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represented in Levittown but is very much the main feature of Las Vegas, although there the technicians and designers of YESCO (Young Electric Sign Company) influence the image of the town much more effectually than any architect. Yet owing to its excessive consumer orientation and its irremediable banality, Las Vegas is cited by most architects only as a negative example.

Las Vegas?

Robert Venturi put this question to a group of students at Yale University: "If it is all so bad, why then is it so inspiring?" The thoroughly timely counsel of Andy Warhol: "...if you just look at the surface of my pictures and films and me myself, there I am. There is nothing behind it all" was applied to Las Vegas and led to the following considerations:

1. Las Vegas and the Strip (main street and central axis of Las Vegas, the central line of orientation for the whole town) as a phenomenon of the national and local economy.
2. Intensity of utilization of the region in general and of the Strip in particular.
3. Links between activities on the Strip and next to it.
4. Circulation systems for cars, through traffic, pedestrians, rail traffic, air traffic for the region, and pedestrian movements, cars and through traffic on the Strip.
5. Extent and rate of flow of different categories of traffic at different times.
6. The relation between activities and movement along the Strip.
7. The Strip as a recreation system, as promenade.

The study "Learning from Las Vegas", which was completed in 1972, was based on extensive mapping, covering, for example, types of site utilization, asphalted surfaces, cars, car rental agencies, wedding chapels, illumination intensity, all signs

legible along the Strip, as well as air views, views from behind the steering-wheel and sequences of building fronts.

The principal findings can be summarized as follows:

- Most of the hotels, casinos and supermarkets are low, flat-roofed structures, because this keeps down building and air-conditioning costs.
- They are set back from the street, with car parks in between.
- The buildings sprawl and thus assume a monumental appearance.
- The lateral façades are specially designed, because they are seen most from the street. The front elevation is of less importance, and the rear is devoid of importance.
- Along the 3.9-mile-long Strip there are enormous advertising signs (some of them up to 22 stories in height) of casinos and hotels, which can be read even at a distance by speeding motorists. Above: trademark, emblem. Below: more detailed information.
- Smaller advertisements – more information for the motorist drawing up close.
- Special architectural styles to identify large amusement centers (Moorish, Etruscan, Neo-Gothic, etc.).
- Other types of space manipulation (inside as well as outside); spaces are not determined by material shape and natural light, but by artificial illumination, which generates luminous bodies and shapes. The building with no illumination at all has only structural and technical functions.

The "Decorated shed"

Along with his descriptive and critical observations on Levittown and Las Vegas, Robert Venturi elaborates a prototype of a building, which will probably play a major role, and not only in these two towns, the so-called "decorated shed".

Definition: Spatial systems and construction serve the building programme; ornaments are appended independently.

Theory of the ordinary and the ugly

"We avoided cluttering our buildings; we ruled out left-over elements, chance distortions, sudden inspirations, remarkable exceptions, unusual diagonals, things inside other things, forced or evaded complications, wall facing or brick masonry, left-over space, superfluous space, ambiguities..."

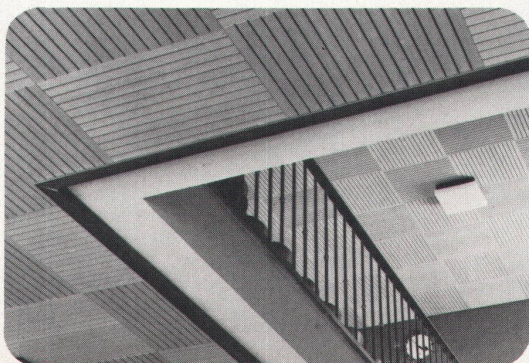
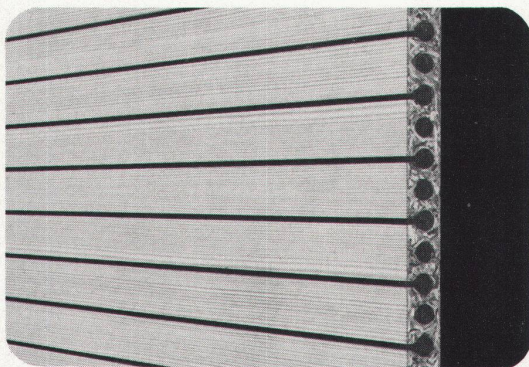
There has been in our work but little absurdity, compromise, compliance and capacity to adapt, little overlapping, little equivalence, no multiple foci, or volumes that are simultaneously good and bad. Most of the complexities and contradictions which we toyed with we did not use, because we did not have the occasion to use them".

The image of ordinariness and ugliness begins with the popular character of these buildings, and continues via their anonymity and banality, including even the decorated false front.

The seemingly arbitrary selection of ordinary banal objects has the effect that suddenly one ponders these things, if only because these familiar things have gone on existing in a way that was not expected of them.

And if we hold it against Robert Venturi that the mixed media architecture of Las Vegas has merely commercial aims, whose Roman, Gothic and New England symbolism no longer convey what it really means but merely create sales sensations, the only conclusion he draws for contemporary architecture is that it is indispensable to apply such sensational tricks. They are based on popular symbols. No wonder if all of a sudden a house looks funny, witty, impudent and jocular. Are our capacities for experience so stuck and jammed that we can no longer understand a joke? Joking is human – why then should not architecture be allowed to joke? ●

Danzer-Fertigelemente für den Innenausbau aus echtem Holz



z.B. Deweton-Akustikplatten

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