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Architecture as as Act of Transfer: Framing Denise Scott Brown's Architectural Practice with Performance

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ARCHITECTURE AS AN ACT OF TRANSFER:
FRAMING DENISE SCOTT BROWN'S ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE
WITH PERFORMANCE

by

Kelsey Kuehn

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ABSTRACT

ARCHITECTURE AS AN ACT OF TRANSFER: FRAMING DENISE SCOTT BROWN'S ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE WITH PERFORMANCE

by

Kelsey Kuehn

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019
Under the Supervision of Professor Jennifer Johung and Professor Katharine Wells

This thesis examines the architectural practice of theorist, planner, architect, and activist Denise Scott Brown. Existing scholarship about the architect's work is sparse and typically situates her as a significant figure due to her status as a woman working in a male-dominated field. To address this gap in scholarship, this thesis analyzes Scott Brown's intellectual formation relative to her work on the Crosstown Community Advocacy Planning project carried out in Philadelphia in 1968 through the lens of performance theory. Her practice is considered a mediation between the archive and the repertoire as they are defined by performance studies scholar Diana Taylor. Taylor distinguishes the archive, comprised of "supposedly enduring material," from the repertoire, which she defines as an ephemeral repository of embodied practice. Performance intervenes to highlight how the uncertain and temporal aspects of design explored by Scott Brown in her work for the Crosstown Community negotiated gaps in architectural concern. This thesis ultimately argues Denise Scott Brown navigated an architectural practice that subverted contemporaneous trends within the practice of architecture at large and reoriented the role of the architect away from that of a singular, male genius and toward that of a mediator.

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Introduction

In 1989, Denise Scott Brown published her seminal article titled “Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture.” First drafted nearly a decade and a half earlier, the essay details Scott Brown’s personal experiences as a female architect and planner in America. “Write about my work!” she pleaded to journalists, lamenting their superficial interests in her “woman’s problem” as a woman working in a male-dominated field.¹ At the time, critics and journalists seldom acknowledged her work and often misattributed authorship to her male partner. Today, thirty years after that initial publication, little has changed.

Scott Brown is known to most by way of her personal and professional partnership with the ‘Father of Postmodernism,’ Robert Venturi. Born in Zambia in 1931, she studied architecture in South Africa and London before moving to Philadelphia in 1958 to study urban planning at the University of Pennsylvania, where she would eventually meet Venturi. Shortly after, the two began a creative partnership that would last a lifetime. While the couple emphasized equality and collaboration throughout their shared practice, Scott Brown's contributions often fell to the wayside. She led a dynamic and interdisciplinary career as an architect, planner, educator, activist, and theorist.

In this thesis, I argue that Denise Scott Brown navigated an architectural practice which subverted contemporaneous trends within the practice of architecture at large and reoriented the role of the architect away from that of a singular (male) genius and toward that of a mediator. I utilize performance as a theoretical framework to analyze how her work intervenes upon the relationships between the built environment, the practice of everyday life, and the practice of

¹ Denise Scott Brown, “Sexism and the Star System,” in *Having Words* (London: Architectural Association, 2013), 88.

architecture. Furthermore, I contend that Scott Brown developed her critical and interdisciplinary practice from a liminal position within the field of architecture. This argument is informed by Francesca Hughes' understanding of gender to "describe a position from which critical distance is generated by gender difference."² Both an insider and outsider in the male-dominated field of architecture, Scott Brown's practice broadened architectural concern.

In order to address this gap in scholarship, this thesis will analyze Denise Scott Brown's architectural practice via a lesser-known project undertaken in Philadelphia called the Crosstown Community Advocacy Planning project. The Crosstown project, as it will be referred to throughout this thesis, is an example of an early, unrealized, and often misattributed project headed by Scott Brown shortly after joining the firm of Venturi and Rauch.³ The Citizen's Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community contracted the architects in response to an expressway proposal that would have resulted in the demolition of the Crosstown neighborhood and the forced relocation of its residents. For Scott Brown, as principal in charge, the project is one of the earliest examples of her methods and theories applied to a real-world problem. Many of the techniques employed during the Crosstown project are echoed throughout Scott Brown's career before and after it took place. Therefore, the project allows for a comprehensive examination of Scott Brown's emerging and distinct ideas and methodologies at the time.

Existing scholarship about Scott Brown's practice is sparse and primarily exists in the form of interviews and brief essays. Her theoretical and architectural work is commonly featured

² Francesca Hughes, ed., *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), xvi.

³ Denise Scott Brown, "Towards an Active Socioplastics," in *Having Words* (London: Architectural Association, 2013), 43.

or referenced in compilations specifically about prominent women in the design field.⁴ Such cursory scholarly attention perpetuates the notion that Scott Brown's work is only significant because of her gender. Throughout her career, she actively experienced the frequently attempted erasure of her presence and work by colleagues, journalists, and historians. Her work was often mistakenly and intentionally credited to Venturi, signaling her outsider status within the field. While it is indisputable that Scott Brown is a prominent figure in the field of architecture, her work has certainly not been considered in a way that reflects its significance.

The most substantial extant scholarship analyzes her collaborations with Venturi, especially their distinguished and widely studied project, the *Learning from Las Vegas* studio carried out in 1968. Although the project ultimately manifested collaboratively, Martino Stierli identifies Scott Brown's distinct methodologies and interests as the "main impulse" for conducting an analysis of the desert metropolis in his article "Las Vegas Studio."⁵ Primarily concerned with the pair's shared imaging of the city of Las Vegas, the article is exemplary of existing scholarly analysis of Scott Brown's process. Stierli describes Scott Brown's use of photography to generate "unprejudiced" studies of vernacular urban landscapes throughout her career.⁶ However, Stierli offers no analysis into the way such studies shaped her architectural practice or impacted the built environment. Scholarly examinations of Scott Brown's practice continue to exist in this form, as minor references to elements of her work within larger studies dedicated to collaborative projects.

⁴ Examples include Barbara Hutmacher MacLean, *I Can't Do What?: Voices of Pathfinding Women* (Ventura, Calif.: Pathfinder Publishers, 1997), Libby Sellers, *Women Design* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2017), Gaylen Moore and Lynn Gilbert, *Particular Passions: Talks with Women who have Shaped our Times* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1981), and Amanda Willett, *Women and Architecture: Public Space, Public Work* (Princeton, N.J.: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2003).

⁵ Martino Stierli, "Las Vegas Studio," in *Las Vegas Studio: Images from the Archives of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown* (Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess AG, 2008), 13.

⁶ Stierli, "Las Vegas Studio," 23.

In response, I will examine Scott Brown's architectural practice as it was carried out in the Crosstown project through the lens of performance theory. By way of performance, Scott Brown's position is framed as a mediation between the archive and the repertoire as they are defined by performance studies scholar Diana Taylor. Taylor distinguishes the archive, comprised of "supposedly enduring material," from the repertoire, which she defines as an ephemeral repository of embodied practice.⁷ I will demonstrate that Scott Brown's architectural practice functioned as an "act of transfer" between the archive and the repertoire via her social emphasis and preservation of vernacular urban landscapes.⁸ Theater historian and scholar Joseph Roach conceives such landscapes as "vortices of behavior," spaces that legitimize, reinforce, or intensify everyday, embodied practices.⁹ In Scott Brown's work, the architectural environs channel everyday practices and negotiate disparities between the archive and the repertoire, just in the way Roach posits.

I foreground my study with a discussion of resonances between theoretical perspectives within the fields of architecture and performance studies. Scholars in each field have long considered the relationship between the built environment and embodied culture. In the first section of this thesis, I shed light on the commonalities between architecture and performance to demonstrate how performance theory can shape our understanding of architectural practice, the built environment, and, ultimately, embodied culture. The second section interrogates the circumstances of Scott Brown's intellectual formation. I consider the distinctive conditions across three continents that shaped her defining social activism, interdisciplinarity, and interest in

⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 21.

⁸ "Act of transfer" is a concept I'm borrowing from Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 2.

⁹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 28.

the vernacular. I demonstrate, via performance, that the landscapes Scott Brown encountered throughout her formative years reflected tensions between the recorded and embodied histories of urban space, thus shaping a practice aimed at negotiating this relationship. The final section of this study exemplifies Scott Brown's architectural practice as mediatory by way of the Crosstown Community project. I consider aspects of the project that are emblematic of her distinct approach to planning and architecture, establishing connections with Scott Brown's theoretical writings, prior academic work, and other noteworthy projects. I demonstrate how Scott Brown's practice resonates with the analyses of performance scholars and ultimately conclude that her work negotiated relationships between archived and embodied culture, broadened architectural concern, and, therefore, contributed to the redefinition of the role of the architect.

