LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS: THE FORGOTTEN SYMBOLISM OF ARCHITECTURAL FORM

Robert Venturi
Denise Scott Brown
Steven Izenour

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England
1972 (1977 ed.)

SOME DEFINITIONS USING THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

"Not innovating willfulness but reverence for the archetype."
Herman Melville

"Incessant new beginnings lead to sterility."
Wallace Stevens

"I like boring things."
Andy Warhol

To make the case for a new but old direction in architecture, we shall use some perhaps indiscreet comparisons to show what we are for and what we are against and ultimately to justify our own architecture. When architects talk or write, they philosophize almost solely to justify their own work, and this apologia will be no different. Our argument depends on comparisons, because it is simple to the point of banality. It needs contrast to point it up. We shall use, somewhat undiplomatically, some of the works of leading architects today as contrast and context.

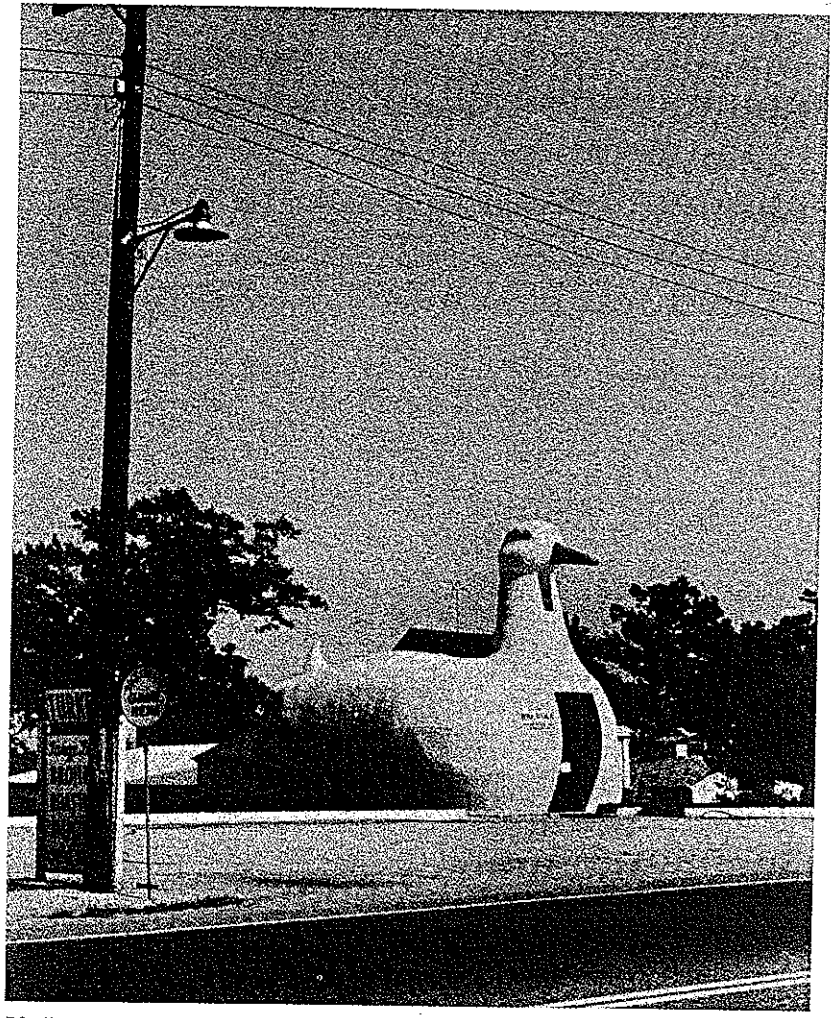
We shall emphasize image—image over process or form—in asserting that architecture depends in its perception and creation on past experience and emotional association and that these symbolic and representational elements may often be contradictory to the form, structure, and program with which they combine in the same building. We shall survey this contradiction in its two main manifestations:

1. Where the architectural systems of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form. This kind of building-becoming-sculpture we call the *duck* in honor of the duck-shaped drive-in, "The Long Island Duckling," illustrated in *God's Own Junkyard* by Peter Blake (Fig. 73).[1]
2. Where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently of them. This we call the *decorated shed* (Fig. 74).

The duck is the special building that *is* a symbol; the decorated shed is the conventional shelter that *applies* symbols (Figs. 75, 76). We maintain that both kinds of architecture are valid—Chartres is a duck (although it is a decorated shed as well), and the Palazzo Farnese is a decorated shed—but we think that the duck is seldom relevant today, although it pervades Modern architecture.

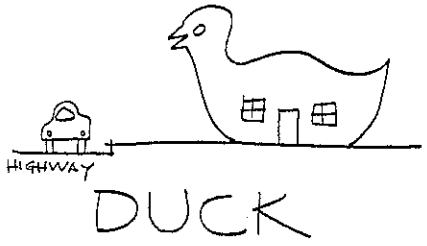
We shall describe how we come by the automobile-oriented commer-

1. Peter Blake, *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 101. See also Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, "On Ducks and Decoration," *Architecture Canada* (October 1968).

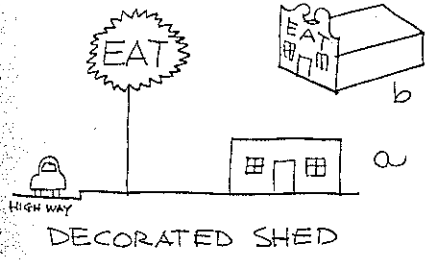


73. "Long Island Duckling" from *God's Own Junkyard*

74. Road scene from *God's Own Junkyard*



75. Duck



76. Decorated shed

cial architecture of urban sprawl as our source for a civic and residential architecture of meaning, viable now, as the turn-of-the-century industrial vocabulary was viable for a Modern architecture of space and industrial technology 40 years ago. We shall show how the iconography, rather than the space and piazzas of historical architecture, forms the background for the study of association and symbolism in commercial art and strip architecture.

Finally we shall argue for the symbolism of the ugly and ordinary in architecture and for the particular significance of the decorated shed with a rhetorical front and conventional behind: for architecture as shelter with symbols on it.

THE DUCK AND THE DECORATED SHED

Let us elaborate on the decorated shed by comparing Paul Rudolph's Crawford Manor with our Guild House (in association with Cope and Lippincott; Figs. 77, 78). These two buildings are comparable in use, size, and date of construction: Both are high-rise apartments for the elderly, consisting of about 90 units, built in the mid-1960s. Their settings vary: Guild House, although freestanding, is a six-story imitation palazzo, analogous in structure and materials to the surrounding buildings and continuing, through its position and form, the street line of the Philadelphia gridiron plan it sits in. Crawford Manor, on the other hand, is unequivocally a soaring tower, unique in its Modern, Ville Radieuse world along New Haven's limited-access Oak Street Connector.

But it is the contrast in the *images* of these buildings in relation to their systems of construction that we want to emphasize. The system of construction and program of Guild House are ordinary and conventional and look it; the system of construction and program of Crawford Manor are ordinary and conventional but do not look it.

Let us interject here that we chose Crawford Manor for this comparison not because of any particular antagonism toward that building. It is, in fact, a skillful building by a skillful architect, and we could easily have chosen a much more extreme version of what we are criticizing. But in general we chose it because it can represent establishment architecture now (that is, it represents the great majority of what you see today in any architecture journal), and in particular because it corresponds in fundamental ways with Guild House. On the other hand, our choosing Guild House for comparison involves a disadvantage, because that building is now five years old, and some of our later work can more explicitly and vividly convey our current ideas. Last, please do not criticize us for primarily analyzing image: We are doing so simply because image is pertinent to our argument, not because we wish to deny an interest in or the importance of process, program, and structure or, indeed, social issues in architecture or in these two buildings. Along with most architects, we probably spend 90 percent of our design time on these other important subjects and less than 10 percent on the questions we are addressing here; they are merely not the direct subject of this inquiry.

To continue our comparisons, the construction of Guild House is poured-in-place concrete plate with curtain walls, pierced by double-hung windows and enclosing the interior space to make rooms. The material is common brick—darker than usual to match the smog-smudged brick of the neighborhood. The mechanical systems of Guild House are nowhere manifest in the outside forms. The typical floor plan contains a 1920s-apartment-house variety of units to accommodate particular needs, views, and exposures; this distorts the efficient grid of columns (Fig. 80). The structure of Crawford Manor, which is poured-in-place concrete with concrete block faced with a striated pattern, is likewise a conventional frame supporting laid-up masonry walls (Fig. 79). But it does not look it. It looks more advanced technologically and more progressive spatially. It looks as if its supports are spatial, perhaps mechanical-harboring shafts made of a continuous plastic material reminiscent of *béton brut* with the striated marks of violently heroic construction process embossed in their form. They articulate the flowing interior space, their structural purity never punctured by holes for windows or distorted by exceptions in the plan. Interior light is "modulated" by the voids between the structure and the "floating" cantilevered balconies (Fig. 81).

