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“I Will Try My Best to Make It Worth It”

Robert Venturi’s Road to Rome

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Robert Venturi’s Rome Prize fellowship (1954–56) is a familiar, pivotal episode in his early career. But why did he want to go to the American Academy in the early 1950s? Venturi approached his fellowship with rare determination at a time when modernism made the Rome Prize’s architectural relevance unclear. What made him certain this opportunity would be the key to his success, and how did this influence the book he published a decade later? As *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* marks its fiftieth anniversary, clarifying why Venturi valued the Rome Prize further illuminates his views on history, context, and meaningful design.

For the first time, I feel confident now that I am ready to *design & build* a building—and oh, that is a satisfying feeling—and exciting.¹

When the thirty-one-year-old Robert Venturi wrote that sentence in July 1956, he had earned two architecture degrees from Princeton University and worked for four different architects, including Eero Saarinen. Yet this declaration comes from his final letter home from the American Academy in Rome. He was convinced that his fellowship had given him something crucial for his career. More than his education or internships, the Rome Prize experience made Venturi believe—“for the first time”—that he was a full-fledged architect.

This episode from Venturi’s creative biography is familiar, in part because he faithfully fulfilled a promise made to architect James

Kellum Smith, president of both the Academy and McKim, Mead and White. After returning from Rome, Venturi wrote Smith a letter of thanks, declaring,

I consider my associations [at the Academy] and my travels and discoveries made possible by the fellowship, the richest experiences of my life; if I shall be able to make any contribution in architecture, I shall credit an essential share of it to my experience in Italy at the Academy.²

Venturi insisted that the Rome Prize helped shape his work when he received the Pritzker Prize in 1991 and at the Academy’s centennial in 1994, among other occasions.³ His acknowledgments have inspired many investigations of its impact, reinforcing its prominence.⁴

Venturi’s immense gratitude for his fellowship was proportional to the determination he demonstrated in obtaining it. He won the Rome Prize on his third consecutive attempt: Venturi applied to the Academy in 1952, 1953, and 1954, the year he finally succeeded.⁵ Moreover, it required further persistence to enjoy his award because it coincided with a family crisis. Venturi left Saarinen’s office and returned to Philadelphia in 1953, when his seventy-two-year-old father became ill. An only child, he came to support his mother, a “semi-invalid,” and run the family produce business (a responsibility he carried on top of design practice until 1973) while working in architecture part-time.⁶

These demands delayed Venturi’s arrival at the Academy by a month, to late October 1954, and also brought him back from Rome twice. His first trip home was in December 1954–January 1955.⁷ In July 1955 he returned to Philadelphia again for five months, until December 30, 1955.⁸ Venturi’s “two-year” Academy fellowship, which ended in July 1956, thus actually consisted of three shorter periods: one lasting under two months, then two separate seven-month stays.⁹ In his extensive correspondence home during his fellowship, Venturi dutifully monitors his parents’ well-being, advises them on practical matters, and shares his experiences in vivid detail (Figure 1).¹⁰ Upon his return to Rome after the five-month interruption, he also insists that the sacrifice will be worthwhile:

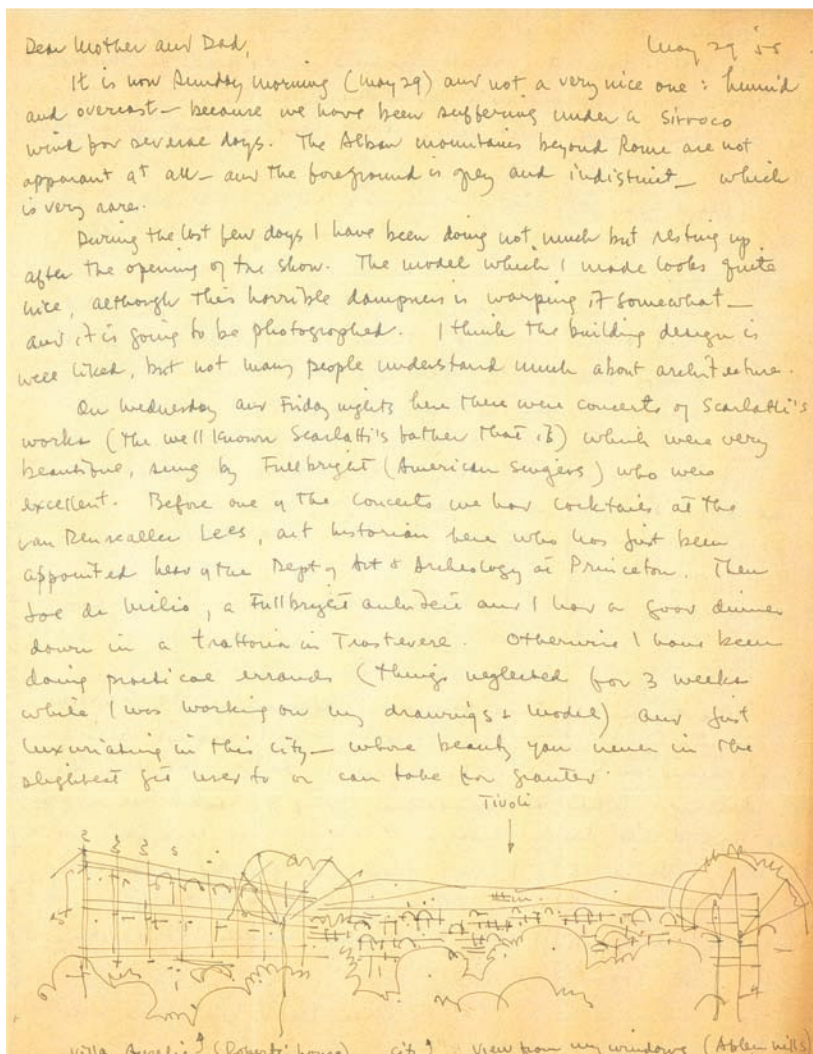


Figure 1. Robert Venturi, letter with drawing of the view from his studio at the American Academy in Rome, May 29, 1955. (Courtesy of the Venturi Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Reproduced with permission.)



Figure 2. McKim, Mead and White, Main Building, American Academy in Rome, 1911–14. (Courtesy of the American Academy in Rome Photographic Archive. Reproduced with permission.)

Venice became increasingly engaged with the international discipline during the 1950s, but Rome's image remained comparatively conservative. In particular, its national academies represented the discipline's reactionary wing in reputation, if not always in reality.¹⁴

After World War II the American Academy, founded in 1894 to buttress the US Beaux-Arts establishment, redefined itself for a changed era (Figure 2). Under a new director, Laurance Roberts (1946–59), the institution became more open: work requirements and stylistic limits ended, and the community finally welcomed women artists, nonwhite, and Jewish members. The postwar Academy made an especially decisive turn toward modern architecture, formerly considered an adversary. After reopening in 1947, Rome Prizes in architecture were consistently awarded to graduates of modernist design programs, predominantly Harvard University's Graduate School of Design (GSD), Yale University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The Academy's new program of artist residencies was also designed to bring a senior American architect for a short stay each year. Among the first architects chosen were noted

I do hope with all my heart that my experiences and my work will be really valuable and rich and rewarding, and will make the cost of my being here—in difficulties for you, and uneasiness for me and certain risk involving the business—worth it. I will try my best to make it worth it.¹¹

This and similar statements elsewhere (“I am having a wonderful and valuable time. I am very sure of this”) convey a resolution—a vow, even—to ensure his fellowship would pay off.¹² Venturi's a priori conviction that the Rome Prize would define his career makes his later invocations of the Academy's importance seem like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Rome Prize is such a cornerstone of Venturi's biography that it has acquired an aura of inevitability. But his tenacious pursuit of a fellowship was strange for an architect in the early 1950s.¹³ Italy was peripheral, not central, to America's postwar discipline. New York, Chicago, and Boston were its new epicenters, where modernist architecture was built and promoted by transplanted European prophets such as Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and American adherents such as Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM). In contrast, Rome appeared irrelevant to architects' immediate interests. Northern Italian architects in Milan and

modernists George Howe (1948–49), Louis Kahn (1950–51), and Pietro Belluschi (1953–54).¹⁵ Their presence helped demonstrate that, despite its heritage, the Academy was aligned with the contemporary discipline.

While these changes preserved the Academy from architectural irrelevance and ensured a supply of well-credentialed fellows, its reputation during the 1950s hardly justified Venturi's persistent Rome Prize quest. Howe, Kahn, and Belluschi were major figures, but they were not Academy residents at the height of their careers.¹⁶ Other resident architects during that decade had more limited reputations, and for three years (1954–57) there was no architect in residence, a gap that overlapped with Venturi's 1954–56 fellowship.¹⁷ During this period the director worked to bring luminaries Eero Saarinen and Lewis Mumford as residents but failed.¹⁸ Despite its postwar revival and modernist reorientation, when Venturi applied to the Academy it was a marginal destination for American architects. There was no obvious reason to believe a Rome Prize would translate into postwar architectural success. So what convinced Venturi that it was crucial for his career?

