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EYES

THAT

Scheidegger & Spiess
Yale School of Architecture

SAW

Architecture After Las Vegas

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Eve Blau

*Pedagogy and Politics: Making Place
and Learning from Las Vegas*

In the late 1960s the Yale School of Art and Architecture was one of the key sites at which the trajectories of political activism and Postmodern critique intersected, generating a cultural landscape and political subtext for the cultural radicalism that followed in their wake. At Yale that collision generated a series of projects, the most influential of which was the studio/seminar Learning from Las Vegas, or Form Analysis as Design Research, taught by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour in the fall of 1968. But there were many others. After Yale president Kingman Brewster brought in Charles Moore to chair the Department of Architecture in 1965, architecture students became increasingly involved in urban research, experiments with film, video, and communications technology, "intermedia" installations, new methods and materials of construction (including foam and inflatable structures), and building projects in remote and impoverished parts of rural Appalachia, all of which held the promise of new directions for the discipline.¹ This context is critical for understanding both the milieu in which *Learning from Las Vegas* took shape and the currents that shifted the

¹ Charles W. Moore (1925–93) was chair of the Department of Architecture from 1965 to 1969 and then dean of the Faculties of Design and Planning from 1969 to 1970. For more, see Eve Blau, *Architecture or Revolution: Charles Moore and Yale in the Late 1960s* (New Haven: Yale University School of Architecture, 2001); Leslie L. Luebbers, "Place, Time, and the Art of Architecture: The Education of Charles W. Moore" (PhD diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2001); Charles W. Moore, *You Have to Pay for the Public Life: Selected Essays*, ed. Kevin P. Keim (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000); and Richard W. Hayes, *The Yale Building Project: The First 40 Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press and Yale School of Architecture, 2007). I am indebted to Peter Rose and Dan Scully for their insights and memories of Yale in the late 1960s, and to Dan for his helpful reading of this text. An earlier version of this essay appeared in *Log*, no. 38 (fall 2016).

critique of Modernism from a questioning of established codes of practice to a focus on signs as generators of radical new forms of society, culture, and subjectivity.

In 1968, as Moore reported to Brewster, Yale was “riding the crest of the present wave.” The school was held to be the “notably turned-on free-wheeling place where *It’s Happening*,” attracting “first-rate” students and “an inordinate amount” of positive media attention (*Progressive Architecture* was dubbed the “Yale Alumni Magazine” because it featured Yale student work so frequently).² Yale’s popularity and newsworthiness, Moore suggested, were due first to the quality of the students and second “to the absence of restrictions on their imagination and their involvement, [rather] than to any highly organized regimen.” He also observed that “our profession is, at this point in time, dramatically devoid of any impressive—or useful—body of teachable theory. This may turn out to be a disguised boon, as it leaves us embarrassingly free to deal with rapidly developing problems of the urban environment; it certainly has the effect of heightening, and speeding the waves of significant change.”³

When Moore was recruited by Yale he had been chair of the architecture department at the University of California, Berkeley, for three years. There his objective had been to broaden the curriculum to include “everything from computers to operations research; mathematical, social, and all kinds of academic theories,” not to make it more technocratic but to enable architects to be “more subtle, more supple, more complex, instead of rigid.”⁴ Moore worked closely with Joseph Esherick on the curriculum and recruited Christopher Alexander and architecture historians Spiro Kostof and Norma Evenson to the faculty. But the central focus of Moore’s teaching, writing, and practice while at Berkeley was the development of what he called a “theory of place.” This

work established him as a significant educator and designer in the early 1960s and led to the invitation to head the architecture department at Yale. It also informed a fundamental tenet of his architecture and pedagogy.

In 1962 Moore, with his Berkeley colleagues Donlyn Lyndon, Sim Van der Ryn, and Patrick J. Quinn, published the first in a series of texts on place, titled “Toward Making Places,” in J. B. Jackson’s magazine *Landscape*. In the opening paragraphs they set out the fundamental premise: “The basic function of architecture . . . past the provision of merely shelter, past the expressive manipulation of materials or even of space . . . is the creation of place, of what Susanne Langer calls an ‘ethnic domain.’ This creation of place amounts at first to taking possession of a portion of the earth’s surface. Then, architecture being an act, that process of taking possession is abstracted.”⁵ The architectural act, Moore later elaborated, is “the ordered extension of man’s idea about himself in specific locations on the face of the earth.”⁶ This concept of place as specific and culturally determined relates to a number of philosophical and cultural discourses of the time, including Jackson’s “human geography,” the poetic phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the discourses of psychoanalysis, all of which Moore referenced in his teaching. But Moore’s signal contribution was to link these discourses specifically to architecture and urbanism and to what he saw as the architect’s single most important task: to make place in an increasingly “aspatial electronic world.”⁷

Two works in particular precipitated Moore’s appointment at Yale. His most important text on the subject of placemaking, “You Have to Pay for the Public Life,” was published in Yale’s *Perspecta* in 1965. In it Moore sets out to consider monumental

2 Charles W. Moore, *Annual Report of the Chairman, Department of Architecture, School of Art and Architecture, to the President and Fellows of Yale University for the Academic Year 1967–1968*.

3 Ibid.

4 Charles W. Moore, oral history interview by Sally Woodbridge, December 28, 1984, transcript, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Moore began teaching at Berkeley in 1959.

5 Donlyn Lyndon, Charles W. Moore, Patrick J. Quinn, and Sim Van der Ryn, “Toward Making Places,” *Landscape* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1962): 32.

6 Moore, “Plug It in Ramses, and See if It Lights Up, Because We Aren’t Going to Keep It Unless It Works,” *Perspecta* 11 (1967): 34.

7 Ibid., 37.



Fig. 1 View of Main Street, Disneyland. From Charles Moore. "You Have to Pay for the Public Life," *Perspecta* 9/10 (1965).

architecture as part of the urban scene in California, a challenge offered to him by editor Robert A.M. Stern (Fig. 1). "*Perspecta's* editors suspected, I presume, that I would discover that in California there is no contemporary monumental architecture, or that there is no urban scene," Moore writes.⁸ Rejecting *Perspecta's* terms of reference, he asserts that monumentality is an act, not a thing, "not a product of compositional techniques, . . . of flamboyance of form, or even of conspicuous consumption of space, time, or money."⁹ Rather, *monumental* and *urban*, he claims, are adjectives that describe individuals "giving up something, space or money or prominence or concern, to the public realm." The "function" of that act is to mark a place that has more than private importance or interest.¹⁰