Dissonance and Resonance between Architecture and Performance

Scholars of architectural and performance studies, among other disciplines, have identified relationships between the built environment and embodied culture. Architects apply terms like ‘program,’ ‘organization,’ and ‘function’ to describe how anticipated inhabitants should utilize space based on its design and orientation. Performance intervenes upon these understandings and embraces the uncertainty of other forces, such as user-defined programming, in architectural design. This thesis is founded in a perceived relationship between the ideologies and practices of scholars in architecture and performance. Ultimately, I will analyze Scott Brown’s architectural practice via performance theory to illuminate how it subverted accepted practices and acknowledged embodied culture. The purpose of this section is to establish precedence for this inquiry, locate areas of resonance and dissonance between performance and architectural studies, and evaluate the impact that such a synthesis creates.

As previously stated, this thesis is informed by the distinction between the archive and the repertoire made by Diana Taylor. The importance of Taylor’s analysis to this study is twofold. First, the differentiation between recorded knowledge and embodied knowledge reveals the disproportionate attention between the two in the practice of architecture. Architecture and its representations, in the forms of drawings and renderings, are located within the archive that Taylor defines as comprised of the “supposedly enduring materials.”¹⁰ The spatial intent inscribed by architects through design is grounded in inherited relationships about function and organization. This inheritance is facilitated primarily by the theories and representations of architecture that constitute archived knowledge. Therefore, in the practice of architecture, the archive, as Taylor describes, sustains power via the perceived perpetuity of tangible knowledge

¹⁰ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.

over embodied knowledge.¹¹ Despite this supposed endurance, the archive itself is also mediated. As Taylor argues, acts of transfer can intervene upon the disparity between the archive and the repertoire via “rethinking the canon and critical methodologies” in a way that emphasizes embodied knowledge.¹² Scott Brown’s rethinking of the methodologies by which architecture is studied and designed begins to subvert trends in architectural practice that draw exclusively from archived knowledge.

In a second way, Taylor’s delineation is useful for understanding that there are disparities within both the archive itself and between archived knowledge and embodied knowledge. It is well established that the canon of architectural history exclusively favors the singular genius of the architect and that, most of the time, that architect is male and non-minority. The archive of architecture and architectural representations, although expanding with time, still predominantly reflects this singularity. Scott Brown addresses this in her essay about sexism in relation to the rise of the star architect. Chronicling the many times historians and journalists intentionally excluded her presence in favor of solely highlighting Venturi, she posits that stars are incapable of creating themselves.¹³ Scott Brown’s experience affirms Taylor’s assertion that the archive sustains power, but her liminality within the field of architecture, both insider and outsider, offers critical distance from which to practice subversive methods. Therefore, this thesis identifies embodied knowledge, otherwise termed the repertoire, as a site for intervention in the practice of architecture.

There is a spectrum that I identify, however, within the archive as it relates to architecture that is affirmed by architect and historian Kent Kleinman. In his article,

¹¹ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.

¹² Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 27.

¹³ Scott Brown, “Sexism and the Star System,” 83.

“Archiving/Architecture,” Kleinman differentiates built architecture from its archived representations. Unless built architecture is protected by some preservationist organization (a form of archiving the environment), the degree to which architecture constitutes archival knowledge is lessened. This is described succinctly by Kleinman, who contends that built architecture is unstable, mediated, and the result of multiple forces or persons.¹⁴ While the archived representations of built architecture are shielded from change, architecture itself is subject to physical reconstruction and social reinterpretation. Therefore, built architecture is afforded much less stability than archived representations of architecture. Kleinman also, like Taylor and Scott Brown, describes the archive as a stabilizer that “confers [an] aura of originality” and “allows the conceit of authorship to gain a plausible foothold.”¹⁵ This further affirms a disparity within the archive of architecture itself. Architectural representations, Kleinman argues, are “conceptualized in terms of the archive” and aim to compensate for an unattainable lack between architectural realization and representation.¹⁶ Kleinman concludes that the archive is, therefore, a “machine for forgetting” the differentiation between built architecture and its architectural representations.¹⁷

In performance, interpreting the archive as a machine for forgetting locates the knowledge that is forgotten within the repertoire. Ephemeral, embodied, everyday practice lacks the staying power afforded to archived knowledge. Architectural practice that acknowledges this imbalance could subvert it. Taylor’s distinction between the archive and the repertoire is only one of the ways in which her work can address this relationship between everyday practice and

¹⁴ Kent Kleinman, “Archiving/Architecture,” *Archival Science* 1, no. 4 (2001): 322.

¹⁵ Kleinman, “Archiving/Architecture,” 322.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 323.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

the built environment. In another way, her exploration of “scenarios” as “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” also informs this inquiry.¹⁸ Scenarios are understood as repeated actions or everyday practices. The physical act of reperforming a scenario, Taylor posits, requires mental association with a physical place.¹⁹ Her conclusion is that place and practice have a “metonymic” relationship: place defines the possibilities of action, yet actions also define place.²⁰ For the practice of architecture, this subverts the concept of designing program into space and highlights uncertainties as a factor in determining architectural form.

The relationship between place and practice gained traction with scholars and practitioners in the field of architecture during the mid-twentieth century, albeit with different concern. In reaction to the authoritarian impositions of modernist designers, some architects and urbanists, Scott Brown included, of the 1960’s and 70’s reconsidered the relationship between the built environment and embodied culture. Particularly, a growing interest in the design and role of “public space” in shaping public life is one widespread characteristic found in scholarship and practice from this period. Author and activist Jane Jacobs directed attention toward the human condition of urban landscapes with her 1961 publication, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs championed the sidewalk as stage for the performance of public life and, like Scott Brown, critiqued the damaging practices of modernist architects and planners that destroyed environments where embodied practice thrived. Specifically, her conception of the “public character” who “just needs to be present” reflects the era’s interest in the relationship

¹⁸ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 28.

¹⁹ Ibid, 29.

²⁰ Ibid.

between everyday practice and the design of the built environment.²¹ Jacobs goes on, however, to report that everyday performance “arises only when the concrete, tangible facilities it requires are present.” Identifying the need for both a present, public body and specific spatial signifiers, Jacobs affirms the mutually constituting relationship between the built environment and embodied culture. Yet, her critique emphasizes the physical, architectural environs as a vital element, whereas Scott Brown views vitality more broadly.

Jacobs, unlike Scott Brown, was an activist and author without formal training in architecture or urban planning. However, both Scott Brown and Jacobs worked to expand the practice of architecture during their time by utilizing writing as a site for analysis, critique, and intervention. In a similar way, urbanist and author William H. Whyte examined the relationship between everyday practice and the design of public space in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Published in 1979, this seminal study utilized observational methods to determine regions of the city where social engagement thrived. Whyte demonstrated a fascination with the behavior and movement of ordinary people, describing the “great spectacles” of urban space.²² Citing the observational work of other urbanists and designers in different regions of the world, such as Jan Gehl, Whyte concluded that the rituals and patterns of activity within urban space transcend geographical limitations, stating how “people in one place tend to act much like people in another.”²³ Whyte’s study, like Jacobs’, is indicative of architectural interest in the physical, designed elements of the urban landscape that instigate and support these patterns. This is where mainstream architectural critique falls short, and where Scott Brown differs from Whyte and Jacobs. While the latter underscored architectural form as a singular determinant of urban

²¹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 68.

²² William Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Washington, D.C.: Conservation Foundation, 1980), 22.

²³ Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, 22.

vitality, Scott Brown viewed the relationship between form, social forces, and everyday practice more comprehensively and cohesively.

In this way, and many others, the practice of architecture began to shift during this period. A perspectival shift was introduced by architects, like Scott Brown, that reoriented architectural interest away from grandiose expectations and toward everyday experiences and vernacular landscapes. Scott Brown frequently refers to this perspective as the “worm’s eye,” or the antithesis to the way architects typically understand space from plan-oriented perspectives.²⁴ Performance allows us to situate figures, like Scott Brown, relative to this shift and understand how their actions subverted accepted practice. In the following sections, I demonstrate how Scott Brown diffused the authority of the architect and the built environment by placing some agency within embodied culture and other disciplines that shape architectural form. I also contend that, as a result of this diffusion, Scott Brown broadened architectural concern at large by way of her practice and representation.

²⁴ Denise Scott Brown, “A Worm’s Eye View of Recent Architectural History,” *Architectural Record* (Feb. 1984): 69.

Intellectual Formation as Context

As demonstrated in the previous section, there are extant resonances and dissonances between ideologies in architecture and performance regarding the relationship between the built environment and embodied culture. In this section, I will analyze the intellectual formation of Scott Brown in order to identify the nature of the forces and landscapes that contextualize her practice. I distinguish and evaluate underlying themes found in the landscapes she studied and demonstrate a divergence between modernist practices and Scott Brown's concerns. A common and influential thread between the varied landscapes Scott Brown encountered throughout her formative years studying architecture is a tension between the recorded and embodied understanding of culture. She initially studied architecture in South Africa before continuing her education in London and Philadelphia. Spanning three decades, each locale presented distinct social, political, and urban conditions that shaped her subsequent theory and practice.

