

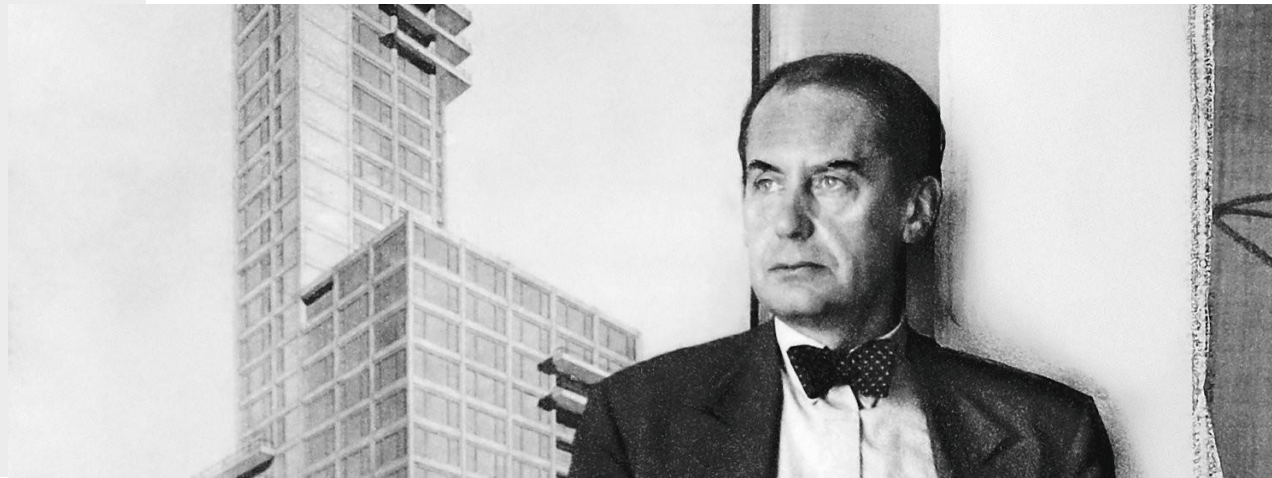
ARCH222 **HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE II** Presentation 24.05.2018
Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture(1966), Robert Venturi

Born in 1925 in Pennsylvania, Robert Venturi is an American architect who is known to be founder of postmodernism. He becomes prominent with his doctrine *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* and *Learning from Las Vegas*.

Ekin Başkentli
Uğur Çınar

After Bauhaus is closed due to the pressure of the Nazi regime, many important instructors such as Mies Van der Rohe and Walter Gropius began their exile years. They both started to lecture at different American universities.

Walter Gropius was made chairman of architecture department at Harvard university shortly after he came to United States. He tried to apply Bauhaus philosophy and design on Harvard program while attempting to cancel the history of architecture courses, yet he failed.



Another former Bauhaus instructor Mies Van der Rohe also spent his exile years in America as director of the school of architecture at Chicago's Armour Institute. The campus which he designed became well-known for its teaching methods. After the second World War, Mies caught some opportunities to practise on large-scaled high-rise buildings.

They both left an impression of Bauhaus tradition on American modernism and inspired other institutes in the United States as well.



With the effect of European modernists, the international style shortly spread through America. In the following decade, American architects adopted the idea to get rid of the ordinary approach of eclectic modernism understanding. However, by the late 50's, international style started repeat its characteristics such as rectilinear forms, plane surfaces without any ornamentation, open interior spaces with the usage of glass steel with concrete. By the late 60's, some American architects started to criticise the repetitive design approach of international style.

JANE JACOBS(1916-06)

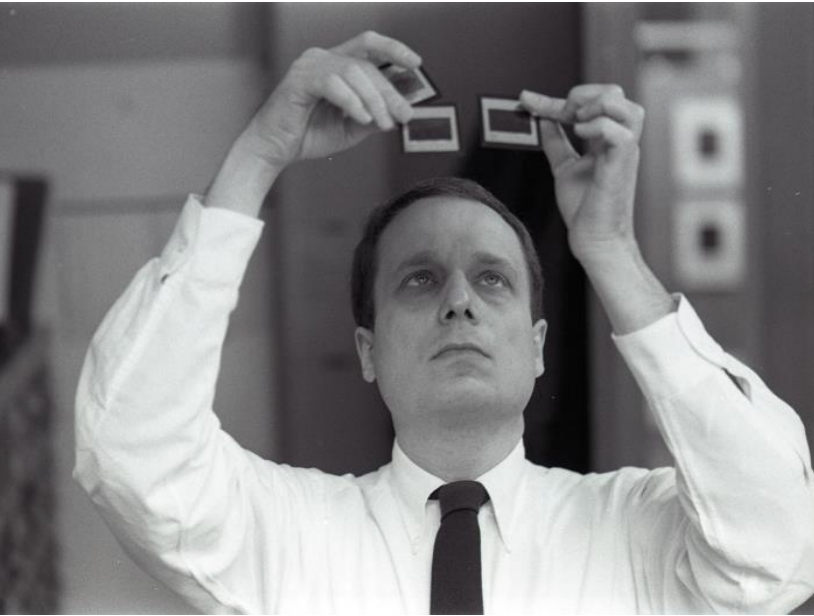
American journalist, activist and researcher who is known for her studies on urban planning and society.

By publishing her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs criticise the dominance of modernism in urban scale and planted the seed for future postmodernism. She had attacked modernist urban concept which are lacking the complexity and layered texture of a liveable city. She proposed that a city essentially based on an arranged complexity like dynamic organisms. She is against elitism in urban planning which disturbs social fabric.



"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, only when, they are created for everybody." –Jane Jacobs

POST-MODERNISM



The idea of postmodernism is a response to idealist and utopian principals of modernism. The difference between modernism and postmodernism is that while modernism is depending on idealism and reason, postmodernism depends on scepticism and suspicion of reason. It may be said that the very first manifest of postmodernism started with pop art.

