

## Chapter 9: Denise Scott Brown and the socio-anthropological meaning as new objectivity

### Challenging functionalism through social patterns

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This chapter examines how urban sociologist Herbert Gans's study for Levittown influenced Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi, and Steven Izenour's "Remedial Housing for Architects or Learning from Levittown" conducted in 1970 in collaboration with their students at Yale University. It takes as its starting point Scott Brown's endeavor to redefine functionalism in "Architecture as Patterns and Systems: Learning from Planning"<sup>1</sup>, and "The Redefinition of Functionalism"<sup>2</sup>, which are included in *Architecture as Signs and Systems: For a Mannerist Time*.

The intention to shape a new way of conceiving functionalism was already present in *Learning from Las Vegas*<sup>3</sup>, where Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour promoted an understanding of Las Vegas as a pattern of activities. Particular emphasis is placed on Scott Brown's understanding of "active socioplastics", and on the impact of advocacy planning and urban sociology on her approach. At the core of the reflections developed in this chapter is the concept of "urban village" that Gans uses in *US in The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans*<sup>4</sup> to shed light on the socio-anthropological aspects of inhabiting urban fabric

In 1952, Denise Scott Brown resettled in London to work as an architect, but, eventually, enrolled at the Architectural Association (AA). Two years after Scott Brown's arrival in London, in 1954, the Department of Tropical Architecture was formed at the AA. It was renamed Department of Tropical Studies in 1961. This department was led by Otto Koenigsberger and its core concern was the research on climatically responsive, energy conscious "Green Architecture"<sup>5</sup>. Scott Brown graduated from the AA Diploma and Certificate in Tropical Architecture in 1956<sup>6</sup>. Before studying in London, she studied at Witwater-

strand University at South Africa, starting in 1949. During her stay in London, she was particularly interested in the “urbanistic ideas of the New Brutalists”<sup>7</sup>. She has described the New Brutalists as “a movement of the 1950s and 1960s that related architecture to social realism”<sup>8</sup>. Scott Brown has mentioned regarding the British context when she relocated in London in 1952: “I landed in post-World War II England amidst the look-back-in-anger generation, in a society in upheaval, where social activism was part of education”<sup>9</sup>.

Scott Brown has remarked that one of the main characteristics of the New Brutalists’ ideology was the intention to shed light on what happened “in the streets of poor city neighborhoods”. According to her, sociologists such as Michael Young and Peter Willmott<sup>10</sup>, who invited “planners to understand how people lived in the East End of London, saying that those who had been bombed out of housing could not simply be moved to the suburban environment of the new towns”, helped architects to realize how important was to try to understand the reasons for which “life on the streets was [for low-income citizens] a support system.”<sup>11</sup> Scott Brown has also highlighted that “[b]efore Jane Jacobs, Young and Willmott voiced complaints against the social disruption induced by urban planning”<sup>12</sup>.

Scott Brown stayed in London for six years, before resettling in Philadelphia in the United States to study planning at the Department of City Planning of the Graduate School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania. An aspect that is of great importance for understanding the reasons behind her decision to study there is the impact that Alison and Peter Smithson had on her thought. Peter Smithson encouraged her to go to the University of Pennsylvania to study planning. Characteristically, Scott Brown has remarked: “Peter Smithson recommended that we apply to the University of Pennsylvania because the architect Louis I. Kahn taught there”<sup>13</sup>. The fact that Alison and Peter Smithson had met Louis Kahn in the framework of the Team Ten meetings could explain this. Alison and Peter Smithson were influenced by Kahn’s as it becomes evident in an essay authored by them that was focused on Kahn’s work<sup>14</sup>.

When Scott Brown arrived at the University of Pennsylvania, the Department of City Planning was significantly influenced by the methods of social sciences. The projects that were conducted in the framework of the Institute for Urban Studies of the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania had not many connections with the dominant models during the same period at the Department of Architecture. An important Figure at the time within the context of Philadelphia, but also beyond it, was the famous architect Louis Kahn. Kahn had started teaching at Yale University in 1947.

In 1955, he was appointed Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and in 1966, he became Cret Professor of Architecture modern ideas. When Denise Scott Brown arrive at University of Pennsylvania as a student in 1958, Kahn was teaching there. As Stanislaus von Moos has remarked, “Venturi had worked at Kahn’s office for nine months in 1956–57”<sup>15</sup>.

Denise Scott Brown, while studying at the University of Pennsylvania, took numerous social sciences courses. Among them the courses of Herbert Gans played an important role for her trajectory. During the same period, she collaborated with a number of social planners, and was involved in social planning in Philadelphia. Her engagement within the circles of social planners should be taken into account when one tries to understand how the exchanges between architects, urban planners and sociologists determined the formation of her pedagogical and design approach. Insightful is her remark that architects, instead of trying to adopt the perspective of sociologists, should try “to look at the information of sociology from an architectural viewpoint”<sup>16</sup>.

One of the aspects that makes Scott Brown’s viewpoint original is the fact that it aims to bring together her interest in the non-judgmental viewpoint of the “new objectivity” of Gans’s understanding of urban sociology and her passion for the aesthetics of pop art. Regarding this issue, she has highlighted: “I like the fact that the influences upon us are the pop artist on one side and the sociologist on the other”<sup>17</sup>. Enlightening regarding how the sociological perspective meets the pop artist viewpoint are Scott Brown’s following words:

The forms of the pop landscape [...] speak to our condition not only aesthetically but on many levels of necessity, from the social necessity to rehouse the poor without destroying them to the architectural necessity to produce buildings and environments that others will need and like<sup>18</sup>.

## 9.1 Denise Scott Brown at the 1956 CIAM Summer School and the significance of planning

Among the aspects that could help us better understand her interest in planning and the reasons for which she decided to resettle in Philadelphia in order to study planning at the University of Pennsylvania are her participation to the CIAM Summer School in Venice, as well as the impact of Italian architect Giuseppe Vaccaro on her thought (Scott Brown 1996). In 1956, Denise and her first husband Robert Scott Brown, who died in 1959 in a car accident, par-

ticipated to the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) Summer School in Venice<sup>19</sup>. During the same period, Robert Venturi, who would become the second husband of the second spent two years – from 1955 to 1956 – as visiting scholar in the Academy of Rome. During his stays in Italy, Venturi developed a friendship with Ernesto N. Rogers and, as Martino Stierli notes, was confronted with the question building in historically sensitive urban areas, which was a major issue in the post-war Italian architectural scene.

Denise and Robert Scott Brown assisted Vaccaro for his project “for Ina-Casa’s Ponte Mammal neighbourhood on the northeast side of Rome”<sup>20</sup>. Characteristically, she remarks, in “Towards an ‘Active Socioplastics’”:

Summer School in Venice and some weeks in the architecture office of Giuseppe Vaccaro in Rome reinforced our intention, first formulated at the AA, to continue our training in architecture via the study of city planning<sup>21</sup>.

During the 1956 CIAM Summer School, Ludovico Quaroni delivered a keynote lecture entitled “The architect and town planning” on 14 September 1956. At the core of this lecture was the interrogation regarding the ways in which architects could have social responsibilities. Quaroni argued that key for enhancing architects’ impact on society is the dissolution of the boundaries between town planning and architecture. He tried to explain “why [...] town planning [should] be the architects’ concern”, drawing a distinction between an understanding of function as object and an understanding of function as principle. He highlighted: “the latest development of the battle for modern art caused architecture to formulate as an object what is just a principle, namely that the form must rise from the functionalism”<sup>22</sup>.

