

Vincent Scully

1996 Raoul Wallenberg Lecture

COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE + URBAN PLANNING
THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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The Architecture of Community

Introduction

The Raoul Wallenberg Lecture series honors a distinguished alumnus of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, and was established expressly to explore the theme of architecture as a humane social art. This lecture series celebrates Wallenberg's heroism at the end of World War II when he saved countless people from extermination by Nazi extremists. There are many lessons to be remembered from his heroic deeds. A few stand out: First is the fact that one person can make a difference – in Wallenberg's case, a huge difference; second is the sacredness of all human life; and the third lesson, especially for the architects and planners amongst us, is that there are many ways we can use our creativity to serve humanity and save communities.

Since its inception, the Wallenberg Lecture has been given by a number of distinguished architects and historians. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner inaugurated the series in 1972 and was followed by such notable scholars as Joseph Rykwert and Spiro Kostof. This year, Professor Vincent Scully joins this illustrious group.

Professor Scully is not only a central figure in the tradition of enlightened scholarship, he is also a remarkable lecturer whose charisma, energy and enthusiasm have made the history of art and architecture live for generations of students. Interested not only in the past but in those who are making history today, he is an outspoken critic and champion of the contemporary scene. Among the best architects in the land, he is considered a colleague. His critical eye is objective, taking nothing at face value and giving each subject careful scrutiny. Vincent Scully is an historian who makes us look at the present in new and insightful ways and, most importantly, who believes that architects should think with their hearts and minds as well as with their eyes.

Robert M. Beckley
Dean, College of Architecture + Urban Planning

The Architecture of Community

I am honored to be a part of this distinguished lecture series and hope that the theme of my lecture will be worthy of Raoul Wallenberg, a brave and humane man.

Considering architecture and urbanism in the United States from 1963 to the present, the basic theme is the destruction of community in part because of the wrong kind of architecture and the wrong kind of urbanism. This destruction has in turn been followed by the revival of community by means of a new – or revived – kind of architecture and urbanism. The past thirty years have in many ways been frightful, full of war and horror. But if we look at them objectively, in the United States especially, we see that they have been marked by one great fact: the fact of liberation. Over those years we have seen things we never thought we would see ten years before: black liberation, women's liberation, gay liberation. Every one of these movements has freed us from stereotypical ways of thinking and prepared us to think more fully and more intelligently about what the human community is, about what it is to be human.

These movements have also played a part in creating a climate of opinion which has helped liberate architecture and urbanism from a closed, hermetic architectural style which – because of its limited view of what the architect's role could be and what methods he could use to design – made it impossible for us to deal with the fundamental problems of communities. It was destructive to the fabric of our cities and, along with other social forces, added to the destruction of the centers of our cities and of the populations who inhabited them. What has happened in the last thirty years has been a liberation which has led to the revival of vernacular and classical traditions of architecture and their reintegration into the mainstream of modern architecture. There has been a revival of an architecture of context rather than of anarchic invention, and of a concern for type rather than for a homogeneous single style. That liberation has in turn led to a revival of traditional urbanism and finally to a revival of the architect's traditional role which had almost been forgotten – the architect as shaper of community of the human settlement.

Of course, that has always been the role of architecture in human society. Architecture is one of the basic strategies that all cultures use to mediate between the helpless individual and the power of nature's absolutely unbearable laws. As well as protecting us physically, man-made structures attempt to humanize nature by giving the illusion that nature cares about us, that nature has a human face. Architecture makes a human order – an illusion, but a great one – in the heart of nature's world.

This human order is beginning to reappear in the creation of new towns, and the rebuilding according to proper principles of the destroyed centers of our old cities. This rebuilding has been supported and helped in every way by the most important mass movement that I know of in modern history to affect architecture: historic preservation. That movement began to gain force in the sixties, starting in 1965 with New York's preservation law and continuing at the national level with the institution of the *Register for Historic Places* in 1966. You notice that it does not say historic buildings. It says places, recognizing the fact that architecture makes a place, architecture makes an environment. The preservation movement has furnished the political clout and the legal force to bring the new urbanism into being.

The preservation movement started, like many of the movements in human life, with a great martyr: the mindless destruction of Penn Station in 1963. Only Philip Johnson and John Lindsay spoke out. Lindsay, who was at that time a Congressman, subsequently became Mayor of New York and got the preservation law through in 1965 largely because of this destroyed building. They are virtually the only people in architecture or in politics who cared. Most of us – myself included – let Penn Station go because our criteria for judging buildings were woefully inadequate and misplaced. We said, "The vaults of the great waiting room are not really concrete vaults. They are hanging on steel and, therefore, do not fulfill the basic important fact of architecture that it must express its structure." Of course, it showed how little we knew about Roman vaults. While made of heavy concrete, Roman vaults nevertheless were so handled that they appeared to be wind-swept canopies held up by air. Greek columns used with the vaults seemed to hold them down, not support them in space. The Penn Station waiting room ceiling operated in the same way; it was not a heavy concrete vault, but was supported on steel.