It is apparent from Scott Brown's writings that her social consciousness and interest in vernacular landscapes extends back to her foundational years in Johannesburg, South Africa. There, she spent her childhood in a complex colonial cultural landscape that reflected the origins of the urban center as a mining city. Gold deposits discovered in the region in 1886 led to an influx of immigrant populations from across the globe.²⁵ The resulting class conflicts and strained race relations continued to affect the social climate of Johannesburg throughout the twentieth century. This multicultural and multiracial landscape diversified further with the arrival of European refugees seeking asylum during the rise and reign of Nazism.²⁶ Scott Brown witnessed how this influx of people contributed to the transformation of Johannesburg into a

²⁵ Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, Vol. 1 (New York: Longman, 1982), 4.

²⁶ Scott Brown, "Towards an Active Socioplastics," 23.

“sophisticated center of arts and intellect.”²⁷ At the same time, however, the institution of a Nationalist government and the legalization of apartheid stoked preexisting racial tensions. In reaction to the social and political climate, liberal students at the University of Witwatersrand, where Scott Brown studied architecture from 1948 until 1952, protested the injustice and inequality intensified by apartheid.²⁸ Recalling her time in South Africa, Scott Brown likens the social climate at university in Johannesburg to the conditions she would later face in London and Philadelphia in the 50’s and 60’s, respectively.²⁹ This social turmoil undoubtedly colored Scott Brown’s perspective and fostered a sympathy for the experiences and environments of marginalized communities.

Apartheid effectively worked against the practice of specific embodied cultures. The authoritarian imposition of “separate development” forcibly displaced populations from urban landscapes.³⁰ Most architects and urban planners practicing in South Africa during apartheid consciously enforced segregation, accepting the directive simply as a “functional challenge” that their designs had to address.³¹ Therefore, compliance with apartheid politics resulted in an architectural practice that enforced the erasure of popular, everyday landscapes and, ultimately, the embodied practices formerly carried out within them. The ephemeral nature of everyday practice casts uncertainty over whether it is powerful enough to transmit embodied knowledge despite physical relocation. The disruption inflicted by architecture that enforced segregation resulted in dichotomous perceptions of the urban landscape detected by Scott Brown.

²⁷ Scott Brown, “Towards an Active Socioplastics,” 23.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Walter Peters, “Apartheid Politics and Architecture in South Africa,” *Social Identities* 10, no. 4 (2004): 537-38.

³¹ Peters, “Apartheid Politics and Architecture,” 538.

In an anecdote about an art class from her youth, Scott Brown describes how her refugee teacher instructed students to take inspiration from the African landscape in order to create ‘African’ art.³² But tensions existed in the landscape before her – “urban and rural, modern and traditional, western and African.”³³ Reconciling her conditioned perception of the African landscape, Scott Brown encountered a dialogue that would extend throughout her career: the dialogue between what ‘is’ and what ‘ought’. The ‘ought’ refers to how landscapes ought to be based on archived knowledge, whereas the ‘is’ defines how the landscape actually appears and is experienced. This dialogue echoes Taylor’s distinction between the archive and the repertoire. Through Taylor’s lens, Scott Brown’s ‘is’ and ‘ought’ can be interpreted as a relationship between embodied knowledge and archived knowledge. This schism results in multiple interpretations of landscapes. The archived, or recorded, understanding of a landscape is protected from change and, as Taylor describes, sustains power.³⁴ The embodied knowledge of a landscape, however, is ephemeral and builds power through reperformance, producing new forms with each iteration. Upon detecting this divide within the landscape, Scott Brown concluded that the invention of place is a process that must be explored and re-explored.³⁵ From this point forward, the invented nature of landscapes by those that inhabit them underlies her perception of their design.

Identifying the tensions between the recorded and embodied landscapes before her, Scott Brown began to develop a receptive way for seeing and interpreting the built environment. This way of seeing, she writes, directed her toward “sources unacceptable to the tastes of the

³² Denise Scott Brown, “Invention and Tradition in the Making of American Place,” in *Having Words* (London: Architectural Association, 2013), 4.

³³ Denise Scott Brown, *Soane Medal Lecture: Denise Scott Brown*, Sir John Soane’s Museum London (Print transcript of recorded lecture, The National Gallery, London, UK, October 17, 2018), 11.

³⁴ Taylor, *Acts of Transfer*, 19.

³⁵ Scott Brown, “Invention and Tradition,” 20.

educated,” which she discovered in the “‘impure’ urban folk/pop[ular] culture.”³⁶ Her analysis of the disparity between recorded and embodied experiences resonates with Taylor’s outlining of the archive and the repertoire. For Scott Brown, the archive constitutes how the practice of everyday life in the urban landscape ought to be, whereas the repertoire reveals the experience as it truly is. This distinction extends to the architectural forms that manifest within urban landscapes that either reflect or rupture embodied practice. Carrying this interpretation forward, I identify Scott Brown’s concern with the aesthetics of the vernacular urban environment as a reinforcement of the performance of everyday practices and therefore a mediation between recorded and embodied knowledge.

Subsequent experiences solidified Scott Brown’s early perceptions about the disparities in urban landscapes and embodied knowledge. In 1952, Scott Brown accepted an offer to study at the Architectural Association (AA) in London as part of a required study abroad program at the University of Witwatersrand.³⁷ The opportunity presented a similar tension between recorded and embodied understanding of the built environment. The postwar climate Scott Brown encountered at AA heralded conflicting architectural ideologies about the reconstruction of the urban landscape following the war. At the time, “the proper focus of architecture was urbanism” and social concern.³⁸ Reflecting on her studies at AA, Scott Brown believes “it formed the foundation for most of [her] subsequent thinking about architecture.”³⁹ Of the many minds and

³⁶ Scott Brown, “Towards and Active Socioplastics,” 25.

³⁷ Barbara Hutmacher MacLean, *I Can't Do What? Voices of Pathfinding Women* (Ventura, Calif.: Pathfinder Publishers, 1997), 98-99.

³⁸ Denise Scott Brown, “Between Three Stools: A Personal View of Urban Design Pedagogy,” in *Urban Concepts* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 9.

³⁹ Scott Brown, “Between Three Stools,” 9.

movements which molded her perspective, the New Brutalism of Peter and Alison Smithson is pivotal.

London, like much of Europe after World War II, was in a period of rebuilding when Scott Brown arrived at AA. The widespread practice of urban renewal resulted in the relocation of communities in older, vernacular neighborhoods devastated by the war to high rise modernist developments at the periphery of the city. An influential study on the social effects of this practice, published by sociologists Michael Young and Peter Wilmott in 1957, revealed the degeneration of social life and the disappearance of everyday rituals.⁴⁰ Architects and planners in the postwar period working against urban renewal sought to remedy this by challenging the ideological and formal agenda of Modern Architecture.

Most notably, the architectural and urbanist philosophies propagated by the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) were critically revisited during this period.⁴¹ In particular, the “functional-mechanical concept(s)” central to CIAM ideologies were scrutinized for their “rationalization” of urban landscapes.⁴² Scott Brown later wrote that the image of the architect in this period was an aggressively masculine and “heroically original architectural revolutionary.”⁴³ She defines the ongoing movement away from this perspective as characterized by more “conserving and nurturing (female?) outlook(s).”⁴⁴ Effectively, architects Peter and Allison Smithson reframed the functionalism of CIAM urbanism to address the social concerns of the period. As part of Team-X, the group of thinkers tasked with generating a program for the

⁴⁰ Michael Young and Peter Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 164-65.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism. Ethic or Aesthetic?* (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1966), 72.

⁴³ Scott Brown, “Sexism and the Star System,” 84.

⁴⁴ Ibid. The parenthetical “female?” is Scott Brown’s own reflection.

tenth CIAM conference, the Smithsons introduced a humane definition of functionalism aimed at producing architecture that was sympathetic to the preservation and stimulation of vital communities.⁴⁵ The notion of ‘vitality’ can be understood in terms of performance as the live performance of community or culture. By this understanding, the movement in postwar London to design for vitality is also a movement to examine and produce landscapes that recognize and intensify embodied practice.

