welcome Park (Philadelphia, 1982), which were meant as public or semi-public territory, the public interest cannot have been a factor of any significance in the project, considering the neutralised character of that

publicness. All the attention has gone into the signs and the form, and not into the function or a possible manipulation of the programme. Urban design, in the sense of a complicated pavement or of a subtle articulation of space, seems to be the highest achievable good.

But that is not all. An *a priori* pluralism expressed by multiple layers of signification is defended as being the most democratic thing around. Democracy is no longer the political result of confrontation between ideologically-driven individuals, but a feature of our personal mental worlds. The inner life of the 'politically correct' individual is a pluralistic theatre. Democracy is transformed from a political system into an unquestioned state of the psyche. The democrat no longer acts *in* the forum of events, he or she *is* a forum. The highest possible aspiration is to become chairman of this permanent internal debate.

**From Totem to Lifestyle**

Venturi and Scott Brown repeatedly present their design principles as democratic and humane. Their work has far more to do with what people really want, they suggest, than could ever be the case in Modernism or in several Post-Modernist strands. And they are not just referring to a uniform mass, but to a differentiated group with differing lifestyles. As Scott Brown has said, 'I have certain tastes, other people have other tastes. I share some with everyone. I, as a creator, have a right to my own appreciation of that building. But I would be wrong to ram that, and only that, down the throat of someone else. There should be room in one building for lots of types of enjoyment.' The problem with this is that those lifestyles are presented as genuine choices. But lifestyles are a matter of the projected needs of specific market segments, seen as consumers, whereas architecture should not be about market preferences but about experience of life today and in the future. If we reduce architecture to a consumer good chasing a market share, we fail to discern what the public wants – apart from instant gratification – in a social sense and what it may hope for in a political sense. The almost biological need for 'meaning' is not the same as the longing for a meaning. Architecture that devotes itself to the former, with its legitimacy derived from marketing concepts, and pushes the latter aside as a non-architectural problem has an exceedingly narrow base. This also immediately puts the claimed democratic character of Venturi and Scott Brown's thesis into perspective. Democracy is not just about what people wish to *have*, but about what people would like to *be*. The works of Venturi and Scott Brown do not appear to get as far as stimulating the posing of the latter question. With its stress on different significations for different market segments, each with its own characteristic need for meaning, this architecture contributes both to the cacophony that stands for the democratic process and to a massive consensus on the way our society should be organised. Everything is neutralised and the status quo is primary. If we persist in giving people what they want, then thinking about what people are capable of wanting, about ideologies that might transform the folly of the day into durable values, fades into the background. The 'democratic' architecture of spectacle clears the way for those totalitarian tendencies that its proponents think so far from their bed.

Las Vegas helped us to reinterpret traditional architecture and, by redirecting us to Rome, set us to mending the rupture Modern architecture had made with its tradition. In so doing we were able, as well, to incorporate portions of the American suburban landscape into the fold of architecture, where they had not been included before.

Denise Scott Brown

If the signs are all twelve feet high, you can be sure an aesthetic ordinance is at work, promulgated by the design professions and intended to produce order in the environment. A more successful approach might be to encourage the erection of taller signs that dominate the rest of the clutter. The fact that this suggestion would

be dismissed by most design review boards in the United States suggests that urban designers still lack means to describe and define the strip landscape; therefore they cannot see it; therefore they cannot handle it aesthetically.

Denise Scott Brown

Because we designers lack a sturdy grasp on our historical heritage, we lack the confidence to tolerate architectural change. An understanding of the role of invention in historical architecture and of the way the past affects present preferences would help designers and design controllers to conquer their own aesthetic prejudices and therefore to deal more effectively than they do now with the everyday American landscape and the making of American place.