The architectural elements for supplying exterior light in Guild House are frankly windows. We relied on the conventional method of doing windows in a building, and we by no means thought through from the beginning the subject of exterior light modulation but started where someone else had left off before us. The windows look familiar; they *look like*, as well as *are*, windows, and in this respect their use is explicitly symbolic. But like all effective symbolic images, they are intended to look familiar and unfamiliar. They are the conventional element used slightly unconventionally. Like the subject matter of Pop Art, they are commonplace elements made uncommon through distortion in shape (slight), change in scale (they are much bigger than normal double-hung windows), and change in context (double-hung windows in a perhaps high-fashion building, Fig. 82).

DECORATION ON THE SHED

Guild House has ornament on it; Crawford Manor does not (Fig. 83). The ornament on Guild House is explicit. It both reinforces and contradicts the form of the building it adorns. And it is to some extent sym-

bolic. The continuous stripe of white-glazed brick high on the facade, in combination with the plane of white-glazed brick below, divides the building into three uneven stories: basement, principal story, and attic. It contradicts the scale of the six real and equal floors on which it is imposed and suggests the proportions of a Renaissance palace. The central white panel also enhances the focus and scale of the entrance. It extends the ground floor to the top of the balcony of the second floor in the way, and for the same reasons, that the increased elaboration and scale around the door of a Renaissance palace or Gothic portal does. The exceptional and fat column in an otherwise flat wall surface increases the focus of the entrance, and the luxurious granite and glazed brick enhance the amenity there, as does the veined marble that developers apply at street level to make their apartment entrances more classy and rentable. At the same time, the column's position in the middle of the entrance diminishes its importance.

The arched window in Guild House is not structural. Unlike the more purely ornamental elements in this building, it reflects an interior function of the shed, that is, the common activities at the top. But the big common room itself is an exception to the system inside. On the front elevation, an arch sits above a central vertical stripe of balcony voids, whose base is the ornamental entrance. Arch, balconies, and base together unify the facade and, like a giant order (or classic jukebox front), undermine the six stories to increase the scale and monumentality of the front. In turn, the giant order is topped by a flourish, an unconnected, symmetrical television antenna in gold anodized aluminum, which is both an imitation of an abstract Lippold sculpture and symbol for the elderly. An open-armed, polychromatic, plaster madonna in this position would have been more imageful but unsuitable for a Quaker institution that eschews all outward symbols—as do Crawford Manor and most orthodox Modern architecture, which reject ornament and association in the perception of forms.

EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT ASSOCIATIONS

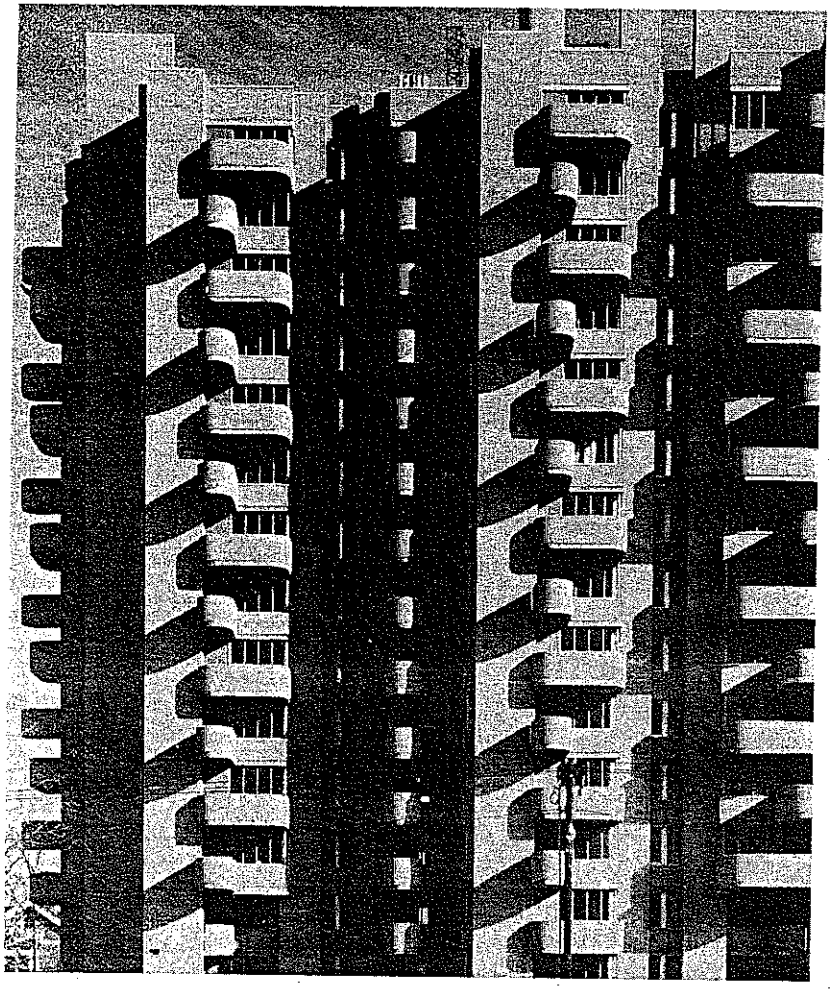
Adornments of representational sculpture on the roof, or a prettily shaped window, or wittiness or rhetoric of any kind are unthinkable for Crawford Manor. Nor would it sport appliqués of expensive material on a column or white stripes and wainscoting copied from Renaissance compositions. For instance, Crawford Manor's cantilevered balconies are "structurally integrated"; they are parapeted with the overall structural material and devoid of ornament. Balconies at Guild House are not structural exercises, and the railings are adornments as well as recollections at a bigger scale of conventional patterns in stamped metal (Fig. 84).

Guild House symbolism involves ornament and is more or less dependent on explicit associations; it looks like what it is not only because of what it is but also because of what it reminds you of. But the architectural elements of Crawford Manor abound in associations of another, less explicit, kind. Implicit in the pure architectural forms of Crawford Manor is a symbolism different from the appliqué ornament of Guild House with its explicit, almost heraldic, associations. The implicit symbolism of Crawford Manor we read into the undecorated physiognomy of the building through associations and past experience; it provides layers of meaning beyond the "abstract expressionist" messages derived from the inherent physiognomic characteristics of the forms—their size, texture, color, and so forth. These meanings come from our knowledge of technology, from the work and writings of the Modern form givers, from the vocabulary of industrial architecture, and from other sources. For instance, the vertical shafts of Crawford Manor connote structural piers (they are not structural), made of rusticated "reinforced concrete" (with mortar joints), harboring servant spaces and mechanical systems (actually kitchens), terminating in the silhouettes of exhaust systems (suitable to industrial laboratories), articulating light-modulating voids (instead of framing windows), articulating flowing space (confined to efficiency apartments but augmented by very ubiquitous balconies that themselves suggest apartment dwelling), and articulating program functions that protrude sensitively (or expressionistically) from the edges of the plan.

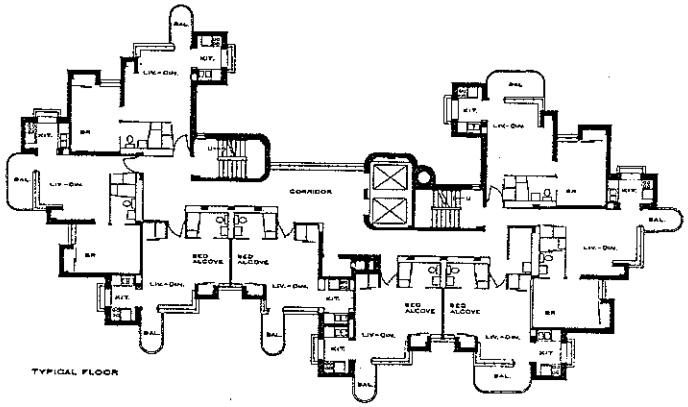
HEROIC AND ORIGINAL, OR UGLY AND ORDINARY

The content of Crawford Manor's implicit symbolism is what we call "heroic and original." Although the substance is conventional and ordinary, the image is heroic and original. The content of the explicit symbolism of Guild House is what we call "ugly and ordinary." The technologically unadvanced brick, the old-fashioned, double-hung windows, the pretty materials around the entrance, and the ugly antenna not hidden behind the parapet in the accepted fashion, all are distinctly conventional in image as well as substance or, rather, ugly and ordinary. (The inevitable plastic flowers at home in these windows are, rather, *pretty* and ordinary; they do not make this architecture look silly as they would, we think, the heroic and original windows of Crawford Manor, Fig. 85.)