Unusual or Typical?

After World War II, the Academy required architecture applicants to describe their reasons for wanting to go to Rome, so Venturi's three application statements outline his motivations.¹⁹ A consistent theme is the relationship between history and contemporary design. In 1954, Venturi begins his third statement by declaring that "a progressive architect must be conscious of his tradition," because just as "new buildings cannot have their complete meaning alone, they cannot be created without relation to old ones, to their particular context in time as well as place." He then cites T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" of 1919,

which asserts that a "historical sense" is "nearly indispensable" in mature creative work. Eliot defines this sense as:

a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.²⁰

Venturi then insists that unlike a writer, an architect's creative tradition must be internalized physically. He claimed that "a significant part" of the tradition relevant to American architects, especially prior to the nineteenth century, had to be learned "through the experience of living and working in an everyday context against the background of European architecture."²¹ For architects to acquire Eliot's prerequisite for meaningful work—that is, to feel the "whole of architecture's literature" from antiquity to the present "in their bones"—requires more than photographs, texts, or tourism. Full ownership of their discipline's heritage, Venturi argued, requires architects to absorb history through direct, extended exposure, so that it can permeate their consciousness as if by osmosis. Given the uniquely deep spectrum of (Western) architectural history available in Rome, this city was an ideal base for such a project.

History had been de-emphasized in many postwar architecture programs, following its prominent demotion under Joseph Hudnut and Walter Gropius at Harvard's GSD.²² Venturi's interest in the subject is often considered unusual and attributed to his education at Princeton, where he earned a bachelor of arts in 1947 and a master of fine arts in

architecture in 1950. In 1949, visiting critic Antonin Raymond remarked on Princeton master's students' historic awareness:

I believe that this was about the best work I have seen at any institution and what struck me most was the high intellectual and cultural level of the candidates. Your delving into the past to rejuvenate the age long principles of good design is particularly important, and distinguishes your school from perhaps all others.²³

Raymond's observations confirm that the school nurtured historic interests and humanities training for architecture students to an exceptional extent. Studies of Princeton's program emphasize its unusually supportive stance toward history during the postwar era.²⁴ Jean Labatut, the Beaux-Arts-trained architect who dominated the program from 1928 to 1967, maintained a cooperative relationship between architecture and art history faculty. But Princeton used history to support modernist design instruction during this period. Venturi's use of "tradition" as a preferred substitute for "history" echoes the language of Gropius and Sigfried Giedion, whose *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* of 1941 was architecture's most widely read history text through the 1970s.²⁵ For Giedion and Gropius, "history" indicated an invalid Beaux-Arts, pattern-book approach. In contrast, "tradition" was vital and relevant; instead of static design templates, it conveyed continuity between a period's architecture and culture and demonstrated how successful buildings fulfill contemporary needs.

Venturi's interest in history was well informed, but not that unusual; over half of postwar Rome Prize architects invoked history in their applications.²⁶ Some proposed to study how past monuments demonstrated abstract formal principles, including scale,

proportion, geometry, and space. Others, like Venturi, saw familiarity with Italy's heritage as essential to an architect's creative development, or as a catalog of instructive case studies. Several mentioned specific historic periods, but few identified particular architects or works to investigate; generalizations about "the past" or "tradition" were more common. This variety and imprecision were indicative of the void left when the Academy abandoned Beaux-Arts ideology.²⁷ Each architect had to formulate a rationale for Rome's contemporary relevance in isolation; vague responses about which history mattered, and how, reflected this challenge.

Venturi anchors his interest in history in relation to another theme: urbanism. His 1954 statement asserts that:

[Rome's] Baroque piazzas reveal a sensibility in the relationship of buildings which we have a chance of paralleling, perhaps for the first time since the 18th century, now that our architecture of the individual building is beginning to develop a consistent vocabulary. This constant, dependable refinement of Rome's outdoor spaces resulting from a recognition of both continuity and contrast in its development, its easy monumentality, its pedestrian scale, its planning which stimulates a sense of community, are all uncommon elements in the 19th and 20th century city known to an American architect, which I would like to become familiar with.²⁸

That Venturi intended to use his fellowship to study the city, particularly Baroque urbanism, shows the influence of *Space, Time and Architecture*, one of his chief guides to Rome.²⁹ Giedion presented seventeenth- and eighteenth-century planning and space as a precursor to the dynamism of modern cities and modernist design. Giedion espoused the functionalist urban principles of the Congrès Internationaux

d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), however, while Venturi's statement critiqued them. He wanted to study the "rich urban life of typical European cities" because it offered an antidote to the sterile diagrammatic planning that failed to produce cities "in the full sense, to provide the rich experience of civic living."³⁰

Departure from the modernist urbanism codified in the Athens Charter is consistent with Venturi's early interest in Camillo Sitte and alignment with the Townscape movement, which promoted picturesque, organic urbanism and aesthetics.³¹ In 1953, he published his first article, "The Campidoglio: A Case Study," in the "Townscape" section of the *Architectural Review*, the movement's principal forum.³² The brief essay is an excerpt from Venturi's MFA thesis, entitled "Context in Architectural Composition," and discusses how changes in the Campidoglio's surroundings altered its significance (Figure 3).³³ His thesis and article both apply Townscape's mode of empirical urban analysis, which emphasized pedestrian experience. But urbanism, Townscape, and the baroque were also common interests for the Academy's other postwar architects.³⁴ Aside from his mentions of Mannerism (unique for this period's Rome fellows), the topics Venturi mentions were consistent with those discussed by his peers, and with contemporary architectural discourse.³⁵

One thing that is unusual about Venturi's statement is the conviction he expresses. In all three applications he declares, "I apply for no alternate scholarship"; the Rome Prize was not one of many equivalent options. Venturi sought the precise "opportunities [which the Academy] affords of living and working specifically in Rome, in association with artists and scholars in other fields," which represent "the kind of experience I think I need now in the development of my career as an active architect." While interests in the pedestrian city, piazzas, and Baroque space

were common, no other architect expressed anything approaching Venturi's faith in the Rome Prize's intrinsic value.

His essay also synthesizes many typical themes into an unusually cogent argument for how an extended stay in Rome benefits an American architect. Most other applications present one or two ideas, sometimes briefly or naively. In contrast, Venturi's lengthy statement, refined and expanded after his 1952 and 1953 submissions, presents issues he had meditated upon since graduate school. Its focus on "experience," for instance, echoes a passage in his thesis about the impact of visiting buildings formerly known only through graphics and photographs. Venturi described how the chance to "relate the individual building and the setting, to perceive it in a perceptual whole" enhances our understanding of architecture.³⁶

Contextual perception connects Townscape, Venturi's application, article, and thesis. The latter also mentions another point that distinguishes Venturi from most other fellows: he had already been to Rome. In 1948, during his first solo European tour, he "fell in love" with the city and experienced the difference between knowing works through images (usually black-and-white; he marvels how Rome is "a deep orange") and encountering them in person.³⁷ Venturi visited Italy a second time with his parents in 1952, after his first Academy application was rejected. Having already seen the sights made the theme of "familiarity" and "living and working" in Europe more necessary. He argued that authentic knowledge of Rome's built heritage demands direct exposure over time, so that works become a framework for ordinary life instead of inert objects of detached contemplation.

And yet the American Academy was not an obvious place to obtain this sort of immersive experience. Like the French and Spanish Academies, it is a foreign enclave overlooking the city from behind

a wall. The residential experience Venturi described was more easily gained by living in a *centro storico* apartment, attending an Italian university, or working in a local architect's office. He could have supported an extended stay through the newly minted Fulbright program or other traveling fellowships.³⁸ But instead he insisted on absorbing Rome from the Academy as a fellow. The inconsistency between Venturi's stated ends and his chosen means suggests other reasons for pursuing the Rome Prize.

Circles of Influence

Something else that set Venturi apart from other fellows was his affiliation with an unusual number of architects connected to the postwar Academy. Labatut, his Princeton professor, was resident architect in 1952–53.³⁹ Eero Saarinen, Venturi's employer from 1951 to 1953, visited the Academy in the fall of 1951 and shared materials from his trip that inspired Venturi.⁴⁰ Spero Daltas, a colleague at Saarinen's office, was also a Rome Prize fellow in 1949–51. Daltas, who established a firm in Rome in the 1950s and became an Academy Trustee from 1968 to 1992, undoubtedly provided enthusiastic reports.⁴¹ Labatut, Saarinen, and Daltas all wrote letters supporting Venturi's applications and might have collectively motivated his first attempt in 1952.⁴²

Venturi has claimed, however, that he first resolved to go the Academy much earlier: in 1948, the year of his first visit to Italy.⁴³ But evidence of the Academy's architectural value was scarce then: it had just resumed operations after its wartime closure in 1947, and the recasting of its Beaux-Arts identity was barely under way. So few architects applied for the first postwar Rome Prize in 1947 that the jury was postponed.⁴⁴ That year, however, Venturi also met two other architects involved with the Academy, whose later careers would suggest it correlated directly with professional success.

