



I AM A MONUMENT: On Learning from Las Vegas (MIT Press)

By Aron Vinegar



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Learning from Las Vegas, originally published by the MIT Press in 1972, was one of the most influential and controversial architectural books of its era. Forty years later, it remains a perennial bestseller and a definitive theoretical text. Its authors -- architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour -- famously used the Las Vegas Strip to argue the virtues of the "ordinary and ugly" above the "heroic and original" qualities of architectural modernism. *Learning from Las Vegas* not only moved architecture to the center of cultural debates, it changed our ideas about what architecture was and could be. In this provocative rereading of an iconic text, Aron Vinegar argues that to read *Learning from Las Vegas* only as an exemplary postmodernist text -- to understand it, for example, as a call for pastiche or as ironic provocation -- is to underestimate its deeper critical and ethical meaning, and to miss the underlying dialectic between skepticism and the ordinary, expression and the deadpan, that runs through the text. Especially revealing is Vinegar's close analysis of the differences between the first 1972 edition, designed for the MIT Press by Muriel Cooper, and the "revised" edition of 1977, which was radically stripped down and largely redesigned by Denise Scott Brown.



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I AM A MONUMENT: On Learning from Las Vegas (MIT Press) By Aron Vinegar Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1545212 in Books
- Published on: 2008-09-05
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .50" w x 8.00" l, 1.79 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 248 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Aron Vinegar literally reopens the book on architectural postmodernism. By reading *Learning from Las Vegas* as philosophy, not irony, Vinegar reaches out from American architecture in the 1970s to address architectural theory at large. It is a beguiling intervention.

(Simon Sadler, Professor of Architectural and Urban History, University of California, Davis)

While the powerful impact of *Complexity and Contradiction* has receded with time, *Learning from Las Vegas* still manages to provoke strong reactions and the sort of glib dismissal that is one way of warding off the challenge of a truly radical argument. Vinegar's wide-ranging discussion refreshes and re-opens a set of questions that have only grown more pressing in recent years, giving their original formulation the scholarly and critical attention they clearly deserve.

(Alan J. Plattus, Professor of Architecture, Yale University)

About the Author

Aron Vinegar is Assistant Professor in the Department of History of Art at Ohio State University.

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