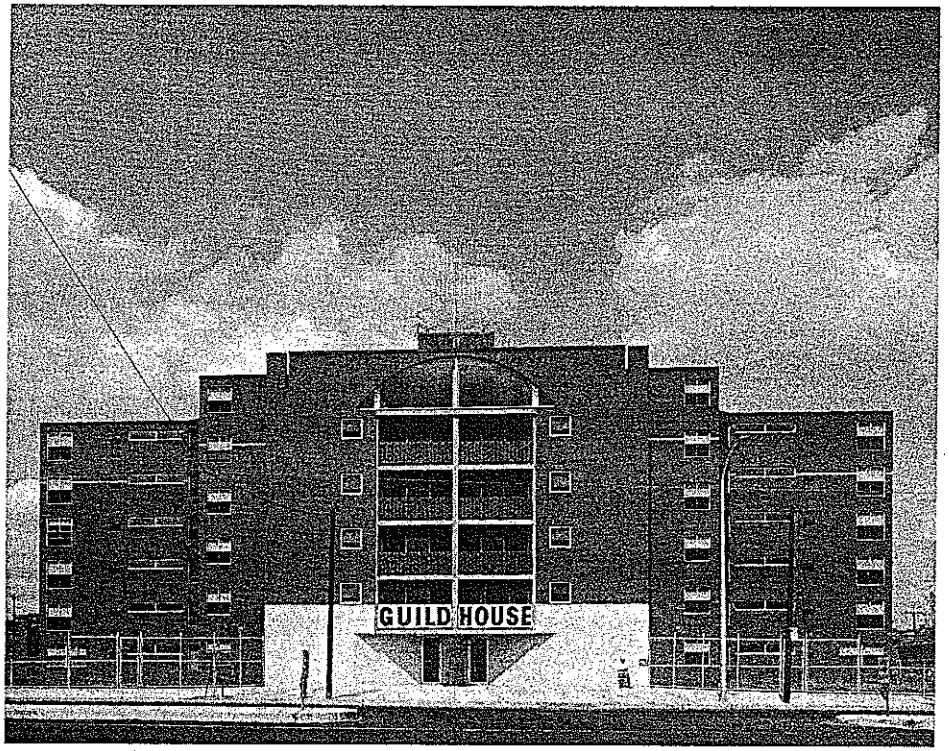
But in Guild House, the symbolism of the ordinary goes further than this. The pretensions of the "giant order" on the front, the symmetrical, palazzolike composition with its three monumental stories (as well as its six real stories), topped by a piece of sculpture—or almost sculpture—suggest something of the heroic and original. It is true that in this



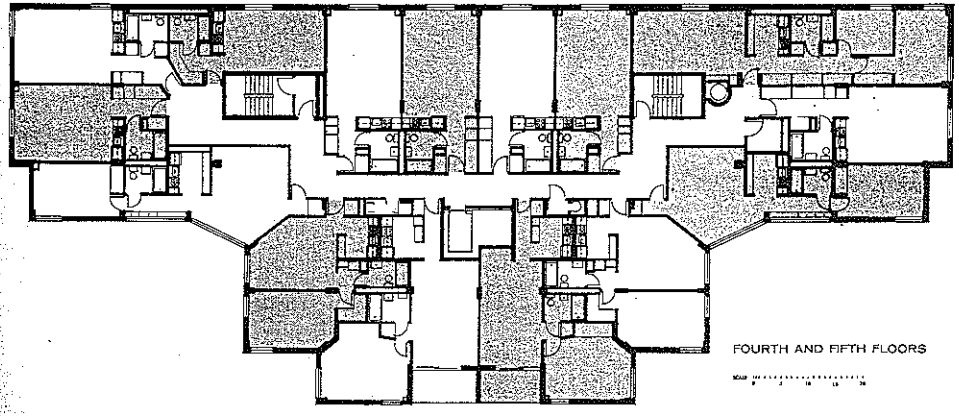
77. Crawford Manor, New Haven, 1962-1966; Paul Rudolph



79. Crawford Manor, typical plan

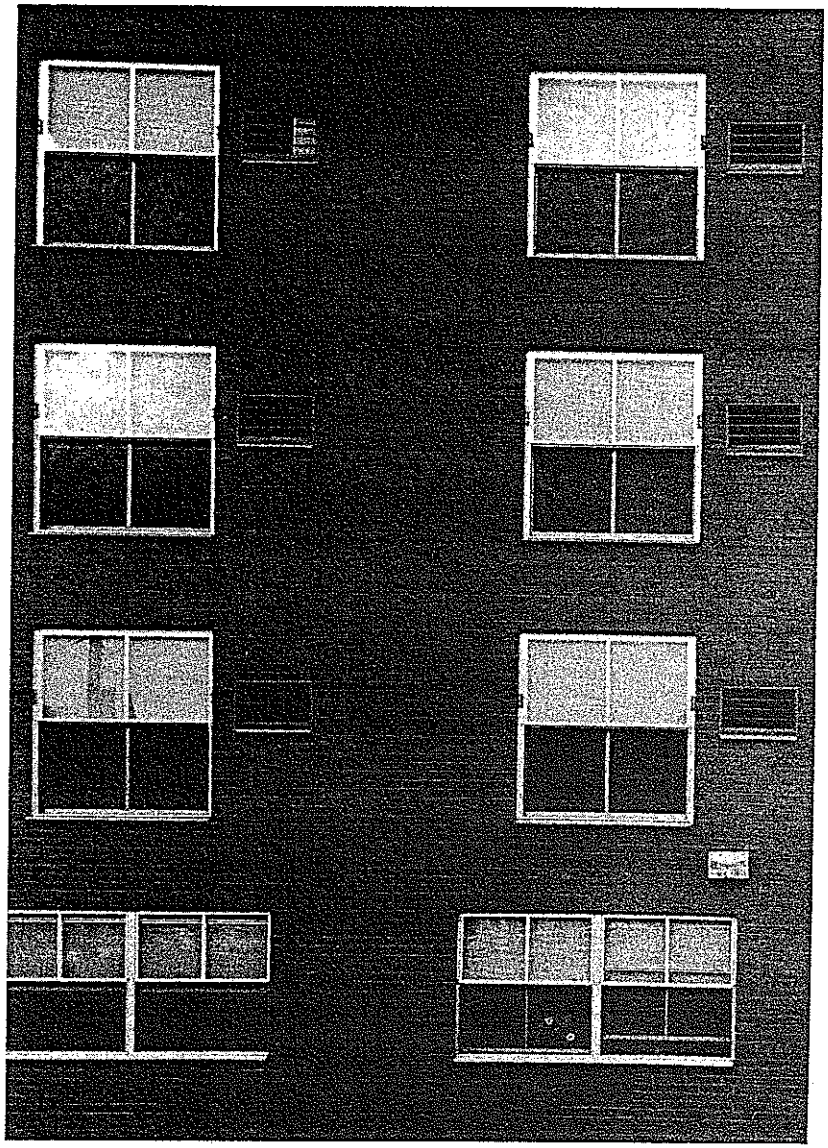


78. Guild House, Friends' Housing for the Elderly, Philadelphia, 1960-1963; Venturi and Rauch, Cope and Lippincott, Associates