The first was George Howe, the Academy's first architect in residence.⁴⁵ During the summer of 1947, Venturi worked for Philadelphia architect Robert Montgomery Brown, Howe's close associate and eventual partner.⁴⁶ At that time, Howe was director of the much-publicized Jefferson National Expansion Memorial competition in St. Louis and was also scheduling his upcoming stay in Rome.⁴⁷ That summer Venturi probably met Howe, whose involvement with the Academy set a compelling example, and another Philadelphia architect linked to the Academy: Louis Kahn. Kahn, Howe's former partner, and Brown had offices in the same building.⁴⁸ Kahn had been corresponding with the Academy since April 1947, when he applied for the Rome Prize.⁴⁹ Although declared ineligible for a fellowship, Kahn was invited to succeed Howe as a resident.⁵⁰ Thus, the year before Venturi's first trip to Europe, he met two architects anticipating imminent Academy stays. In February 1950, when Venturi presented his master's thesis at Princeton, the jury included Howe and Kahn, by then colleagues at Yale. Howe had just returned from Rome, and Kahn would depart for his residency later that year. Given that Venturi's thesis discussed many Roman examples and described the impact of his 1948 trip, Howe and Kahn surely encouraged him to apply for an Academy fellowship on this occasion (if not earlier).⁵¹

In addition, Venturi likely observed that both architects enjoyed an apparent postresidency professional boost. Howe became chair of architecture at Yale immediately after returning from the Academy. Kahn received the commission for the Yale University Art Gallery expansion (1951–53), which inaugurated the most productive phase of his late-blooming practice, while a resident.⁵² For Venturi, Kahn's case would have had an especially strong impact. He drafted his winning

application statement of 1954 while working part-time as Kahn's teaching assistant at the University of Pennsylvania and in his office, the architecture positions he took after returning to Philadelphia in 1953.

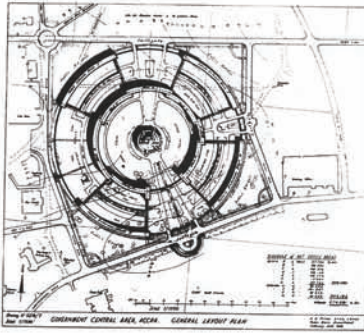
During the 1950s Venturi had profound respect, almost veneration, for Kahn, who was supportive in return.⁵³ Kahn wrote letters of recommendation for Venturi's first Rome Prize application in 1952, when he was a jury member, and again in 1954, after encouraging Venturi to try again after his second rejection in 1953.⁵⁴ Even more than his letters, Kahn's example probably kept Venturi focused on the Academy. Given the mythic status Kahn's residency has acquired, this seems natural. His stay, and especially his encounters with antiquity, are credited with inspiring his shift to an architecture of solid forms and discrete volumes at the Yale Art Gallery and at the Jewish Community Center for Trenton, New Jersey (1955–57), the project where he "discovered himself."⁵⁵

Kahn's work began to evoke ancient ruins' phenomenal power during the 1950s, but this evolution took place while Venturi was in Rome. From 1952 to 1954, when Venturi sought the Rome Prize, Kahn's projects only prefigured the design qualities that cemented his legacy. Venturi's earliest projects of the late 1950s reveal an obvious debt to Kahn's work, but their approaches would diverge by the 1960s. By then, Kahn's massive, ponderous, tectonic monuments contrasted with Venturi's intricately visual planarity—a Doric temple to his Italian façade, as Vincent Scully observed.⁵⁶ Kahn's inspirational power for the young Venturi, however, perhaps owed as much to his persona as his architecture. Along with Kahn's legendary magnetism, single-mindedness, and vision was a personal story with elements echoing Venturi's own: an ethnic "outsider" in exclusive Philadelphia who succeeded through stubborn effort and committed,

WORLD

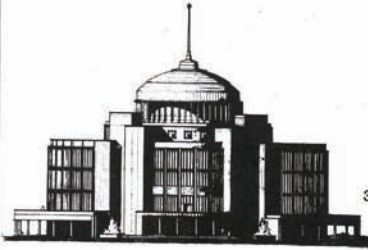
GOVERNMENT CENTRE AT ACCRA, GOLD COAST

The impression that official architectural taste in West Africa has taken a dramatic turn for the better needs to be tempered by a consideration of buildings such as the New Government Centre at Accra, 1, which shows that the change of heart is by no means complete. Designed by A. G. Paton for the Gold Coast Public Works Department, it hardly measures up to the



problem of creating a building capable of symbolizing the New Order in the Commonwealth. Aridly geometrical planning, 2, which recalls the barren avenues of New Delhi, is mated with Edwardian concepts of monumentality which do not accord very well with crudely exposed lift-shafts, brise-soleils, and other features of mid-century commercial building in the tropics, 3.

Provision for air conditioning etc. appears to be excellent so that failure to take advantage of natural methods of sun-control, such as proper orientation, impossible in this scheme, is of little con-



sequence, but the highly axial planning seems to invite aesthetic disaster if the peripheral extensions have to be built separately, rather than all at once. Had a more liberal and asymmetrical type of planning, like that of Le Corbusier's scheme for Chandigarh, been adopted, piecemeal expansion would have been possible without visual disorder.

P.R.B.

INDOOR PLANTS

Elettaria Cardamomum (Zingiberaceae)

This evergreen perennial has only recently been reintroduced into this country as a room plant. It is a native of India, but it was, and perhaps still is, cultivated in Jamaica and the East Indies as an economic plant. It is the true cardamom plant, its seed capsules yielding a spice which is extensively used in Scandinavian countries in cakes. Cardamom is only obtainable here from a few of the more expensive grocers.

Although it was first introduced into this country in 1811 under the name of *Alpinia Cardamomum*, probably as a curiosity to be cultivated as a hotbed exotic, it must have lost favour fairly rapidly since information about its culture

is now difficult to obtain. Experience of the year-old potted specimens now with suppliers show it to be fairly tough and hardy if used only as a foliage plant. Stove heat is probably essential for its cultivation if flowers and seed are required.

Its foliage is handsome though not particularly distinguished. The leaves if rubbed will leave a fairly strong scent of



cinnamon on the fingers. It requires a shady position, moist soil, a rather rich mixture of peaty sand would be suitable, and it can be propagated from root divisions.

H. F. Clark

TOWNSCAPE

THE CAMPIDOGGIO: A CASE STUDY

The architect has a responsibility toward the landscape, which he can subtly enhance or impair, for we see in perceptual wholes and the introduction of any new building will change the character of all the other elements in a scene. The Campidoglio in Rome has been injured through ignorance of this principle. A study of maps and drawings of its changing setting shows a group of buildings in themselves not significantly altered, but nevertheless revealing variations in expression and quality.

Michelangelo's design of the Campidoglio itself can be considered as an enhanced setting for the senatorial palace which was in existence in the mid sixteenth century, 1 and 2. This he modified almost negligibly by the application of the pilasters, entablature, and window architraves. It was by means of the flanking

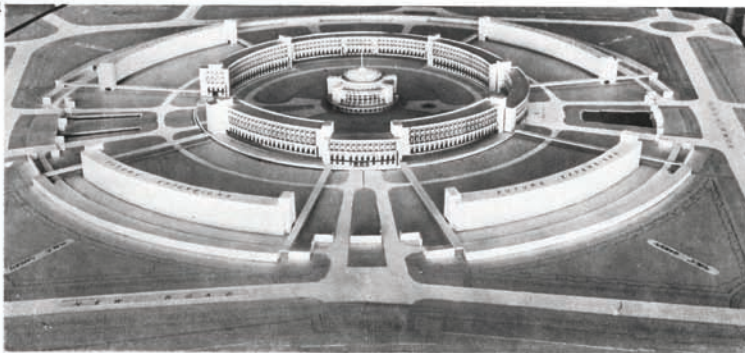


Figure 3a. Robert Venturi, "The Campidoglio: A Case Study," *Architectural Review* 113, no. 32 (May 1953): 333. (Reproduced with permission).



Figure 3b. Robert Venturi, "The Campidoglio: A Case Study," *Architectural Review* 113, no. 32 (May 1953): 334. (Reproduced with permission).

ambitious work. That Rome and the Academy buttressed Kahn's standing was surely obvious as Venturi worked alongside him in his office and at Penn.

While Kahn's designs manifested his developing ideas only gradually, he expressed enthusiasm for his Academy experience right away; Rome immediately reoriented his thinking.⁵⁷ His excitement also inspired those around him. Roberts described the immediate impact of Kahn's residency on his travel companions:

when I returned here early in March I had never seen before such an excited and interested group of architects as those whom you took to Egypt and Greece. ... You gave the Academy just the right shot in the arm and gave the architects the most exciting winter that any group has had here since I've been in Rome.⁵⁸

Daltas had accompanied Kahn on that trip, a conduit for that infectious energy as he and Venturi worked together in Saarinen's office (Figure 4).