On one level Moore's assertions can be read as a reprise of the monumentality discourse of the 1940s.¹¹ But, significantly, he shifts the terms of discussion from architectural *form* to political *space*: Where, he asks, is the public realm in a city like Los Angeles, where all property and space are privatized and hardly anyone gives anything to the public? The closest thing Los Angeles has to a traditionally conceived public realm, Moore proposes, is Disneyland, which he describes as an ersatz urbanism that looks and feels like the real thing but lacks political space, and therefore does not allow for political experience. In Disneyland there is nowhere "to have an effective revolution."¹² The only spaces in Los Angeles conducive to revolution are the freeways. Just as the Communards took to the streets of Paris in 1871, Angelenos wishing to stage a revolution in contemporary Los Angeles must take to the freeways. Alternatively, Moore suggests, they could

8 Moore, "You Have to Pay for the Public Life," *Perspecta* 9/10 (1965): 58.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 See Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger, and Sigfried Giedion, "Nine Points on Monumentality," in Giedion, *Architecture, You and Me: The Diary of a Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 48–52; Giedion, "The Need for a New Monumentality," in *New Architecture and City Planning*, ed. Paul Zucker (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944), 549–68. See also Christiane C. Collins and George R. Collins, "Monumentality: A Critical Matter in Modern Architecture," *Harvard Architecture Review* 4 (1984).

12 Moore, "You Have to Pay for the Public Life," 64.

gripping enough to wake the public conscience to the vanishing Places of the public realm we got for free. Most effectively, we might, as architects, first seek to develop a vocabulary of forms responsive to the marvelously complex and varied functions of our society, instead of continuing to impose the vague generalizations with which we presently add to the grayness of the suburban sea. Then, we might start sorting out for our special attention those things for which the public has to pay, from which might derive the public life. These things would not be the city halls and equestrian statues of another place and time, but had better be something far bigger and better, and of far more public use. They might, for instance, be freeways: freeways (119, 120) are not for individual people, like living rooms are and like confused planners would have you believe the whole city ought to be; they are for the public use, a part of the public realm; and if the fidgety structures beside them and the deserts for parking – or for nothing – under them don't yet make sense, it is surely because there has so far been too little provision for and contribution to and understanding of the public realm, not too much. The freeways could be the real monuments of the future, the places set aside for special celebration by people able to experience space and light and motion and relationships to other people and things at a speed that so far only this century has allowed. Here are structures big enough and strong enough, once they are regarded as a part of the city, to re-excite the public imagination about



119



120

“emplane for New York to organize sedition on Madison Avenue; word would quickly enough get back.”¹³ The freeways are not only the true public realm in the “floating world” of cars and houses “adrift in the suburban sea” of Los Angeles; they also meet all of Moore’s criteria for monumentality as the act of placemaking: you have to pay for them, they are for public use, and they are strong and exciting forms. They are, he claims, the markers “for a place set in motion, transforming itself to another place.” They could be the real monuments of the future, “structures big enough and strong enough, once they are regarded as part of the city, to re-excite the public imagination about the city”¹⁴ (Fig. 2).

Like all of Moore’s texts (and his demeanor generally), the tone is heavily ironic. This irony undercuts the seriousness of the argument and deflects critical judgment. Is the fact that you have to pay for the public life good or bad? Does Moore really believe that freeways hold the promise of generating a new public realm? Every claim comes with an ironic spin that undercuts its sincerity. The intention is to complicate the issues; to open them to interpretation, to doubt, to further investigation; to provoke and stimulate, rather than prescribe. As didactic methods, irresolution and open-endedness can be highly effective. Moore’s provocation tapped into the contentious mood then roiling university campuses across the country. “You Have to Pay for the Public Life” makes a number of points that may also have resonated with Yale’s senior administration, particularly the recognition that the traditional city no longer existed in mid-century America, that it was necessary for architects to think differently about the social and physical environments of cities—especially about the architectural implications of suburban sprawl and emerging technologies of communication that were then transforming urban environments in the United States—and that contemporary Los Angeles might well be the future towards which American urbanism was moving in the 1960s.

¹³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴ Ibid., 59, 97.

Fig. 2 “The freeways could be the real monuments of the future.” Page from Charles Moore. “You Have to Pay for the Public Life,” *Perspecta* 9/10 (1965).



Fig. 3, 4 The Sea Ranch, CA. Condominium 1, Moore Lyndon Turnbull Whitaker architects, with the collaboration of Lawrence Halprin, 1963–65.

The second project to consolidate Moore’s ascendancy as a teacher and designer was Condominium I at the Sea Ranch (1963–65), one of the most widely published and copied buildings of the 1960s (Figs. 3, 4).¹⁵ Built on an exposed site 85 miles north of San Francisco, in a wild and powerful coastal landscape of cliffs, bluffs, and windblasted stands of Monterey cypress, Condominium I’s angular shed-roofed forms engage the region’s vernacular working buildings (barns, and mining and timbering sheds). At the same time Moore and his partners at Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull, and Whitaker (MLTW) infused the “casual shanty idiom” of Bay Region architecture with a new formal discipline, a diagrammatic clarification of space that for Moore derived from Louis Kahn’s concept of interrelated served and servant spaces.¹⁶ Inside, the conventions of the domestic plan are discarded in favor of an organization wherein the acts of habitation—gathering, cooking, dining, sleeping, bathing, and so on—are collected in highly abstract freestanding structures painted in bold primary colors that recall Constructivist sculptures of the 1920s.

The Sea Ranch actualizes Moore’s concept of architectonic placemaking. At the time it seemed to signal an exciting new turn in American architecture towards a Modernism that was resolutely abstract but also attentive to site, materials, and larger urban and ecological issues; that embraced cultural and natural landscapes, the vernacular and the avant-garde, high art and popular culture, technological innovation and phenomenology; and that most of all conceived of architecture and the purview of the architect as encompassing all scales of design, from the individual object to the territory. Not surprisingly, these same engagements and concerns would also inform the curricular changes Moore implemented at Yale.

¹⁵ Space does not allow for full treatment here of the evolution of the project, the roles of collaborators, including Joseph Esherick and Moore’s partners at MLTW—Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull, and Richard Whitaker—or its important ecological and environmental objectives. For a bibliography on the Sea Ranch, see E.J. Johnson, ed., *Charles Moore: Buildings and Projects, 1949–1986* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 283–98.

¹⁶ See Moore, Gerald Allen, and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (New York: Henry Holt, 1974).