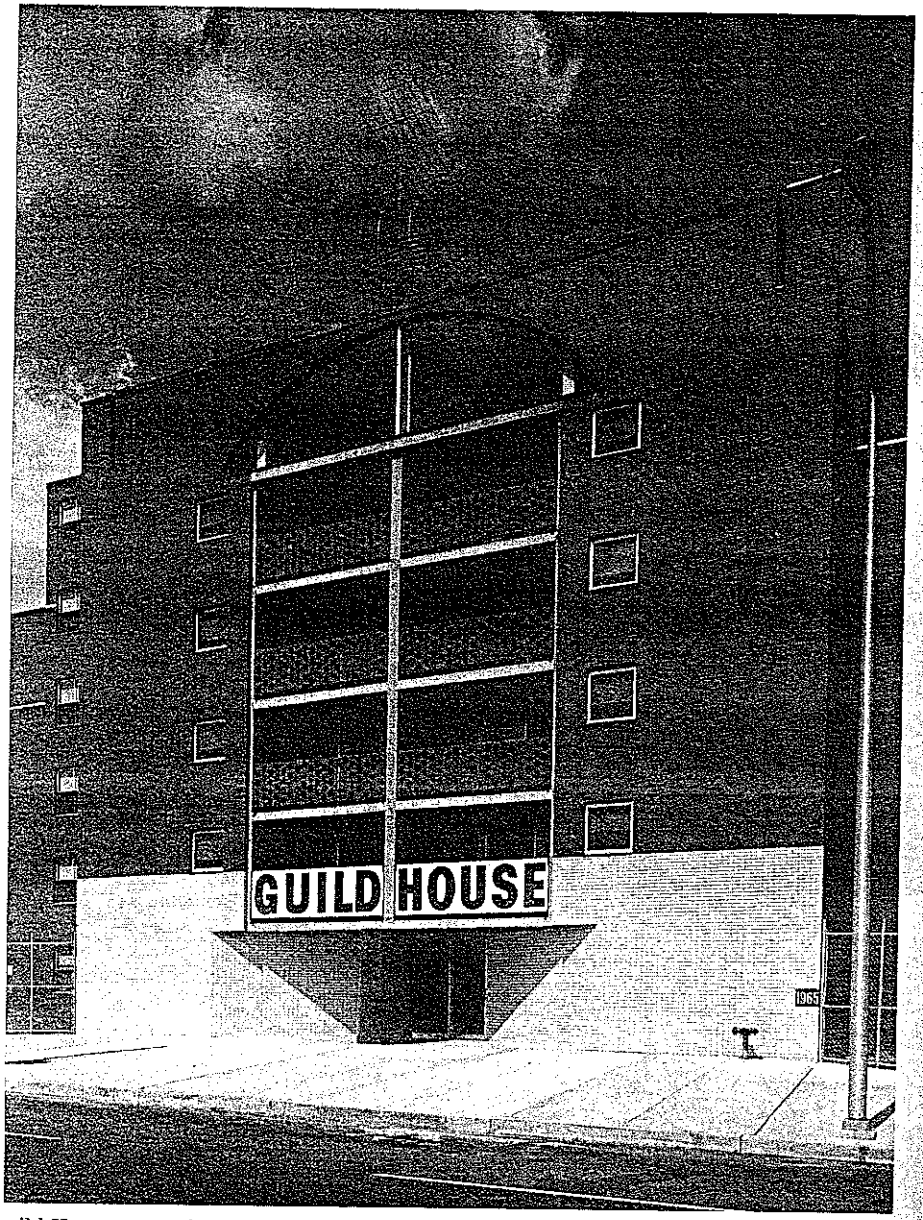


80. Guild House, typical plan

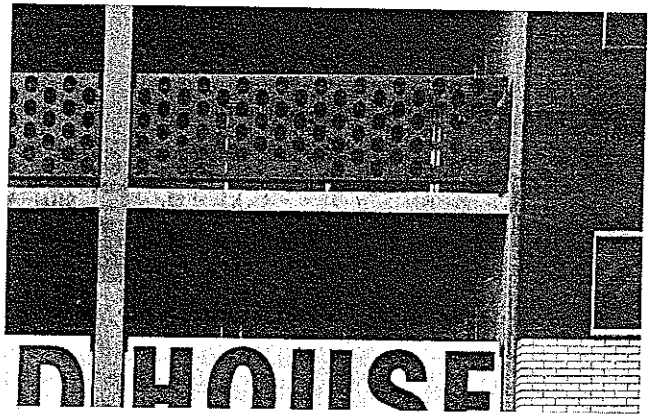
81. Crawford Manor (detail)



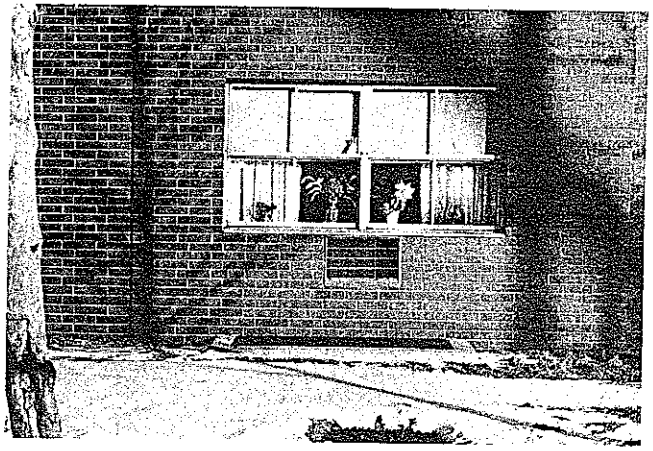
82. Guild House, windows



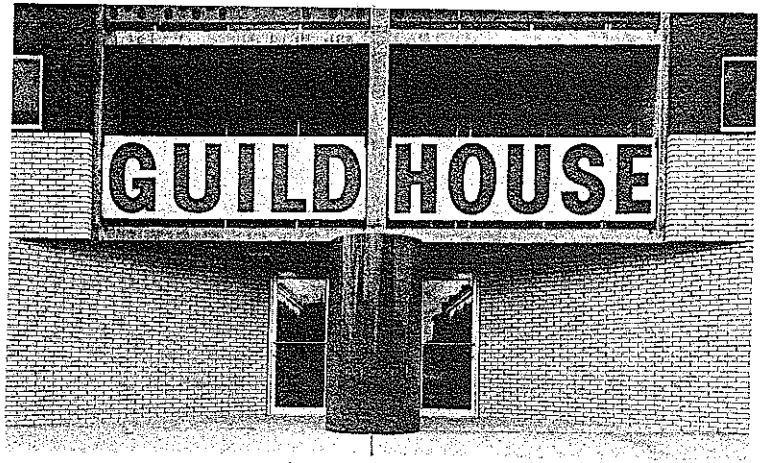
uild House, central panel



84. Guild House, balcony



85. Guild House, detail of window



86. Guild House, sign

case the heroic and original facade is somewhat ironical, but it is this juxtaposition of contrasting symbols—the appliqué of one order of symbols on another—that constitutes for us the decorated shed. This is what makes Guild House an architect's decorated shed—not architecture without architects.

The purest decorated shed would be some form of conventional systems-building shelter that corresponds closely to the space, structure, and program requirements of the architecture, and upon which is laid a contrasting—and, if in the nature of the circumstances, contradictory—decoration. In Guild House the ornamental-symbolic elements are more or less literally appliqué: The planes and stripes of white brick are appliqué; the street facade through its disengagement at the top corners implies its separation from the bulk of the shed at the front. (This quality also implies continuity, and therefore unity, with the street line of facades of the other older, nonfreestanding buildings on each side.) The symbolism of the decoration happens to be ugly and ordinary with a dash of ironic heroic and original, and the shed is straight ugly and ordinary, though in its brick and windows it is symbolic too. Although there is ample historical precedent for the decorated shed, present-day roadside commercial architecture—the $10,000 stand with the $100,000 sign—was the immediate prototype of our decorated shed. And it is in the sign of Guild House that the purest manifestation of the decorated shed and the most vivid contrast with Crawford Manor lies.

ORNAMENT: SIGNS AND SYMBOLS, DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION, HERALDRY AND PHYSIOGNOMY, MEANING AND EXPRESSION

A sign on a building carries a denotative meaning in the explicit message of its letters and words. It contrasts with the connotative expression of the other, more architectural elements of the building. A big sign, like that over the entrance of Guild House, big enough to be read from passing cars on Spring Garden Street, is particularly ugly and ordinary in its explicit commercial associations (Fig. 86). It is significant that the sign for Crawford Manor is modest, tasteful, and not commercial. It is too small to be seen from fast-moving cars on the Oak Street Connector. But signs as explicit symbols, especially big, commercial-looking signs, are anathema in architecture such as Crawford Manor. Its identification comes, not through explicit, denotative communication, through literally spelling out "I am Guild House," but through the connotation implicit in the physiognomy of its pure architectural form, which is intended to express in some way housing for the elderly.

We have borrowed the simple literary distinctions between "denotative" and "connotative" meanings and applied them to the heraldic and

physiognomic element in architecture. To clarify further, the sign saying GUILD HOUSE *denotes* meaning through its words; as such, it is the heraldic element *par excellence*. The character of the graphics, however, *connotes* institutional dignity, while, contradictorily, the size of the graphics *connotes* commercialism. The position of the sign perhaps also *connotes* entering. The white-glazed brick *denotes* decoration as a unique and rich appliqué on the normal red brick. Through the location of the white areas and stripes on the facade, we have tried *connotatively* to suggest floor levels associated with palaces and thereby palace-like scale and monumentality. The double-hung windows *denote* their function, but their grouping *connotes* domesticity and ordinary meanings.

Denotation indicates specific meaning; connotation suggests general meanings. The same element can have both denotative and connotative meanings, and these may be mutually contradictory. Generally, to the extent that it is denotative in its meaning, an element depends on its heraldic characteristics; to the extent that it is connotative, an element depends on its physiognomic qualities. Modern architecture (and Crawford Manor as its exemplar) has tended to shun the heraldic and denotative in architecture and to exaggerate the physiognomic and connotative. Modern architecture uses expressive ornament and shuns explicit symbolic ornament.

In sum, we have analyzed Guild House and Crawford Manor in terms of content of the image and in terms of method used to achieve image. A comparative catalog of Guild House versus Crawford Manor in these terms is shown in Table 1.

IS BORING ARCHITECTURE INTERESTING?

