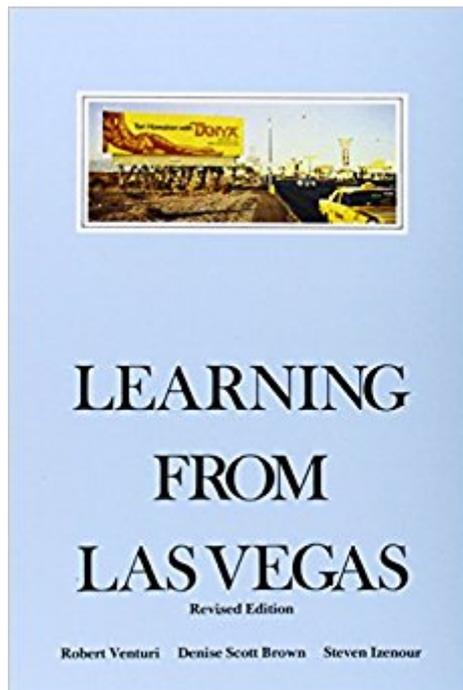


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Learning From Las Vegas - Revised Edition: The Forgotten Symbolism Of Architectural Form



Synopsis

Learning from Las Vegas created a healthy controversy on its appearance in 1972, calling for architects to be more receptive to the tastes and values of "common" people and less immodest in their erections of "heroic," self-aggrandizing monuments. This revision includes the full texts of Part I of the original, on the Las Vegas strip, and Part II, "Ugly and Ordinary Architecture, or the Decorated Shed," a generalization from the findings of the first part on symbolism in architecture and the iconography of urban sprawl. (The final part of the first edition, on the architectural work of the firm Venturi and Rauch, is not included in the revision.) The new paperback edition has a smaller format, fewer pictures, and a considerably lower price than the original. There are an added preface by Scott Brown and a bibliography of writings by the members of Venturi and Rauch and about the firm's work.

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Customer Reviews

I admire and respect Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown for their great career and contribution to architecture, which has yet to be fully assessed. The depth of their thinking, the vigilant efforts to achieve their aesthetic vision, their desire to overcome modernist dogma, which had mutated into marginalized elite uncivic abstraction, falsely denying vibrant areas of life...how can one argue with the importance and value of such work? Let me try. To me, this book represents one of the most interesting turning points of an architectural career, very similar to Rem Koolhaas' essay on Bigness in S,M,L,XL. Both texts are attempting to give themselves an elite artist's alibi for co-opting the

corporate machinery's unself-conscious production. Here, both artists (VRSB and OMA) attempt to escape into pop art, just like their friend Andy Warhol, thumbing his nose at the self important abstract expressionists. There's just one problem with this; they are architects, not just artists. And this places them in significantly different political territory. Architects build in the public sphere, and therefore have a powerful civic impact. They enable some political forces, and, by physical default, suppress others. If they were artists, their voice is a singular one, an unsponsored comment, to be entertained or dismissed. Architecture cannot be waved away. So, being architects, is 'Learning from Las Vegas' and 'Bigness' an elite artist's manifesto, or a cynical architect's effort to solicit clients from the bloated and most lucrative areas of commerce? The ambiguity is disturbing, because ultimately it has proven out not to matter what their intention.

"Learning from Las Vegas" is a powerful argument for challenging root assumptions. In this particular case its assumptions about architecture and how modernism wanted to strip away ornamentation in favor promoting form and space. "Learning from Las Vegas" sees this as just another form of bias. In part one, the authors looked back to older forms, found in the renaissance and beyond where churches were as much about signs and symbols as space and form. They see the Vegas strip in particular as a great example of the promotion of signs and symbols as integral to the structures. This wasn't merely ornamentation nor was it decorative. The Strip is a commercial zone and successful architecture is that which first stands out with its message and then engages the viewer with it. That isn't a nice byproduct of architecture that is essential to making the architecture successful. Part two is entitled, "ugly and ordinary architecture or the decorated shed," which is most powerful in comparing two ordinary senior housing complexes which come from very different architectural aesthetics. One, the "Crawford Manor" is a poster child for modern architecture and the other the "Guild House" looks as if it had no architecture. What is interesting about this comparison is that it doesn't attempt to show that one approach is superior than the other only the architecturally driven building, the "Crawford Manor" ends up as boring and flawed as the less designed "Guild House." Unity and consistency in achieving an architectural vision isn't enough to make a successful building. Fun, whimsy and accessibility of style are even more important.

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