Pedagogy

In his 1969 book *New Directions in American Architecture*, Robert A. M. Stern characterizes the change in Yale's architecture program under Moore as a swing "from an emphasis on shape and elaboration (as was the case under his predecessor, Paul Rudolph) towards a concern for the usefulness of architecture in relation to the problems of life in our less-advanced areas, in our cities, and in our backwater locales."¹⁷ While true, this was not the whole story. Moore was committed to the primacy of design and to retaining Yale's "ties with the most exciting architectural developments in the New York Metropolitan area," not to mention its "glamorous image." At the same time he wanted to make the school "what it has not been and what I think it should be: a center for academic and intellectual development on the frontiers of a profession which still seems peculiarly vague about where its frontiers lie."¹⁸ Moore indicated what that might entail in his revision of the description of Yale's architecture degree program (presumably originally written by the previous chair, Rudolph) in the university bulletin in 1967:

To the architect falls the satisfaction of seeing the ideas and attitudes of his society take physical form, to become the container for man's activities and the imprint of his society and himself on the face of the earth. In today's period of explosive growth this is a more challenging activity than ever before. Ordering the earth becomes in some respects more difficult and more exciting than arriving at the moon. Providing for the physical needs of more and more people without destroying the individual's relation to the land, maintaining his important sense of having some

distinguishable place in the world, and giving him the chance to arrive at a perception of the physical order of things is a task which requires intellect and the highest level of creativity.

The architect, who may once have seen himself standing slightly apart from society, is now wrapped up in some of its central problems. To solve these problems he needs to discover and make maximum use of phenomenal amounts of information, with no guide but his own point of view to resolve conflicts or establish a hierarchy of importances among the physical and emotional functions which condition even the simplest inhabited structure.¹⁹

The core curriculum Moore designed with Kent Bloomer inherited many of the phenomenological and spatial preoccupations of Moore's California work. The formal exercises were conceived in terms of "design verbs" (seeing, exposing, timing, making). The performance of these acts was immediate, and their efficacy was determined collectively by faculty and students. Spatial problems were conceived in terms of "verbs of use" (bathing, sleeping, meeting, eating, etc.) and culminated in the design of a house.²⁰ Students were also encouraged to spend time outside the studio, exploring New Haven's railways, dock yards, factories, urban neighborhoods, and industrial edges, as well as the vernacular and monumental architecture of New England and farther afield.²¹ Looking, sketching, painting, photographing, filming, and reading broadly were considered essential components of the core education of the architect, as were sleeping and eating in buildings of interest. Under Moore the school began offering new courses in experimental filmmaking, photography, animation, games, and computer applications.²² Studios at Yale

17 Robert A. M. Stern, *New Directions in American Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 78.

18 Moore, *Annual Report of the Chairman, 1965–1966*.

19 *Bulletin of Yale University School of Art and Architecture*, series 63, no. 1 (January 1, 1967): 19.

20 In the second year, projects became larger and more programmatically complex.

21 Kent Bloomer, in conversation with the author, November 2000.

22 Moore, *Annual Report of the Chairman, 1966–1967 and 1967–1968*.



Fig. 5 Moonraker Athletic Center, Sea Ranch, CA, 1966. Moore Lyndon Turnbull Whitaker architects. Interior view with "supergraphics" by Barbara Stauffacher Solomon. Photo by Jim Alinder.

increasingly focused on urban problems, low-cost housing, community design, advocacy planning, and studies of inner-city neighborhoods in New Haven and Manhattan. Urban design, Moore insisted, was not a separate field from architecture. "The design school, to be useful, must have adjacency to knowledge about cities and the environment."²³ He involved students in his own attempts to provide affirmative urban environments for New Haven's predominantly African American urban poor, including his own controversial public housing project, Church Street South (1966–69),²⁴

Moore's new curriculum also fostered the exploration of connections between architecture and graphics with the enthusiastic collaboration of Alvin Eisenman, the school's director of graduate studies in graphic design.²⁵ Moore invited designers to teach courses that engaged the three-dimensional spatial potential of graphic design.²⁶ One of the most successful and widely publicized projects was a one-week design problem directed by Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, a San Francisco graphic designer who had painted the interiors of Moore and Turnbull's Athletic Center at the Sea Ranch in 1966 and whose work combined "supersized Abstract Expressionist [fields of color] . . . with hard-edged graphics from Switzerland and got . . . supergraphics."²⁷ The purpose of supergraphics, Stauffacher insisted, "is to clarify, not to confuse. . . . Supergraphics are different from the old, two-dimensional graphics, and they're more helpful to architects. . . . They are a reinforcement of architecture."²⁸ This had

23 Moore, *Annual Report of the Chairman, 1967–1968 and 1969–1970*.

24 A project with a long and troubled history (it was first offered to Mies van der Rohe, who walked away because the budget was grossly inadequate), Church Street South—despite the communal facilities, walkways, park, piazzas, and commercial spaces it provided—failed to achieve an affirmative urban environment. Isolated from the downtown core of New Haven and starved for funds, the scaled-back and partially realized scheme was reviled and vandalized almost from the moment of its completion—a sobering lesson for both Moore and the school about the sociospatial complexity of effective urban design.

25 Moore, *Annual Report of the Chairman, 1967–1968*.

26 Moore, *Annual Report of the Chairman, 1966–1967*.

27 Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, unpublished manuscript.

28 Stauffacher Solomon, "Bathroom Graphics: Make it Happy Kid," *Progressive Architecture* 48 (March 1967): 158.

been her challenge at the Sea Ranch, where the interior spaces of the Athletic Center, shrunk by budget cuts, became cramped and confusing. Her supergraphics—red, blue, yellow, green, purple, and black stripes, circles, dots, arrows, and letters painted at superscale across overlapping wall planes, around corners, and up stairs—managed both to clarify the organization by providing a coherent system of signage and to animate and visually expand the interior spaces (Fig. 5). At Yale she assigned students to use only paint to spatially alter the interiors of the Art and Architecture Building’s elevators. The project was hailed by Ada Louise Huxtable as a “productive protest” against “the huge hack symbols of the Establishment . . . giving them a highly creative raspberry.” “This work is going somewhere,” she claimed, “even if it is to a straight dead-end. That won’t matter, because in the process it will have opened important new doors of vision and experience.”²⁹

The largest and most ambitious of the intermedia spatial explorations at Yale in 1968 was titled, in full, “Project Argus: A Multiple Montage from the Griggs Collection of Classic Film and an Experiment in Light and Sound Environment in and around the Department of Architecture’s New Structure in the Exhibition Hall of the Art and Architecture Building.” Named after the many-eyed monster of mythology, Argus was a mixed-media installation of pulsating lights, electronic sounds, and film clips spooled on continuous loops and projected in and onto a massive bridge-like structure that spanned the exhibition area. Designed by Moore, Bloomer, and Felix Drury, and constructed by second-year students from steel tubing and plywood panels sheathed in reflective mylar, Argus was approximately 60 feet long, 30 feet high, and 10 feet wide, with occupiable spaces on multiple levels. A two-part performance was staged on April 25, 1968. In the first part, films, including early comedies of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and Mack Sennett, were projected onto Argus’s reflective surfaces

²⁹ Ada Louise Huxtable, “Kicked a Building Lately?,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 1969.