Venturi was conscious of Kahn's example throughout his fellowship. One of his first extended trips was a *voyage à l'orient* that retraced Kahn's route.⁵⁹ Venturi also hoped Kahn

would return to the Academy during his stay. In early 1956, when the architecture resident for his second year was still under discussion, Venturi wrote his parents that "it might be Eero Saarinen or Lou Kahn. I am (discreetly) rooting for the latter."⁶⁰ He was disappointed to learn that Kahn would not be coming: "A few travels with you in Italy would have made for the most exciting experiences and later, the most treasured memories I can think of."⁶¹ In 1956 Saarinen's fame was greater than Kahn's, but this was irrelevant to Venturi. While in Rome, he received job offers from several architects, including Marcel Breuer, but instead asked Kahn whether he could work for him again, which he did for seven months.⁶² During his fellowship, Venturi even offered to send Kahn money to help his practice during a financial crisis.⁶³

Kahn occupied a special place in Venturi's consciousness, but his application also mentions an article he planned to publish about how the Mediterranean inspired another modern architect: Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1955, he submitted this article, "Hillbrows and Hilltowns," to the *Architectural Review* and *Casabella* from the Academy (without success).⁶⁴ Heavily indebted to Townscape, it argues

that Wright's Tuscan residency of 1910–11 profoundly changed his approach to relating architecture and landscape.⁶⁵ Venturi's essay also cites another mentor who offered a valuable perspective on how the Rome Prize could propel an architect's career: Donald Drew Egbert, Princeton professor of architectural and art history.⁶⁶

Venturi has often credited Egbert's influence on his thinking, especially the four times he attended Egbert's history of modern architecture course.⁶⁷ This class discussed the influence of the École des Beaux-Arts, whose history Egbert had researched since the 1930s.⁶⁸ While Beaux-Arts architects still dominated the U.S. discipline at midcentury, Egbert's knowledge was distinct; he was among the first to study the system with an art historian's scholarly perspective. Also rare was his "inclusive" modernist history, which emphasized the social and political contexts in which design ideas develop, in contrast to the more "doctrinaire" approach of partisan-historians like Giedion, also a CIAM president. Egbert understood the Beaux-Arts as more than modernism's foil and could help Venturi grasp how the Rome Prize had defined a pinnacle of achievement over modern architecture's *longue durée*.

Context, Complexity and Contradiction, and Confidence

Once at the Academy, Venturi used his Rome Prize to design new studios in the Academy's garden, contributing drawings and a model to its annual exhibition in 1955.⁶⁹ He visited counterparts at the French Academy and British School, attended lectures by Italian architects organized for the Fulbright Commission by Bruno Zevi, and met

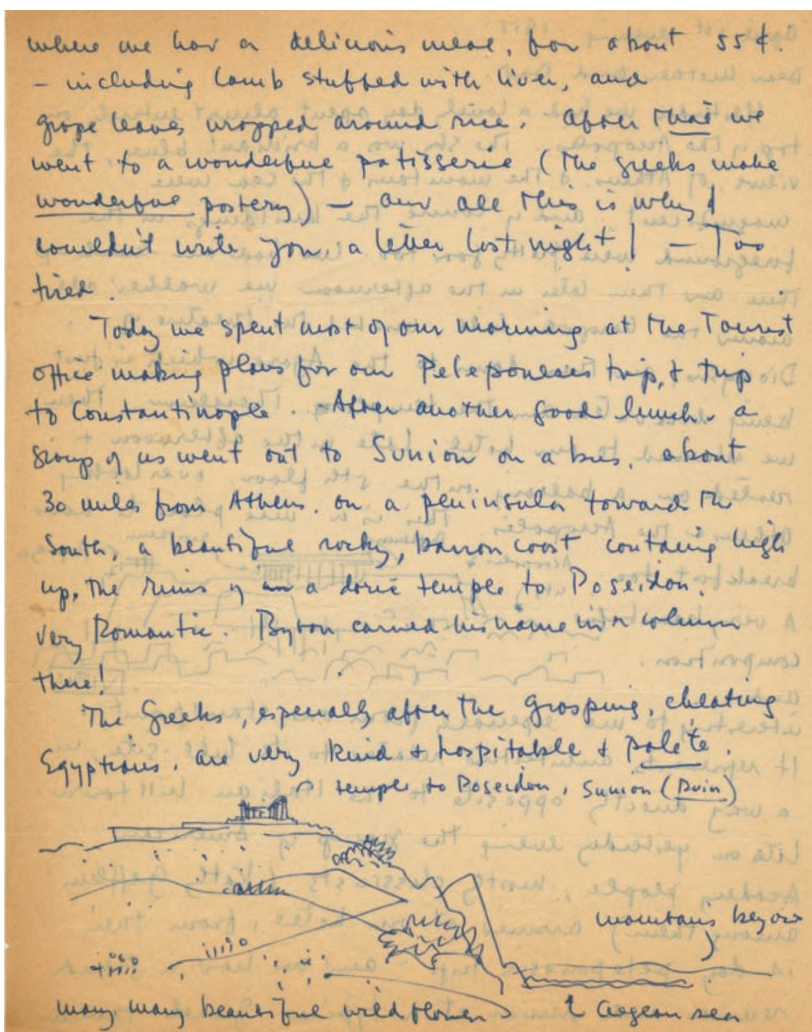
Figure 4. Louis Kahn and American Academy fellows in Delphi, Greece (left to right: Joseph and Dorothy Amisano, Spero Daltas, Louis Kahn, and Fritz Sippel), February 1951. (Courtesy of the George B. Patton Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Reproduced with permission.)





Figure 5. Left: Robert Venturi, photograph of Piazza San Marco, Venice, 1956. (Courtesy of the Venturi Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Reproduced with permission.)

Figure 6. Below: Letter to parents with sketch of Temple at Sounion, Greece, April 1, 1955. (Courtesy of the Venturi Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Reproduced with permission.)



Pierluigi Nervi, Enrico Peressutti, and Enrico Morandi at Academy events. But mostly he traveled, spending nearly half of his time on extended trips, plus numerous visits in and around Rome.⁷⁰ Venturi took photographs but drew little, apart from marginal sketches in letters to his parents (Figures 5 and 6). A car (a black Volkswagen Beetle, according to architecture fellow Charles Brickbauer) gave Venturi added mobility, but otherwise his activities were typical of postwar Academy architects.⁷¹ Yet soon after his late arrival the director singled him out, calling him “just the right architect to have sent here.”⁷²

The clearest validation of Roberts's opinion was the 1966 publication of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, which secured Venturi's international reputation as a major practitioner and critic. Scully's introduction to the book declared it was “probably the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture* of 1923,” insisting in 1977 that “time has shown that this outrageous statement was nothing more than the unvarnished truth.”⁷³ Setting aside Scully's most extreme assertions (e.g., “the future will value it among the few basic texts of our time”), *Complexity and Contradiction*, now fifty years old, was unquestionably pivotal for late twentieth-century architecture. The flood of commentary, critique, and analysis that its publication inspired continues apace.⁷⁴ The book is often tied to Venturi's Rome Prize; Martino Stierli called it an “intellectual digest” that offers a “delayed collection of images, thoughts and itineraries generated by” his Academy stay and early travels and identified germs of later themes in those experiences.⁷⁵ Anthony Vidler claimed that Venturi's book completed “the work that he had begun in 1954 in Rome.”⁷⁶ Vidler does not describe Venturi's “work,” however, or explain how *Complexity and Contradiction* completed it.

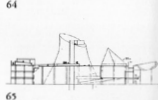
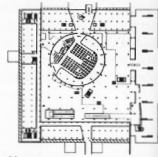
On this point, the book's

tion and qualification. On the other hand, contradiction juxtaposed is unbending. It contains violent contrasts and uncompromising oppositions. Contradiction adapted ends in a whole which is perhaps impure. Contradiction juxtaposed ends in a whole which is perhaps unresolved.

These types of contradiction occur in the work of Le Corbusier. Contrasts in the plans of the Villa Savoye (5) and the Assembly Building in Chandigarh (64) correspond to those in the elevations of the Villa Pignatelli and the Villa Palomba. In the Villa Savoye the positions of some of the columns in the rectangular bay system adjust slightly to accommodate to particular spatial needs—one column is moved and another removed. In the Assembly Building although the grid of columns also adjusts to the exceptional plastic form of the assembly hall, in the juxtaposition of the hall itself and the grid, they do not adapt—the juxtaposition is violent and uncompromising not only in plan but also in sections, where it appears to have been thrust violently into the grid (65).

Kahn has said: "It is the role of design to adjust to the circumstantial." The interior rectangles of Palladio's palace plans are frequently distorted into nonrectangular configurations in order to adjust to the Vicenza street patterns. The resultant tensions give a vitality to the buildings not apparent in their ideal counterparts illustrated in the *Quattro Libri*. In the Palazzo Massimo (66) a curving rather than an angular distortion accommodated the façade to the street, which also curved before it was changed in the nineteenth century. In the typical gambrel roof the need to accommodate living space within a roof angle essentially determined by drainage and structural functions results in an eloquent distortion of the original gable. These examples are distinguishable from the expressionistic distortions of Rococo or of German Expressionism where the distorted is not contrasted with the undistorted.