This movement was termed by the Smithsons as “New Brutalism.” The aesthetic roots for the New Brutalist movement can be found in the multi-disciplinary Independent Group, an organization comprised primarily of proto-pop artists as well as the Smithsons themselves.⁴⁶ The Independent Group similarly reacted to modernism and the negative effects of postwar rebuilding by highlighting the aesthetics of popular, vernacular culture through artistic representation. As already indicated, however, New Brutalism was not an exclusively aesthetic movement. While today the term Neo-Brutalism describes the revival of Brutalist aesthetics, New Brutalism at the time described the emergence of an architectural ethic.⁴⁷ Architectural attention was turned away from the physical and toward the ethical with the dissemination of New Brutalist ideology. In their manifesto, published originally in *Architectural Design* in 1957, the Smithsons wrote that they understand “architecture as the direct result of a way of life.”⁴⁸ This association was found to be most direct in the vernacular urban landscapes that were discredited by modernists. Therefore, the Smithsons not only began to redirect architectural discourse toward the consideration of embodied culture, but they also aimed to inscribe

⁴⁵ Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 70-72.

⁴⁶ Scott Brown, “Towards an Active Socioplastics,” 25.

⁴⁷ Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 10.

⁴⁸ Peter and Alison Smithson, “The New Brutalism,” in *Architectural Design* 27 (April 1957), as reprinted in Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 45.

vernacular architecture into the canon, or archive, of architectural history. Scott Brown, privy to the work of Peter and Allison Smithson, expanded her interest in the aesthetics of vernacular landscapes to include New Brutalist ethics.

In addition to the movement's ethical ideologies, Scott Brown adopted a practice carried out by the Smithsons termed "active socioplastics."⁴⁹ To determine the relationship between formal architectural elements and social vitality, the architects canvassed neighborhoods in London with high levels of social activity prior to the war.⁵⁰ The architects championed the embodied experience of urban space as an agent for determining the effects of urban form on the performance of everyday practice. As a research and design method, active socioplastics can be interpreted as an attempt to bridge the gap between physical and social form. Scott Brown wrote profusely on the New Brutalist's, and later Pop Art's, "receptive ways of seeing" the everyday landscape and its importance to the practice of architecture and planning.⁵¹ For her, however, this framework extends as far back as her experiences in Africa. The New Brutalism promulgated by the Smithsons refined this mode of seeing further and provided a methodology for implementing it.

Following her time at AA, Scott Brown and her first partner, also coincidentally named Robert, embarked on a study tour of Europe. Across the continent, they encountered a period of rebuilding framed by urbanism and social concern that resonated with the New Brutalist ideologies back in England. The trip bolstered Scott Brown's desire to diversify her understanding of urban landscapes and study architecture through the lens of city planning. She

⁴⁹ Scott Brown, "Towards an Active Socioplastics," 25.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Denise Scott Brown, "On Pop Art, Permissiveness, and Planning," in *Having Words* (London: Architectural Association, 2013), 58.

looked to American institutions and eventually, by way of Peter Smithson's counsel, found herself at the University of Pennsylvania.

Robert and Denise Scott Brown arrived in Philadelphia for the fall semester in 1958. The climate at the University of Pennsylvania in the late fifties reflected the turbulent nature of the concurrent Civil Rights movement and stirred with signs of the forthcoming social movements of the sixties.⁵² Again, Scott Brown encountered a society entangled in social upheaval and entrenched in a battle with urban renewal. Urban planning as a practice similarly underwent extreme reformation during this time. The work of sociologists and urban critics began to redirect the practice of urban planning away from the physical development of the built environment and toward social forces that shape it. This redirection resulted in a trend referred to as "social planning" which eventually took root in the Planning Department at Penn and spanned Scott Brown's time there as both a student and professor. The interdisciplinarity that characterized the practice of social planning prompted Scott Brown's adoption of methodologies and knowledge found in disciplines outside of architecture and planning. In her seven years at Penn, Scott Brown encountered more influential colleagues than I can survey here. The ideologies of social scientist Herbert Gans and urban planner David Crane, however, notably directed Scott Brown toward a practice that mediated the relationship between the archive and the repertoire.

Sociologist Herbert Gans taught in the Urban Studies department at Penn. His skepticism toward architecture and concern for social life, popular culture, and planning intrigued Scott Brown.⁵³ Gans, like Young and Wilmott, studied the effects of displacement on urban

⁵² Scott Brown, "Between Three Stools," 10.

⁵³ Scott Brown, "Towards an Active Socioplastics," 29.

communities during the period of urban renewal. His practice involved being a “participant observer” in the communities he studied.⁵⁴ The term describes a liminal space taken up in the public theater of the built environment. While “observer” connotes a degree of separation from the performance of everyday practice, a form of spectatorship, “participant” introduces a sense of embodied understanding. This sense of understanding, although different from the knowledge embodied by inhabitants of a place, allows designers of the built environment to act as a mediator between the recorded and embodied understanding of urban space. This practice echoes and refines Scott Brown’s adopted “active socioplastics” from New Brutalism. As a participant observer, the lens through which the built environment is understood is brought out of the archive, or the realm of architects and planners, and into the repertoire, where embodied knowledge can begin to be accessed and interpreted.

Like the New Brutalists and Pop artists, Gans was also reacting to modernist practice and ideology. He disrupted early modernist understandings of functionalism and countered them with the notions of dysfunction and flexibility through what he called “non-directive” planning.⁵⁵ Embracing this functional uncertainty in the built environment, Gans effectively designed for the diverse performances of everyday practice. Scott Brown, influenced by Gans’s ideologies, later wrote that looking to popular culture and vernacular environments for “formal vocabularies” would reveal the “untidiness of urban life” and produce a landscape “more relevant to diverse people’s needs.”⁵⁶ The measurable and quantitative aspects of architecture are those that constitute archival knowledge within the field. The exclusive consideration of archived knowledge results in design that prioritizes architectural genius and caters to a select minority.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Scott Brown, “Towards an Active Socioplastics,” 30.

⁵⁶ Denise Scott Brown, “Learning from Pop,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 7, no. 2 (1973): 389.

Designing for the “unmeasurable, non-quantitative aspects of architecture” results in landscapes that are more conducive to the pluralistic practice of everyday life.⁵⁷ The dysfunctional and unmeasurable aspects, therefore, are almost certainly found within the repertoire, or the live experience of the built environment. Gan’s notion of the “non-directive” in planning resonates with the ethics of New Brutalists in that both harbored a sensitivity for the social implications of architectural design.

Scott Brown transitioned seamlessly from student to instructor in the Penn planning department. An introductory course about urban design for non-architects was void of a professor and David Crane extended the opportunity to her to fill the gap.⁵⁸ An architect and planner, Crane, similar to Gans, considered the dysfunction of the built environment and developed methods for untangling the messiness. His model for conducting research and design was aimed at identifying the varied forces in society that act as “determinants of urban form.”⁵⁹ These forces include the scientific and the non-quantitative, drawing from the methods of a variety of disciplines. In performance terminology, these forces could be located as components of both the archive and the repertoire. The consideration of both recorded and embodied knowledge aids in interpreting the disorder of the everyday landscape and the pluralistic performance of everyday practice within it. Therefore, Crane’s reading of the relationship between urban forms and the forces that shape them mediates the gaps in knowledge between the archive and the repertoire. Scott Brown adopted Crane’s ideology as a “framework for relating the physical and non-physical” in architecture and planning practice.⁶⁰ A self-proclaimed

⁵⁷ Denise Scott Brown, “On Formal Analysis as Design Research,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 32, no. 4 (1979): 11.

⁵⁸ Scott Brown, “Between Three Stools,” 12.

⁵⁹ Scott Brown, “Towards an Active Socioplastics,” 38.

⁶⁰ Scott Brown, “Towards an Active Socioplastics,” 38.

specialist in the “linkages,” Scott Brown’s approach to the practice of architecture mediated much more than the relationship between the archive and the repertoire.⁶¹ It was a practice that operated at the nexus of multiple influences and disciplines. Her liminality, both within and between the field of architecture and tangential fields, fostered a subversion of trends in architectural practice. Interpreting the ideologies of Crane and others, Scott Brown forged a mediatory and collaborative practice that diffused the authority of the architect and broadened architectural concern.

This tour through the landscapes of Scott Brown’s intellectual formation situates her practice as part of a movement that diverged from contemporaneous modernist practice. Her perspectives developed out of and in reaction to radical and conventional philosophies within architecture. In the following section, I will outline specific methods in Scott Brown’s architectural practice that diverged from generally accepted trends and that originate in the ideologies surveyed here. Using the Crosstown project as a conduit for this analysis, I will demonstrate how these methods contributed to the restructuring of architectural practice at large.

⁶¹ Denise Scott Brown, “With People in Mind,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 35, no.1 (1981): 43.