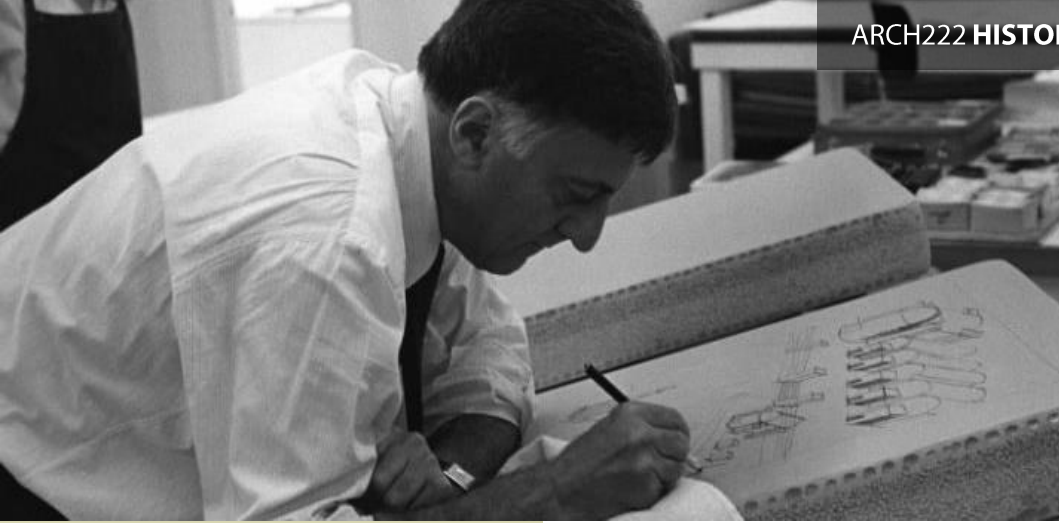
In architectural manner, such objections and responses to international style, which is supported by Le Corbusier and Mies Van der Rohe, in the United States is ended up shaping a new idea that developed against the observed shortcoming of modernism (as a result of ignoring cultural structures of society.)

The practicing architect and historian Robert Venturi has sparked the discussion against modernism with his doctrine, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* by criticising the international style. Beyond functionalism, he believed that architecture also has a communicative side and he designed his buildings according to the communicative functionalism.

"The Pop Art Movement was largely a British and American cultural phenomenon of the late 1950's and 60's and was named by the art critic Lawrence Alloway in reference to the prosaic iconography of its painting and sculpture... Pop art represented an attempt to return to a more objective,, universally acceptable form of art after the dominance in both the United States and Europe of the highly personal Abstract Expressionism. It was iconoclastic, rejecting both the supremacy of the "high art" of the past and the pretensions of other contemporary avant-garde art."

- Encyclopedia Britannica, Definition of Pop Art





ALDO ROSSI (1931-97)

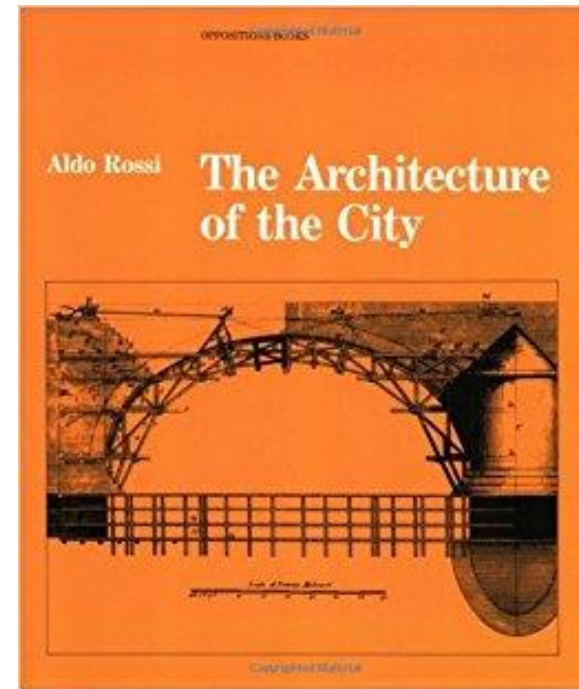
Born in 1931 in Milan, Aldo Rossi is an Italian Architect. After he graduated from Polytechnic of Milan, he worked in architectural journal *Casabellacontinuita* as an editor which he marked social and political facts of the country in his writings.

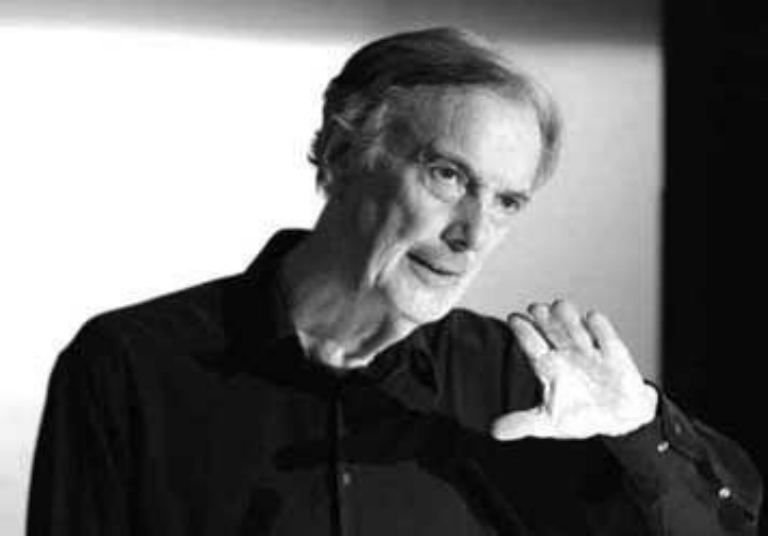
Later on 1964 when he ended his career in the journal, he joined in an Italian critique which is criticising the progressivism and functionalism of modernist movement. The early refusal of the modernist movement is started in USA with the Venturi's book and in Europe Rossi's book.