Besides circumstantial distortion, there are other techniques of adaptation. The expedient device is an element in all anonymous architecture that is dependent on a strong conventional order. It is used to adjust the order to circumstances which are contradictory to it: such circumstances are often topographical. The bracket on the house at Dommege (67) is a device that expedites the tense transition from symmetrical façade to symmetrical gable and at the same time accommodates the asymmetrical overhang on the right side. A vivid play of order and the circumstantial is,

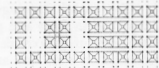


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in fact, a characteristic of all Italian architecture, with its bold contradictions of monumentality and expediency. The ornamented post in the center of the inner portal at Vézelay (68), which is a shore for the lunette, interrupts the axis to the altar. It is an expedient device made eventful. Kahn's uniquely deep beams over the great span of the gymnasium in the project for the Trenton Community Center are exceptional devices to maintain the consistency of the domes of the roof. They are made manifest in plan by the filled-in-columns that support them (69). Lutyens' work abounds in devices: the split at the side of the house called The Salutation in Sandwich (70), is an expedient device which is spatial. By introducing natural illumination at the central stair landing, it breaks the order and promotes surprise in the classical prism of the house. (In some of Jasper Johns' painting the device is similarly made explicit by arrows and notation.)

Le Corbusier today is a master of the eventful exception, another technique of accommodation. He breaks the order of the bays in the ground floor of the Villa Savoye (5) by moving one column and removing another, as I have shown, to accommodate exceptional circumstances involving space and circulation. In this eloquent compromise Le Corbusier makes the dominant regularity of the composition more vivid.

The exceptional location of windows, like the eventful exception in columns, usually produces an altered symmetry. For example, the windows at Mount Vernon (71) do not follow an exact symmetrical pattern. Instead, the window pattern is the result of earlier renovations, and it breaks the dominant order of the central pediment and symmetrical wings. In McKim, Mead and White's Low House (72) the blatantly exceptional window positions in the north façade contradicted the consistent symmetrical order of the outside shape to admit the circumstantial complexities of its domestic program. The very subtly distorted relationships of the windows in H. H. Richardson's house for Henry Adams in Washington (73) reflected the particular circumstances of the private functions inside, yet they maintained the regularity and symmetry demanded by the public function of a monumental building on Lafayette Square. Here the subtle compromise between order and circumstance, outside and inside, and private and public functions, produced ambiguous rhythms and vibrant tensions in the façade.



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Figure 7. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 1st ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 54–55). Reproduced with permission.

acknowledgments are indirect. Venturi described himself as "indebted to the American Academy in Rome for the Fellowship, ten years ago, which allowed me to live in Rome," but says nothing about how living in Rome shaped *Complexity and Contradiction*.⁷⁷ Decades later, he characterized the Academy fellowship as an introspective interlude "when you can prepare for future action in a period of inaction" and then recounted discovering Mannerism's relevance toward the end of his stay; "and out of that intuition several years later evolved *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*" (Figure 7).⁷⁸ Venturi implied that his book benefited less from a purposeful project than "inaction" and receptivity. This is consistent with passages in his letters expressing both concern and optimism about how he spent his final seven-month stay:

I certainly have been doing a lot of traveling this second term and I am convinced that I will be a better architect because of it. Although sometimes I am a little concerned to note that I have nothing at all tangeable [*sic*] to show for it, that I have not taken even notes or made sketches, I hope that is not a bad sign.⁷⁹

Comparing Venturi's book with his fellowship application reveals key differences. His statement emphasizes the pedestrian urbanism of Europe's historic cities, but the city is a marginal topic in *Complexity and Contradiction*.⁸⁰ Mannerism expanded from a passing mention in his 1954 statement to his book's primary theoretical armature in 1966. While most of *Complexity and Contradiction*'s 253 expository images depict sites he visited, nearly all are taken from books or other outside sources. Only seven are Venturi's own photos; six depict Armando Brasini's

little-photographed, neo-Baroque Fascist projects.⁸¹ This preference for documentary over personal images distances the book from Venturi's travels. *Complexity and Contradiction*'s "collection of thoughts [and] images" was also processed through a decade of practice and teaching. From 1962 to 1964, the content and structure evolved substantially from the draft submitted for his Graham Foundation grant as he revised the manuscript for publication. Rather than serving as the book's genesis, Venturi's fellowship might mark discrete stages in his work, reminiscent of how Kahn's residency is viewed. That his book's acknowledgments do not mention Kahn (despite featuring five of his projects) further suggests a new direction.⁸²

There is, however, one conspicuous connection between Venturi's 1954 application and the 1966 book: Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." This persistence across twelve years conjoins his

intentions for Rome to *Complexity and Contradiction* by way of history. Both Venturi's fellowship statement and his book's preface cite the same passage on "the historical sense," in which Eliot claims that ownership of tradition is "nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year."⁸³ It distinguishes youthful inspiration from the mature consciousness that can sustain extended creative output. Venturi's preface describes this approach as his own: "I try to be guided not by habit but by a conscious sense of the past—by precedent, thoughtfully considered."

Venturi's quest for the Rome Prize and his subsequent, decade-long project to transform that experience into tangible results were driven by the ambition Eliot describes, motivated by respect for an art's past achievements.⁸⁴ What could make his fellowship "worth it"? Producing work of the highest caliber, worthy of the discipline Venturi fought to join. Echoing Eliot, Scully argued that both *Complexity and Contradiction* and *Vers une Architecture* "are by architects who have really learned something from the architecture of the past," adding that "for Le Corbusier and Venturi, the experience was personal and direct. Each was thus able to free himself from the fixed patterns of thought and the fashions of his contemporaries." This invokes and extends the "empirical knowledge" Venturi discussed in his application, claiming that physical knowledge produces greater originality. Scully considers travel necessary, if not sufficient, for architectural greatness.

To Venturi, this comparison may have been gratifying, embarrassing, or both. Scully was hardly a disinterested critic: a staunch supporter of Venturi and Kahn, he believed that Venturi's work "completes that renewed connection with the whole of our past" begun by Kahn.⁸⁵ Scully was at the Academy on a Fulbright scholarship in 1951–52, which possibly influenced his views about its impact. He called Venturi

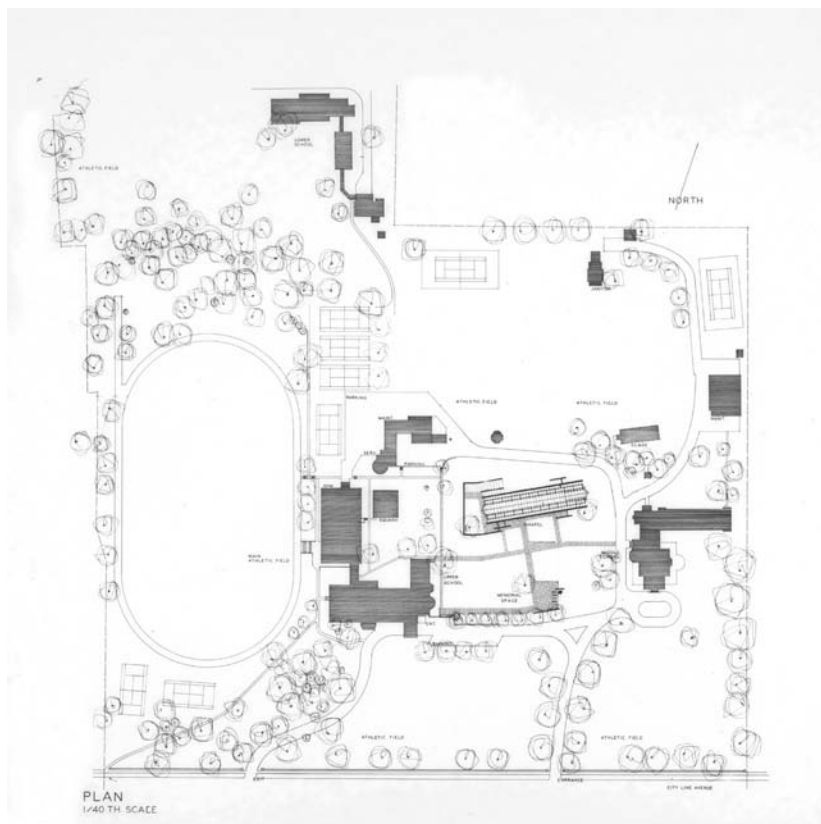


Figure 8. Robert Venturi, site plan, A Chapel for the Episcopal Academy in Merion, Pennsylvania, "Context in Architectural Competition," MFA thesis, Princeton University, 1950. Reproduced with permission.