from seven simultaneously operating projectors. In the second part, called “Pulsa,” large banks of fluorescent tubes were programmed to create a flashing, multicolored environment. The effect of spatial disorientation was heightened by strobe lights and intense bursts of electronic sounds. Argus effected a total abstraction of the environment, creating spaces that could not be understood visually and had to be experienced bodily. Complex, dynamic, and fragmented, the abstracted psychedelic spaces of Argus were seen as the architectonic correlative of the radical actions of those who were attempting to “creatively destroy the system.”³⁰

Politics

Increasingly, architectural experimentation at Yale intersected with the growing politicization of campuses nationwide. Moore’s chairmanship coincided exactly with the defining political events of that half-decade: the radicalization of the civil rights movement and the escalation of the Vietnam War. In 1965 the first anti-war teach-ins and draft card burnings took place on U.S. college campuses. Opposition to the war intensified as the conflict escalated and seemed increasingly unwinnable. For the first time in vivid color, nightly TV news reports showed U.S. soldiers fighting, being wounded, and dying. By the spring of 1968 more than 200 student protests had taken place on more than 100 university campuses (Fig. 6). The brutal crackdown on anti-war protest at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August 1968, which was covered live on network TV, further polarized American society along new generational lines. The civil rights movement followed a similar trajectory of increasing

³⁰ “Architecture (Modern and Progressive): Charles Moore,” *Dialogue with Laurel Vlock*, Laurel Vlock Collection, Marvin K. Peterson Library, University of New Haven. The influence of György Kepes on the construction of intermedia environments, including Argus, is significant. See György Kepes, *Light as a Creative Medium* (Cambridge: Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, 1965).



radicalization and violence. The assassination of Malcolm X in February 1965 was followed by the Watts riots in August. In 1966 the Black Panthers were founded. Major race riots broke out in Newark and Detroit in the summer of 1967. The spiraling violence and racial tension culminated in the dispiriting spring of 1968, when the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April was followed by the assassination of Robert Kennedy in June.

This was the political backdrop to the changes Moore put in place during his first three years at Yale. He and other faculty attempted to respond to these events—and to pressure from students to bring politics into the studio—by allowing (without actually endorsing) protest in the school and supporting new student-led activist organizations such as the Black Workshop, an interdisciplinary African American student organization formed in 1968 that developed community-design and public-education projects in New Haven, Newark, and other eastern cities, and The Architects' Resistance, which organized demonstrations, published position papers exposing unethical practices within the profession, and supported the publication of *Novum Organum*, a student broadsheet “for expression, confrontation, and debate” on issues of architecture and city planning.³¹

Despite the administration's efforts to quell the incipient rebellion, studios were canceled and classes disrupted or given over to self-questioning discussions about the proper study of architecture and planning. That fall, efforts at reorganization were largely unsuccessful in pacifying the mood of confrontation edged with violence that seemed to have overtaken the school.³² First-semester design problems, including health

31 *Novum Organum*, no. 1 (November 14, 1968). The Architects' Resistance (TAR) was formed by a contingent of Yale architecture and planning students and practitioners in New Haven, New York, Boston, and Washington, D.C. who had walked out of a regional AIA meeting in New Haven in 1968, protesting the “lack of moral and political concern within the design professions.” TAR also organized demonstrations protesting university policies. One such policy was the lack of financial aid for students of the School of Art and Architecture, which in 1968 garnered a mock “burial of an unknown A+A student,” whose “casket” was lowered into the Beinecke Library sculpture court to symbolize the death of the arts at Yale.

32 Moore, *Annual Report of the Chairman, 1968–1969*.

Fig. 6 Student rally on New Haven Green to protest the Vietnam War and demand the release of the Black Panthers. New Haven, CT, May 1970.

stations in Raleigh County, West Virginia, and a shopping center in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, were rejected as socially irrelevant and the studios were canceled. It was into this climate of developing chaos that Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour parachuted their studio/seminar, *Learning from Las Vegas*.

Learning from Las Vegas at Yale

With its focus on advertising, consumerism, parking lots, billboards, and other features of the commercial strip, the *Learning from Las Vegas* studio was an anomaly, far removed from the students' vocalized interest in social-minded, antiestablishment activism. "When we came to teach at Yale," Scott Brown later recalled, "we said this project must be really 'agin' the government to get the students interested."³³ The studio itself was framed as "an attempt to find philosophies of architectural urbanism and vocabularies of urban form more suited to the conditions and problems of a mass, mobilized society than are the philosophies of 'total design' (i.e., total architectural control) of the early Modern movement. Emphasis upon relevance and involvement."³⁴ The pitch—combining a rejection of Modernist certainties with a commitment to social activism—evidently worked: nine architecture, two planning, and two graphics students were admitted to the class (others no doubt applied).

Yale proved the ideal environment for Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour's project. Moore's notoriously "loose and unspecified governance," and the freedom it afforded faculty and students, fostered an academic environment remarkably open to the proposition that there were valuable architectural lessons to

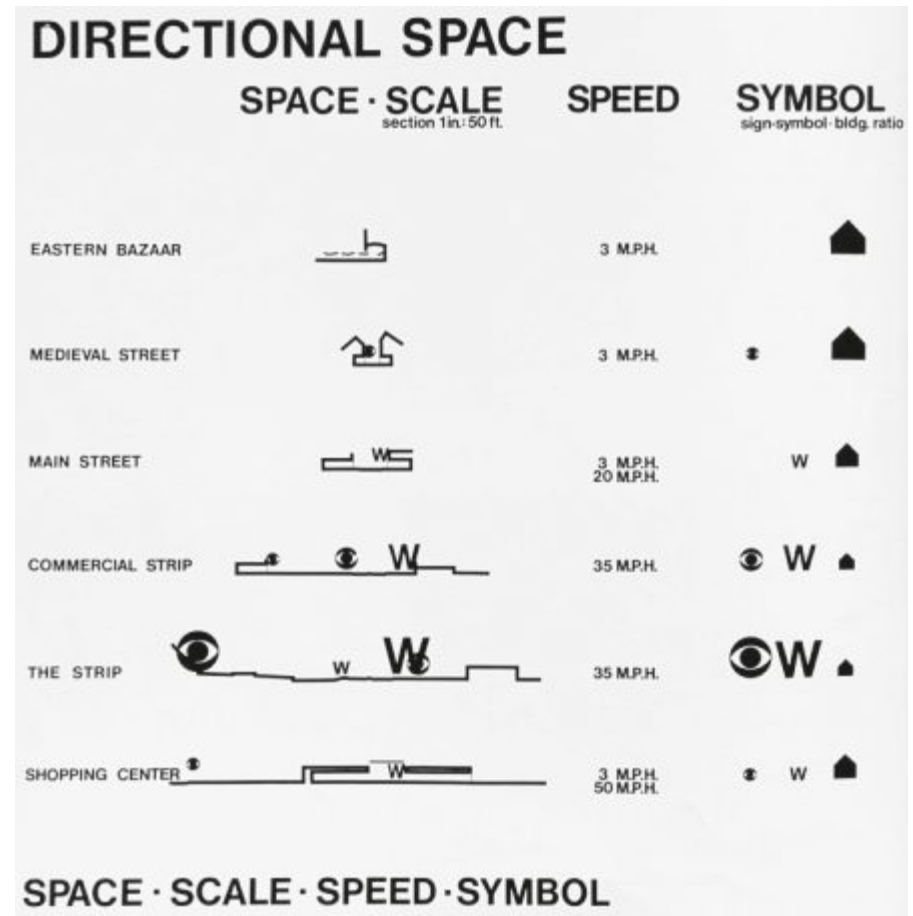


Fig. 7 *Learning from Las Vegas* Research Studio. "Space, Scale, Speed, Symbol." Illustration from *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972).