Casabella Continuita was a architectural journey in Italy which focuses on radical modern designs. It also had some interview with World's most famous architects.

In 1966, he published his book *The Architecture of City* (L'architettura Della Citta) which he mainly criticise the modernist movement's failures in European historic cities. It was published with the *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* at the same year. He opposed to "*form follows function*" motto of modernist movement with his idea of "*function follows form*".

The distinction between Venturi's and Rossi's works is the approach of the critics on modernism and the language.

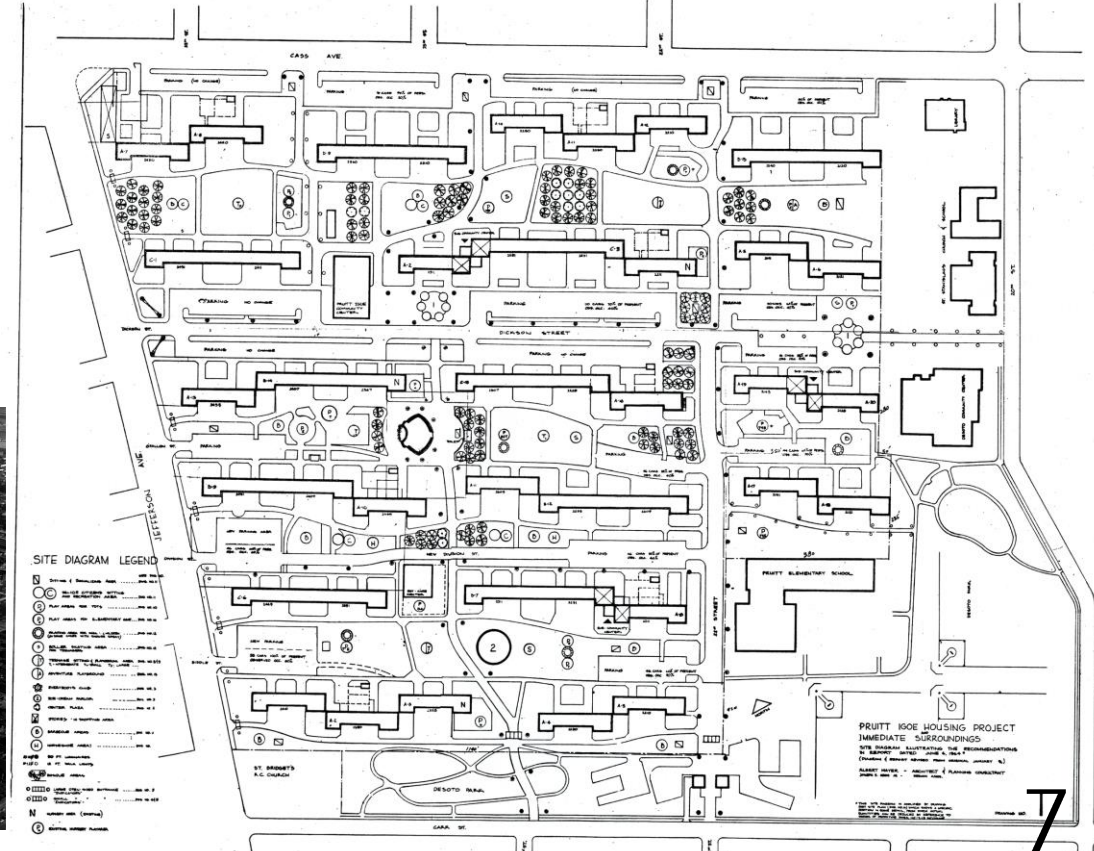




“Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 15, 1972, at 3.32 p.m. (or thereabouts), when the infamous Pruitt Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grace by dynamite.”

-Charles Jencks

In 1972, a very modernist example of mass housing is flattened. Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project, which is designed for low income families in St. Louis, Missouri, is demolished since the government agreed that the Project is not suitable for people to live anymore.



ROBERT VENTURI (1925-)

Robert Venturi is a practicing architect and architectural historian, graduated from Princeton university and started his further studies under an offensive program, which embraces Beaux-art frame in architecture, of Professor **Jean Labatut** who left an impact on his design perception.

Later in 1951, he worked at **Eero Saarinen's** office for a short time than continued his studies at American Academy in Rome. As an Italian-American he was interested in his ancestors works and studied on architectural history in Europe for 2 years. As a result, he was rewarded the Rome Prize Fellowship at 1954, one of the members of the jury was **Louis Kahn** who would become his employer and later became his colleague as professor at University of Pennsylvania between 1954-65.



Meanwhile, he met with a fellow member of university, who is an architect and planner also architectural rhetorician that will become his life-partner, **Denise Scott Brown**.

In the following years, with his partner and associate Denise Scott Brown, he will leave a mark on architectural history which will change American architecture's direction for decades and influence many by remarkable publications *Complexity and Contradictory in Architecture (1966)* and *Learning from Las Vegas (1977)* and buildings such as *Vanna Venturi House, Guild House, etc.*



EERO SAARINEN (1910-61)

Finnish born architect. His designs were based on experimentation and exploration on architecture. His career started in the United States at Flint Institute of Research and Planning.

His designs includes the most significant examples of American symbolism such as St. Louis Gateway Arch (1948-64), Detroit General Motors (1948-56) and TWA Terminal in New York J. F. Kennedy Airport (1956-62). He is known to be ***the contrarian architect of modernism***.