"an Italian architect of the great tradition," acquired through art history courses at Princeton and the Rome Prize. Scully does not relate this elite cultural mantle to Venturi's immigrant family directly but implies it is also a birthright.⁸⁶ Venturi instead eschews biographical references in *Complexity and Contradiction*. The book's nonintuitive structure foregrounds his formal and theoretical principles and renders any other ordering system based on chronology, style, geography, or biography impossible (Figure 7). Venturi's book was not about himself, but about a set of formal ideas.

Yet this conflicts with the subjectivity he injects with the opening sentence: "I like complexity and contradiction in architecture." How does he reconcile individual history and objective principles?

Neil Levine observed that for Venturi, "historical representation had to do with his search for a more contextual architecture."⁸⁷ Context is a constant, from Princeton through Venturi's decades-long partnership with Denise Scott Brown. It is tradition and context—architectural, spatial, intellectual, cultural, and personal—that unite his fellowship proposal and *Complexity and Contradiction*. Another Eliot passage included in the book, but not in Venturi's application, is "tradition cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor." Pursuing the Rome Prize through many rejections and challenges was a sacrificial investment in claiming this tradition—his *own* tradition, one encompassing his complex, contradictory experience as an Italian-American, Quaker-Catholic, modernist-historiphilic, populist-elite architect-who-knows-commerce-and-art.

For decades, critics have explored how deeply context defines



Figure 9: Robert Venturi, photograph from the Pantheon dome, Rome, June 11, 1955. (Courtesy of the Venturi Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Reproduced with permission.)

Venturi's approach to architecture. His mother's house responds to the gable-roofed neo-Colonials of Chestnut Hill, iconic images of "home," Venturi's fascination with Luigi Moretti's Casa del Girasole in Rome, even Breuer's prohibitions on paint colors. It is as playfully serious, reflectively synthetic, and "non-judgmental" about context

as the solutions he, Scott Brown, and their partners would produce for Nantucket Island, commercial strips, and Trafalgar Square. This understanding of context already pervaded his master's thesis, where precedents from Rome and beyond supported his design for a chapel at a Philadelphia-area Episcopal academy, housed in a campus of eclectic nineteenth-century houses. Venturi's chapel fulfills the modernist ideal of a structurally ambitious, formally abstract object that nods to context through residential scale

and local fieldstone. A far stronger contextual agenda is evident in the site plan, in which the chapel is a hyphen conjoining the bifurcated campus. Angled to rebalance the site, a walled courtyard at the west end reconciles existing and newly imposed orientations (Figure 8). The solution is informed by both architectural and personal context: Venturi knew the academy through experience because he was a student there for nine years.

This amplifies the significance of Venturi's colorful accounts of his fellowship. Climbing the Great Pyramid or the Pantheon's dome revealed their vastness as nothing else could (Figure 9). Attending Triduum and beatification liturgies at baroque churches brought their theatricality to life through music, candlelight, ceremony, and the odor of incense. Smelling untreated sewage in rural Basilicata, eating "meager fare" while lodging with locals in his father's native Abruzzo, shivering in the bitter cold of an unheated village church during a movie screening, seeing refugees housed in an ornate Sicilian villa, feeling at home in "his" parts of Naples: all provided experiences of context and tradition in the broadest sense.

Complexity and Contradiction does not mention these experiences, but it benefits from them. Venturi's book presents a range of traditions and contexts that is ostentatiously varied but neither random nor neutral. He interweaves modernist and historicist masterpieces, obscure and unfashionable works, vernacular structures and contemporary painting together with intent, fluency, and—above all—authority. Venturi's book offers his own context: his journeys, his reading, his conversations, his thoughts, his vision. *Complexity and Contradiction* was "simply" an account of his favorite works' defining formal qualities, which he wanted to capture in his architecture: "an apologia ... of my own work."⁸⁸ This characterization of the book

as merely an interpretive guide to Venturi's projects camouflages a far deeper investment. Gentle or not, the book was his manifesto, his *credo*. Its reception would help determine whether his pursuit of the Rome Prize, and of architecture, had been worth it.

Venturi's real Rome Prize project was to ensure that his fellowship launched his architectural career. Even before *Complexity and Contradiction* appeared in early 1967, he had clearly succeeded. More than any other postwar architecture fellow, Venturi leveraged his Rome Prize into disciplinary prominence. In early 1966, he followed in Kahn's footsteps again by returning to the Academy as a resident architect. Later that year, he made his first trip to Las Vegas with Scott Brown, inaugurating yet another historic chapter. They would approach that city and America's commercial vernacular in an immersive, analytical, and reflective way, shaped by their respective experiences in Rome.⁸⁹

Venturi sought his fellowship at a critical juncture, when filial duty conflicted with architectural ambitions. The Rome Prize's chief value was not its support for study in Italy (which he could have financed in other ways), but its validation of his professional goals. The Academy affiliated him with architects like Howe and Kahn, and a centuries-old tradition of creative preeminence. This affirmation helped convince Venturi that he would not just be "an" architect. It sustained his determination to produce design and critical work that might enter architectural history, however controversial in the present.

By the 1970s and 1980s, when the Academy readily attracted top architects, Venturi's pursuit of a fellowship in the 1950s appeared prescient.⁹⁰ The Rome Prize was born of a conviction that one place, experienced within an interdisciplinary community, fosters the highest levels of cultural achievement. The Academy's imposing main building

leverages this tradition by projecting an image of permanence, but it offered postwar arts fellows a newly blank canvas. For Venturi, that was sufficient. Even before arriving on the Janiculum, he had already received something invaluable from the Academy: a vote of confidence. Like most awards, the power of Venturi's Rome Prize was both contingent and real.

Author Biography

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Notes

- 1 Robert Venturi Jr. to Robert and Vanna Venturi, July 3, 1956, Venturi Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical Museum (hereafter VSB Collection, AAUP).
- 2 Robert Venturi to James Kellum Smith, October 14, 1956, VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 3 "Notes for a Lecture Celebrating the Centennial of the American Academy in Rome Delivered in Chicago," and "Robert Venturi's Response at the Pritzker Prize Award Ceremony at the Palacio de Iturbide, Mexico City, May 16, 1991," in *Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture: A View from the Drafting Room*, ed. R. Venturi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 47–56, 97–100.
- 4 Martino Stierli called Venturi's fellowship "the central episode in his intellectual biography." See Stierli, "In the Academy's Garden: Robert Venturi, the Grand Tour and the Revision of Modern Architecture," AA Files 56 (2007): 41–62.

See also David Brownlee, David De Long, and Katherine Hiesinger, *Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates: Architecture, Urbanism, Design* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), 7–13.

- 5 Academy Secretary Mary Williams encouraged his persistence; Mary T. Williams to Robert Venturi, February 24, 1954, VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 6 Robert Venturi to Laurance Roberts, October 5, 1954, VSB Collection, AAUP. Venturi ended his involvement with the family business in 1973, two years before his mother's death. See D. Brownlee, "Form and Content," in Brownlee et al., *Out of the Ordinary* (note 4), 10–12.
- 7 The Academy's year began October 1, but Venturi flew to Rome in late October. See Robert Venturi to Laurance Roberts, October 5, 1954, American Academy in Rome Records, 1855–circa 1981 (bulk 1894–1946), Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (hereafter AAR Records, AAA); Robert Venturi to Lou [Louis I. Kahn], January 17, 1955, VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 8 Venturi traveled to the United States in mid-July 1955 and returned to Rome on December 30, 1955. Robert Venturi to R. and V. Venturi, June 26, 1955, and December 31, 1955, VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 9 Venturi flew home on July 16–17, 1956, with a stopover in Amsterdam. Robert Venturi to R. and V. Venturi, June 21, 1956, "Rome: notes: letters," VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 10 Fifty letters and sixty-seven postcards sent to his parents during his fellowship are held in the VSB Collection, AAUP. See Brownlee, "Form and Content" (note 6), 10–12.
- 11 Robert Venturi to R. and V. Venturi, December 31, 1955, VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 12 Robert Venturi to R. and V. Venturi, March 23, 1955, VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 13 For other architects at the Academy during this period, see D. Costanzo, "The Lessons of Rome: Architects at the American Academy, 1947–1966" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2009).
- 14 At the postwar French Academy, architects won the Grand Prix de Rome with conservative projects but produced *envois* that fulfilled regulations in modernist ways. The Spanish Academy was modernized in 1954, while the British School's conservative faculty resisted modernism well into the 1950s. See D. Costanzo, "Eternal City to Open City: Rome's Postwar Academies as Architecture's First Global Programs," in *Globalizing Architecture: Fluxes and Disruptions*, Papers from the 102nd Annual Meeting of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) (Washington, DC: ACSA, 2014), 551–58.
- 15 D. Costanzo, "A Truly Liberal Orientation": Laurance Roberts, Modern Architecture, and the Postwar American Academy in Rome," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 74, no. 2 (June 2015): 223–47.
- 16 Howe worked for the federal government during World War II and then struggled to revive his practice. When Kahn came to Rome in late 1950, he was known mainly for writings and wartime housing projects; he had just begun teaching at Yale in 1947. After becoming MIT's Dean of Architecture in 1951, Belluschi was more