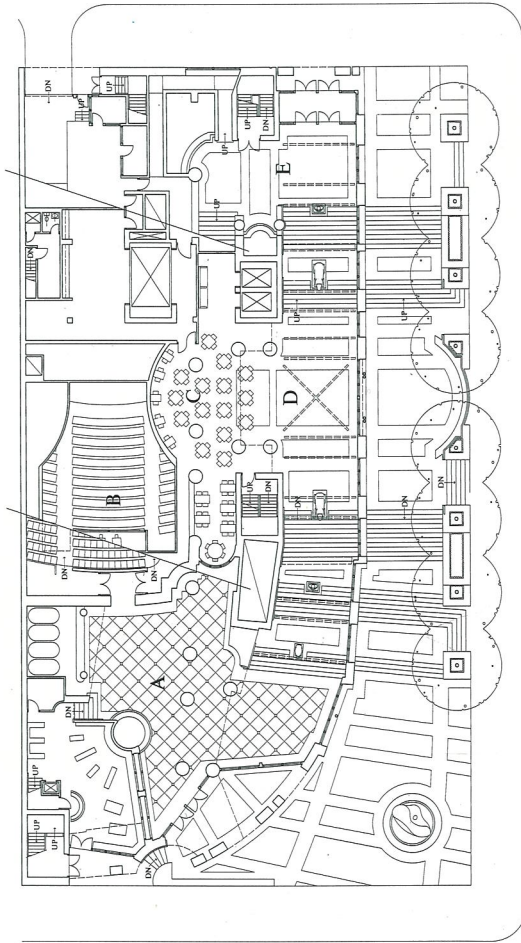
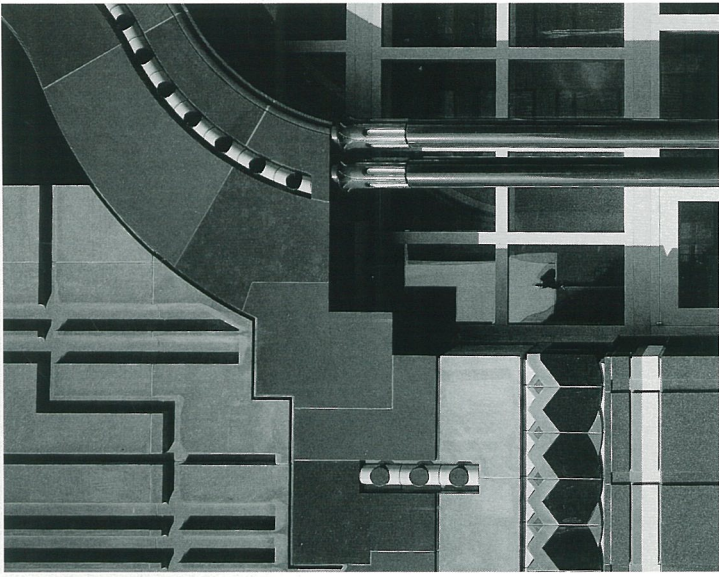
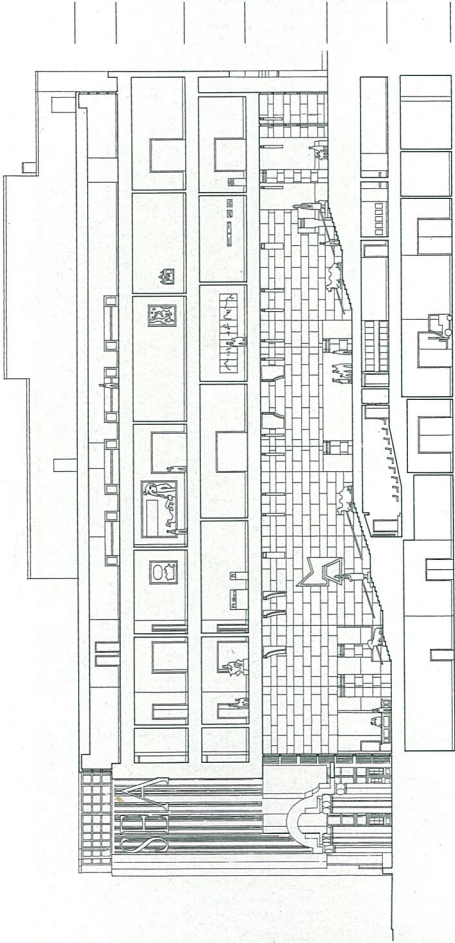
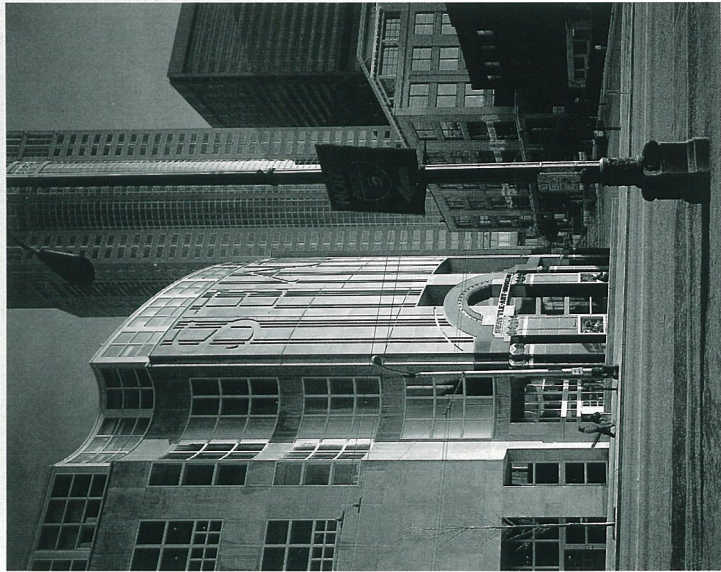
Denise Scott Brown