Framing a Mediatory Practice

The Crosstown project and the Learning from Las Vegas studio ran concurrently in 1968. While the studio was co-taught and collaboratively produced alongside students in an academic setting, Scott Brown acted as partner-in-charge for the Crosstown project. In “Sexism and the Star System in Architecture,” Scott Brown described the misattribution and acclaim afforded to Venturi specifically for her work with the Crosstown community. Stanislaus von Moos’ monograph of the architect’s work, compiled collaboratively with Venturi and Scott Brown, defined Scott Brown as the architect in charge of the project.⁶² Despite these instances, and many more, where Scott Brown is definitively identified as head of the Crosstown project, existing scholarship exclusively analyzes the project in the context of her partnership with Venturi. It remains unexplored how the project embodies elements of Scott Brown’s distinct practice and ideology. Additionally, the Crosstown project, unlike the Las Vegas studio, constituted a real-world problem to which architectural philosophies were applied by Scott Brown early on in her career. For these reasons, the project is a significant vehicle for analyzing her architectural practice. The present section will close this gap and examine aspects of the Crosstown project that exemplify how Scott Brown’s practice acknowledged embodied culture and broadened the definition of architectural practice.

Initial conceptions of a thoroughfare across Philadelphia date back to the 1940s.⁶³ The City Plan Commission formally proposed the Crosstown Expressway in 1955 as part of “Philadelphia’s Program for Major Highways.” A later map depicts a web of existing and proposed highway infrastructure that would circumnavigate downtown Philadelphia and radiate

⁶² Stanislaus von Moos, *Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown: Buildings and Projects* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 90.

⁶³ Sebastian Haumann, “Vernacular Architecture as Self-Determination: Venturi, Scott Brown, and the Controversy over Philadelphia’s Crosstown Expressway 1967-73,” *Footprint* 3, no. 1 (2014): 39.

out from the city center to connect with additional circumferential regional expressway systems [Figure 1]. The Crosstown segment was proposed to run along South Street at the southern border of Philadelphia's central business district and downtown. At the time of the project's proposal, the neighborhood along South Street was largely comprised of low-income and minority populations. Scott Brown described it architecturally as a "commercial strip at the scale of Main Street" and socially as "the main street of Philadelphia's center city black community."⁶⁴ Due to a myriad of factors, including discriminatory housing practices and the Great Depression, the neighborhoods along South Street slowly deteriorated throughout the middle of the twentieth century. As was the case for many highway and urban renewal projects nationwide, the Crosstown expressway would have eradicated the "blighted" neighborhood along South Street and separated low-income minority populations in southern Philadelphia from the central business district. Following the announcement of the expressway route, conditions along South Street declined even further when residents fled the area in mass quantities.⁶⁵

The 1966-71 Capital Program released a comprehensive plan for the city's expressways that addressed the construction of proposed highway developments more concretely.⁶⁶ The plan indicated that the Crosstown expressway was in Stage II of the expressway system, or "already programmed for construction."⁶⁷ The developmental progress and increased publicity surrounding the project prompted the formation of the Citizen's Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community (CCPDCC) in 1967. Primarily comprised of residents and

⁶⁴ Denise Scott Brown, "An Alternate Proposal that Builds on the Character and Population of South Street," *The Architectural Forum* 135, (Oct. 1971): 42.

⁶⁵ Dominic Sama, "Highway veto Entraps Grays Ferry Merchants," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 July 1968, Box 17, Folder 225.II.A.6812.37, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁶⁶ Philadelphia's Comprehensive Plan for Expressways, 11 February 1966, Flat Files, Folder 292.IV.B97, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

business owners in South Philadelphia, the CCPDCC also attracted concerned persons from throughout the city at large.⁶⁸ In addition to protesting the construction of the Crosstown expressway, the CCPDCC aimed to demonstrate the value of South Street and involve residents in the development of a “counterplan” for the neighborhood.⁶⁹ To achieve this, the committee sought partnerships with local architects and planners. Scott Brown joined the firm of Venturi and Rauch in late 1967. In early 1968, the firm was contacted by an advisor to the CCPDCC who stated, “If you can like the Las Vegas strip we trust you not to try to neaten up South Street at the expense of its occupants.”⁷⁰ Later that spring, the CCPDCC signed a contract with Venturi and Rauch for the “planning and development of the South-Bainbridge Street Corridor” in an effort to prevent the expressway and encourage positive social and physical change.⁷¹

As principal-in-charge, Scott Brown managed all aspects tied to the creation of an alternative proposal. This included periods of research, collaboration, and design. The resultant counterplan, “developed in close collaboration with the...CCPDCC,” made recommendations for housing development, called for the development of a “promenade” of culture and history, and emphasized the regeneration of commercial activity through architectural rehabilitation rather than new construction.⁷² It aimed to preserve the Main Street character of South Street and minimize the relocation of existing residents. However, Scott Brown was careful not to frame architectural intervention as the sole solution for the community. The counterplan also

⁶⁸ Proposal for Community Organization Program Submitted to Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement, 3 November 1967, Box 17, Folder 225.II.A.6812.34, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁶⁹ Scott Brown, “An Alternate Proposal,” 42.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Correspondence from CCPDCC to Venturi and Rauch, 17 June 1968, Box 17, Folder 225.II.A.6812.39, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁷² Crosstown Community II Proposal by Denise Scott Brown, Ueland and Junker, Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, 26 September 1968:1-2, Box 16, Folder 225.II.A.6812, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

emphasized a need for neighborhood services and highlighted social and economic programs that would increase “local employment, business ownership and home ownership.”⁷³ While expressway supporters leaned on “megastructural fantasies” to solve, or more appropriately ‘erase,’ social issues, the proposal for South Street found solutions in the physical and social form of the existing environment.⁷⁴ Such solutions were discovered by way of Scott Brown’s distinct approach to architectural research and design.

The counterplan developed around an analysis of the “social, economic, and physical conditions” of the South Street community.⁷⁵ It took the form of a written report, augmented with visual materials, including photographs, drawings, and maps, and communicated Scott Brown’s interest in the various forces that shape the built environment. Although the counterplan was never implemented in the way the architect intended, the project “[made] the case for the community” and aided in halting the construction of the Crosstown expressway.⁷⁶ More important to this study is how the Crosstown project embodies a transition in the practice of architecture. Scott Brown’s approach towards the South Street community was emblematic of her socially oriented architectural practice, which contributed to the generation of new dialogues in the field and diffused architectural authority by acknowledging embodied culture as a force that shapes the analysis and design of the built environment.

The Crosstown project constitutes an implementation of ideologies that Scott Brown explored in academic spheres as an instructor at the University of Pennsylvania. In the syllabus

⁷³ Crosstown Community I Proposal by Denise Scott Brown, Ueland and Junker, Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, 6 August 1968: 2, Box 16, Folder 225.II.A.6812.13, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁷⁴ Scott Brown, “An Alternate Proposal,” 44.

⁷⁵ von Moos, *Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown*, 90.

⁷⁶ Scott Brown, “An Alternate Proposal,” 44.

for the second installment of her Form, Forces, and Function (FFF) studio, Scott Brown wrote about the need for more comprehensive studies of the built environment. She lamented that “what pass[ed] in most architectural schools for information about cities...[was] the theories of other architects about cities.”⁷⁷ The studio operated under the theory that the physical forms of the urban landscape and the functions they fulfilled were shaped by more unseen forces than architects understood. Therefore, it aimed to mine the “treasury of knowledge locked in the vaults” of other tangentially related fields.⁷⁸ In the case of the Crosstown project, Scott Brown put this practice to work on a real-world problem. While the architect studied more conventional material, such as the “committee members’ detailed knowledge of the area” and the “data...available from local agencies,” she also developed an understanding of less tangible, embodied and experiential forms of knowledge.⁷⁹ Notably, Scott Brown employed participatory research methods and utilized photography to document and interpret the relationships between architectural form and everyday practice along South Street.

As part of her analysis of the community, the architect spent a significant amount of time in the neighborhood and along the corridor. For months she frequently occupied storefronts, spoke with residents, and drove along the strip to gain an embodied understanding of how “people, cars, and signs interacted.”⁸⁰ For Scott Brown, this embodied experience carried as much significance as tangible knowledge, such as neighborhood vacancy and unemployment rates, in the reconceptualization of South Street. The participatory methods she utilized evoke the active socioplastics of the New Brutalists in their attempt to bridge the gap between physical and

⁷⁷ Syllabus for City Planning 503, “Form, Forces, and Function” by Denise Scott Brown, 1963, Box 5, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁷⁸ Scott Brown, “Form, Forces, and Functions,” 4.

⁷⁹ Scott Brown, “An Alternate Proposal,” 42.

⁸⁰ Scott Brown, “Towards an Active Socioplastics,” 44.

social form. These underrecognized relationships and forces, she argued, “shape the physical form of the city much more than do the ‘programs’ or ‘functions’ that architects design for.”⁸¹ Her practice placed agency in the way people inhabited space instead of attempting to shape behavior through architectural intervention. Dominant trends in architecture aimed to either completely eradicate or impose rational, architectural order over existing urban forms. Scott Brown diverged from this practice by designing based on unforeseen patterns and intangible knowledge that she discovered from within the community. Her physical inhabitation of South Street and receptive way of interpreting it not only subverted the modernist preference for radical change and rationalization, but also blurred the line between participant and observer.