- influential politically than creatively. On Howe's late career, see D. Costanzo, "Architectural Amnesia: George Howe, Mario De Renzi and the U.S. Consulate in Naples," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 56–57 (2012): 353–69.
- 17 The residents for 1951–52 and 1957–58 were especially obscure: Frederick J. Woodbridge of the New York firm Adams and Woodbridge, and Princeton professor Francis Comstock. During Venturi's stay, Ernesto Rogers of Milan visited as an unofficial substitute. For Rogers's influence on Venturi, see Stierli, "In the Academy's Garden" (note 4).
- 18 Saarinen visited the Academy in 1951 but canceled his residency for the spring of 1956, despite traveling to Tuscany during that period. The following year, Mumford canceled his planned winter residency for 1956–57 and did not visit the Academy while in Rome during the summer of 1957. Both cases show the limits of the Academy's appeal to major figures; see Costanzo, "A Truly Liberal Orientation" (note 15), 237–38.
- 19 Venturi's application statements of 1952 and 1953 are held in the VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 20 On Venturi's interest in literary theory, see Maarten Delbeke, "Mannerism and Meaning in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture," *Journal of Architecture* 15, no. 3 (2010): 267–82.
- 21 Statement of purpose [1954], Fellows Files: Venturi, Robert, 1954–56; American Academy in Rome Records, 1855–2014, American Academy in Rome, New York City (hereafter "AAR Archives, NY").
- 22 Anthony Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism: Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and City Planning at Harvard* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002); Jill Pearlman, *Inventing American Modernism: Joseph Hudnut, Walter Gropius, and the Bauhaus Legacy at Harvard* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); and Gwendolyn Wright and Janet Parks, eds., *History of History in American Schools of Architecture, 1865–1975* (New York: Temple Hoyne Buell Center and Princeton Architectural Press, 1990).
- 23 Antonin Raymond to Jean Labatut, February 4, 1949, Jean Labatut Papers, Box 9 Folder 7, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
- 24 *Princeton's Beaux-Arts and Its New Academicism: An Exhibition of Original Drawings over Fifty Years* (New York: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, n.d. [1977?]). On Venturi and the "Princeton System," see Stanislaus von Moos, *Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates: Buildings and Projects 1986–1998* (New York: Monacelli, 1999), 28–29.
- 25 Venturi described this book as "all the rage" during his youth; Stierli, "Interview with Venturi and Scott Brown," AAR Archives, NY.
- 26 Of thirty-eight application statements by Rome Prize architects between 1947 and 1966, twenty-two mention premodern subjects. See Costanzo, "The Lessons of Rome" (note 13).
- 27 For discussion of how postwar fellows discuss history, see *ibid.*, 98–115.
- 28 Statement of purpose [1954] (note 21).
- 29 Stierli, "Interview with Venturi and Scott Brown" (note 25), and "In the Academy's Garden" (note 4), 45. On the book's influence on postwar architects' view of the Baroque, see D. Costanzo, "Giedion as Guide: *Space, Time and Architecture* and the Modernist Reception of Baroque Rome," in *The Baroque in Architectural Culture, 1880–1980*, ed. Andrew Leach, John MacArthur, and Maarten Delbeke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 129–138.
- 30 Statement of purpose [1954] (note 21).
- 31 Venturi describes how Sittes' *Der Städte-Bau nach seinem künstlerischen Grundsätzen* of 1889 (translated into English in 1945 as *City Planning According to Its Artistic Principles*) inspired his enthusiasm for Italian piazzas in letters home during his 1948 trip. The book contributed to the birth of the Townscape movement, christened by Ivor De Wolfe (pseudonym for Hubert de Cronin Hastings) in "Townscape: A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy Founded on the True Rock of Sir Uvedale Price," *Architectural Review*, vol. 106 (December 1949): 355–362.
- 32 R. Venturi, "The Campidoglio: A Case Study," *Architectural Review* 113, no. 32 (May 1953): 333–34.
- 33 Venturi's master's thesis is reprinted in *Iconography and Electronics* (note 3), 335–74. Other examples from Rome were the Piazza S. Ignazio, the Trevi Fountain, and St. Peter's Square.
- 34 Of thirty-eight applications, sixteen mention urbanism and eight the Baroque; Costanzo, "The Lessons of Rome" (note 13). Thomas Schumacher, an architecture fellow from 1967 to 1969, noted the postwar popularity of "Townscape-influenced urban space studies" in his essay "Michael Graves: The Algebra of Metaphor," in *Michael Graves: Idee e progetti 1981–1991*, ed. Theodore L. Brown and Maurizio de Vita (Milano: Electa, 1991), 40, n. 2.
- 35 Venturi's application statements all mention Mannerism. For the genesis and implications of this interest, see Delbeke, "Mannerism and Meaning" (note 20); and D. Costanzo, "Text, Lies and Architecture: Colin Rowe, Robert Venturi and Mannerism," *Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 4 (August 2013): 455–73.
- 36 Venturi, "Context in Architectural Composition," in his *Iconography and Electronics* (note 3), 336.
- 37 Venturi celebrated the anniversary of his first arrival in Rome on August 8, 1948; see his "Academy Centennial Lecture," in his *Iconography and Electronics* (note 3), 48. He calls Rome "a deep orange" in his letters of August 8 and 9, 1948, VSB Collection, AAUP.
- 38 Several architects were in Rome during this period as Fulbright fellows, including Warren Platner, also a Rome Prize fellow, Myron Goldsmith (Fulbright, 1953–55), and John Hejduk (Fulbright, 1955–56).
- 39 Labatut returned to the Academy as a resident architect in 1959, 1964, and 1968; see B. Kohl, W. Linker, and B. Suzanne Kavelman, *The Centennial Directory of the American Academy in Rome* (New York: American Academy in Rome, 1995).
- 40 "Eero has returned with some wonderful color slides of Italian piazzas, especially that of San Marco, and four copies of engravings of maps of Rome of different periods which give you palpitations [*sic*] of the heart." Robert Venturi to Louis Kahn, November 28, 1951, Kahn Collection, AAUP; cited by E. Johnson, "Sketching Abroad" in *Drawn from the Source: The Travel Sketches of Louis I. Kahn*, eds. E. Johnson and M. Lewis (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 76, 130, n. 176.
- 41 Venturi's archive includes a list of sites and destinations in Italy, probably by Daltas. Spero Daltas & Associates later had 250 employees in its Rome office. Personal communication with the author, April 24, May 1, and May 14, 2007.
- 42 All three wrote supporting Venturi's winning 1954 application; see Fellows Files: Venturi, Robert, 1954–56; AAR Archives, NY.
- 43 Venturi, "Academy Centennial Lecture" (note 37), 48.
- 44 George Howe to Laurence Roberts, April 16, 1947, Howe Papers, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Department of Drawings and Archives, Columbia University, New York, NY.
- 45 Howe leveraged what was originally a four-month residency into a nearly twenty-month stay; see Costanzo, "Architectural Amnesia" (note 16).
- 46 Diane L. Minnite, "Chronology," in Brownlee et al., *Out of the Ordinary* (note 4), 245; and R. A. M. Stern, *George Howe: Towards a Modern American Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975).
- 47 Originally planned for the fall–winter of 1947–48, Howe came in March 1948 because of the St. Louis competition; see Costanzo, "Architectural Amnesia" (note 16).
- 48 William Whitaker, "Chronology," in *Louis I. Kahn: The Power of Architecture*, ed. Mateo Kries, Jochen Eisenbrand, and Stanislaus von Moos (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2012), 25.
- 49 Louis Kahn to American Academy in Rome, April 25, 1947, Kahn Collection, AAUP.
- 50 Certain jurors considered his background too "distinguished" for an award intended for "emerging" professionals; Michael Rapuano to Louis Kahn, May 28, 1947; Louis Kahn to George Howe, June 13, 1947; George Howe to Louis Kahn, June 18, 1947, Kahn Collection, AAUP. That they eliminated him despite a dearth of applicants shows the Academy's internal conflicts; see Costanzo, "A Truly Liberal Orientation" (note 15).
- 51 Venturi's thesis boards are all dated February 1950. Besides the Campidoglio, other Roman precedents include the Piazza Sant'Ignazio, the Trevi Fountain, the Piazza di Spagna, the Pantheon, and St. Peter's.
- 52 These events were related in ways invisible to Venturi. Kahn, who had taught at Yale since 1947, supported Howe's selection as department chair. Howe in turn pushed for Kahn to receive the Art Gallery project. See Carter Wiseman, *Louis I. Kahn: Beyond Time and Style: A Life in Architecture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).
- 53 Denise Scott Brown called Kahn Venturi's "architectural mother"; Scott Brown, "A Worm's Eye View of Recent Architectural History," *Architectural Record* 172 (February 1984): 69–81.
- 54 Kahn was not on the jury that selected Venturi in 1954 as is sometimes claimed. The jury members that year were William Platt, Walker Cain, [Roy?] Larson, Pietro Belluschi, and Wallace K. Harrison; Laurence Roberts to James Kellum Smith, February 24, 1954, AAR Records, AAA [5759: 1077–8]. For Kahn's recommendations for Venturi, see Louis I. Kahn to American Academy in Rome, January 21, 1952, and January 29, 1954, Fellows Files: Robert Venturi, AAR Archives, NY. Kahn's letter of encouragement is undated but names a 1953 Rome Prize winner, so it must have been written after the competition; 225. RV.36,