Quaroni’s critique of functionalism could be interpreted as a critique of Le Corbusier’s categorization of human actions into “dwelling, working, [and] cultivating mind and body”, and of Le Corbusier’s understanding of the user as “machine-man” and the house as “machine à habiter”. Quaroni suggested a reinvention of the concept of function, challenging Le Corbusier’s quantitative and simplistic understanding of function, and blaming him for neglecting the physical, special, psychological, and moral factors related to function. He asserted, during the aforementioned lecture: “not having fully digested the idea of function, in the long run, we identified it only with a question of form”. Quaroni also argued that “function cannot be determined by means of mere square or cubic meters, since it is a compound of physical, special, psychologi-

cal, moral factors”, and underscored the importance of understanding “architecture as a social function”<sup>23</sup>.

Quaroni identified Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright as “the last specimen of that generation of architects, the founder of which was perhaps Brunelleschi”, who without “having fully digested the idea of function [...] identified it only with a question of form”<sup>24</sup>. He also underlined the importance of the architects’ role in revealing the connections between the individual and the collective in society. According to Quaroni, a characteristic of contemporary city was the absence of a homogeneous structure. Quaroni used the concept of “marvellous city” to refer to this absence of homogeneity in urban structures. The notion of “urban architecture”, which was dominant in the debates concerning architectural and urban epistemology and educational strategies in several schools of architecture in Italy during the 1960s, was at the core of Quaroni’s thought. What I argue here is that Scott Brown was influenced by this keynote lecture of Quaroni, particularly as far as the critique of modernist functionalism and the dissolution of the distinction between architecture and town planning are concerned<sup>25</sup>.

Ludovico Quaroni’s aforementioned keynote lecture and his critique of Le Corbusier and modernist functionalist architecture and urbanism constituted an early encounter of Scott Brown with an analysis of the risks that a rigid understanding of the concept of function in architecture and urban planning entails, on the one hand, and the drawbacks of separating the practice of architecture and the practice of urban planning, on the other hand. Quaroni, eleven years later, in *La torre di Babele*<sup>26</sup>, “argues that ‘the modern city is really ugly’ and that the neglected lesson of historic cities is the well-integrated synthesis of function, technology and aesthetics”<sup>27</sup>. Despite the commonalities between some aspects of Quaroni’s critical view of modernist functionalism and Scott Brown’s deferred judgement, Quaroni’s analysis of “the tension between the historic and the modern city”, and his choice to relate “the historic city’s beauty to its ‘clear design ... and structure’ [and the ugliness of] [...] the modern city [to the fact that it is] [...] ‘chaotic’”<sup>28</sup> differs a lot from Scott Brown’s posture, who seems to desire to understand the logic behind the complexity and patterns characterizing the post-war urban and suburban fabric.

## 9.2 Advocacy planning movement and the critiques of urban renewal

To grasp the specificity of the context of Philadelphia during the late 1950s, we should bear in mind the urban renewal efforts and the critiques of the advocacy planning movement. Scott Brown has commented on advocacy planners' critique of urban renewal program, highlighting that it "derived from the problem that urban renewal had become 'human removal'"<sup>29</sup>. She has also underscored that the main argument of advocacy planners was that architects and urban planners' "leadership had diverted urban renewal from a community support to a socially coercive boondoggle"<sup>30</sup>. In parallel, during this period, several universities in the United States launched programs in city planning or urban design. Among them is Harvard University that initiated its program on urban design two years before Scott Brown's arrival in the United States.

The pedagogical approach of the Department of City Planning at the University of Pennsylvania when Scott Brown resettled there was influenced by social sciences and New Left critiques. The activities and publications of Jane Jacobs are also of great significance for understanding the social aspects of the ideas of Scott Brown during those years. Among the texts of Jacobs that had an important impact on Scott Brown's thought is Jane Jacobs's articles entitled "The City's Threat to Open Land", "Redevelopment Today", and "What is a City?" published in *Architectural Forum* in 1958, that is to say the same year in which Scott Brown resettled in Philadelphia<sup>31</sup>. Scott Brown remarked concerning the context in Philadelphia in the 1950s and its relationship to what would later be called *New Left*:

Here, long before it was visible in other places, was the elation that comes with the discovery and definition of a problem: poverty. The continued existence of poor people in America was a real discovery for students and faculty in the late 1950s. The social planning movement engulfed Penn's planning department<sup>32</sup>.

In the early 1960s, one of the most important advocacy planners, Paul Davidoff, also taught at the City Planning Department of the University of Pennsylvania between 1958 and 1965. Davidoff was among the protagonists of Advocacy Planning movement in the United States. In his seminal article entitled "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning" published in 1965, remarked that "[p]lanners should be able to engage in the political process as advocates of the interests both of government and of such other groups, organizations, or individuals who are

concerned with proposing policies for the future development of the community<sup>33</sup>.

David A. Crane, who was Scott Brown's student advisor at the University of Pennsylvania, also had an important impact on her, especially as far as the strategies employed in studio teaching are concerned<sup>34</sup>. As Clément Orillard reminds us, Crane collaborated with Kevin Lynch for the preparation of the maps and diagrams included in *The Image of the City*<sup>35</sup>. During the period Crane mentored Scott Brown, he worked on a conference focusing on urban design criticism<sup>36</sup>. In 1959, Scott Brown started working as Crane's teaching assistant<sup>37</sup>.

During the period that Scott Brown studied at the Department of City Planning of the University of Pennsylvania there was a tension between the pedagogical methods of social planners and studio-based teaching strategies. This tension is described by Scott-Brown as "the physical/non-physical debate"<sup>38</sup>. Gans used the expression "fallacy of physical determinism"<sup>39</sup> to refer to the tendency of urban planners to believe that "place shapes people's behavior"<sup>40</sup>.

### 9.3 The impact of Herbert Gans's socio-anthropological perspective on Denise Scott Brown's approach

The University of Pennsylvania was one of the universities that hired sociologists to teach at their planning departments. An important Figure that taught there when Scott Brown arrived was urban sociologist Herbert Gans, who is mentioned in Paul Davidoff's seminal article "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning"<sup>41</sup>. Between 1953 and 1971, Gans was affiliated with the Institute of Urban Studies of the University of Pennsylvania, the Center for Urban Education, and the MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies. Along with Davidoff, he played an important role in the emergence of the advocacy planning movement in the United States. Scott Brown was particularly interested in Gans's "new objectivity", which aimed to relate "social life, popular culture and planning"<sup>42</sup>.