Within this liminal space between researcher and resident, Scott Brown could begin to interpret the everyday practices that defined South Street. The embodied knowledge gained from occupying storefronts, wandering the neighborhoods, and talking with business owners and residents mediated disparities between archived understanding and the lived experience of South Street. Proponents of the expressway adopted the narrative that the dilapidated architecture of the South Street neighborhood therefore also signified non-vital communities. As we now understand, the archive sustains power due to its perceived endurance. Through her physical experience of South Street and her interactions with inhabitants, or the “architects of the vernacular,” Scott Brown diffused architectural authority and inscribed aspects of embodied experience, personal or otherwise, into the archive.⁸² Her plan to preserve the formal architectural qualities of South Street is, in large part, derived from her experiences along it, where she found a distinct vitality performed within the existing form. Therefore, her practice

⁸¹ Scott Brown, “With People in Mind,” 44.

⁸² The phrase “architects of the vernacular” comes from Haumann, “Vernacular Architecture,” 41.

mediated gaps not only between archived and embodied knowledge, but also within the realm of architectural concern. Effectively, Scott Brown challenged the notion of the architect as a latent observer and prescriptive designer by employing more receptive modes of seeing, experiencing, and interpreting the built environment.

While the architect later produced perspectival renderings to accompany her counterplans for the community, Scott Brown also employed representational strategies as part of her research of South Street. She captured her experiences along the corridor through hundreds of photographs to conduct an analysis of social and physical forms within the neighborhood. She and Venturi are more famously known for their use of photography and film as a method for study during the Las Vegas studio. Photographing and filming the built environment allowed them to “[learn] from the existing landscape” and “question how [they] look[ed] at things.”⁸³ It is well documented, in writings by both the architects themselves and secondary scholarship, that their interest in architectural representation through photography shared formal and ideological connections with the Pop Art movement.⁸⁴ However, the purpose of the present analysis is not to examine how Scott Brown’s approach and photographs resonate with that of Pop artists. Instead, it explores the influence of such a practice in the context of architectural analysis and design.

For the Crosstown project, Scott Brown utilized photography to analyze the relationship between the social and physical forms that embodied the community and to capture her distinct perspective as a participant observer of the strip-like quality of South Street. One photograph, for example, intentionally frames the relationship between the sidewalk, storefronts, signage, and the

⁸³ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 1.

⁸⁴ Denise Scott Brown, “Learning from Pop,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 7, no. 2 (1973): 387-401, and Katharine Smith, “Mobilizing Visions: Representing the American Landscape,” in *Relearning from Las Vegas*, ed. Aron Vinegar and Michael Golec (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 97-128.

street [Figure 2]. In the foreground, a person glances sideways into the window of a commercial shop while projecting signs create a canopy over the sidewalk. The flashy, large-scale signs attract the attention of fast, vehicular movement, whereas the storefronts that open onto the sidewalk engage the pedestrian. This condition, what Scott Brown defines as “communication across space,” is an important unseen relationship between everyday practice and the built forms of South Street.⁸⁵ The formal qualities of the storefronts anticipate the presence of a social actor, therefore defining the possibilities of action within public space. Their linear relationship, close proximity, and orientation toward the sidewalk direct movement through the corridor, blur the separation between interior and exterior space, and reveal an environment designed around the events that occur in the public space.

In turn, Scott Brown documented how a present, public body also defines the characteristics of place. Another photograph captures one of the many populated corners along the South Street corridor [Figure 3]. In the foreground two people begin to cross the street while another person leans against the lamp pole at the corner of the sidewalk. To the left, a pair of people engage in conversation outside of the coffee shop that occupies the corner of the block. The building features a corner entrance that interrupts the linearity of the strip. In other photographs, Scott Brown documented the linear movement of people she found characteristic of the corridor, but this photograph captures the way human presence activates the urban space of South Street in another way. It communicates the diversity and close proximity of events that occurred along the commercial strip. These patterns of occupation and embodiment are what Scott Brown aimed to preserve along South Street. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of their occurrence and architectural form, she advocated that the preservation of the physical

⁸⁵ Scott Brown, “Learning from Pop,” 389.

character of the corridor would enhance the vitality of the community and, consequently, the performance of everyday practice.

In addition to capturing more candid events along South Street, Scott Brown also manipulated photographs to further explore and emphasize the relationship between architectural and social form. She produced composite representations of the corridor by piecing together hundreds of elevation photographs taken while driving along South Street [Figures 4]. The collaged images, each titled “Piece of South Street ‘Ruscha,’” directly reference Pop Artist Edward Ruscha’s “Every Building on the Sunset Strip,” which similarly documents the architecture of Los Angeles’ Sunset Strip.⁸⁶ The linear orientation of the collaged images is a representational strategy that emphasizes the strip-like quality of the corridor. It imbues a sense of motion that echoes the physical sensation of moving through space and creates a continuous narrative about varying scales of embodiment. The elevations reveal the minimal legibility of the architectural condition of South Street to fast, vehicular movement.

Unlike Ruscha, Scott Brown interspersed closeup vignettes of interior spaces, storefronts and people along the collage [Figure 5]. These vignettes conversely capture the experiences afforded to slower, pedestrian travel and reveal temporal patterns in the environment that emerge as a result of inhabitation. While South Street, like the Sunset Strip, embodies strip-like characteristics, such as its linear orientation and projecting signage, that appeal to vehicular travel, it primarily exists at the scale of Main Street and serves “a large area of non-mobile people.”⁸⁷ Scott Brown’s representation reflects this duality by augmenting Ruscha’s collage

⁸⁶ Katharine Smith, “Mobilizing Visions: Representing the American Landscape,” in *Relearning from Las Vegas*, ed. Aron Vinegar and Michael Golec (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 107-110.

⁸⁷ Crosstown Community I Proposal by Denise Scott Brown, Ueland and Junker, Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, 6 August 1968, Box 16, Folder 225.II.A.6812.13, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

technique with vignettes that communicate another mode of embodiment. Images of interior and exterior spaces further blur the boundary between them, as the formal language of building elevations is held in relationship with the ephemeral configurations of interior spaces. All of these tensions along South Street were held in favor by Scott Brown. The juxtaposition of multiple scales of temporal experience reveals a myriad of patterns that informed Scott Brown's counterplan to build on, instead of disrupt, the existing urban condition.

Scott Brown's adoption of the aesthetic strategies of Pop artists in architectural practice signals a shift in the field away from built architecture and toward representations of architecture as sites for research and intervention. For Scott Brown, the collages revealed previously unseen forces and relationships between built form and everyday practice. Her documentation elevated the status of vernacular architecture along South Street and argued for the retention and revitalization of popular forms. For Scott Brown, the removal of such architectural forms would cause "social harm [that] can be irreparable."⁸⁸ Therefore, her use of photography in architectural practice communicated the interconnected nature of the built environment and the performance of everyday life.

To Scott Brown, photographs of South Street captured the vitality and dysfunction of urban life in a positive light. Through this work, she argued that the built environment embodied "formal vocabularies" that were "more relevant to people's diverse needs" and worthy of investigation.⁸⁹ On South Street, Scott Brown found these formal vocabularies in the existing vernacular shop fronts along the corridor. In her report to the CCPDCC, she remarked that they were "neither colonial nor new," but still constituted "unique, urbanistically eloquent" structures

⁸⁸ Scott Brown, "Learning from Pop," 391.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 389.

that should be revitalized and preserved.⁹⁰ Scott Brown's documentation and preservation of popular architectural forms symbolizes a mediation between archived and embodied knowledge of the built environment and a shift in architectural concern. As her photographs document, South Street's landscape contained the "symbolic and communicative aspects of architecture" that were otherwise lost in modernist design.⁹¹ These aspects were interpreted by Scott Brown as the formal expression of an embodied, popular culture specific to the South Street community. Therefore, her counterplan was concerned with preserving existing conditions "rather than with utopian, non-fundable dreams and architectural monuments."⁹²

The significance of Scott Brown's use of photography to analyze the Crosstown community is multifaceted. Her documentation of the South Street corridor translated embodied experience from an intangible source of knowledge into an archival media. No longer ephemeral, the live conditions of South Street were captured and inscribed into the archive, thereby expanding recorded knowledge of the community and the built environment. The act also physically transcribed vernacular architectural forms into the canon of architectural concern for the city of Philadelphia. It effectively elevated the status of architecture without architects and displaced questions about the importance of authorship to architectural design. In yet another way, Scott Brown's use of photography and concern for existing landscapes revealed that "architectural design does not have to be consumed by an act of building in order to make a cultural difference."⁹³ Her writings and photography are, therefore, understood as subversive

⁹⁰ Report to the Citizen's Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community Appendix A, 6 August 1968, Box 16, Folder 225.II.A.6812.18, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁹¹ Scott Brown, "Learning from Pop," 389.