33 Denise Scott Brown quoted in *Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown: Learning from Las Vegas: Supercrit #2*, ed. Kester Rattenbury and Samantha Hardingham (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), 113.

34 Moore, *Annual Report of the Chairman, 1968-1969*.

be learned from Las Vegas.³⁵ As Moore wrote to Brewster, his own “elusive goals” for architectural education were shared by Venturi and involved “a broadening of the range of things in our society that we look at and care about, in order to develop a less exclusive, more responsive, [and] therefore more effective architecture.”³⁶ Furthermore, unlike the many studios rejected for their lack of social relevance in the tumultuous fall semester of 1968, *Learning from Las Vegas* offered clearly articulated pedagogical and methodological goals and had an explicitly instrumental architectural agenda.³⁷

In fact the lessons to be learned from Las Vegas had already been identified by Venturi and Scott Brown in their article “A Significance for A & P Parking Lots, or Learning from Las Vegas,” published several months before the studio took place. They included the observations that “space is not the most important constituent of suburban form,” that “the sign is more important than the architecture,” that “billboards are almost all right,” that “spatial relationships are made by symbols more than by forms,” that “the graphic sign in space has become the architecture of this landscape,” and that “communication dominates space as an element in the architecture and in the landscape” (Figs. 7, 8).³⁸ The work of the studio was to develop “graphic means more suitable than those now used by architects and planners, to describe ‘urban sprawl’ urbanism and particularly the commercial strip.”³⁹ In the studio notes, published in the second 1977 edition of *Learning from Las Vegas*, this is spelled out: “We are evolving new tools: analytical tools for understanding new space and form, and graphic tools for representing them. Don’t bug us for lack of



Fig. 8 “Upper Strip, driving north.” Photo taken during the Learning from Las Vegas Research Studio, Las Vegas, NV, 1968.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Dan Scully, a student in the studio/seminar, noted that Venturi and Scott Brown “knew what they wanted, but we were also free to find what we wanted.” Personal communication with the author, September 12, 2011.

³⁸ Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, “A Significance for A & P Parking Lots, or Learning from Las Vegas,” *Architectural Forum* 128 (March 1968): 37–43. Reprinted in Venturi, Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, [1972] 1977), 6, 8, 13.

³⁹ Scott Brown and Venturi, preface to the first edition, *Learning from Las Vegas*, xii.

social concern; we are trying to train ourselves to offer *socially* relevant skills.”⁴⁰ The Learning from Las Vegas studio tapped into much of the work already underway at the school—investigations into the popular landscape, urban and rural vernaculars, graphics and architecture, urban design, and new media—as well as the practice of field research. The students brought a finely tuned sensibility and a particular set of skills to the examination of the Las Vegas Strip, especially its graphic elements.

In the studio notes Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour included instructions regarding graphic techniques: “We feel that we should construct our visual image of Las Vegas by means of a collage made from Las Vegas artifacts of many types and sizes. . . . To construct this collage, you should collect images, verbal slogans, and objects. . . . Bear in mind that, however diverse the pieces, they must be juxtaposed in a meaningful way, for example, as are Rome and Las Vegas in this study [presumably the A&P article]. Document the American piazza versus the Roman, and Nolli’s Rome versus the Strip.”⁴¹ Students began by using the Nolli Map’s graphic code of figure and ground, mass and void, to map the Strip’s undeveloped land, asphalt, autos, buildings, ceremonial spaces, and light levels (Figs. 9, 10). They then layered those mappings in a single drawing to analyze the relationships among them. Other techniques, most notably collage, were employed as well, and the students mined information from a variety of sources including telephone company maps (from 1954, 1961, and 1968), which they used to plot the location of a range of businesses on or near the Strip.⁴²

The most interesting analytical graphic technique developed in the studio was a series of sectional diagrams that attempted to visualize scalar and spatial relationships among signs, buildings, billboards, and other objects on the Strip as they were perceived from a moving vantage point. The studio developed a set

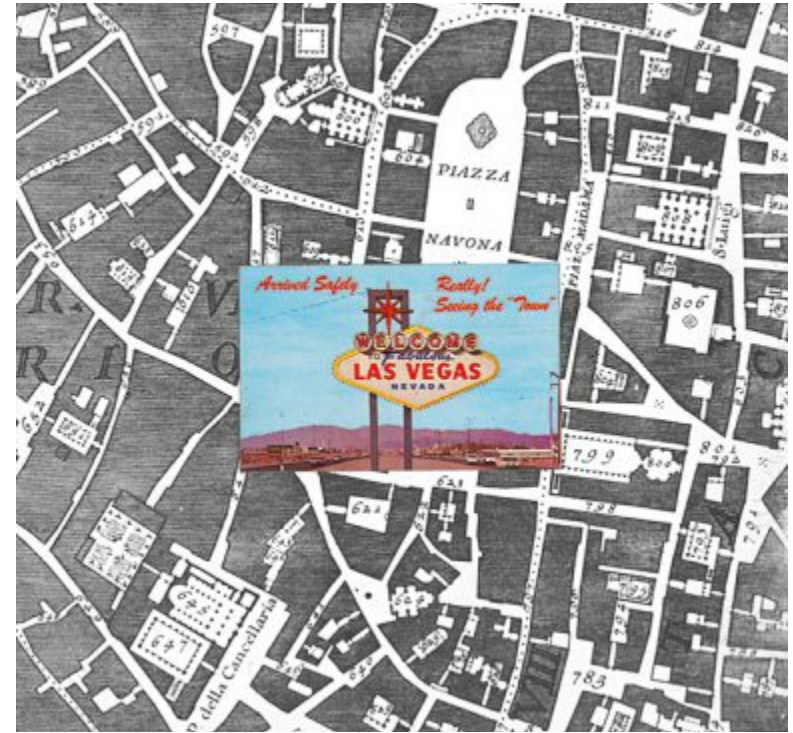


Fig. 9 Learning from Las Vegas Research Studio. “Nolli’s Map of Rome.” Collage (reproduced in black and white in *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1972, Fig. 19), 1968.