Scott Brown's interest in the concept of "objectivity" goes back to her years at the AA, as it becomes evident in her following words: "The belief that architecture could save the world through objectivity and a brave use of technology was shared by many young architects at the AA"<sup>43</sup>. During her studies at the AA, Scott Brown had as student advisor German Jewish architect and urban planner Arthur Korn, who was then member of the MARS (Modern Architectural Research) group, which was active between 1933 and 1957. Scott Brown has

associated her interest in the concept of “active socioplastics” with the impact that Korn’s ideas had on her. Regarding Arthur Korn’s impact on Scott Brown’s approach, one should bring to mind Korn’s book entitled *History Builds the Town*, in which special attention is paid to the fact that “[t]here has been in history an infinite variety of towns differing in function, structure and components”<sup>44</sup>. At the core of Korn’s analysis is the idea that the different forms of towns encountered in different societies are related to the economic and political structures of these societies.

Figure 9.1. *Photograph of the West End by Herbert Gans, c. 1957.*



Credits: Herbert Gans papers, 1944–2004, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library

While studying at the University of Pennsylvania, Scott Brown followed the courses of Gans, who was the first awardee of a PhD Degree from the Department of City Planning (1957)<sup>45</sup>. Gans, before joining the Department of City Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, was at the University of Chicago.



Important for Gans's approach was the work of Martin Meyerson and John Dyckmen<sup>46</sup>. Among Gans's books that influenced Scott Brown's approach is *US in The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans*, in which the author examined the everyday life of the inhabitants in Boston's West End, a slum cleared area<sup>47</sup>. The aforementioned book constituted a critique of the urban renewal strategies in the West End in Boston. It was based on an eight-months *in situ* research conducted during a period preceding the demolition of this area. More specifically, Gans remarked regarding his study of Italian Americans in Boston's West End: "The West End was not really a slum, and although many of its inhabitants did have problems, these did not stem from the neighborhood."<sup>48</sup> (Figure 9.1)

Gans placed particular emphasis on the special characteristic of the environment and the community in Boston's West End, and analyzed the impact of urban renewal, gentrification and displacement on existing communities<sup>49</sup>. Characteristically, he remarks, in *US in The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans*, that "[n]ot all city neighborhoods are urban villages"<sup>50</sup>. Reading Gans's book, one realizes that he intended to shed light on the socio-anthropological meaning of the concept of "urban village". More specifically, he defined "urban village" as a "city low-rent neighborhood typically one in which European immigrants – and more recently Negro and Puerto Rican – try to adapt their nonurban institutions and culture to the urban milieu"<sup>51</sup>.

#### 9.4 Learning from Levittown Studio: Towards a socio-anthropological perspective

In the photographs that Scott Brown took at South Street west of Broad Street in Philadelphia, one can discern the impact of Gans's approach on her perspective (Figure 9.2). Another seminal book by Gans is *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*<sup>52</sup>. Three years after the publication of the latter, in 1970, Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour and Denise Scott Brown coordinated the study "Remedial Housing for Architects or Learning from Levittown", which was held in collaboration with their students at Yale University (Figure 9.3, Figure 9.4). In the themes addressed in the course entitled "Learning from Levittown Studio" that Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour taught during the fall semester in 1970, we can easily discern the influence of Herbert Gans's work and an interest in depicting the iconographical and symbolic values of suburbia, which is based on the

intention to value the socio-anthropological dimension of the perception of architecture and the city. In the framework of the aforementioned course, special emphasis was placed on the analysis of the following aspects concern the profile of the citizens of Levittown: family organization, education, ambitions and values, attitudes, leisure, use of house, occupation, social contacts, media, possessions, orbits of mobility, and central investments.

*Figure 9.2. Photograph taken at South Street in Philadelphia by Denise Scott Brown.*



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Of great interest is the way the groups of citizens were categorized in the posters produced. These groups were the following: (a) a first group concerning low income-black matriarchal families with 7 years of education, which were occupied mainly as workers and unemployed and corresponded to approximately 7% of the population of New Haven, (b) a second group concerning low income-Italian origin-urban families with 8 years of education, which were occupied mainly as operatives and laborers and corresponded to approximately 10% of New Haven (c) a third group concerning suburban-working class

families with 8–11 years of education, which were occupied mainly as operatives and laborers and corresponded to approximately 10% of the population of New Haven, (d) a fourth group concerning suburban-low-middle class families with High School and 2 years College education, which were occupied mainly as craftsmen, salesmen and clerical and laborers and corresponded to approximately 35% of the population of New Haven, and (e) a fifth group concerning upper-middle class families with 4 years College education, which were occupied mainly in business and corresponded to approximately 20% of the population of New Haven<sup>53</sup> (Figure 9.5).

Figure 9.3. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Levittown Studio*, Fall 1970. *Life Styles Expressed in the House*.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Figure 9.4. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, *Learning from Levittown Studio*, Fall 1970. *Styling, Sprawl, Space & Imagery*. Scanned from photo reproduction.



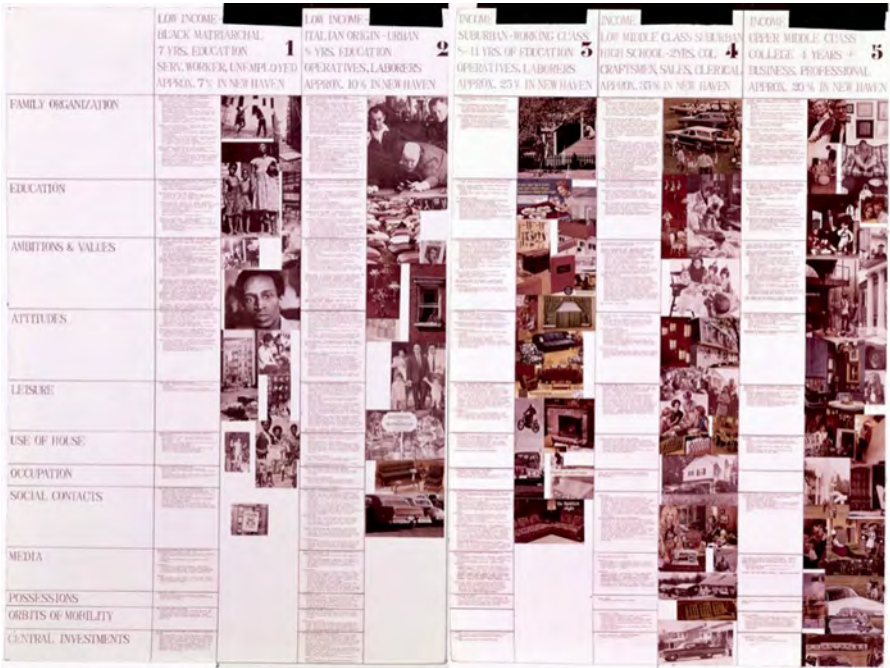
Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Looking closely at the posters produced in the framework of the Learning from Levittown Studio, one distinguishes the emergence of new means of communications or signs that reveal a shift in the social and aesthetic parameters of architectural and urban perception. Despite the fact that the emergence of these new media is more related within the existing scholarship on Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi to their study of Las Vegas and their seminal *Learning from Las Vegas*<sup>54</sup>, for which they collaborated with Steven Izenour as they did for *Learning from Levittown Studio*, we can see that they are very present, we can see that they are at the core of their visual analysis of Levittown as well. Several of the posters that were produced during the Learning from Levittown Studio were included in “Learning from Pop”, which was published in *Casabella* in 1971<sup>55</sup>. In this article, Scott Brown criticized Le Corbusier’s approach, juxtaposing it to the strategies of analyzing the ways in which the in-



habitants of Levittown shape their environment. According to her, architects should take into account “what people do to building”<sup>56</sup>.