For all its commonness, is Guild House boring? For all its dramatic balconies, is Crawford Manor interesting? Is it not, perhaps, the other way around? Our criticism of Crawford Manor and the buildings it stands for is not moralistic, nor is it concerned with so-called honesty in architecture or a lack of correspondence between substance and image *per se*; Crawford Manor *is* ugly and ordinary while *looking* heroic and original. We criticize Crawford Manor not for "dishonesty," but for irrelevance today. We shall try to show how, in both the method and content of its images, Crawford Manor, as well as the architecture it represents, has impoverished itself by rejecting denotative ornament and the rich tradition of iconography in historical architecture and by ignoring—or rather using unawares—the connotative expression it substituted for decoration. When it cast out eclecticism, Modern architecture submerged symbolism. Instead it promoted expressionism, concentrating on the expression of architectural elements themselves: on the

Table 1. Comparison of Guild House and Crawford Manor

Guild House	Crawford Manor
An architecture of meaning	An architecture of expression
Explicit "denotative" symbolism	Implicit "connotative" symbolism
Symbolic ornament	Expressive ornament
Applied ornament	Integral expressionism
Mixed media	Pure architecture
Decoration by the attaching of superficial elements	Unadmitted decoration by the articulation of integral elements
Symbolism	Abstraction
Representational art	"Abstract expressionism"
Evocative architecture	Innovative architecture
Societal messages	Architectural content
Propaganda	Architectural articulation
High *and* low art	High art
Evolutionary, using historical precedent	Revolutionary, progressive, anti-traditional
Conventional	Creative, unique, and original
Old words with new meanings	New words
Ordinary	Extraordinary
Expedient	Heroic
Pretty in front	Pretty (or at least unified) all around
Inconsistent	Consistent
Conventional technology	Advanced technology
Tendency toward urban sprawl	Tendency toward megastructure
Starts from client's value system	Tries to elevate client's value system and/or budget by reference to Art and Metaphysics
Looks cheap	Looks expensive
"Boring"	"Interesting"

expression of structure and function. It suggested, through the image of the building, reformist-progressive social and industrial aims that it could seldom achieve in reality. By limiting itself to strident articulations of the pure architectural elements of space, structure, and program, Modern architecture's expression has become a dry expressionism, empty and boring—and in the end irresponsible. Ironically, the Modern architecture of today, while rejecting explicit symbolism and frivolous appliqué ornament, has distorted the whole building into one big ornament. In substituting "articulation" for decoration, it has become a duck.

HISTORICAL AND OTHER PRECEDENTS: TOWARDS AN OLD ARCHITECTURE

HISTORICAL SYMBOLISM AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE

The forms of Modern architecture have been created by architects and analyzed by critics largely in terms of their perceptual qualities and at the expense of their symbolic meanings derived from association. To the extent that the Moderns recognize the systems of symbols that pervade our environment, they tend to refer to the debasement of our symbols. Although largely forgotten by Modern architects, the historical precedent for symbolism in architecture exists, and the complexities of iconography have continued to be a major part of the discipline of art history. Early Modern architects scorned recollection in architecture. They rejected eclecticism and style as elements of architecture as well as any historicism that minimized the revolutionary over the evolutionary character of their almost exclusively technology-based architecture. A second generation of Modern architects acknowledged only the "constituent facts" of history, as extracted by Sigfried Giedion,[2] who abstracted the historical building and its piazza as pure form and space in light. These architects' preoccupation with space as *the* architectural quality caused them to read the buildings as forms, the piazzas as space, and the graphics and sculpture as color, texture, and scale. The ensemble became an abstract expression in architecture in the decade of abstract expressionism in painting. The iconographic forms and trappings of medieval and Renaissance architecture were reduced to polychromatic texture at the service of space; the symbolic complexities and contradictions of Mannerist architecture were appreciated for their formal complexities and contradictions; Neoclassical architecture was liked, not for its Romantic use of association, but for its formal simplicity. Architects liked the *backs* of nineteenth century railroad stations—literally the sheds—and tolerated the fronts as irrelevant, if amusing, aberrations of historical eclecticism. The symbol systems developed by the commercial artists of Madison Avenue, which constitute the symbolic ambience of urban sprawl, they did not acknowledge.

In the 1950s and 1960s, these "Abstract Expressionists" of Modern architecture acknowledged one dimension of the hill town-piazza complex: its "pedestrian scale" and the "urban life" engendered by its architecture. This view of medieval urbanism encouraged the megastructural (or megasculptural?) fantasies—in this context hill towns with technological trimmings—and reinforced the antiautomobile bias of the Modern architect. But the competition of signs and symbols in the

2. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1944), Part I.

medieval city at various levels of perception and meaning in both building and piazza was lost on the space-oriented architect. Perhaps the symbols, besides being foreign in content, were at a scale and a degree of complexity too subtle for today's bruised sensibilities and impatient pace. This explains, perhaps, the ironical fact that the return to iconography for some of us architects of that generation was via the sensibilities of the Pop artists of the early 1960s and via the duck and the decorated shed on Route 66: from Rome to Las Vegas, but also back again from Las Vegas to Rome.

THE CATHEDRAL AS DUCK AND SHED

In iconographic terms, the cathedral is a decorated shed *and* a duck. The Late Byzantine Metropole Cathedral in Athens is absurd as a piece of architecture (Fig. 87). It is "out of scale": Its small size does not correspond to its complex form—that is, if form must be determined primarily by structure—because the space that the square room encloses could be spanned without the interior supports and the complex roof configuration of dome, drum, and vaults. However, it is not absurd as a duck—as a domed Greek cross, evolved structurally from large buildings in greater cities, but developed symbolically here to mean cathedral. And this duck is itself decorated with an appliqué collage of *objets trouvés*—bas-reliefs in masonry—more or less explicitly symbolic in content.

Amiens Cathedral is a billboard with a building behind it (Fig. 88). Gothic cathedrals have been considered weak in that they did not achieve an "organic unity" between front and side. But this disjunction is a natural reflection of an inherent contradiction in a complex building that, toward the cathedral square, is a relatively two-dimensional screen for propaganda and, in back, is a masonry systems building. This is the reflection of a contradiction between image and function that the decorated shed often accommodates. (The shed behind is also a duck because its shape is that of a cross.)

The facades of the great cathedrals of the Ile de France are two-dimensional planes at the scale of the whole; they were to evolve at the top corners into towers to connect with the surrounding countryside. But in detail these facades are buildings in themselves, simulating an architecture of space in the strongly three-dimensional relief of their sculpture. The niches for statues—as Sir John Summerson has pointed out—are yet another level of architecture within architecture. But the impact of the facade comes from the immensely complex meaning derived from the symbolism and explicit associations of the aedicules and their statues and from their relative positions and sizes in the hierarchic order of the kingdom of heaven on the facades. In this orchestration of

messages, connotation as practiced by Modern architects is scarcely important. The shape of the facade, in fact, disguises the silhouette of nave and aisles behind, and the doors and the rose windows are the barest reflections of the architectural complex inside.

SYMBOLIC EVOLUTION IN LAS VEGAS

Just as the architectural evolution of a typical Gothic cathedral may be traced over the decades through stylistic and symbolic changes, a similar evolution—rare in contemporary architecture—may also be followed in the commercial architecture of Las Vegas. However, in Las Vegas, this evolution is compressed into years rather than decades, reflecting the quicker tempo of our times, if not the less eternal message of commercial rather than religious propaganda. Evolution in Las Vegas is consistently toward more and bigger symbolism. The Golden Nugget casino on Fremont Street was an orthodox decorated shed with big signs in the 1950s—essentially Main Street commercial, ugly and ordinary (Fig. 89). However, by the 1960s it was all sign; there was hardly any building visible (Fig. 90). The quality of the "electrographics" was made more strident to match the crasser scale and more distracting context of the new decade and to keep up with the competition next door. The freestanding signs on the Strip, like the towers at San Gimignano, get bigger as well. They grow either through sequential replacements, as at the Flamingo, the Desert Inn, and the Tropicana, or through enlargement as with the Caesars Palace sign, where a freestanding, pedimented temple facade was extended laterally by one column with a statue on top—a feat never attempted, a problem never solved in the whole evolution of Classical architecture (Fig. 91).