⁴⁰ Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 73. Italics in the original.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴² According to Dan Scully, many of the mapping techniques were developed by Douglas Southworth. Personal communication with the author, September 12, 2011.

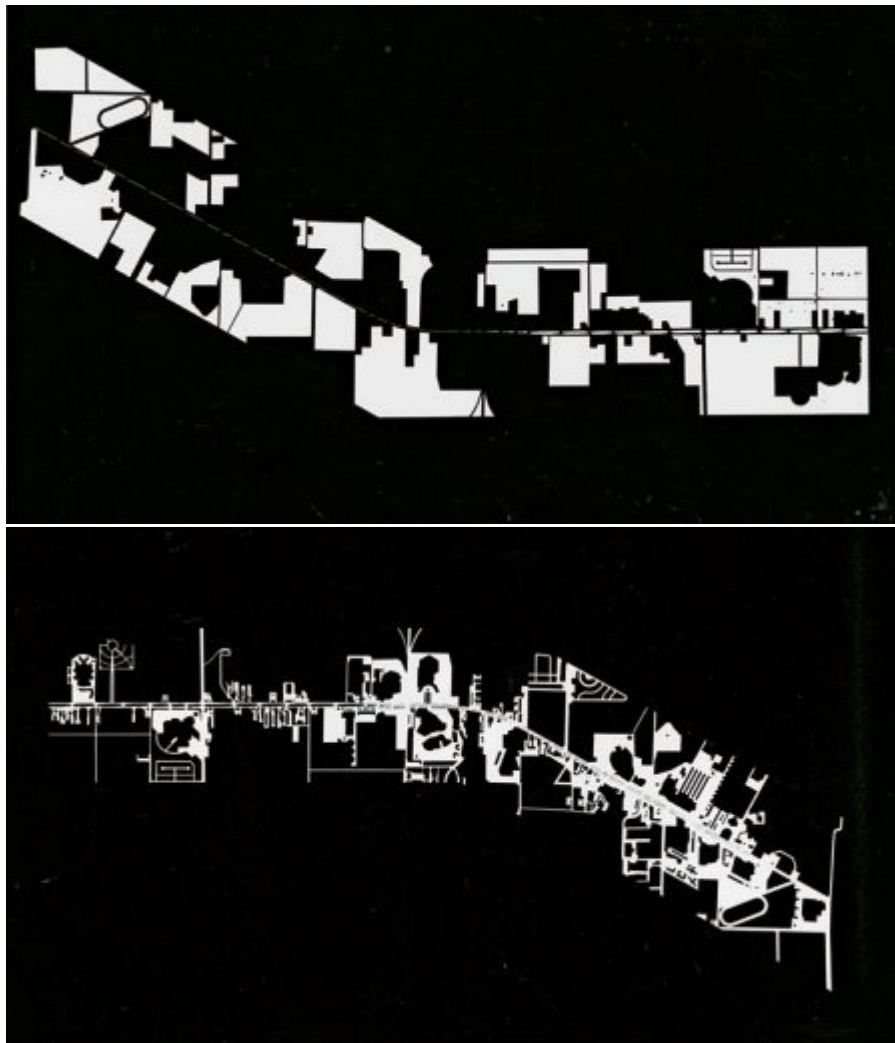


Fig. 10 Learning from Las Vegas Research Studio. "Upper Strip, undeveloped land." Nolli's method applied to the Las Vegas Strip. From *Learning from Las Vegas*, 2nd edition (1977).

of graphic codes to represent the relationship between the Strip's two visual orders: that of the highway and that of the buildings and signs alongside it (Fig. 7). The combination of the two orders constituted the dialectical structure of the Strip: "continuity *and* discontinuity, going *and* stopping, clarity *and* ambiguity, cooperation *and* competition, community *and* individualism."⁴³ Those relationships are explored in "Map of Las Vegas Strip Showing Every Written Word Seen from the Road," an evocatively illegible representation of the visual chaos of the Strip that analyzes it as a system in which "communication dominates space as an element in the architecture and in the landscape."⁴⁴

The most effective and consequential technique used in the studio to capture the logic of this landscape and its architecture involved film, a medium that incorporates space, movement, and time. The idea to use film originated with the students who had been experimenting with the medium as part of Moore's curriculum, both to document urban landscapes and to generate intermedia environments such as Project Argus. In Las Vegas they affixed a camera to the hood of a car and filmed, in a single shot, what they described as a "deadpan" representation of the Strip itself. The concept of the deadpan as a straightforward, uninflected style of depiction derived from artist Ed Ruscha, whose work Venturi and Scott Brown cite as providing "the particular intellectual and artistic underpinnings" of their Las Vegas project.⁴⁵ Yet, neither the film, which the students titled *Las Vegas Deadpan*, nor Ruscha's own composite images are truly unmediated, for each media format has its own logic that both shapes and reveals its subject. In the case of Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), the subject is topographical (see Martino Stierli's essay in this book, esp. pp. 129–173). Recalling a layout common in mid-nineteenth-century illustrated

43 Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 20.

44 *Ibid.*, 8.

45 Venturi and Scott Brown, preface to the first edition, *Learning from Las Vegas*, xii. The studio notes also reference observations on movement perception offered by Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch, and John R. Myer in their 1964 book *The View from the Road*.

street directories, such as John Tallis's *London Street Views*, the book's very format—a 25-foot accordion-folded photomontage showing both sides of the street in panoramic elevation, labeled with each building address and cross street—reflects the work's topographical-indexical focus.⁴⁶

The studio's footage filmed in a single shot follows a different logic: that of the unbroken “stream”—the continuous spatiotemporal flow—of video or television rather than film. Alfred Hitchcock drew the distinction between the media logic of film and television clearly: “Unlike cinema,” he said, “with TV there is no time for suspense, you can only have surprise.”⁴⁷ Video is a medium of continuous flow that privileges accident and chance; it is always on the lookout for the unexpected. As a result, Marshall McLuhan argued, its message has no durable substance: it flows by in a stream and is immediately replaced.⁴⁸ *Las Vegas Deadpan* reveals the spatial logic of the Strip itself. But in this instance the representational technique, rather than the medium, contains the message of Learning from Las Vegas.⁴⁹ Space is key to architectural signification but here it only registers in terms of distance from the eye. Perceived purely visually, the Strip is scaleless, a space without discernible dimensions, beginning, or end. This is especially true in the nighttime footage of *Las Vegas Deadpan* in which only the illuminated signs and lights of the Strip are visible. The environment is reduced to a flat plane, and an optical experience in which neither space nor time has any depth. As such it instantiates the disembodied space of “real-time” flows that (as Paul Virilio pointed out) contains the present and a bit of the immediate future, but none of the past,

and thus obliterates the tense of decisive action.⁵⁰ Its spatiality and temporality preclude political experience.