Figure 9.5. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, *Learning from Levittown Studio*, Fall 1970. House style by income category in New Haven, CT. Photos and markers on poster board.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

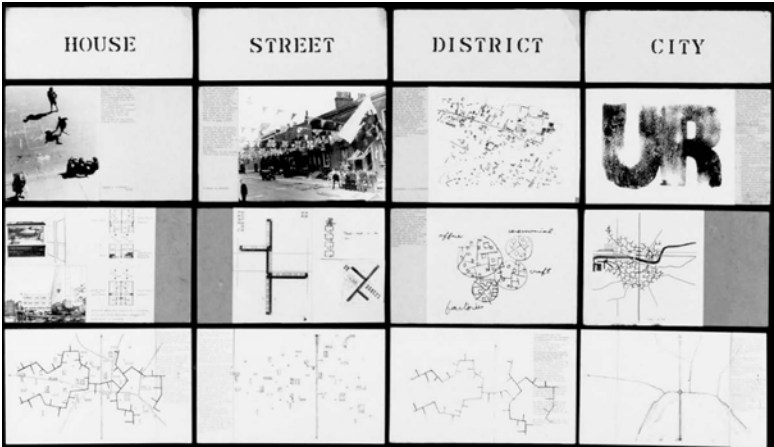
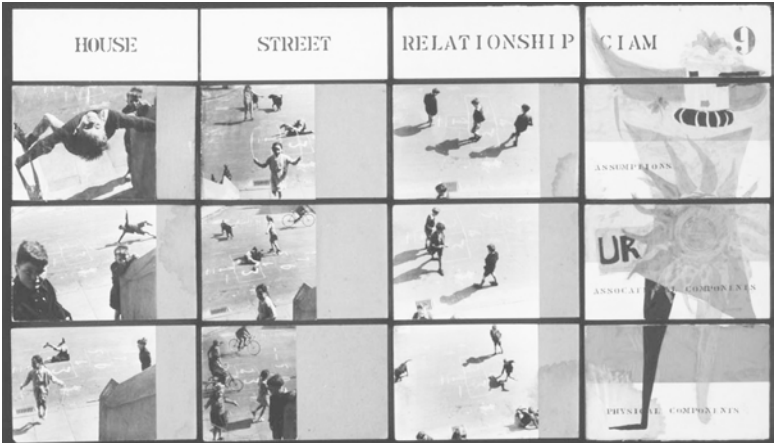
Scott Brown’s concern about the cultural dimension of the way of life of the inhabitants of Levittown was also present in “Learning from Lutyens: Reply to Alison and Peter Smithson”, which was originally published in 1969 in *RIBA Journal*<sup>57</sup>. In this text, which constituted a reply to two articles published in the same journal by Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson respectively<sup>58</sup>, Scott Brown addressed the following question, which echoes Gans’s socio-anthropological view:

Are architect still so condescending about the “dreams” of the occupants of Levittown, and cavalier about the complex social and economic, as well as symbolic, bases of residential sprawl?<sup>59</sup>

There is a through-provoking graphic similarity between the poster produced in the framework of Learning from Levittown studio and Alison and Peter Smithson's representation in the case of the “Urban Re-identification Grid” shown at the 9<sup>th</sup> CIAM held in Aix-en-Provence in France in 1953<sup>60</sup> (Figure 9.6a and Figure 9.6b), which constitutes a turning point regarding the conception of the inhabitants and the “humanization” of functionalism during the post-war era, and the grille “Housing Appropriate to the Valley Section”<sup>61</sup> (Figure 9.7a and Figure 9.7b), which was presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> CIAM held in Dubrovnik in Yugoslavia in 1956, that is to say the same year that the CIAM Summer School mentioned above took place in Venice.

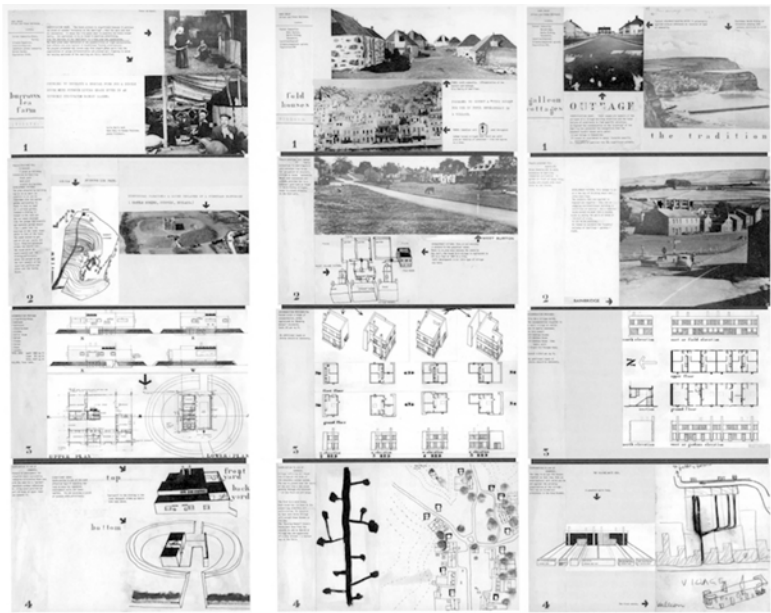
The critique of modernist functionalism, which is at the core of Scott Brown's thought, was also at the heart of the debates of Team Ten, which is also known as Team X or Team Ten and refers to the group of architects and urban planners, as well as other figures concerned about architecture and urbanism, which aim to challenge certain rigid ideas of the CIAM. Team Ten emerged in July 1953 during the 9<sup>th</sup> CIAM. Its creation should be understood in relation to the intention “to ‘re-humanise’ architecture”<sup>62</sup> and urbanism. The Doorn Manifesto or ‘Statement on Habitat’ is considered to be the founding document of Team Ten. It was named after the city in which it was formulated and “signed in January 1954 by the architects Peter Smithson, John Voelcker, Jaap Bakema, Aldo van Eyck and Sandy van Ginkel and the social economist Hans Hovens-Greve”<sup>63</sup>. The main objectives of the Doorn Manifesto was “[t]he rediscovery of the “human” and the intensification of interest in proportions”, and the establishment of design strategies aiming to “to produce towns in which ‘vital human associations’ [would be] [...] expressed”<sup>64</sup>. It was in this manifesto that the “Team 10 presented their ‘Scale of Association’, which was a kind of re-interpretation of Patrick Geddes’ Valley Section”<sup>65</sup>. (Figure 9.8)

Figure 9.6a, b. Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Re-identification Grid*, presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> CIAM in Aix-en-Provence in 1953.