THE RENAISSANCE AND THE DECORATED SHED

The iconography of Renaissance architecture is less overtly propagandistic than is that of medieval or Strip architecture, although its ornament, literally based on the Roman, Classical vocabulary, was to be an instrument for the rebirth of classical civilization. However, since most of this ornament depicts structure—it is ornament symbolic of structure—it is less independent of the shed it is attached to than ornament on medieval and Strip architecture (Fig. 92). The image of the structure and space reinforces rather than contradicts the substance of the structure and space. Pilasters represent modular sinews on the surface of the wall; quoins represent reinforcement at the ends of the wall; vertical moldings, protection at the edges of the wall; rustication, support at the bottom of the wall; drip cornices, protection from rain on the wall; horizontal moldings, the progressive stages in the depth of the wall; and a combination of many of these ornaments at the edge of a

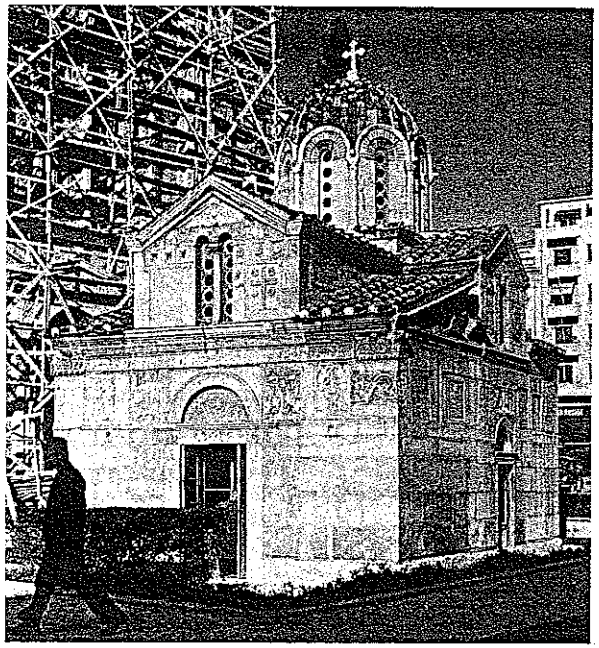
door symbolizes the importance of the door in the face of the wall. Although some of these elements are functional as well—for instance, the drips are, but the pilasters are not—all are explicitly symbolic, associating the glories of Rome with the refinements of building.

But Renaissance iconography is not all structural. The *stemma* above the door is a sign. The Baroque facades of Francesco Borromini, for instance, are rich with symbolism in bas-relief—religious, dynastic, and other. It is significant that Giedion, in his brilliant analysis of the facade of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, described the contrapuntal layerings, undulating rhythms, and subtle scales of the forms and surfaces as abstract elements in a composition in relation to the outside space of the street but without reference to the complex layering of symbolic meanings they contain.

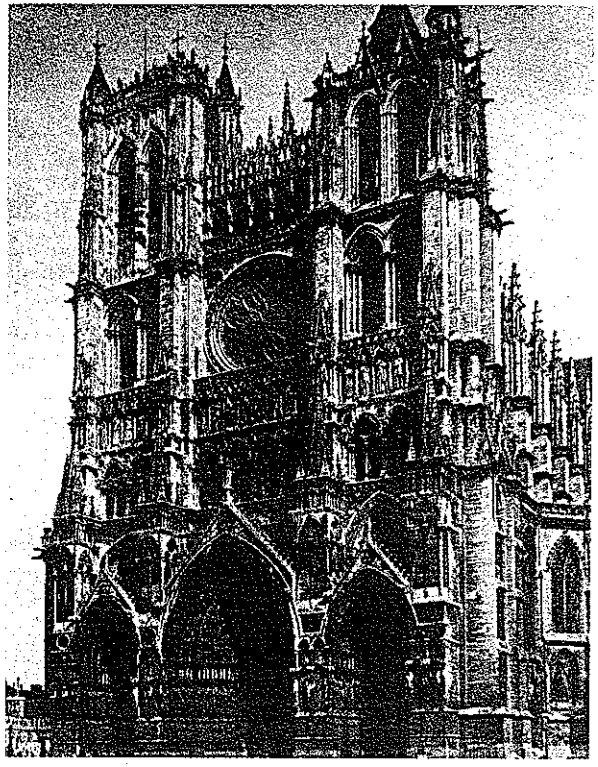
The Italian palace is the decorated shed *par excellence*. For two centuries, from Florence to Rome, the plan of rooms *en suite* around a rectangular, arcaded *cortile* with an entrance penetration in the middle of a facade and a three-story elevation with occasional mezzanines was a constant base for a series of stylistic and compositional variations. The architectural scaffolding was the same for the Strozzi Palace with its three stories of diminishing rustication, for the Rucellai with its quasi-frame of three-ordered pilasters, for the Farnese with its quoined corners complementing the focus of the ornamental central bay and its resultant horizontal hierarchy, and for the Odescalchi with its monumental giant order imposing the image of one dominant story on three (Figs. 93, 94). The basis for the significant evaluation of the development of Italian civic architecture from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century lies in the decoration of a shed. Similar ornament adorns subsequent palazzi, commercial and *senza cortili*. The Carson Pirie Scott department store supports at the ground floor a cast-iron cladding of biological patterns in low relief with intricate scale appropriate for sustaining the customers' interest at eye level, while abruptly opposing, in the formal vocabulary above it, the ugly and ordinary symbolism of a conventional loft (Fig. 95). The conventional shed of a high-rise Howard Johnson motel is more Ville Radieuse slab than palazzo, but the explicit symbolism of its virtually pedimented doorway, a rigid frame in heraldic orange enamel, matches the Classical pediment with feudal crest over the entrance of a patrician palazzo, if we grant the change in scale and the jump in context from urban piazza to Pop sprawl (Fig. 96).

NINETEENTH-CENTURY ECLECTICISM

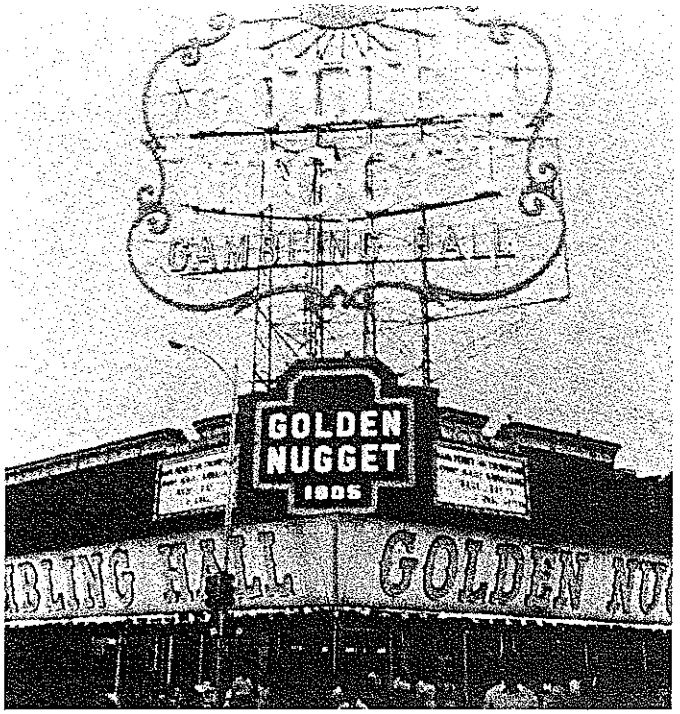
The stylistic eclecticism of the nineteenth century was essentially a symbolism of function, although sometimes a symbolism of nationalism