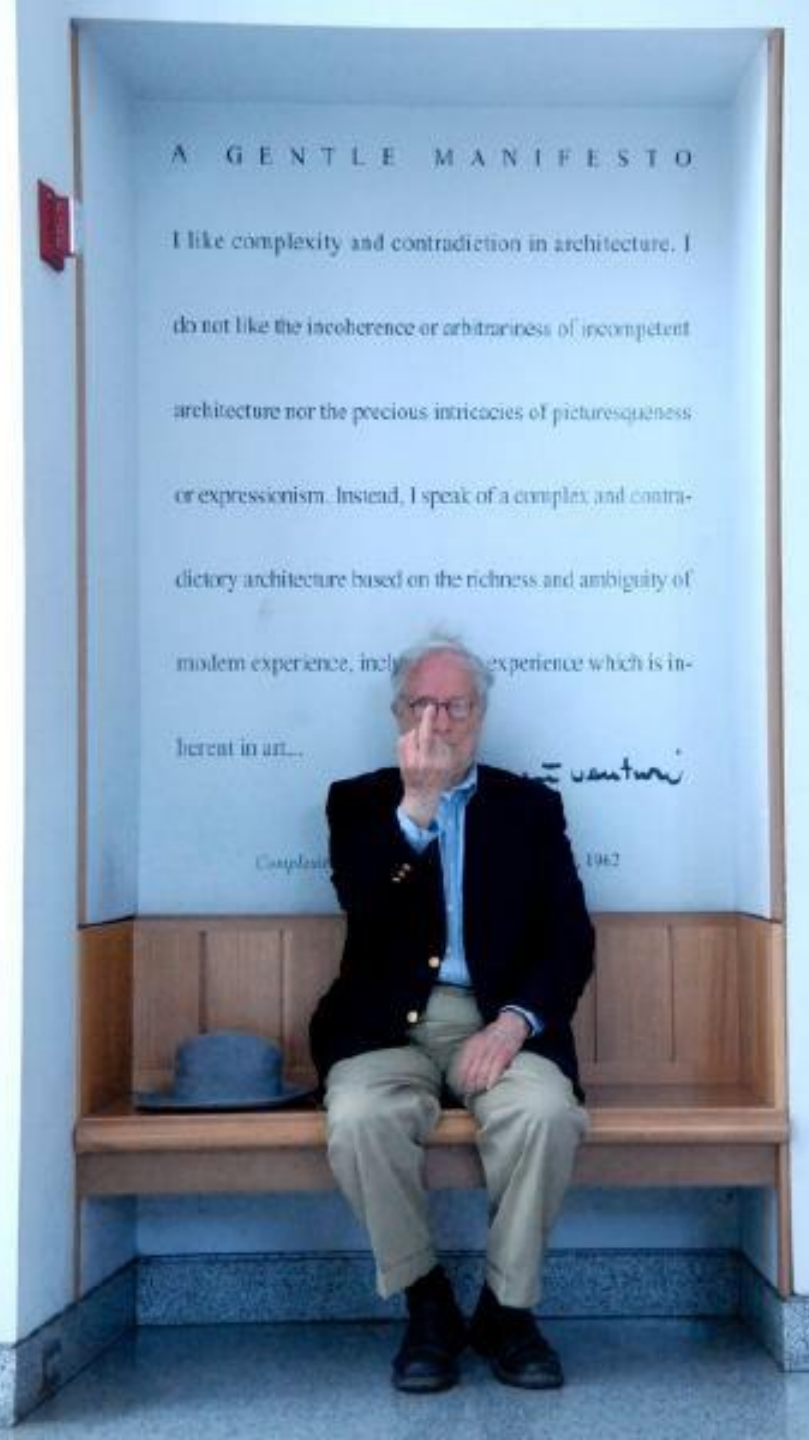
LOUIS KAHN (1901-74)

American architect who is graduated from University of Pennsylvania (1924). After graduating he visited Europe and studied on architectural monuments. Between 1930-40's he designed mostly mass housing and private residences then he became professor at Yale University. After his years as fellow in American Academy of Rome, where his path is coincided with Robert Venturi, he left the past decades design attitude international style, with his work of Yale University Art Gallery (1952-54). He was one of he jury members of Robert Venturi in American Academy in Rome, later on Venturi assisted his studios at Yale University. Their relationship was formed on mutual influences rather than student-teacher relation. Even, it is said that Venturi influenced Kahn more than Kahn influenced him.



DENISE SCOTT BROWN (1931-)

She was working with the architect since 1998 to 1952. She attempted to study liberal politics in University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, but she couldn't. Instead of studying on a field which women do not accepted, she went to London to work with the modernist architect Frederic Gibberd as she was studying architecture. She met with Robert Scott Brown(1954) and after her graduation she married with him. In the next three years they worked and travelled around Europe. In 1958, they moved back to United States since she started to study at University of Pennsylvania. In the following year Robert died when she completed her master program. In 1960 she met with Robert Venturi and they became collaborators and lectured courses from 1962 to 1964. After they studied on Learning from Las Vegas, they married at 1967 and became partner on almost everything.



NONSTRAIGHTFORWARD ARCHITECTURE: A GENTLE MANIFESTO

Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture “A Gentle Manifesto” is not an easy reading to understand the antagonist manner of postmodernism.

The text, which he titled as “A Gentle Manifesto”, is a brief summary and introduction of the book. He even created a contradiction in oxymoronic title by using gentle and manifesto together. Since a manifest is a strong and “*straightforward*” declaration, with the usage of “gentle” it becomes “*nonstraightforward*” so in title he actually refers to his ideas about architecture.

In the text, Venturi outlines the architecture which he wanted to see that displaces modernism. He claims that, even though architecture has complex and contradictory in its nature, contradiction and complexity is accepted everywhere except architecture. Moreover, through the text, he criticises the simple language of modern architecture. By pointing out the things that he wanted to see in architecture, he states that he prefers a messy vitality over clear unity and explains it with the architecture’s totality in its contradicting elements which provides complexity in design. At the end he comes up with the counter-argument to “*Less is more.*”; ***More is not less.***



Vincent Joseph Scully was an American art historian in the department of Architecture at Yale University who wrote several books about history of architecture. Scully is described as "the most influential architectural teacher ever." by Phillip Johnson. He supported Robert Venturi on his publications, which made him the one of the most famous architects of 20th century.

Vincent Scully described the book

"Yet it is probably the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbuier's "Vers Une Architecture, of 1923".




COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION IN ARCHITECTURE

ROBERT VENTURI

COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION IN ARCHITECTURE

The Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture of Venturi and Vers Une Architecture of Le Corbusier are very much the same, since they put forward new ideas about making of architecture, yet distinct with their statements.

Robert Venturi suggests that every complexity includes contradictions in itself and the togetherness of these two provides a totality. What is important is that how complexity and contradictions are handled in the whole and are related with the whole. Through *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, he opposed and criticised Modernism and 'orthodox modern architects' by analysing and exemplifying these under 10 subtitles.



COMPLEXITY
AND
CONTRADICTION
IN ARCHITECTURE
ROBERT VENTURI

Complexity and Contradiction vs. Simplification or Picturesqueness

“Forced simplicity results in over simplification...Where simplicity cannot work, simpleness results. Blatant simplification means bland architecture. LESS IS BORE.” -Robert Venturi



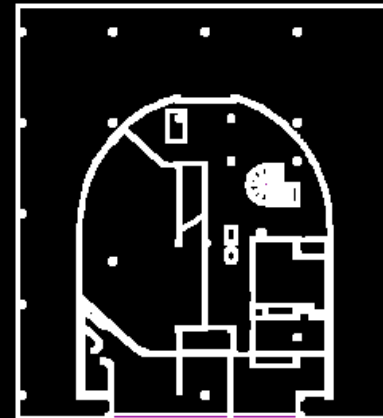
The Wiley House, Philip Johnson

Phillip Johnson visibly separated “private function” from “social functions”, which is ended up as oversimplified program of living.

Ambiguity

Architectural elements which are perceived as *form & structure, texture & material*, creates ambiguity and a question with “or” can describe these relations.

Is it a square plan or not?





COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION IN ARCHITECTURE

ROBERT VENTURI

Contradictory Levels: *The Phenomenon of "Both-And" in Architecture*

In Complexity and Contradiction architecture, the phenomenon of "both-and" is based on hierarchy which returns in several layers of meanings. The complexity and contradiction in "both-and" is related with the element's relation to whole.

"Architecture must have bad spaces as well as good spaces." –Louis Kahn



He asks for Casa del Girasole by Luigi Moretti: ***"Are they one building with a split or two buildings joined?"***

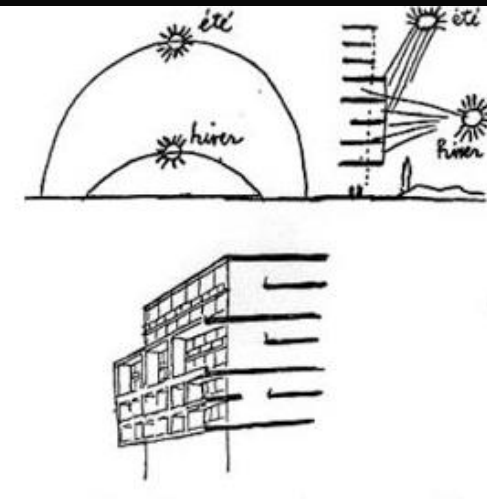


Shodan House example on "yet" condition; Venturi said that ***"it is closed yet open. Precisely closed by its corners, yet randomly opened on its surfaces"***

Contradictory Levels Continued: *The Double-Functioning Element*

The Distinction between "both-and" and "double-functioning element" is that; "both-and" is related with the relation of a part to the whole and doubles the meaning not the function.

In the example of Unité d'Habitation, The brise-soleils are structure porches as well as sunscreens.





COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION IN ARCHITECTURE

ROBERT VENTURI

Accommodation and The Limitations of Order: *The Conventional Element*

Since Venturi states that every complexity comes with its contradiction within the whole, he describes conventional element as “*circumstantial contradiction*” of a complex reality which forms unity. These contradictions are exceptional inconsistencies that derives from a consistent complexity.

“By order, I do not mean orderliness”. -Louis Kahn

The conventional elements break the order under different circumstances, so it creates a contrast relation which supports meaning and he adds “**Order must exist before it can be broken**”.



As we see in the bridge example, the structural elements vividly accommodates the contradictions through an order which makes them conventional elements. The contradiction here is the terrain and the complexity is the accommodation of elements and terrain which provides the unity.

Contradiction Adopted

Contradictions in complex and consistent order become conventional when contradiction element is compromised and accommodated. This creates circumstantial distortions which are the contradictions in the complex whole.

As well as these circumstantial distortions, another way to adopt contradictions is to create a conventional order which arranges the circumstances.

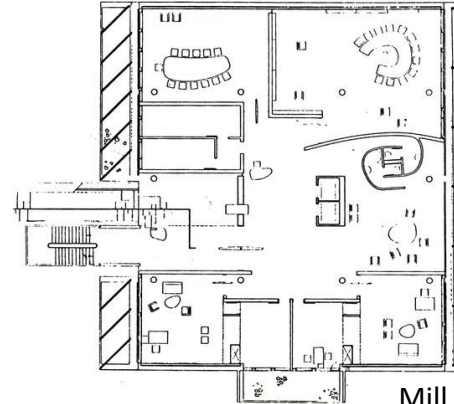
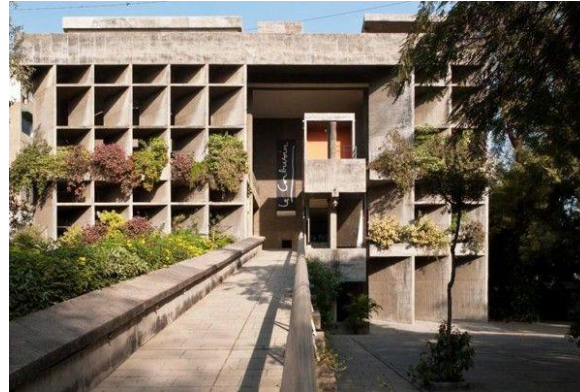


COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION IN ARCHITECTURE

ROBERT VENTURI

Contradiction Juxtaposed

If we consider “*contradiction adopted*” as inclusive manner of creating a complexity, then “*contradiction juxtaposed*” is the exclusive approach of comparing and contrasting the contradiction to whole.



