A Duck But Not an Animal

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LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS

In the 1960s Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour led a series of Yale architecture studios. The most famous of these documented and analyzed the Las Vegas Strip, a 4.2 mile section of the city’s primary boulevard. The work became a preamble to *Learning From Las Vegas*, first published in 1972. It called for an architecture which embraced popular iconography. Its two main manifestations were the Duck and the Decorated Shed. Each emphasized “image over process or form”. For the Duck “the architectural systems of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form”. In the Decorated Shed “systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently of them” (87). While Venturi and his partners advocated the Decorated Shed, the Duck was left as a skewer of modern architecture.

THE NEW DUCK

Today the more “extreme versions” of modern architecture Venturi once alluded to dominate our landscape. The problem is using the Duck, whose basis is the Long Island Duckling, to spearhead the insult. The two cannot and should not be conflated. One is representational and the other abstract. The New Duck is meant to alleviate this misappropriation of the Long Island Duckling. It is the UnDuck, because it has been emptied of referential content. It is merely its silhouette.

THE WORK

The UnDuck must be proven to be a legitimate building. Three forms have been chosen which hover between representation and abstraction. Each have been stuffed with program at nine different scales ranging from the diminutive to the mega. These demonstrate the universal feasibility of program and structure. The buildings are then dropped into both traditional and contemporary contexts around the world. A series of realistic renderings bring the project full circle.

WHAT IT MEANS

Program and scale are destabilized. Site is emptied of meaning. The ultimate way in which these outrageous forms mean something is through their iconography. The surprising legibility of the frat house in the shape of a snowflake crystal, the enormous familiarity of an office tower in the form of an earbud, how at home we feel in front of a bungalow sculpted like a bacterium, etc., and then it will make sense why on yelp.com the Long Island Duckling has a 4.5 star review.

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THE DUCK (and decorated shed) CONTINUUM

the Long Island Duckling
Flanders, New York
meat and egg shop
THE DUCK

the Long Island Duckling
Flanders, New York
meat and egg shop

the Fish Building
Hyderabad, India
government offices
United Equipment HQ
Flanders, New York
United corporate headquarters

Bondurant’s Pharmacy
Lexington, Kentucky
pharmacy

the Donut Hole
La Puente, California
bakery

Longaberger HQ
Newark, Ohio
company offices
Bahá’í House of Worship
New Delhi, India
temple

Universum Science Center
Bremen, Germany
science museum

Ping-Pong Hotel
Huainan, China
hotel

the Hood Bottle
Boston, Massachusetts
dairy dispenser

Teapot Dome Service Station
Zilla, Washington
service station

the Fish Building
Hyderabad, India
government offices

Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam
museum

Sydney Opera House
Sydney, Australia
opera house

uniM

Chiat/Day Building
Venice, California
corporate headquarters

the Long Island Duckling
Flanders, New York
meat and egg shop

Lincoln Center
Tianjin, China
concert hall
York, New York Hotel
Las Vegas, Nevada
hotel

Babe’s Italian Ices
Las Vegas, Nevada
italian ice shop

Wadham’s
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
gas and service station

Lincoln Center
Tianjin, China
concert hall
Sydney Opera House
Sydney, Australia
opera house

Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam
museum

the Robot Building
Bangkok, Thailand
UOB bank headquarters
representational and recognizable

abstract and unrecognizable

representational BUT unrecognizable