Complexity and Contradiction: Influence and Impact

“Each generation writes its biography in the buildings it creates.” – Lewis Mumford

Theories of Architecture: Sept 30, 2011
Melanie Panutsos| Professor Sabini
Analyzing the Current State: Venturi’s Mentors/Influences

- **Baroque & Rococo 17th-18th Century** [Tension & Complexity]
  - Trevi Fountain
  - Basilica at Ottobeuren
  - Robinghof Salzburg
  - Exaggerated Motion
  - Grandeur
  - Ornament

- **Italian Mannerism 1520-1580** [Formal Symbolism]
  - Villa Farnese
  - Il Gesu, Rome
  - Museo Capitolino
  - Complex
  - Contradictions
  - Symbolism inherent
Analyzing the Current State: 
Venturi’s Mentors/Influences

• **Classics** [Use as History/Symbolism]
  - Monumental
  - Symbolic
  - Memory
  - Ornament
  - Reuse

• **Early Modern** [Selective Reflection of History]
  - A.E.G by Peter Behrens
  - Steiner House by A. Loos
  - Unity Temple by F.L. Wright
  - 1900-1910
  - Integration of past/present
  - Phase of transition evident
Analyzing the Current State:
Venturi’s Mentors/Influences

- **Louis I. Kahn** [Venturi’s greatest influence]
  - Salk Institute
  - 1959-1966
  - Modern
  - Complex
  - Ordered

- **Alvar Aalto** [Concern for the gesamtkunstwerk]
  - Saynatsalo
  - 1949-1952
  - Modern
  - Central Piazza
  - Complex Layout
Analyzing the Current State:
Venturi’s Mentors/Influences

- **Philip Johnson** [History, Symbolic Meaning]
  - Glass House, 1949
  - Minimal, Modern
  - Sheldon Museum of Art
  - 1963
  - Historic Value
  - Use of Technology

- **Roy Lichtenstein & Andy Warhol** [Interest in the Everyday]
  - Roy Lichtenstein
  - Pop Art
  - 1960’s
  - Andy Warhol
  - Commercial Art
  - 1949-1961
Critique on the Current State:
Venturi’s criticism of his peers circa 1966

- Architects prefer to overhaul rather than enhance the site.

- Modern architecture has distorted the built form into one giant ornament. (DUCK)

- Architecture has lost its energy; become “routine and unquestionable canon.”

- Modern architecture has forgotten the importance of symbol and seeks to communicate only through form.

- Architecture should persuade.
Responses to Venturi: 
Whites [Oppositions]

• Mies Van der Rohe
  – **Minimalism**, uniformity of style
• The “**New York Five**” 1972
  – Publication of architectural projects inspired by the Modern Movement
  – Represented a counterpoint to Venturi’s, Stern’s, and Jenck’s call for signification of meaning”
  – Interests were **formalist**; application of cubism to architecture
  – **Members**: Charles Gwathmey (“cool, tightly controlled modernism”), Peter Eisenman, Richard Meier, Michael Graves, John Hejduk

![Museum of the Moving Image Charles Gwathmey - 1988](image1)
![Eisenman House 1975](image2)
![Smith House by Meier 1967](image3)
![Gwathmey Residence 1965](image4)
Responses to Venturi:
Grays [Subscribers]

- **Vincent Scully**
  - Advocate for Robert Venturi

- **Five On Five**
  - Opposed/criticized the New York Five
  - Called *Five Architects’s* work European/idealist
  - Exclusive vs inclusive
  - **Members**: Jaqueline T. Robertson, Allan Greenberg, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert A.M. Stern, Charles Wallard Moore
  - Criticized Individuals:
    - Richard Meier
      - Poor design, shoddy
    - Peter Eisenman
      - Architecture removed from culture
    - Michael Graves
      - Burdened by technique
Responses to Venturi:
[Further Influenced]

• Robert A.M. Stern
  – Yale student, “The Doubles of Postmodernism”
• Charles Jencks
  – *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*
• Rem Koolhaas
  – Called Complexity and Contradiction the “last architectural manifesto”
• Phillip Johnson
  – “It all came from Bob Venturi’s book…”
• Michael Graves
  – “renounced abstract and ahistorical formalism”
• Steven Phillip Song
  – *Shifting Paradigms: Renovating the Decorated Shed.* (2007)
• Peter Eisenman
  – Venturi/Scott brown “initiated a radical change in architectural discourse, opening a whole new world of thinking”
• Eero Saarinen
  – TWA Terminal expresses dynamicism with concrete resembling a bird in flight
• Louis I. Kahn
  – Both mentor and student, a “dynamic exchange”
Venturi’s Expanded Influence:
[Outside the Discipline]

*Learning from Las Vegas*, is a text that continues to inspire and provoke artists, planners, designers, and architects more than forty years after its first publication.

—Steven Phillip Song
Venturi’s Expanded Influence:
[Outside the Discipline]

- Postmodernism
- Deconstructivism
  - “The foundation of [Venturi’s] theory has supported most of the progressive architecture of the last four decades.”
- Adaptive Reuse
  - Willingness to accommodate conflicting cultural messages
- Film, music, dance, literature, theater
  - “Subverts the boundaries between high and low art”
- Performance art, commercial art
  - Availability, public, commodified appearances
  - Ed Ruscha, Wayne White
- Multimedia
  - Installation/Computer Art
Continuing Presence:

[Ongoing Significance]

• Continued influence on the way people design/theorize about architecture.

• Continued importance is placed on spatial layouts, multi-layering of spaces, and contextual significance.

• “There are at least four major lessons in Learning from Las Vegas that are relevant, especially today.” (Steven Philip Song)
  – Understanding of the emerging automobile
  – Role of iconography, symbolism and communication in architecture
  – Learn a new receptivity to the tastes and values of other people
  – The importance of the studying the complexities of the modern world with objectivity.
When “Learning From Las Vegas” was published, we were all still getting used to a world of freeways and McDonald’s drive-thrus. Today commercial culture is more powerful and pervasive than ever. We may need these two architects as much now as ever.

- Nicolai Ouroussoff

“The Lessons of Las Vegas Still Hold Surprises.”
Resources Cited or Consulted

  www.designtavern.com/2009/02/less-is-more-vs-less-is-bore (4).
  www.birdsdoit.wordpress.com/2011/03/23/less-is-more-vs-less-is-bore. (5).
Resources Cited or Consulted (Cont.)