Mill Owners Association Building, Le Corbusier

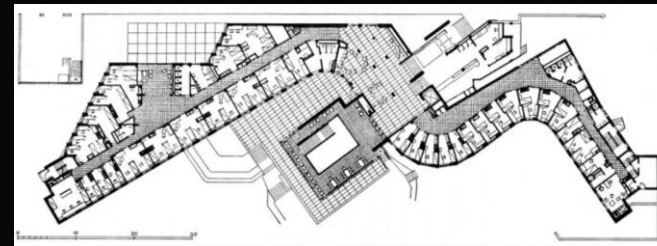
In the example, we see that two diagonals (stair and ramp) are coincided, which is a contradiction since they are perpendicular diagonals, and at the point where they coincide a void is created in order to juxtapose their relation.

The Inside and The Outside

“*Architecture occurs at the meeting of interior and exterior forces of use and space.*” The interior and exterior qualities are different and contrary. The use of such exterior and interior spaces together creates contradiction and complexity in the whole.



MIT Baker House Dormitory, Alvar Aalto



The spaces at the back vary in order to create other varying spaces that create a distinct relation with the exterior. Except other modernist examples, the architect is using conventions such as curvilinear form in order to solve the problem.

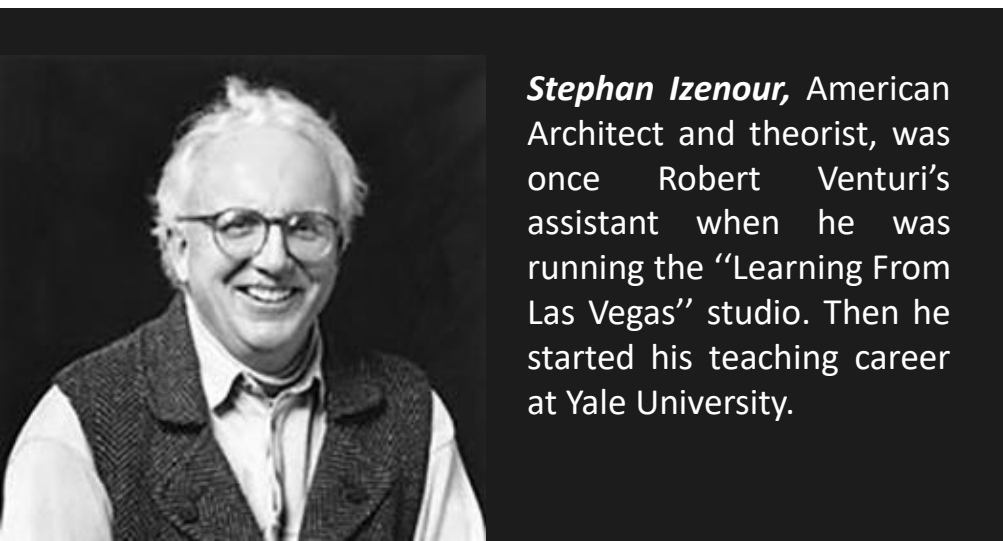
The Obligation Toward The Difficult Whole

He states that complexity and contradiction consist of multiplicity of diverse elements which are in relation and emphasizes that unity is appearing in multiplicity. It is difficult to achieve the whole since creating a sense of relation between different elements of architecture takes effort.



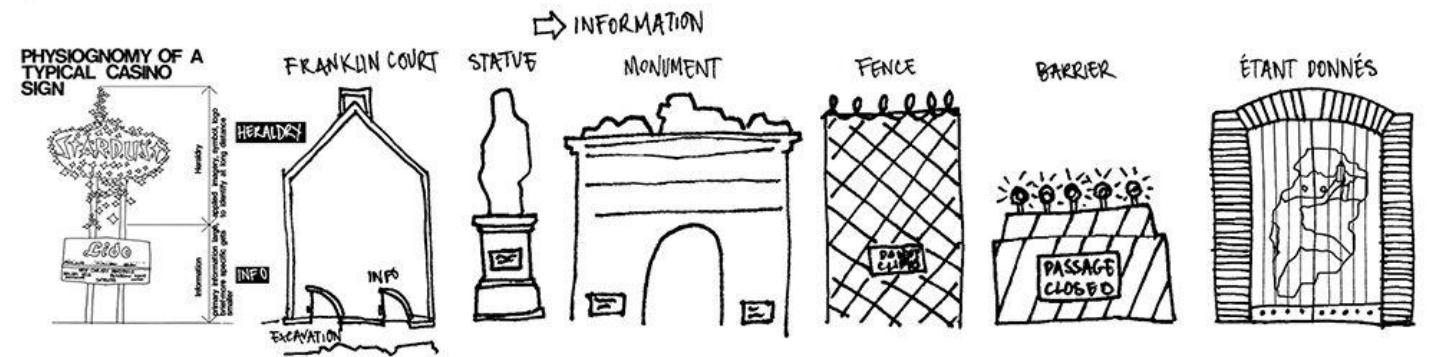
LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS

After his studies on Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, he published another book which is a follow-up on criticising modernism in terms of communicative functions of architecture through signs and symbolism, *Learning from Las Vegas (1972)*. It is written by Robert Venturi, his wife Denise Scott Brown and his colleague Steven Izenour. The book is primarily concerned with the linguistic approach of architecture.

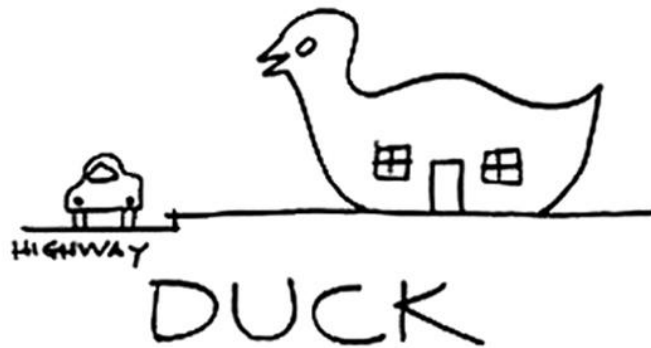


Stephan Izenour, American Architect and theorist, was once Robert Venturi's assistant when he was running the "Learning From Las Vegas" studio. Then he started his teaching career at Yale University.