⁹² Untitled Document from Denise Scott Brown Personal File, Undated, Box 16, Folder 225.II.A.6812.13, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁹³ Dagmar Richter, "A Practice of One's Own: The Critical Copy and Translation of Space," in *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*, ed. Francesca Hughes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 98.

actions in architectural practice. They present new spatial and formal opportunities for the critical analysis of the built environment. For the Crosstown project, photography highlighted relationships between architectural form and everyday practice that informed the recommendations for the community's redevelopment.

Scott Brown also leaned on architectural drawings to visually communicate the intent of the counterplan. She and fellow studio staff drafted a handful of architectural renderings that expressed the fundamental concerns associated with the preservation of architectural form along South Street. For example, one drawing depicts the "West Center," one of two "civic nuclei" neighborhood-service centers proposed for the community [Figure 6].⁹⁴ It illustrates a large freestanding sign that spans the width of the street and mural-scale wall signage that calls attention to a gap in the urban fabric, signifying the building's status as a service center. The center itself is represented in a refurbished building with an adjacent public space "for outdoor movies and theater," community gathering, and other non-specific activities.⁹⁵ In its entirety, the illustration does not constitute a detailed depiction of the architectural condition along South Street. However, the drawing communicates and emphasizes the relationship between architectural form and everyday practice. The buildings, although vaguely rendered, are formally familiar to South Street by their mixed use, close proximity to one another and their orientation toward the sidewalk.

Because her architectural services for the project went unpaid, the financial resources for design realization were slim.⁹⁶ In one respect, Scott Brown described how the "skeletal plans"

⁹⁴ Crosstown Community I Proposal by Denise Scott Brown, Ueland and Junker, Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, 6 August 1968, Box 16, Folder 225.II.A.6812.13, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Scott Brown, "An Alternate Proposal," 44.

could allow community members to “infuse imagination and character” into the designs on a personal level.”⁹⁷ However, the non-specific quality of these drawings can be situated in conversation with Scott Brown’s interpretation of the temporal aspects of architecture. The lack of specificity in the South Street renderings characterizes her interest in the “unmeasurable, non-quantitative aspects of architecture.”⁹⁸ These aspects escape the perceived permanence of the built environment and constitute the embodied uncertainties of an architectural condition. While the “West Center” was a brick and mortar recommendation for the rehabilitation of South Street, the language of its architectural character was not defined by an outside rationale. Instead, the neighborhood center manifested within existing built form and reused existing conditions, mapping a new layer of functionality onto urban form. For Scott Brown, this practice attended to then-present functional needs while also acknowledging their temporality.

Scott Brown’s recommendations for South Street reflect her interest in the “multiple possibilities for the definition and redefinition” of the various of forces at work in the built environment.⁹⁹ This concern is distinct and underlies her architectural work following South Street as a partner and collaborator to Venturi. While the two embarked on an intertwined career, Scott Brown’s social concern and interdisciplinary research and design methods served as the foundation for future projects. For example, in the early 1980’s, she produced similar photographic collages of Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis as part of a redevelopment plan for which she operated as the consultant for urban design. The images revealed a “framework” within the built environment that “appeared complex,” indicative of local identity, and worthy of

⁹⁷ Crosstown Community I Proposal by Denise Scott Brown, Ueland and Junker, Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, 6 August 1968, Box 16, Folder 225.II.A.6812.13, Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁹⁸ Scott Brown, “On Formal Analysis as Design Research,” 11.

⁹⁹ Scott Brown, “On Pop Art, Permissiveness, and Planning,” 58.

preservation.¹⁰⁰ Later, as principal-in-charge of an urban redevelopment project for the Center City region of Memphis, Scott Brown situated her work again within a “broad economic and regional context” to create a design plan that highlighted the city’s extant “cultural and historical richness.”¹⁰¹ In each context, her designs took form within an interdisciplinary and collaborative practice not only informed by embodied experience, but also concerned with new patterns of life and the local characteristics of everyday practice. Through this work, as with the South Street project, Scott Brown contributed to a widespread and ongoing shift toward mediatory approaches in the practice of architecture at large.

¹⁰⁰ Denise Scott Brown, “An Urban Design Plan,” *Design Quarterly* no. 117 (1982): 14.

¹⁰¹ “Center City Development Plan, Memphis, TN,” Venturi Scott Brown Project Archive Online, accessed October 29, 2019, <http://venturiscottbrown.org/pdfs/MemphisTNCenterCityDevelopmentPlan01.pdf>.

Conclusion

The present study is a response to Denise Scott Brown's initial call: "write about my work!"¹⁰² As one of the earliest examples of her theory and methodology applied to a real-world problem outside of academia, the Crosstown project warrants early analysis within her oeuvre. By way of an examination of her intellectual formation and architectural practice, this thesis renders her work as an integral part of various shifts in the practice of architecture at large. It frames her work as subversive and mediatory, broadening the concerns of architecture and expanding the definition of architectural practice.

Utilizing performance theory as an analytical lens is useful for understanding Scott Brown's relationship with the built environment and embodied culture. Performance not only outlines a differentiation between archived and embodied knowledge, but also offers a framework for analyzing methodologies that intervene upon the relationship between them. Scott Brown's active socioplastics mediated disparities in the field of architecture by mining embodied experience to generate an understanding of architectural form. Performance intercedes to illuminate the uncertain and temporal aspects of architectural design. For Scott Brown, the program, or function, of architecture is far more elusive than modernist architects made it out to be. Therefore, her practice operated from an understanding that "ideologies come and go and functional needs change with time, yet our buildings remain."¹⁰³ Scott Brown emphasized the needs of the present, embodied culture as a determinant of architectural form instead of dictating social form through physical design. Subsequently, she interpreted and designed architecture

¹⁰² Scott Brown, "Sexism and the Star System," 88.

¹⁰³ Denise Scott Brown, "Through the Looking Glass," in *The Sex of Architecture*, ed. Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Weisman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 215.

while considering the realities of the present and the uncertainties of the future. Performance intervenes not to untangle formal and temporal disorder, but instead to highlight it as an underrecognized opportunity in architectural practice.

Performance also helps to elucidate Scott Brown's position within and between the field of architecture and other disciplines. Specifically, her work on the Crosstown project reveals her liminal situation between the fields of architecture, urban planning, and Pop Art. By occupying a truly inter-discipline space, Scott Brown challenged accepted notions of what actions and concerns constituted architectural practice. Her prioritization of the forces, rather than prescribed functions, that shape architectural form directed her toward the knowledge afforded by other disciplines and embodied experience. In yet another way, performance highlights Scott Brown's liminality in relation to the male-dominated field of architecture as productive. Her marginality generated a critical distance from which she analyzed and subverted conventional trends in architectural practice. However, a continued lack of meaningful scholarship surrounding her practice reveals her sustained marginality in the field of architecture today.

The significance of this analysis is multifaceted. It highlights disparities within the study of architectural history, locating Denise Scott Brown as an understudied figure in relation to the development of architectural practice. It underscores how her practice broadened architectural concern through interdisciplinary research methods and experimentation in architectural representation. More broadly, this study prompts exploration of the relationship between methodologies utilized in architectural practice and embodied culture. Performance mediates the perceived permanence of architecture and directs us toward more elastic strategies for interpreting and generating spatial design. It also calls attention to gaps in the architectural canon and the need to study figures, like Scott Brown, who have contributed to the field in ways

beyond the scope of gender limitations. cursory scholarship that highlights Scott Brown's gender as the source of her significance to the field of architecture undermines the transformative practice that she led and the contributions she made to the development of the field at large.

Her practice embodied a spirit of redefinition characteristic of the temporal and geographic contexts in which it developed. Although unrealized, the counterplan for the Crosstown community is emblematic of her architectural practice which was, at its core, mediatory. Her approach not only negotiated gaps between the recorded and embodied understanding of the built environment, but it also subverted architectural norms and expanded architectural concern. By way of participatory, collaborative, and representational research methods, she diffused the authority of the architect and sought systems for structuring the built environment from within instead of from above. While many of the concerns Scott Brown raised in "Sexism and the Star System" still resonate in the field of architecture today, her work effectively contributed to the ongoing integration of narratives and practices that reorient the role of the architect away from that of a singular, male genius and toward that of a mediator.