Credits: Smithson Family Collection

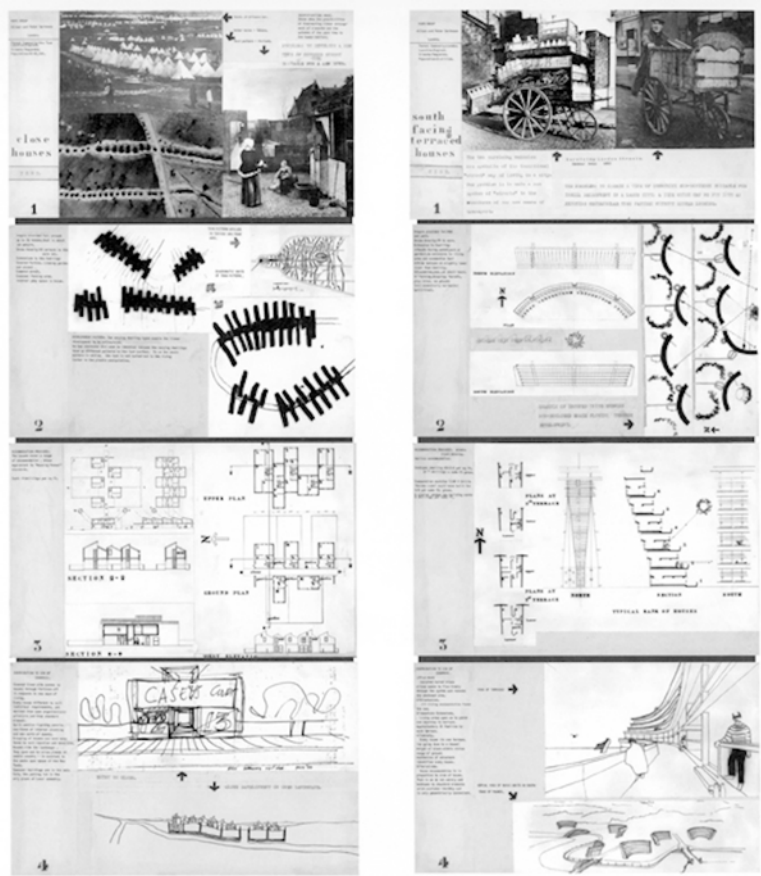
Figure 9.7a. Alison and Peter Smithson, part of the CIAM grille entitled “Housing Appropriate to the Valley Section” presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> CIAM.



Credits: Smithson Family Collection



Figure 9.7b. Alison and Peter Smithson, part of the CIAM grille entitled “Housing Appropriate to the Valley Section” presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> CIAM.

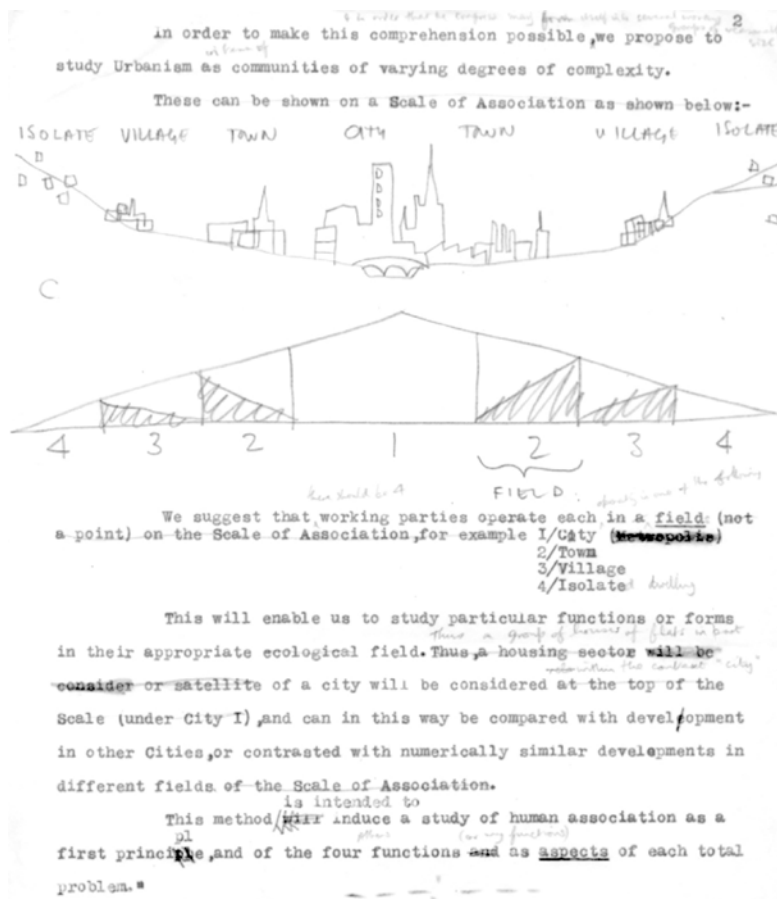


Credits: Smithson Family Collection

The concern about reinventing the way architectural and urban artefacts are inhabited is reflected in the theme of the ninth CIAM held in 1953 in Aix-en-Provence in France, which was the “Grid of Living.” Through their “Urban Re-identification Grid”, Alison and Peter Smithson expressed their ideas concerning the transformation conception of the user in architecture during the post-war years, criticizing the reductive of understanding urban reality during the modernist era<sup>66</sup>. Such a critique is also very present in Scott Brown’s work and, more particularly in the posters produced during the Learning from Levittown Studio in collaboration with Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and their students. The “Urban Re-identification Grid” was organized around the concepts of “house,” “street,” “relationship,” “district,” and “city,” which were important for the visual argumentation of Learning from Levittown Studio as well. Among the visual components included in the “Urban Re-identification Grid” were a photograph of Chisendale Road by Nigel Henderson (1951), who was along with Alison and Peter Smithson, Richard Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi, Lawrence Alloway, William Turnbull, John McHale, and Reyner Banham member of the Independent Group<sup>67</sup>, as well as a “diagram showing the network of housing and streets in the air and their collage for the competition for the Golden Lane Housing project (1952)”<sup>68</sup>.

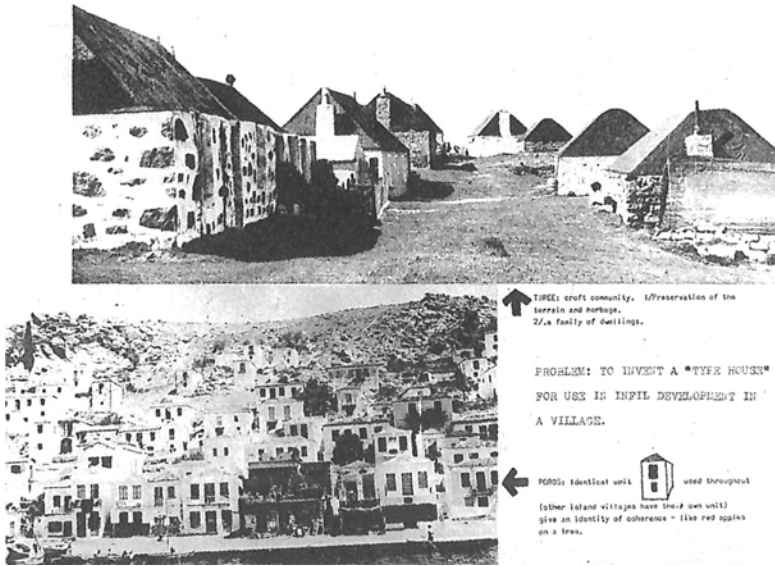
In the grille entitled “Housing Appropriate to the Valley Section”, Alison and Peter Smithson included a photograph taken in the island of Poros in Greece accompanied by the following remark: “Poros: Identical unit used throughout (other island villages have their own unit) give an identity of coherence – like red apples on a tree”<sup>69</sup> (Figure 9.9). Three years, in 1959, during the last CIAM held in Otterlo in the Netherlands, Peter Smithson, in his presentation, paid special attention to the open-ended morphologies he encountered during his travels in Greek coastal villages, placing particular emphasis on “the relationship between the aggregation of Greek villages and the social and cultural patterns of quotidian life of their inhabitants”<sup>70</sup>. This concern about associating the social and cultural patterns of quotidian life of their inhabitants with the architectural and urban morphologies has certain affinities with the study of Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, and their students in Levittown.