PHYSIOGNOMY OF A TYPICAL CASINO SIGN ⇨ HERALDRY



LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS



It is famous for The Duck and The Decorated Shed examples which are exaggerated the condition of “form follows function” of International Style. With these examples, he suggests The Duck building is a good example of “form follows function”. Since its function is probably to do something about ducks, the building’s form is very related with its function.



On the other hand, The Decorated Shed is functional only with its signs, since these signs are differentiating the shed from other sheds. Therefore, according his theories, modernist examples of International Style are nothing but big ducks, as they follow the same rules of an architecture. Contrarily, decorated sheds are good examples of basic communicative functions which architecture should contain according to his ideas.

“Modernism is about space. Postmodernism is about communication. You should do what makes you turn on.”

–Robert Venturi



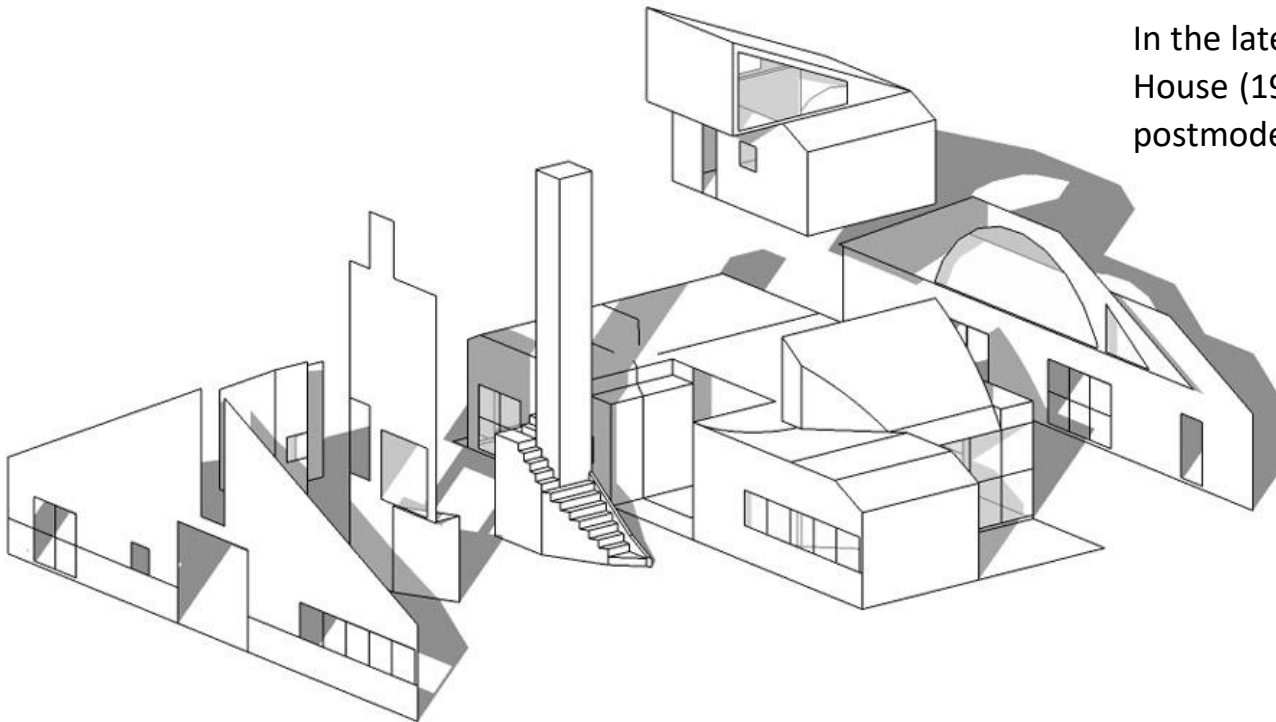
“The first American building to propose an ideological break with Modern abstraction at the same time that is routed in this tradition.” –Peter Eisenman

VANNA VENTURI HOUSE

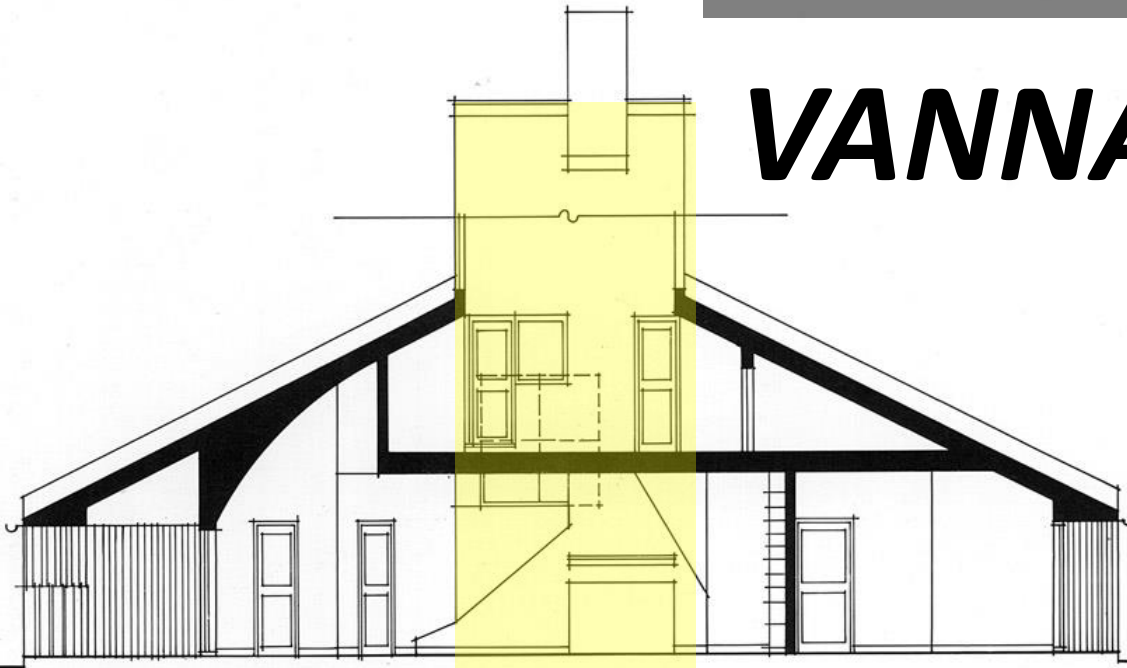
In the late 1950's, Robert Venturi designed a suburban house, Vanna Venturi House (1964) in Philadelphia for his mother. It is considered as the very first postmodern building.