The colonial aspect is rarely considered, though it opens up a host of questions that should be understood as part of our artistic heritage. This is particularly so as the architectural pendulum swings now toward regionalism, and as America assumes the leadership in architectural ideas. In addition, relating American architecture to a worldwide diaspora of colonial architectures can broaden our understanding of American architecture, and may bring new insights in the future as the field of colonial studies widens in Europe and the Third World.

Denise Scott Brown

Artistically, we American architects are cultural immigrants who must face the American hinterland yet make our roads return to Rome.

Denise Scott Brown



The Seattle Art Museum's new building in downtown Seattle is a 150,000 gross square feet building with main entrances on both First and Second Avenues. It is set back thirty feet from University Street to preserve the view corridor to the water. This setback allows the creation of a terraced stair. As the museum will eventually be surrounded by tall skyscrapers, we have employed large scale to emphasise its presence. The south façade is constructed of limestone that is scored with vertical fluting and incised with large letters across the top that announce the museum's name. The west end of this façade pulls back dramatically from the hillside terrace to create an entry plaza at First Avenue and to accommodate a large-scale sculpture. In contrast to the formality of the fluted limestone, the ground level is a lively juxtaposition of granites, marbles and intensely coloured terracotta. Large windows between groups of piers reflect the rhythmic progression of the terraced stair and enhance the continuity between inside and outside. This play of windows and piers is reinforced by alternating pediments and arches tied together in a continuous band of light pink granite. Inside the building, the entrances at First and Second Avenues are connected by a wide stone stair which exactly parallels the outdoor terraced stair.

The main lobby is located at the First Avenue entrance, and on this ground level are found information and orientation functions as well as an auditorium, classrooms and service areas. At the mid-level of the stair, a broad landing terrace opens both into a mezzanine restaurant and onto the terrace outdoors; the restaurant area can be extended onto the landing, and even outside, for banquets and receptions. At the second floor level is the lobby and admission desk for the Second Avenue entrance, and a large flexible gallery for travelling exhibitions. The third and fourth floors house the permanent galleries for the museum's substantial holdings of Asian, ethnic and modern art. The east-west circulation on these floors is defined by a progression of columns with a large window at either end of the building. The galleries to the south of this area are smaller rooms connected en suite which house objects of more intimate scale; the galleries to the north are larger and loft-like. Their long-span beam structure allows the flexibility to arrange the galleries in various ways. Each of these floors also contains a classroom which permits the orientation of students near the art being studied. The fifth floor houses the administrative offices as well as the library and the conservation laboratory. *Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.*



Jeff Wall, *Eviction Struggle*, installation photo/video, 1989