FIGURES

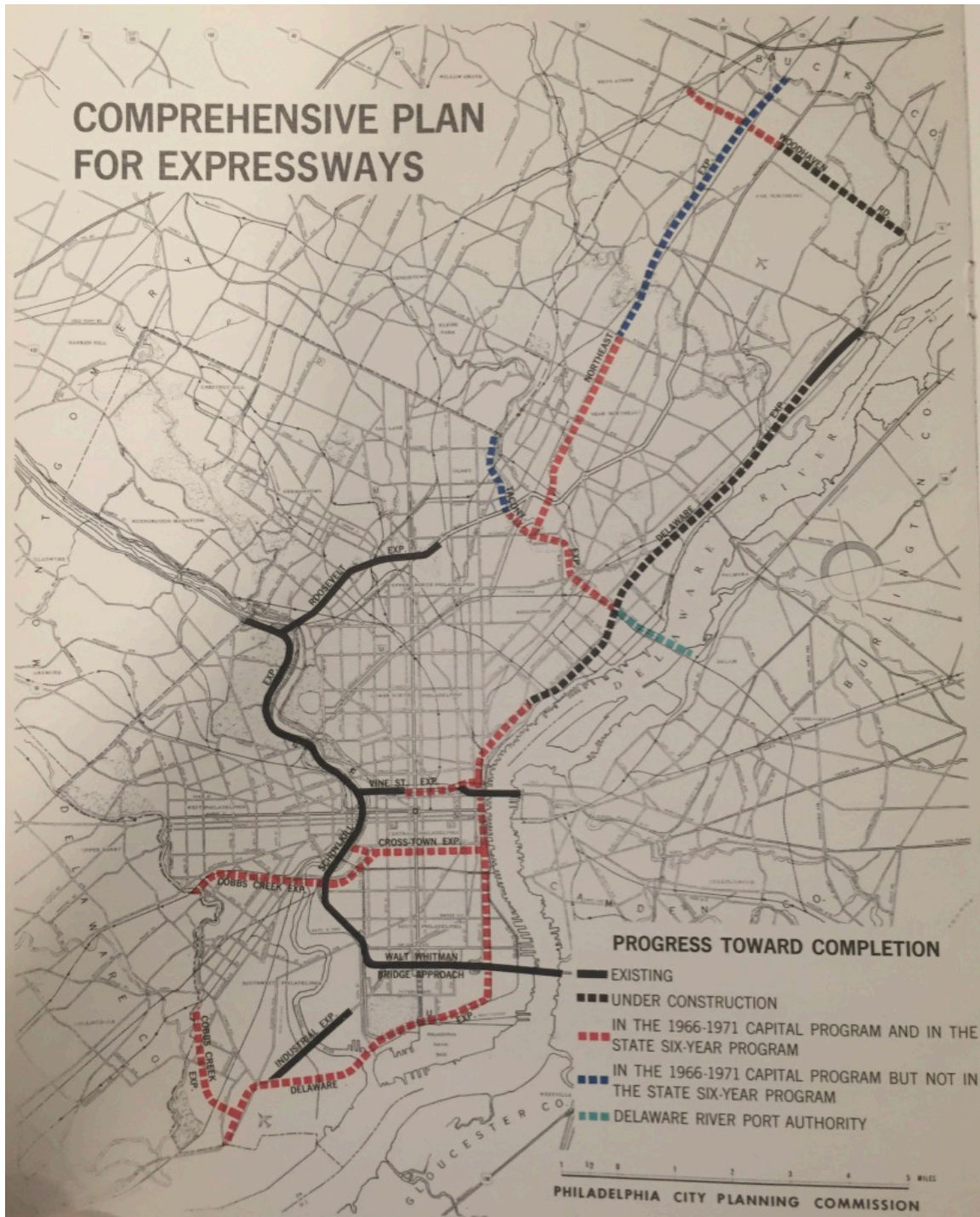


Figure 1. Page from *Philadelphia's Comprehensive Plan for Expressways*, Philadelphia City Planning Commission, February 11, 1966. Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Folder 292.IV.B97, The Architectural Archives at the Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 2. *South Street Photograph*. Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Folder 225.II.A.6812.07, The Architectural Archives at the Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 3. *South Street Photograph*. Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Folder 225.II.A.6812.02, The Architectural Archives at the Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

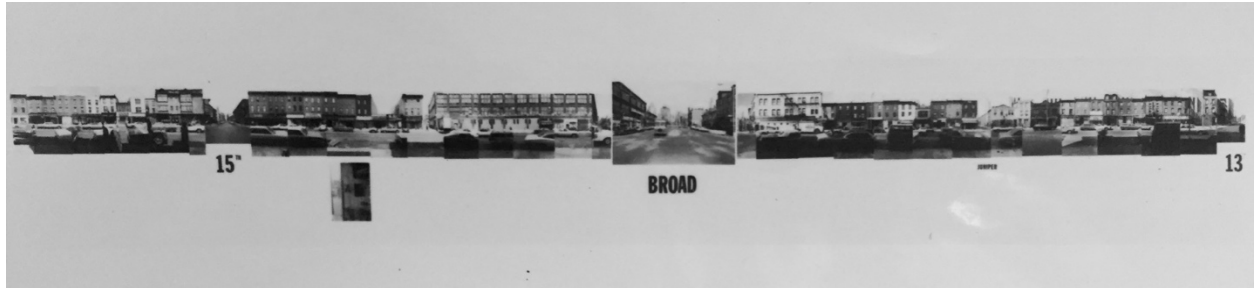


Figure 4. *Piece of South Street 'Ruscha.'* Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Folder 225.II.A.6812.01, The Architectural Archives at the Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

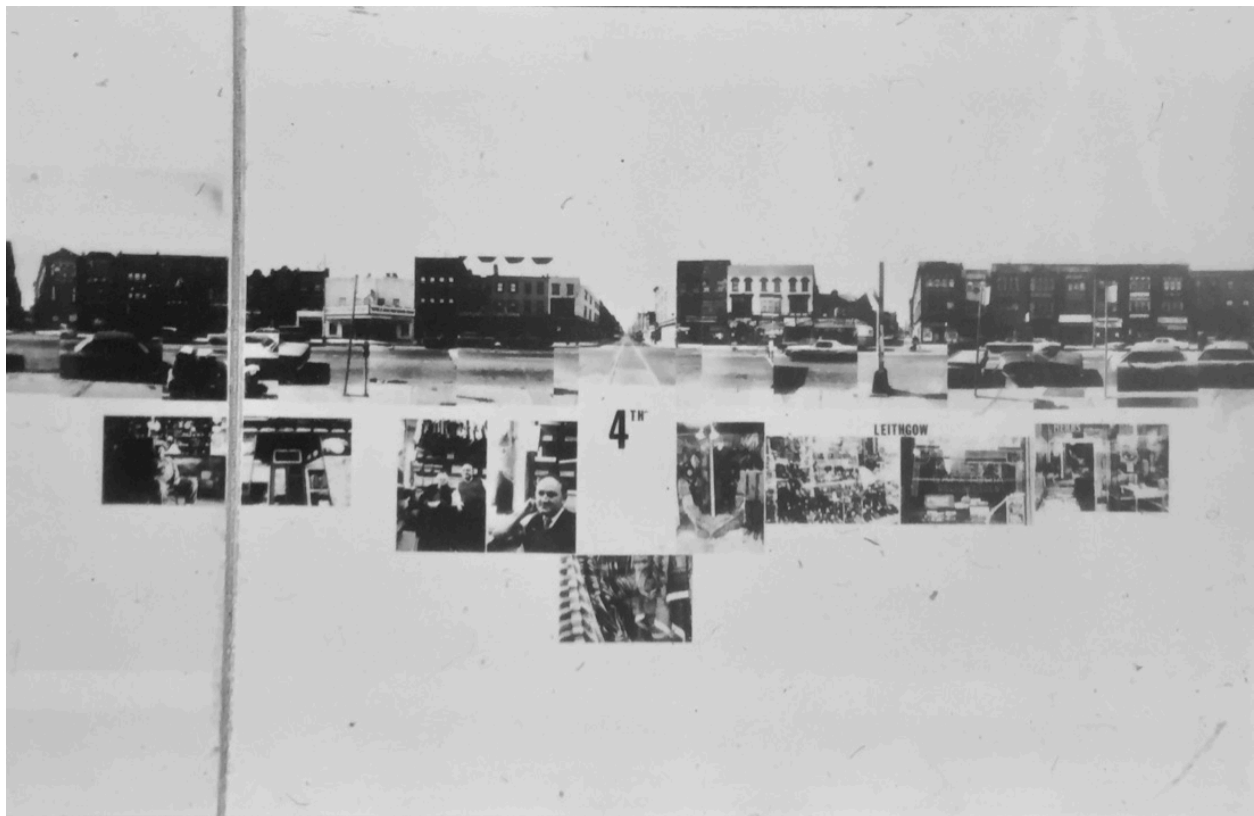


Figure 5. *Piece of South Street 'Ruscha.'* Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Folder 225.II.A.6812.03, The Architectural Archives at the Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 6. *Rendering of West Center*. Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Folder 225.I.A.6812, The Architectural Archives at the Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

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