Figure 9.8. Valley Section Diagram as included in Doorn Manifesto for CIAM meeting in Doorn, January 1954.



Credits: Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/TTEN (Team Ten archive), Rotterdam

Figure 9.9. Alison and Peter Smithson, photograph of Poros island in Greece showing the aggregation of units. Detail of CIAM grille entitled “Housing Appropriate to the Valley Section” presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> CIAM.



Credits: Smithson Family Collection

## 9.5 South Street in Philadelphia and a careful regard for people and existing architecture

In “The Positive Functions of Poverty”, Herbert Gans, drawing upon Merton’s conception of function, analyzed the “functions of poverty”, identifying “functions for groups and aggregates”, including “interest groups, socioeconomic classes, and other population aggregates, for example, those with shared values or similar statuses”<sup>71</sup>. Scott Brown and Venturi remarked in a text describing their study for South Street in Philadelphia:

A rehabilitation of South Street, starting with what is there now rather than with utopian, non-refundable dreams and architectural monuments, with careful regard for people (residents and merchants) and existing

architecture, would be a means for economic regeneration of the whole community, of much more than the street itself<sup>72</sup>.

In the aforementioned description of South Street in Philadelphia, one can discern the care of Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi for respecting the choices of the inhabitants concerning the way space is experienced and transformed according to the cultural characteristics of the citizens. To grasp the context of the South Street in Philadelphia in the late 1960s, one should bear in mind the activities of the so-called “Citizens’ Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community” (CCPDCC), which was established in 1968 by African-American housing activist Alice Lipscomb, community leader George Dukes, and lawyer Robert Sugarman, and advocated that the viable characteristics of the street should be preserved.

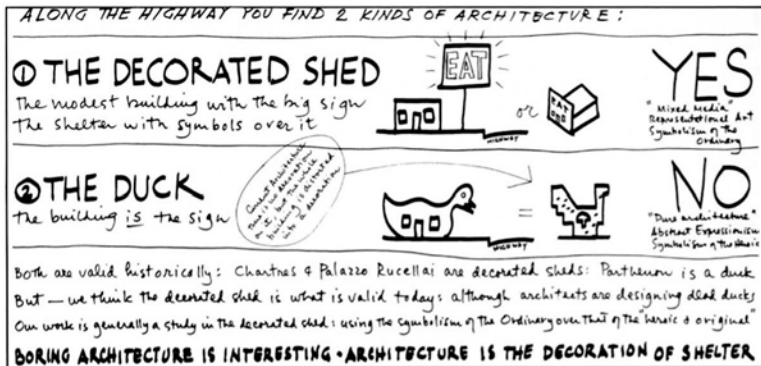
Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown were invited by the CCPDCC in order to show in a visual why an ensemble of features of the street were valuable and should not be ignored. At the core of the activities of the CCPDCC was the critique of the so-called “Crosstown Expressway”, which had been approved to be sponsored by the Federal government. According to Sebastian Haumann, “[t]he intention of the collaboration was to develop an alternative plan for the ‘Corridor’ to fend off the City’s intrusive proposals effectively”<sup>73</sup>. Scott Brown has noted, in “The Rise and Fall of Community Architecture”, regarding their study of the South Street in Philadelphia: “One of the reasons they accepted us was that we had a concern in common. Bob Venturi, apart from being an architect, was a fruit merchant. He had inherited his father’s business on South Street.”<sup>74</sup>

## 9.6 The patterns of mapped data as signs of life

Denise Scott Brown first visited Las Vegas in 1965, during a trip to Los Angeles, where she was teaching at Berkeley for a short period. Scott Brown has remarked that their main objective in the case of their study on Las Vegas was to analyze “symbols in space”<sup>75</sup>. In order to conduct their analysis of “symbols in space”, they chose to examine “the shapes, sizes and locations and symbolic content of signs to learn how people in cars would react to [them]”<sup>76</sup>. They decided to focus on Las Vegas because they considered it representative of the new type of urban form related to the intensified use of the car. In other words, for them, Las Vegas was representative of “the emerging automobile city”. In

this sense, Las Vegas was chosen because, in their opinion, it constituted an “archetype” automobile city, to borrow Scott Brown’s own expression. Perceiving Las Vegas as an “archetype” automobile city went hand in hand with believing that investigating closely how drivers react when confronted with “symbols in space” would also help them better understand the automobile vision characterizing other cities that are closely connected to the car such as Los Angeles (Figure 9.10). Regarding his issue, Scott Brown has underscored: “we examined the archetype, but our aim was to understand, from it, the automobile city – to understand the Los Angeles of that time”<sup>77</sup>.

Figure 9.10. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*. First edition, 1972.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Scott Brown has remarked that “[i]n planning school, [she] [...] learned to understand complex urban orders by mapping urban systems and studying their patterns”. She has always considered mapping as an important tool in both architecture, and urbanism. More specifically, she is convinced that “patterns of mapped data [can] help us to discover an order emerging from within – from what appears to be the chaos of the city – and to avoid imposing an artificial order from without”. She understands mapping as a mechanism serving to reveal “what ‘ought to be’ from what ‘is’”<sup>78</sup>. Scott Brown taught the so-called “Form, Forces and Functions Studio” at the University of Pennsyl-

vania. This studio placed particular emphasis on the interactions between urban activity, settlement patterns, topography, and transportation, and on the of activity intensity patterns. It was centered on urban design, and on the economic and social forces characterizing urban design. This studio was a point of departure for developing a systematic planning approach.

Another interesting case is the exhibit panel “Gas Stations” concerning the theme “Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City”, which was among the outcomes of a study conducted between 1974 and 1976 by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and John Rauch and was displayed at Renwick Gallery in Washington D.C. from 26 February through 31 October 1976 (Figure 9.11a and Figure 9.11b). In this exhibit panel, they juxtaposed different typologies of Gas stations. The exhibition also included the exhibit panels “Building as sign” (Figure 9.12a and Figure 9.12b) and “Themes & ideals of the American Suburb” (Figure 9.13, Figure 9.14). In the latter, one can read:

Although the pluralism of American society is reflected in suburbia’s residential symbolism, some ideals and aspirations are almost universal. These are widely expressed in most suburban (and urban) housing, for example, a longing for the rural life or for things “natural” and a nostalgia for an earlier, simpler time. Also, some pressures behind the drive to suburbia, for example, economic forces and developments in household appliances and leisure equipment, bear universally upon suburbanites and are reflected in their houses, as well as in the developers’ advertising and the mass media.<sup>79</sup>