- VSBA Collection, AAUP.
- 55 Kahn's Rome residency travels have been credited with reorienting his career since Vincent Scully's *Louis I. Kahn* (New York: George Braziller, 1962). On Rome and the Trenton project, see Neil Levine, "Kahn's Edge: The Provocative Historicism of the Trenton Jewish Community Center" in Kries et al., *Louis I. Kahn* (note 48), 101–14.
 - 56 Vincent Scully makes this comparison in his introduction to *Complexity and Contradiction*. See discussion of his comments below.
 - 57 This theme pervades Kahn scholarship: see, e.g., Jan Hochstim, *The Paintings and Sketches of Louis I. Kahn* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 241; David Brownlee and David DeLong, *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 50–51; and Robert McCarter, *Louis I. Kahn* (London: Phaidon, 2005), 56–59. Sarah Williams Goldhagen argues against his residency as a career-changing fulcrum in *Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
 - 58 Laurance Roberts to Louis Kahn, July 31, 1951, Kahn Collection, AAUP.
 - 59 Robert Venturi to R. and V. Venturi, April 6, 1955, "Rome: notes: letters," VSB Collection, AAUP. Both Kahn's and Venturi's travels were also inspired by Le Corbusier's famous pilgrimage of 1910–11.
 - 60 Robert Venturi to R. and V. Venturi, January 22, 1956, "Rome: notes: letters," VSB Collection, AAUP.
 - 61 Robert Venturi to Lou [Louis I. Kahn], March 28, 1956, "Rome: notes: letters," VSB Collection, AAUP.
 - 62 "About jobs: I have not heard from Lou Kahn; I wrote him, asking for one. I got another offer from Breuer in N.Y., O'Conner in N.Y., and through Bill Short, Ken Kassler in Princeton." Robert Venturi to R. and V. Venturi, April 23, 1956, "Rome: notes: letters," VSB Collection, AAUP.
 - 63 Venturi offered to send Kahn a check for \$500 (approximately \$4,400 in 2016 dollars) from the Academy, which he called "chicken feed since, with your weekly payroll, etc. you are working on a larger scale"; Robert Venturi to Lou [Louis I. Kahn], January 17, 1955, "Rome: notes: letters," VSB Collection, AAUP.
 - 64 Unpublished typescript (225.RV.115), VSB Collection, AAUP. Venturi mentions the article in his 1954 application and informs his parents about the article submission and rejections from February to May 1955.
 - 65 The essay may have originated in 1950, when he helped design a Wright exhibition while working for Oscar Stonorov, Howe and Kahn's former partner. The essay's treatment of Wright is more sympathetic than his MFA thesis. Venturi interviewed Wright in 1954 and presented his hypothesis. The response was "a not negative but otherwise ambiguous grunt"; see "Interview, Frank Lloyd Wright, Taliesin WI—William Short and Robert Venturi, 21 August 1954," 225.RV.41, VSB Collection, AAUP. See also Brownlee et al., *Out of the Ordinary* (note 4), 10. Venturi's essay anticipates Anthony Alofsin's *Frank Lloyd Wright, The Lost Years, 1910–1922: A Study of Influence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
 - 66 Egbert also wrote a letter for Venturi's 1953 Rome Prize application. Venturi's 1950 thesis mentions Wright a few times, but briefly.
 - 67 "I sat in on it as a freshman, was the slide projectionist as a sophomore, took it for credit as a junior, and taught in it as a graduate student teaching assistant." R. Venturi, foreword to Donald Drew Egbert, *The Beaux-Arts Tradition in French Architecture*, ed. David van Zanten (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), xiii.
 - 68 Egbert studied architecture at Princeton in the 1920s and art history in Paris in the 1930s. His 1941 book draft on the history of the École des Beaux-Arts was revised from 1970 to 1972, and only published posthumously. See "Editor's Note," in Egbert, *The Beaux-Arts Tradition* (note 67), xv–xvii.
 - 69 The project drawings are in the VSB Collection, AAUP. Two photographs of the model are held in the American Academy in Rome's Photographic Archive. While referred to as a "collaborative project," there is no record of any other contributors.
 - 70 Venturi spent roughly twelve weeks of his two seven-month stays away from Rome on extended trips. From January to July 1955, Venturi visited Abruzzo, spent five weeks in Egypt, Greece, and Turkey, and spent two weeks each in Sicily and Sweden. From January to July 1956, he spent a week in Naples and five weeks in Spain and Portugal, and he also took trips to Calabria, Basilicata, and Puglia, northern Italy and Switzerland, and southern Germany.
 - 71 Charles Brickbauer, e-mail correspondence with the author, March 10, 2016.
 - 72 Roberts's extensive correspondence with the Academy's president, J. K. Smith, occasionally discusses fellows with difficulties, but his positive mention of Venturi is unusual; Laurance Roberts to James K. Smith, November 2, 1954, 5759–1091, AAR Records, AAA.
 - 73 Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 12.
 - 74 For an overview of the book's impact, see Joan Ockman's fiftieth-anniversary book review in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (forthcoming, December 2016).
 - 75 Stierli locates germs of Venturi's complex and contradictory aesthetic order, contextual design, and even the decorated shed in his early travels; Stierli, "In the Academy's Garden" (note 4).
 - 76 Anthony Vidler, "Troubles in Theory Part II: Picturesque to Postmodernism," *Architectural Review* 231 (January 2012): 78–83.
 - 77 Venturi describes how buildings he knew about from images surprised him because of "the opportunity to include and relate the individual building and the setting, to perceive in a perceptual whole," especially Medieval and Baroque piazzas. This experience, his annoyance at context-less Beaux-Arts Institute of Design competition programs, and his discovery of Gestalt psychology all inspired his thesis. See Venturi, "Context in Architectural Composition" (note 36), 336–37.
 - 78 The speech dates to 1994; Venturi, "Academy Centennial Lecture" (note 37).
 - 79 Robert Venturi to R. and V. Venturi, June 3, 1956. He also writes, "I hope my ideas and project which are very vague now will materialize successfully" (December 31, 1955), and "I have been really very busy and having a good time and valuable time though I have not been working and will have nothing to display this time in the late-May show of the Academy" (May 15, 1956); VSB Collection, AAUP.
 - 80 The text discusses urban phenomena only occasionally, and the book's 253 illustrations include only one urban plan and relatively few photos that convey urban scale.
 - 81 Besides six photos of Brasini buildings, Venturi's only other photo shows a detail of the Temple at Karnak (figure 162). His sketches for figures 159, 199, 221, 226, and 239 were done after his return. I consider the second part of the book presenting his firm's work to be separate—design applications versus general principles.
 - 82 Venturi's acknowledgments thank Denise Scott Brown, Philip Finkelpearl (his Princeton friend and English professor at Vassar who mentored his interests in literary theory), Robert A. M. Stern, and Vincent Scully and his wife Marian Scully (who worked on the manuscript). Another unmentioned but undoubtedly significant interlocutor was Romaldo Giurgola of Rome, who started teaching at Penn in 1955.
 - 83 Statement of purpose [1954], Fellows Files: Venturi, Robert 1954–56; AAR Archives, NY; and Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* (note 73), x.
 - 84 After his first solo trip to Europe in 1948, Venturi wrote an essay describing his travels and his meditations on what he saw. This strictly personal project, unrelated to his studies at Princeton, shows a self-conscious effort to transform his travel into architectural enlightenment. At that time, before Kahn's residency, it was likely inspired by Le Corbusier's travels, a model for Kahn as well. See "Summer Activities: Report and Some Impressions," unpublished typescript, VSB Collection, AAUP.
 - 85 Scully, "Introduction," in Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* (note 73).
 - 86 Venturi's father was born in Atezza, Abruzzo, and immigrated with his family as a child. Venturi's maternal grandparents came from Puglia.
 - 87 Neil Levine, "Robert Venturi and the 'Return of Historicism,'" in *The Architecture of Robert Venturi*, ed. Christopher Mead (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 45–67.
 - 88 Venturi, "Preface," in his *Complexity and Contradiction* (note 73).
 - 89 Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997). While not yet acquainted, Venturi and Scott Brown were both in Rome in 1955; Scott Brown worked for Giuseppe Vaccaro in Rome. See Minnite, "Chronology" (note 46), 246–47; and January 3, 2002 interview by Martino Stierli, AAR Archives, NY.
 - 90 This era's architecture residents included Colin Rowe (1970), Richard Meier (1973), Romaldo Giurgola (1978), James Stirling (1983), and Alan Colquhoun (1985); Kohl et al., *Centennial Directory* (note 39).