87. Metropole Cathedral, Athens



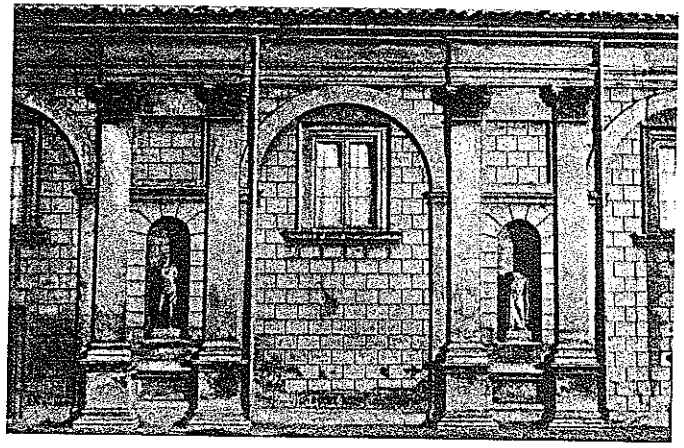
88. Amiens Cathedral, west front



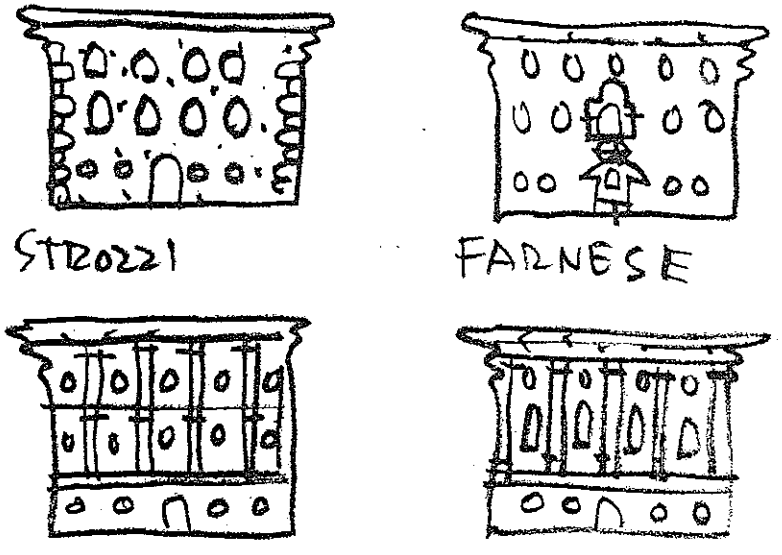
89. Golden Nugget, Las Vegas, pre-1964

90. Golden Nugget, Las Vegas, post-1964

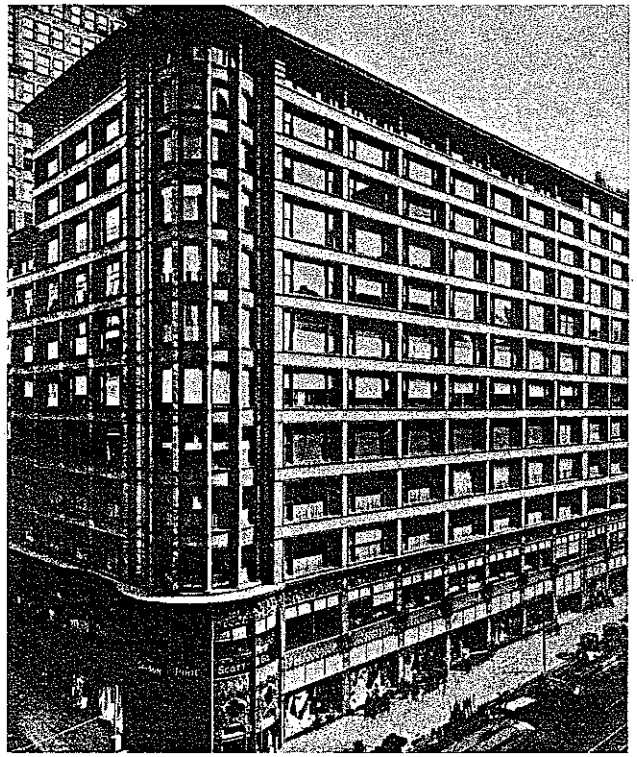
Caesars Palace, extended sign



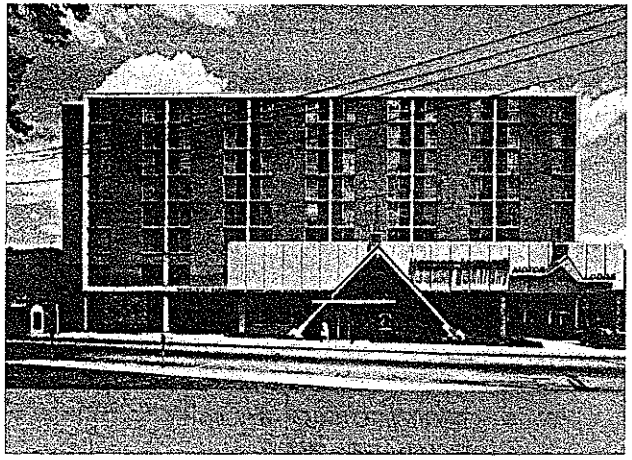
92. Belvedere Court, Vatican



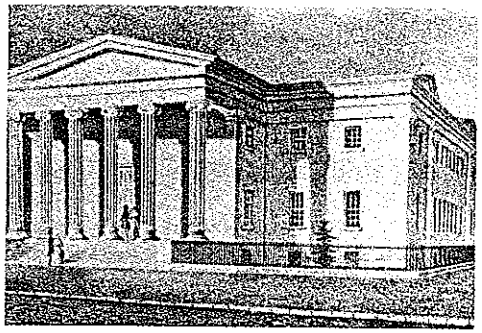
93-94. Palazzo facades



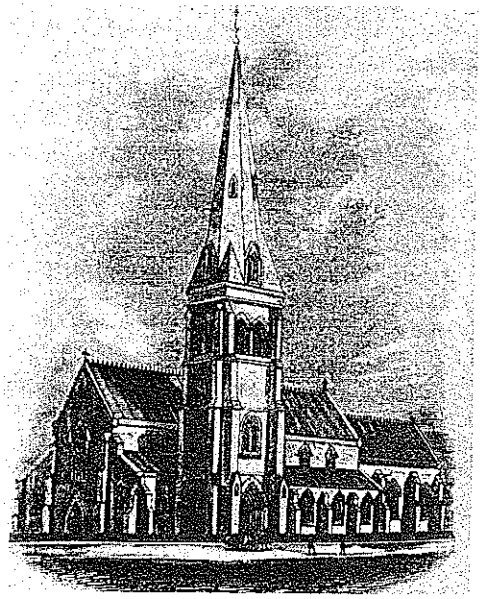
95. Carson Pirie Scott department store, Chicago



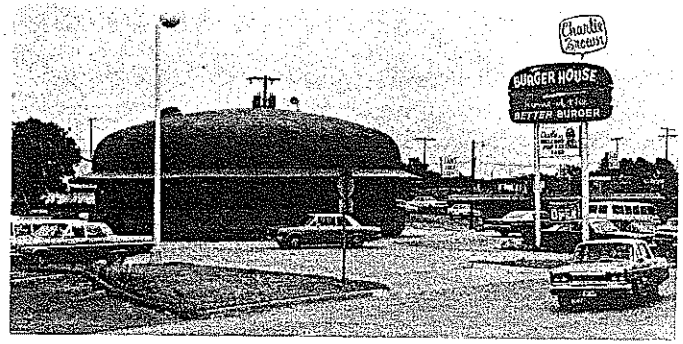
96. Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge and Restaurant, Charlottesville, Virginia



97. Eclectic bank



98. Eclectic church



99. Hamburger stand, Dallas, Texas

—Henri IV Renaissance in France, Tudor in England, for example. But quite consistently styles correspond to building types. Banks were Classical basilicas to suggest civic responsibility and tradition; commercial buildings looked like burghers' houses; universities copied Gothic rather than Classical colleges at Oxford and Cambridge to make symbols of "embattled learning," as George Howe put it, "tending the torch of humanism through the dark ages of economic determinism,"[3] and a choice between Perpendicular and Decorated for midcentury English churches reflected theological differences between the Oxford and Cambridge Movements. The hamburger-shaped hamburger stand is a current, more literal, attempt to express function via association but for commercial persuasion rather than theological refinement (Figs. 97-99).

Donald Drew Egbert,[4] in an analysis of midcentury submissions for the Prix de Rome at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts—home of the bad guys—called functionalism via association a symbolic manifestation of functionalism that preceded the substantive functionalism that was a basis for the Modern movement: Image preceded substance. Egbert also discussed the balance in the new nineteenth-century building types between expression of function via physiognomy and expression of function via style. For instance, the railroad station was recognizable by its cast-iron shed and big clock. These physiognomic symbols contrasted with the explicit heraldic signing of the Renaissance-eclectic waiting and station spaces up front. Sigfried Giedion called this artful contrast within the same building a gross contradiction—a nineteenth-century "split in feeling"—because he saw architecture as technology and space, excluding the element of symbolic meaning.

MODERN ORNAMENT

Modern architects began to make the back the front, symbolizing the configurations of the shed to create a vocabulary for their architecture but denying in theory what they were doing in practice. They said one thing and did another. Less may have been more, but the I-section on Mies van der Rohe's fire-resistant columns, for instance, is as complexly ornamental as the applied pilaster on the Renaissance pier or the incised shaft in the Gothic pier. (In fact, less was more work.) Acknowledged or not, Modern ornament has seldom been symbolic of anything non-architectural since the Bauhaus vanquished Art Deco and the decorative arts. More specifically, its content is consistently spatial and technological. Like the Renaissance vocabulary of the Classical orders, Mies's

3. George Howe, "Some Experiences and Observations of an Elderly Architect," *Perspecta 2, The Yale Architectural Journal*, New Haven (1954), p. 4.

4. Donald Drew Egbert, "Lectures in Modern Architecture" (unpublished), Princeton University, c. 1945.

structural ornament, although specifically contradictory to the structure it adorns, reinforces the architectural content of the building as a whole. If the Classical orders symbolized "rebirth of the Golden Age of Rome," modern I-beams represent "honest expression of modern technology as space"—or something like that. Note, however, it was "modern" technology of the Industrial Revolution that was symbolized by Mies, and this technology, not current electronic technology, is still the source for Modern architectural symbolism today.