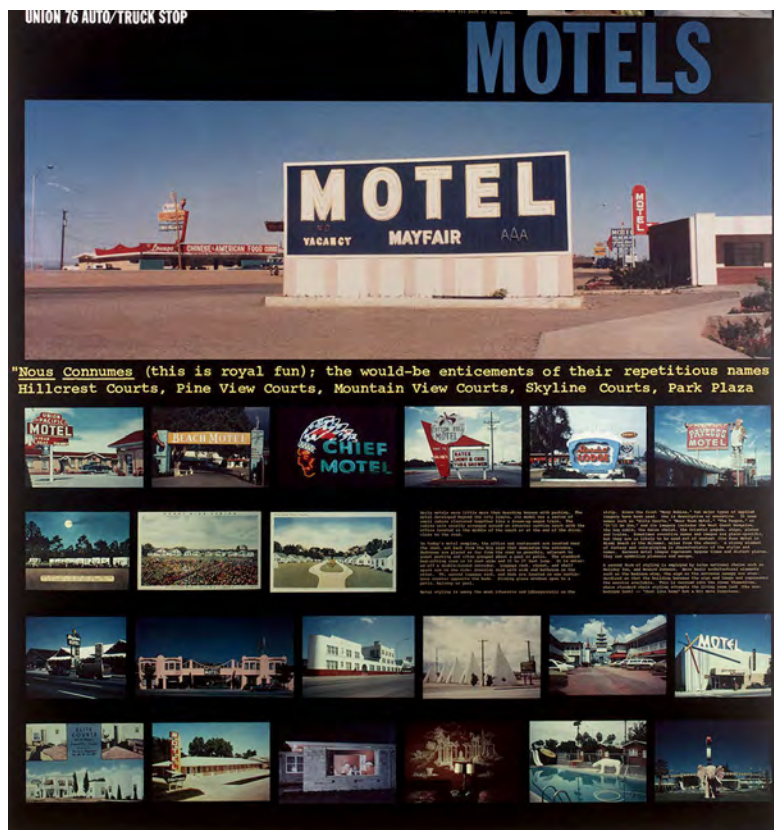
Figure 9.11a. Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, Architects and Planners, *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City* Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C., 1974–1976. Part of Exhibit panel “Gas Stations”.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives,  
University of Pennsylvania



Figure 9.11b. Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, *Architects and Planners, Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City* Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C., 1974–1976. Part of Exhibit panel “Motels”.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Figure 9.12a. Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, Architects and Planners, *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City*. Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C., 1974–1976. Part of Exhibit panel “Building as sign”.



Figure 9.12b. Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, *Architects and Planners, Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City*. Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C., 1974–1976. Part of Exhibit panel “Building as sign”.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Figure 9.13. Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, Architects and Planners, *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City* Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C., 1974–1976. Exhibit panel “Themes & Ideals of the American Suburb”.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania



Figure 9.14. Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, *Architects and Planners, Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City* Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C., 1974–1976. Exhibit panel “Themes & ideals of the American Suburb”.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

## 9.7 Towards a conclusion: Looking sociology from an architectural viewpoint

The intention to shape a new way of conceiving functionalism is present in *Learning from Las Vegas*, where Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour promoted an understanding of “Las Vegas as a Pattern of Activities”, arguing that a “city is a set of intertwined activities that form a pattern on the land”, and that “Las Vegas Strip is not a chaotic sprawl but as set of activities whose pattern [...] depends on the technology of movement and communication and the economic value of land”<sup>80</sup>. Telling is also the question that Scott Brown addresses, in “The Redefinition of Functionalism”: “How ‘functional’ is

it to plan for the first users [...] and not give thought to how it may adapt to generations of users in the unforeseeable future?”<sup>81</sup>.

Scott Brown's fascination with Gans's “new objectivity” goes hand in hand with her interest in the so-called non-judgmental perspective. Regarding this, she has noted: “But we don't say we don't judge. We say we defer judgement. In deferring it, we let more data into the judgement, we make the judgement more sensitive.”<sup>82</sup> This process of deferring judgement is related to Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour's strategies of combining social and aesthetic parameters while choosing to focus on certain aspects of Las Vegas Strip. Scott Brown's following remark is enlightening concerning this: “Why do we accept certain aspects of the strip and not other aspects? The basis of that judgment is partly social, partly aesthetic.”<sup>83</sup>

Denise Scott Brown's way of looking at architectural and urban forms was informed by both urban sociology and pop art. That explains why she believed that being in the middle can help you to learn from both. Her intention to reconcile these two perspectives – that informed by sociology and that informed by pop art – made her develop a critique not only vis-à-vis “the architects who say there's nothing we can learn from the sociologist”, but also vis-à-vis “the sociologists [arguing] that [...] architects [should] [...] extend [their] [...] conceptual framework”<sup>84</sup> in order to be able to grasp the specificities of urban sociology. Scott Brown has noted concerning the ways in which architects' tool are useful for reshaping sociologist' perspective: “I say we will have to extend their framework as well, since they have neither the tools nor the outlook to take it into our field themselves”<sup>85</sup>.

To better grasp Scott Brown's conception of “active socioplastics”, it would be useful to relate it to how Alison and Peter Smithson understood this concept given that she relates it to their design strategies<sup>86</sup>. For the Smithsons, “active socioplastics” referred to “the relationship between the built form and social practice”<sup>87</sup>. They drew upon Michael Young and Peter Willmott's anthropological perspective when they coined the term<sup>88</sup>. In 1953, Young founded the Institute of Community Studies in 1953. Scott Brown remarks, in “Towards an ‘Active Socioplastics’” regarding Alison and Peter Smithson's interpretation of “active socioplastics”:

They used the term socioplastics to suggest tying together the social and the physical, creating physical containers for the social at different scales. The term active referred to the life of people on the streets and

discovering means of learning about it – achieving vitality and allowing for change.<sup>89</sup>