This last lesson may explain why Moore's attitude towards the Learning from Las Vegas project turned from his characteristic ironic detachment to critical equivocation, leading him to declare in 1978, “I never learned anything from Las Vegas.”⁵¹ Space, Scott Brown asserted, “is not the most important constituent of suburban form. Communication across space is more important.”⁵² For Moore communication in architecture was a “haptic as opposed to a visual” operation—“an act consummated by the whole body, muscles as well as eyeballs.”⁵³ What was at issue for Moore was embodied communication. In the curriculum he put in place at Yale—from the first-year core studios and Stauffacher's elevator design problem to Project Argus—the proprioceptive dimensions of communication were explored through architectural acts that granted agency to their users.

By contrast, *Learning from Las Vegas* (like Stern's 1965 *Perspecta* issue) remained embedded in the postwar monumentality discourse and the questions it posed about architectural form. Venturi and Scott Brown went to Las Vegas in search of monumentality and they found it in the large-scale illuminated signs and billboards of that suburban landscape, where “the sign is more important than the architecture.”⁵⁴ The aspatial monumentality celebrated in *Learning from Las Vegas* is the antithesis of Moore's own conception of monumentality as a spatial setting for collective action.

46 I am indebted to Mariana Mogilevich for her insights into the topographical character of Ruscha's work. For a discussion of the notion of the “deadpan” see Stierli in this volume.

47 Richard Schickel, *Alfred Hitchcock: Master of Suspense* (New York: Winstar Home Entertainment, 1999), videocassette.

48 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 292. McLuhan also noted that “today technologies and their consequent environments succeed each other so rapidly that one environment makes us aware of the next.”

49 This is the unacknowledged lesson of *Las Vegas Deadpan* and the signal contribution of the Yale students, Dan Scully and Peter Schlaifer in particular, who shot it.

50 Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 66.

51 Moore, quoted in Barbaralee Diamonstein, *American Architecture Now* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 130.

52 Scott Brown, “Learning from Pop,” *Casabella* 359–360 (December 1971): 17.

53 “Charles Moore on Postmodernism,” *Architectural Design* 47 (1977): 255. Moore, “Personal Statement” in *The Work of Charles W. Moore*, ed. Toshio Nakamura, A+U Extra Edition (Tokyo: A+U Publishing Co., 1978), 8.

54 Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 13. It is almost as if, in this text, they took up the charge that Stern had given Moore in *Perspecta* 9/10 to “consider monumental architecture as part of the urban scene.”

Lipstick (Ascending)

The contradiction between these two positions was brought into sharp relief by their juxtaposition at Yale in the late 1960s. It was highlighted in 1969 by one of the era's most important civic monuments, or political acts of monumentality: Claes Oldenburg's *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*. The project was initiated, planned, and assembled by a group of art and architecture students led by Stuart Wrede (Figs. 11, 12). Inspired by Constructivist works of the 1920s, including Vladimir Tatlin's *Tower* and El Lissitzky's *Lenin Tribune*, Wrede had approached Oldenburg about the possibility of constructing a monument for Yale's campus in February 1969. Oldenburg responded with enthusiasm and presented several models, including *Lipstick*. Students set up a nonprofit organization, the Colossal Keepsake Corporation, dedicated to the construction and donation of monuments to educational and charitable institutions. (The charter provided for the possibility that if Yale refused the monument, it would be donated to another educational institution, most likely Harvard.) More than fifty students, faculty, alumni, and friends of Yale (including Moore, Philip Johnson, James Stirling, and Vincent Scully) contributed funds to finance the project, and Oldenburg donated his time and effort. The Colossal Keepsake Corporation contracted with Lippincott Inc. of North Haven, fabricators of outdoor sculpture, to construct *Lipstick*. On May 15, 1969, a 24-foot-tall, 3,500-pound lipstick tube mounted on a 13-by-14-foot caterpillar track base was installed on Beinecke Plaza in front of Yale's central administrative building. Oldenburg's original conception was that *Lipstick* would be a remote-controlled motorized work that would crawl into position and serve as a platform for speeches. Persons wishing to address the public would mount the *Lipstick* deck and pump up the inflatable vinyl shaft to get attention. After the speech the stick would slowly deflate. (Shortly



Fig. 11 Stuart Wrede's essay "Deed of Gift" on Claes Oldenburg's *Lipstick (Ascending)*, to be erected on the Yale Campus. Page from *Novum Organum 7* (May 1969).

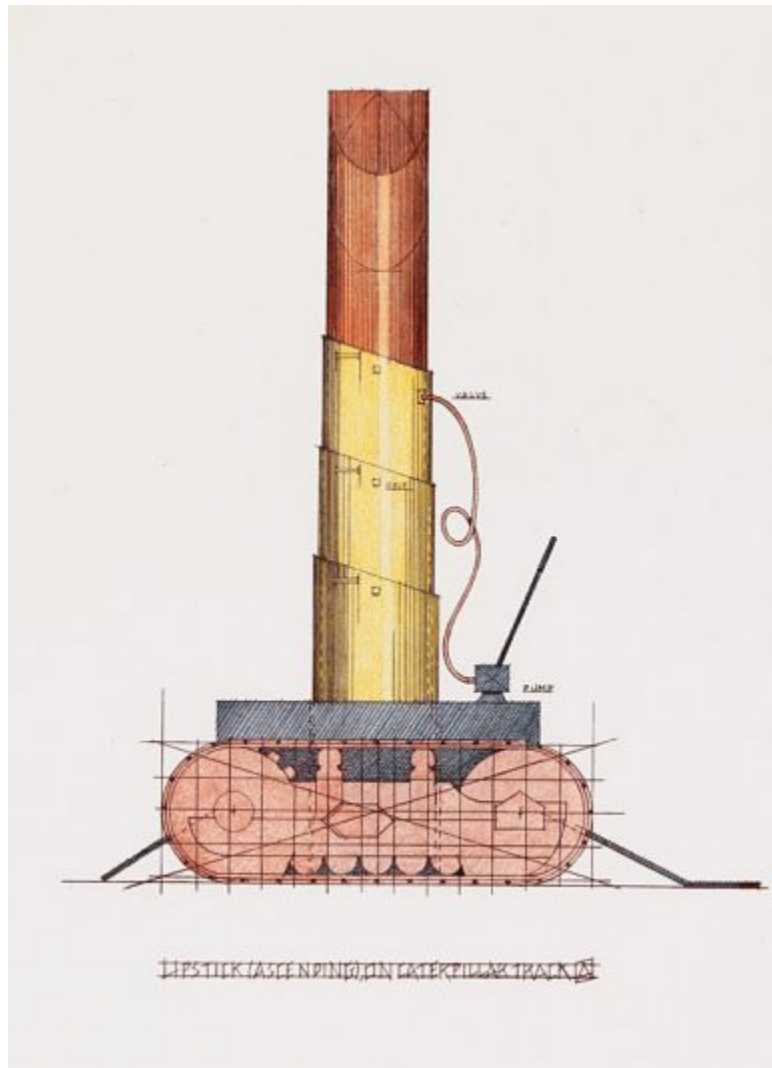


Fig. 12 Claes Oldenburg. *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*. Color lithograph with additions by hand, 1972.