In the book Venturi defined the house as “a little house with large scale”

In the building he applied his ideas about architecture. It includes all contradictions that he mentioned; both complex and simple, open and closed, big and little. The building design has generic elements in general and circumstantial parts in particular. Moreover, he achieved the difficult unity rather than an easy one.



VANNA VENTURI HOUSE



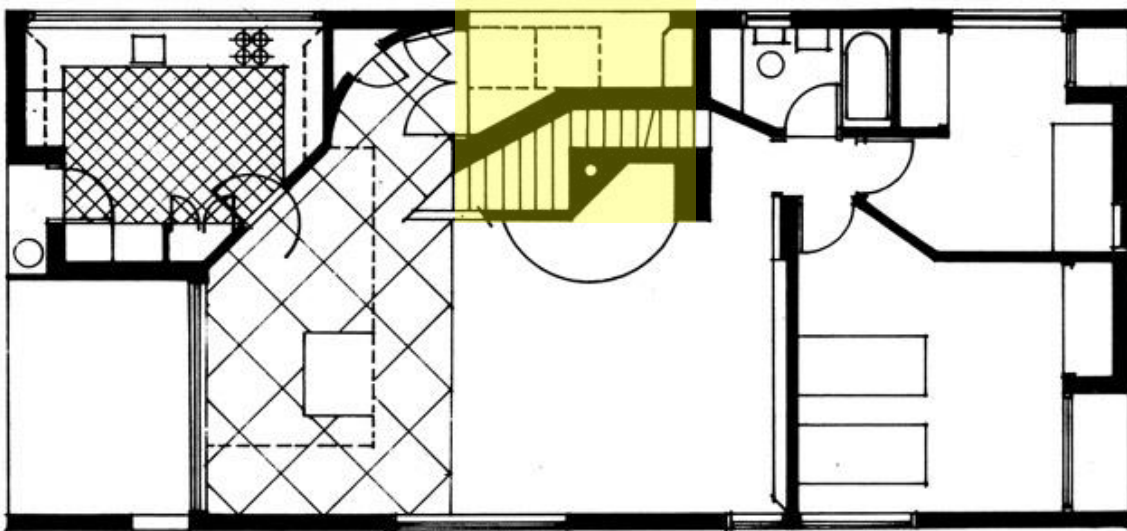
For instance, the front façade both simple and not; the entrance splits the façade in to two which makes house seem symmetric, but due to the placement of the windows which are based on the function of the interior it also does not have a certain symmetry.

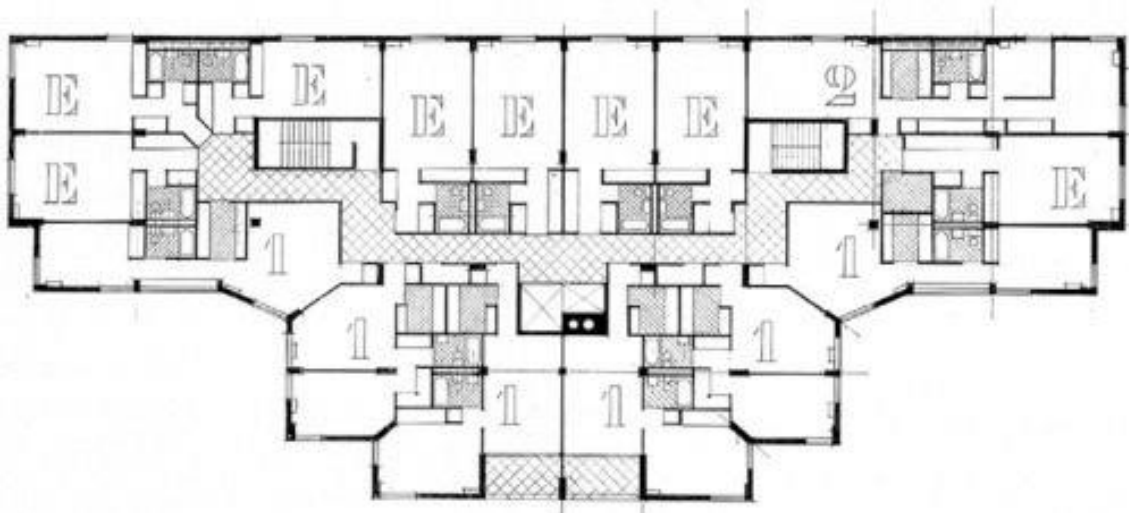
While the façade is simple, the interior is complex. He designed small circulation spaces in order to obtain larger spaces. Doors are wide and low in contrast to its grand entrance.

In interior some elements are too big in comparison to the scale of the spaces such as the fireplace which is a generic element that located at the center of the house.

Also, the stair is another generic element of the house which is both working together with fireplace and competing each other to be the core of the house.

The house's scale is big at exterior when it is compared to interior scale.





Venturi designed the building for 91 old habitants with his wife Denise Scott Brown. Again use of ornamental arch is clearly visible as an ironic approach of postmodernism. Also the antenna represents what older people spend their time on, watching TV.