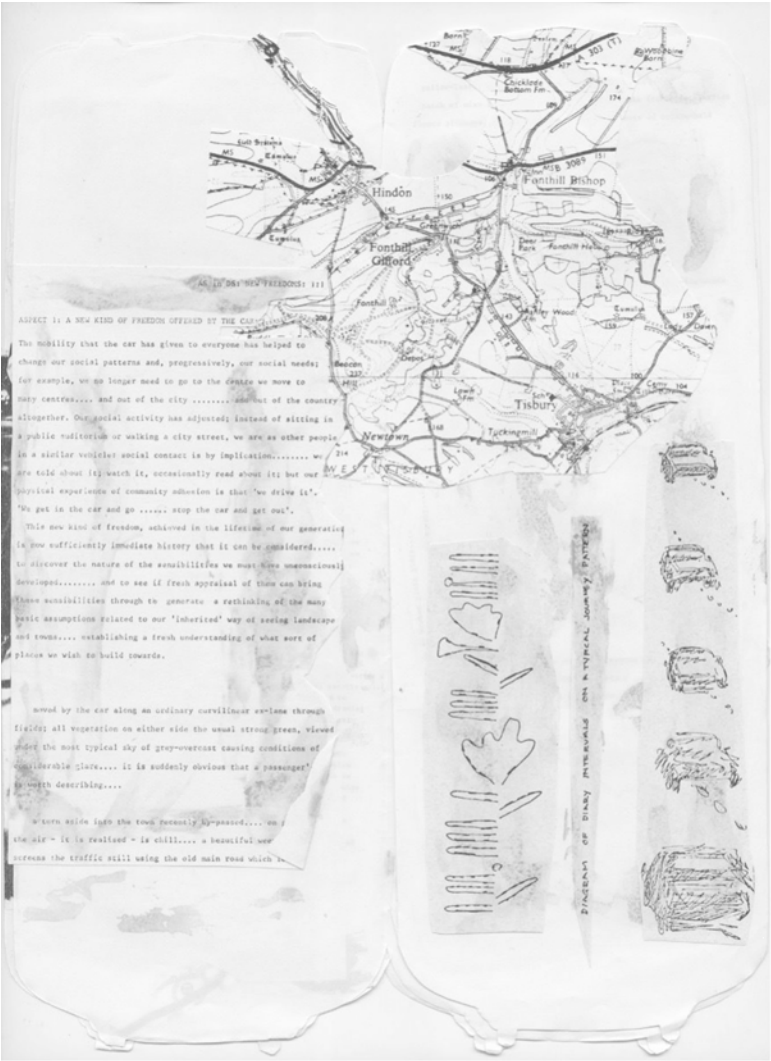
The concept of “active socioplastics” could also be related to the concepts of “as found” and “sensibility of place” in Alison and Peter Smithson’s thought. According to Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schreggenberger, the concept of the “[a]s found [refers to] [...] the tendency to engage with what is there, to recognize the existing, to follow its traces with interest”<sup>90</sup>. An aspect of the “as found” that could be related to Scott Brown’s view of urban reality its association with the “directness, immediacy, rawness, and material presence”, and its “concern with the here and now”<sup>91</sup>.

We could relate “[t]he interest of the Smithsons in the new social patterns and social needs that emerge thanks to the intensified presence of the car in quotidian life [...] to their understanding of the concept of sensibility” of place<sup>92</sup>. Alison Smithson related the “as found” to “the new sensibility resulting from the moving view of landscape”<sup>93</sup>.

The shared interest of Alison and Peter Smithson and Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in the view from the car and in how automobile vision affects how urban and suburban landscapes are perceived, and their concern about how automobile vision pushes architects and urban planners to invent new visual tools to represent the perception of urban, and their design ideas should be interpreted in relation to the attention they paid to “active socioplastics”, the “as found”, “sensibility of place”, and to the articulation between the social patterns of inhabitants and their material expression in the urban and suburban fabric<sup>94</sup> (Figure 9.15, Figure 9.16, Figure 9.17, Figure 9.18, Figure 9.19).

Scott Brown uses the expression “socioplastic praxis” to refer to the strategy of aligning “analysis and synthesis by mapping the patterns of relevant systems, [and] [...] abstracting key variables and overlaying them to create further patterns”<sup>95</sup>. Her belief that through an attentive analysis of the existing patterns one can shape effective methods for creating, through architectural design and urban planning, patterns that take into account the social and cultural aspects of communities has certain affinities with Herbert Gans’s perspective, which paid special attention to popular culture, everyday landscape, and existing social patterns. Gans’s teaching helped Scott Brown refine her understanding of functionalism in architecture and urban planning, and challenge the modernist conception of functionalism.

Figure 9.15. Mock-up of double page spread for AS in DS: *An Eye on the Road* (Smithson 1983; 2001). Artwork by Alison Smithson, 1982.



Credits: Smithson Family Collection



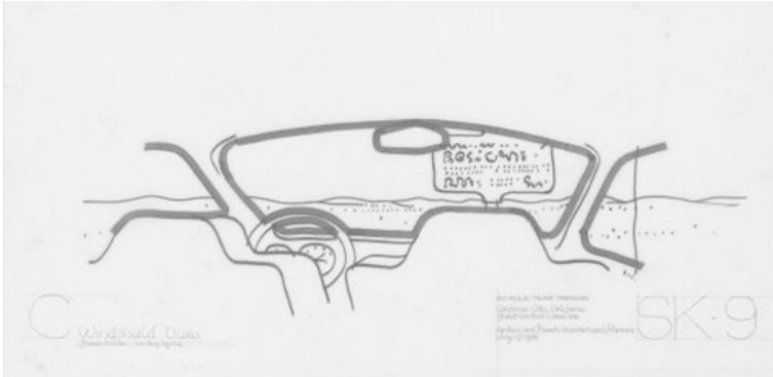
Figure 9.16. Page from photo album, 1973–1976. Top left: Picnic at Scaceber, Autumn 1973. Middle panorama, Six Mile, January/February 1974. Bottom: trees.



Photographs by Alison and Peter Smithson. Credits: Smithson Family Collection

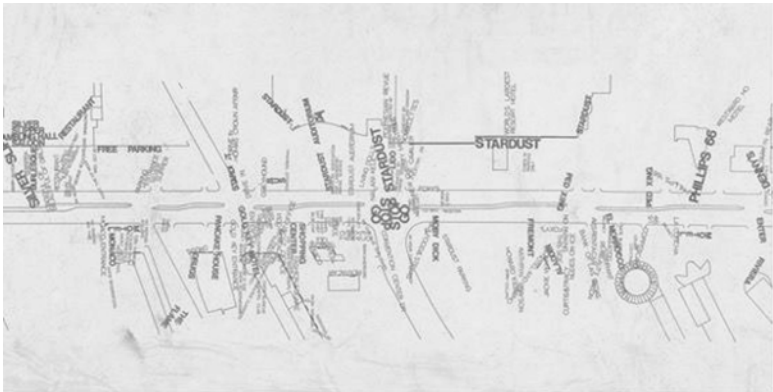
Characteristically, Scott Brown has underscored: “Gans rocked our ideas of functionalism”<sup>96</sup>. Among the main references of Gans concerning his critique of functionalism was the work of American sociologist Robert K. Merton<sup>97</sup>. At the core of Merton’s approach was the critique of the assumptions on which functionalism in anthropology was based<sup>98</sup>. Scott-Brown’s intention to challenge the conventional understanding of modernist functionalism should be interpreted in relation to her endeavor to address architecture and urban planning adopting an inter-disciplinary perspective based on the exchanges between anthropology, urban sociology, architecture and planning.

Figure 9.17. Robert Venturi, John Rauch and Denise Scott Brown, *Architects and Planners. California City General Plan California City, California 1970–1971*, not implemented. SK-9, 20 Mule Team Parkway, Windshield View Design sketch by Robert Venturi, 17 July 1970. Marker on paper.



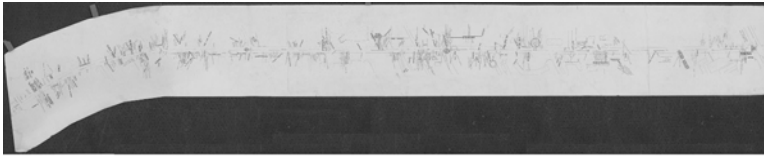
Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives

Figure 9.18. Detail from Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour *Learning from Las Vegas Studio*, Fall 1968. Word map, Las Vegas Strip, 1968.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Figure 9.19. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour *Learning from Las Vegas Studio*, Fall 1968. *Word map, Las Vegas Strip* 1968.



Credits: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

## Notes

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