after the installation, the inflatable vinyl shaft was replaced with a permanently rigid metal shaft.)⁵⁵

The project's relation to Venturi and Scott Brown's concept of monumentality (in terms of the decorated shed) is both obvious and multifaceted. The references to advertising, sexuality, and military hardware combine symbols of glamour and sex with those of power and martial belligerence. The scalar manipulations are a Pop Art move, inverting hierarchies to induce critical reflection on the status quo. But here they are turned to political ends; the monument is a soapbox whose purpose is to inspire and enable collective acts and to generate political space. According to the criteria Moore elaborates in "You Have to Pay for the Public Life," it is a place where a revolution could take place.

That is precisely what happened at Yale a year later, when protests over the Vietnam War and the trials of Black Panthers Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins in New Haven culminated in May Day, a mass demonstration on the New Haven Green in early May 1970 calling for a national student strike to protest the war and demand the release of the Panthers (Fig. 6). The National Guard was called in, a bomb exploded in Ingalls Rink, and crowds were dispersed with tear gas. Disaster was averted when Kingman Brewster decided to welcome the demonstrators with food and shelter, rather than close the university down and surround it with armed guards as he had been urged to do.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, under Moore's "loose and unspecified" mode of governance, the Department of Architecture had begun to spin out of control. In the spring of 1969, shortly after the installation of *Lipstick*, conflict among administration, faculty, and students amid accusations of racism led to the permanent closure of Yale's

⁵⁵ *Lipstick* was rebuilt and installed in Morse College at Yale in 1974. See Hans Dickel, *Claes Oldenburg's Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks, Yale 1969: Kunst im Kontext der Studentenbewegung* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1999); Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995). On Yale student involvement, see Judith Ann Schiff, "The Lipstick: From Anti-War to 'Morse Resource,'" *Yale Alumni Magazine* (February 2000).

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Kabaservice, *The Guardians: Kingman Brewster, His Circle, and the Rise of the Liberal Establishment* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 40.



Fig. 13 The Art and Architecture Building by Paul Rudolph with fire brigade trying to get the June 1969 blaze under control. New Haven, CT, 1969.

Department of City Planning. In June a mysterious fire gutted the top floors of the Art and Architecture Building, forcing the school to relocate to temporary quarters for much of the following academic year (Fig. 13). The administrative structure was reorganized, and Moore was appointed dean, a position he held through 1970.

Lipstick and other explorations of the late 1960s were without issue at Yale. In his last annual report to Brewster, Moore abandoned the ironic tone of his earlier reports: “Few annual reports, I suspect, have described a year so given over to examination, from within and from without, as this one has been for the Faculties of Architecture and City Planning. . . . Our strength, I believe, is that we are still a design school. . . . This seems to me especially critical at a juncture when architecture schools across the country in the search for relevance have abdicated their strength in design. The work of our faculty and students offer[s], I think, impressive current evidence of our health in spite of everything in this critical area: it is worth hanging on to.”⁵⁷ He admitted to having “placed excessive hope in the notion that a wide range of personal freedom for faculty and students to follow their own dictates would speed the search for our elusive goals.”⁵⁸ But Moore’s freewheeling pedagogy also opened the door to the eminently “teachable theory” of Venturi and Scott Brown’s decorated shed, which displaced not only architectural meaning from the building to the sign but also the agency of architecture itself from the space of the city to Manfredo Tafuri’s boudoir.⁵⁹ In 1968 the students in Venturi and Scott Brown’s studio sought the agency of architecture in the suburban landscape of the Las Vegas Strip. In the process they discovered the media-logic of an emerging urban spatiality; the disembodied spatiality of “real-time” flows and of continuous “streaming” that obliterates the architectonic space of effective action. Since its

⁵⁷ Moore, *Annual Report of the Dean, 1969–1970*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ See Manfredo Tafuri, “L’Architecture dans le Boudoir: The Language of Criticism and the Criticism of Language,” trans. Victor Caliendo, *Oppositions* 3 (1974): 37–62.

publication in 1972, *Learning from Las Vegas* has been heralded as an originating moment of the Postmodern turn in American architecture. Today, however, it is the transitional moment and sense of crisis that pervaded it—when cities became the testing ground for neoliberal economic policies, and it became clear that the transformation of mid-century urban environments signaled not only the diminished social agency of architecture, but also the evacuation of political space from the city itself—that seems to resonate most strongly.

Mary McLeod

Wrestling with Meaning in Architecture: Learning from Las Vegas

In the preface to the second edition of *Learning from Las Vegas*, published in 1977, Denise Scott Brown provocatively declared, “Las Vegas is not the subject of our book. The symbolism of architectural form is.”¹ She and her fellow authors, Robert Venturi and Steven Izenour, had fought with MIT Press to get the book redesigned in a more modest format; it was now stripped of all its color (except for the cover), of nearly a third of its images, and, most significantly, of its seductive Modernist graphics (Figs. 1, 2). The last section about the firm’s work was also eliminated. These changes not only made the book more affordable but also, as Scott Brown explained, emphasized the book’s original aim to be a “treatise on symbolism.” To underscore that point the authors added a subtitle, “The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form.”²

The differences between the book’s two editions might be seen as part of a shift in sensibility that occurred in architecture

1 Denise Scott Brown, preface to the revised edition, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), xv. All subsequent citations of *Learning from Las Vegas* in these notes are to this edition unless specified otherwise.

2 For convenience, henceforth, I refer to the authors as Venturi and Scott Brown. Although Steven Izenour contributed significantly to the publication, especially the book’s graphic elements and photographs, according to Scott Brown the book’s written content was primarily the result of discussions between Venturi and herself. Scott Brown told me that Venturi’s name is listed first because he wrote the first draft of the manuscript (except the portions in Part I related to the studio program), but that many of the subsequent revisions to that draft were hers (Scott Brown, telephone conversation with the author, January 14, 2010). See also the original typed manuscript in the Venturi, Scott Brown Collection in the Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as VSB Collection, AAUP). Note, however, that Izenour, who served as a teaching assistant for the 1968 Las Vegas studio and helped prepare the studio handouts, may have played a major role in the discussions among the authors of the book *Meaning in Architecture*, edited by George Baird and Charles Jencks. (See note 15, below.)