ORNAMENT AND INTERIOR SPACE

Mies's I-section appliqués represent naked steel-frame construction, and they make the necessarily bulky, enclosed, fire-resistant frame underneath look thinner through their complex articulations. Mies used ornamental marble in his early interiors to define space. The marble and marblelike panels in the Barcelona Pavilion, the House with Three Courts, and other buildings of that period are less symbolic than the later exterior pilasters, although the lush veneering of the marble and its reputation for rarity connote richness (Fig. 100). Although these "floating" panels can now almost be mistaken for abstract expressionist easel paintings of the 1950s, their purpose was to articulate Flowing Space by directing it within a linear steel frame. Ornament is the servant of Space.

The Kolbe sculpture in this pavilion may have certain symbolic associations, but it too is there primarily to punctuate and direct space; it points up through contrast the machine aesthetic forms around it. A later generation of Modern architects has made these configurations of directional panels and punctuating sculpture the accepted technique for exhibition and museum display, giving the display elements an informational as well as a space-directing role. Mies's elements were symbolic rather than informational; they contrasted the natural with the machined, demonstrating what Modern architecture was by setting it against what it was not. Neither Mies nor his followers used the forms symbolically to convey other-than-architectural meaning. Social realism in a Mies pavilion would be as unthinkable as a WPA mural in the Petit Trianon (except that the flat roof itself was a symbol of socialism in the 1920s).

In the Renaissance interior too, ornament is used along with plenty of light to direct and punctuate space. But here in contrast with the Mies interiors, it is the constructional elements that are ornamental—the frames, moldings, pilasters, and architraves that reinforce the forms and identify enclosed space—while the surfaces are the neutral context. Inside the Mannerist Casino Pio V, however, pilasters, niches, architraves, and cornices obscure the nature of the space or, rather, make the dis-

tinction between wall and vault ambiguous, because these elements, traditionally identified with walls, extend over the vault's surface (Fig. 101).

In the chapel of the Byzantine Martorama in Sicily there is no question of architectural clarification or of Mannerist ambiguity (Fig. 102). Instead, representation smothers space, its patterns camouflaging the forms it adorns. The ornamental patterns are almost independent of, and at times contradictory to, walls, piers, soffits, vaults, and dome. These forms are rounded at their edges to accommodate continuous mosaic surfaces, and the gold mosaic background further softens the geometry, while in the obscure light that occasionally highlights significant symbols, space disintegrates into an amorphous glow. The gilded rocaille in the Amalienburg pavilion at Nymphenburg does the same thing with bas-relief (Fig. 103). Motival bas-relief, splattered like spinach over walls and furniture, hardware and sconces; reflected by mirrors and crystal fixtures; enhanced by generous light yet obscured by indeterminate curves in plan and section, disintegrates space into an amorphous glitter. Significantly, the Rococo ornament is hardly symbolic and not at all propagandistic. It obscures space, but the ornament is still architectural; in the Byzantine church, propagandistic symbolism overwhelms architecture.

THE LAS VEGAS STRIP

The Las Vegas Strip at night, like the Martorama interior, is symbolic images in dark, amorphous space; but, like the Amalienburg, it glitters rather than glows (Fig. 104). Any sense of enclosure or direction comes from lighted signs rather than forms reflected in light (Fig. 105). The source of light in the Strip is direct; the signs themselves are the source. They do not reflect light from external, sometimes hidden, sources as is the case with most billboards and Modern architecture. The mechanical movement of neon lights is quicker than mosaic glitter, which depends on the passage of the sun and the pace of the observer; and the intensity of light on the Strip as well as the tempo of its movement is greater to accommodate the greater spaces, greater speeds, and greater impacts that our technology permits and our sensibilities respond to. Also, the tempo of our economy encourages that changeable and disposable environmental decoration known as advertising art. The messages are different now, but despite the differences the methods are the same, and architecture is no longer simply the "skillful, accurate, and magnificent play of masses seen in light."

The Strip by day is a different place, no longer Byzantine (Fig. 106). The forms of the buildings are visible but remain secondary to the signs in visual impact and symbolic content. The space of urban sprawl is not

enclosed and directed as in traditional cities. Rather, it is open and indeterminate, identified by points in space and patterns on the ground; these are two-dimensional or sculptural symbols in space rather than buildings in space, complex configurations that are graphic or representational. Acting as symbols, the signs and buildings identify the space by their location and direction, and space is further defined and directed by utility poles and street and parking patterns. In residential sprawl the orientation of houses toward the street, their stylistic treatment as decorated sheds, and their landscaping and lawn fixtures—wagon wheels, mailboxes on erect chains, colonial lamps, and segments of split-rail fence—substitute for the signs of commercial sprawl as the definers of space (Figs. 107, 108).

Like the complex architectural accumulations of the Roman Forum, the Strip by day reads as chaos if you perceive only its forms and exclude its symbolic content. The Forum, like the Strip, was a landscape of symbols with layers of meaning evident in the location of roads and buildings, buildings representing earlier buildings, and the sculpture piled all over. Formally the Forum was an awful mess; symbolically it was a rich mix.

The series of triumphal arches in Rome is a prototype of the billboard (*mutatis mutandis* for scale, speed, and content). The architectural ornament, including pilasters, pediments, and coffers, is a kind of bas-relief that makes only a gesture toward architectural form. It is as symbolic as the bas-reliefs of processions and the inscriptions that compete for the surface (Fig. 109). Along with their function as billboards carrying messages, the triumphal arches in the Roman Forum were spatial markers channeling processional paths within a complex urban landscape. On Route 66 the billboards, set in series at a constant angle toward the oncoming traffic, with a standard distance between themselves and from the roadside, perform a similar formal-spatial function. Often the brightest, cleanest, and best-maintained elements in industrial sprawl, the billboards both cover and beautify that landscape. Like the configurations of sepulchral monuments along the Via Appia (again *mutatis mutandis* for scale), they mark the way through the vast spaces *beyond* urban sprawl. But these spatial characteristics of form, position, and orientation are secondary to their symbolic function. Along the highway, advertising Tanya via graphics and anatomy, like advertising the victories of Constantine via inscriptions and bas-reliefs, is more important than identifying the space (Fig. 110).

URBAN SPRAWL AND THE MEGASTRUCTURE

The urban manifestations of ugly and ordinary architecture and the decorated shed are closer to urban sprawl than to the megastructure

Table 2. Comparison of Urban Sprawl with Megastructure

Urban Sprawl	Megastructure
Ugly and ordinary	Heroic and original
Depends on explicit symbolism	Rejects explicit symbolism
Symbols in space	Forms in space
Image	Form
Mixed media	Pure architecture
Big signs designed by commercial artists	Little signs (and only if absolutely necessary) designed by "graphic artists"
Auto environment	Post- and pre-auto environment
Cars	Public transportation
Takes the parking lot seriously and pastiches the pedestrian	"Straight" architecture with serious but egocentric aims for the pedestrian; it irresponsibly ignores or tries to "piazzafy" the parking lot
Disneyland	Piazzas
Promoted by sales staff	Promoted by experts
Feasible and being built	Technologically feasible perhaps, but socially and economically unfeasible
Popular life-style	"Correct" life-style
Historical styles	Modern style
Uses typological models	Uses original creations
Process city	Instant city
Broadacre City	Ville Radieuse
Looks awful	Makes a nice model
Architects don't like	Architects like
20th-century communication technology	19th-century industrial vision
Social realism	Science fiction
Expedience	Technological indulgence
Expedient	Visionary
Ambiguous urban image	Traditional urban image
Vital mess	"Total Design" (and design review boards)
Building for markets	Building for Man
This year's problems	The old architectural revolution
Heterogeneous images	The image of the middle-class intelligentsia
The difficult image	The easy image
The difficult whole	The easy whole

(Figs. 111, 112). We have explained how, for us, commercial vernacular architecture was a vivid initial source for symbolism in architecture. We have described in the Las Vegas study the victory of symbols-in-space over forms-in-space in the brutal automobile landscape of great distances and high speed, where the subtleties of pure architectural space can no longer be savored. But the symbolism of urban sprawl lies also in its residential architecture, not only in the strident, roadside communications of the commercial strip (decorated shed or duck). Although the ranch house, split level or otherwise, conforms in its spatial configuration to several set patterns, it is appliquéd with varied though conforming ornament, evoking combinations of Colonial, New Orleans, Regency, Western, French Provincial, Modern, and other styles. Garden apartments—especially those of the Southwest—equally are decorated sheds whose pedestrian courts, like those of motels, are separate from, but close to, the automobile. A comparison of urban sprawl with the megastructure is made in Table 2.

Sprawl City's image (Fig. 113) is a result of process. In this respect it follows the canons of Modern architecture that require form to result from function, structure, and construction methods, that is, from the processes of its making. But for our time the megastructure (Fig. 114) is a distortion of normal city building process for the sake *inter alia* of image. Modern architects contradict themselves when they support functionalism *and* the megastructure. They do not recognize the image of the process city when they see it on the Strip, because it is both too familiar and too different from what they have been trained to accept.