During World War II, how many times our emotions were stirred by coming into the city via that wonderful station, that great forest of steel. As we moved forward, all of a sudden the steel was clothed with the glory of public space – not private space, but public space for everyone. It all disappeared. The great waiting room was destroyed. Today, I do not think they could touch it, but in 1963, it went without a whimper from any of us. Once, we entered the city like gods. Now we scurry in like rats, which is probably what we deserve.

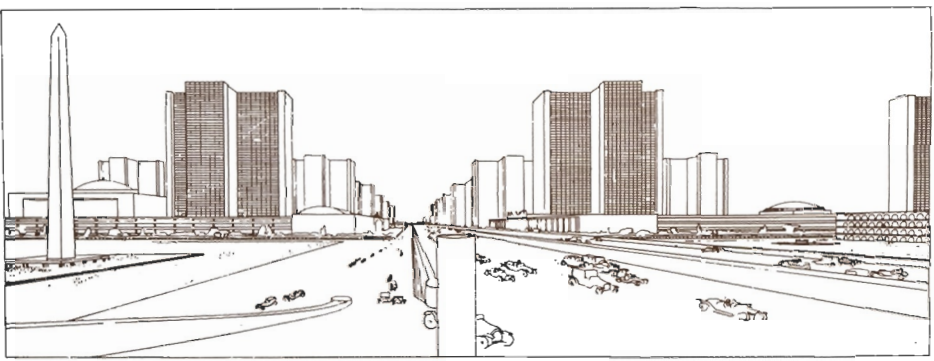


Main Waiting Room, Pennsylvania Station.

During the period when we were destroying buildings, we were also destroying neighborhoods. We were destroying communities at the service of the great destroyer of all: the automobile. I regret having to say this in Michigan, the heart of the motor industry, but it was Robert Moses' love affair with the automobile, his snobbery about the automobile, which destroyed the city. If you did not have an automobile you could not travel around New York or go to his great beaches. He raised subway fares and used them to build highways instead of improving subways. His biographer, Caro, pitilessly chronicled how a viable neighborhood in the Bronx rotted and died when the Cross-Bronx Expressway was rammed through it.

Similar tragedies were happening everywhere in the United States by the early 1960s and I, like most art historians, paid no attention until all of a sudden it was in my own back yard in New Haven, Connecticut. We had a forward-looking Mayor, Dick Lee, who – with the very best architectural and planning advice and a lot of government money – did all the wrong things. He built the so-called Oak Street Connector off of I-95, an eight-lane superhighway set down low which smashed through an old integrated neighborhood.

At first nobody objected. In fact, this pattern was repeated from Maine to Miami. I-95 destroyed neighborhood after neighborhood all the way down the East Coast, climaxing in Miami where it sliced through a stable, established African-American neighborhood called Overtown. As neighborhoods were destroyed, the mediation of architecture between human beings and madness dissolved. Without houses, streets, squares and churches, the populations of those cities were driven, to a large extent, mad. And perfectly, understandably so.



City for Three Million People, Le Corbusier.

America in redevelopment was intent upon building the dreams of the great high modern architects and urbanists, notably Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer. Le Corbusier, whose urban ideals of the 1920s were realized in America's cities, was the pre-eminent critic of the old kind of city. Le Corbusier says how awful it is. The streets are so narrow, you have to look at other human beings. This is depressing. What you want instead is a kind of Swiss purity: good and clean with no people; nice cross-axial skyscrapers and superblocks; and air, space and light. All the complexity of the city was to give way to one man's cataclysmic and diminishing vision of what the life of a city might be, and his images – complete with Citroens roaring up and down roadways – are what we built. His vision became the image of downtown New Haven with the Connector. Le Corbusier said that in his ideal city only those who spoke the language of the city could live in the *cite d'affaires*, the city of managers, the city of businessmen. Our corporate cities have office buildings, hospitals and all the big things, but the little neighborhoods and the people who lived in them were eliminated. Indeed, there is a document in the New Haven Redevelopment Office which says, "We must be sure that when people drive in from the suburbs, they don't see anything that will upset them, anything unpleasant. Get those people out of there, get those neighborhoods out of there, and make it all clean." It is hard to believe but it is a fact.

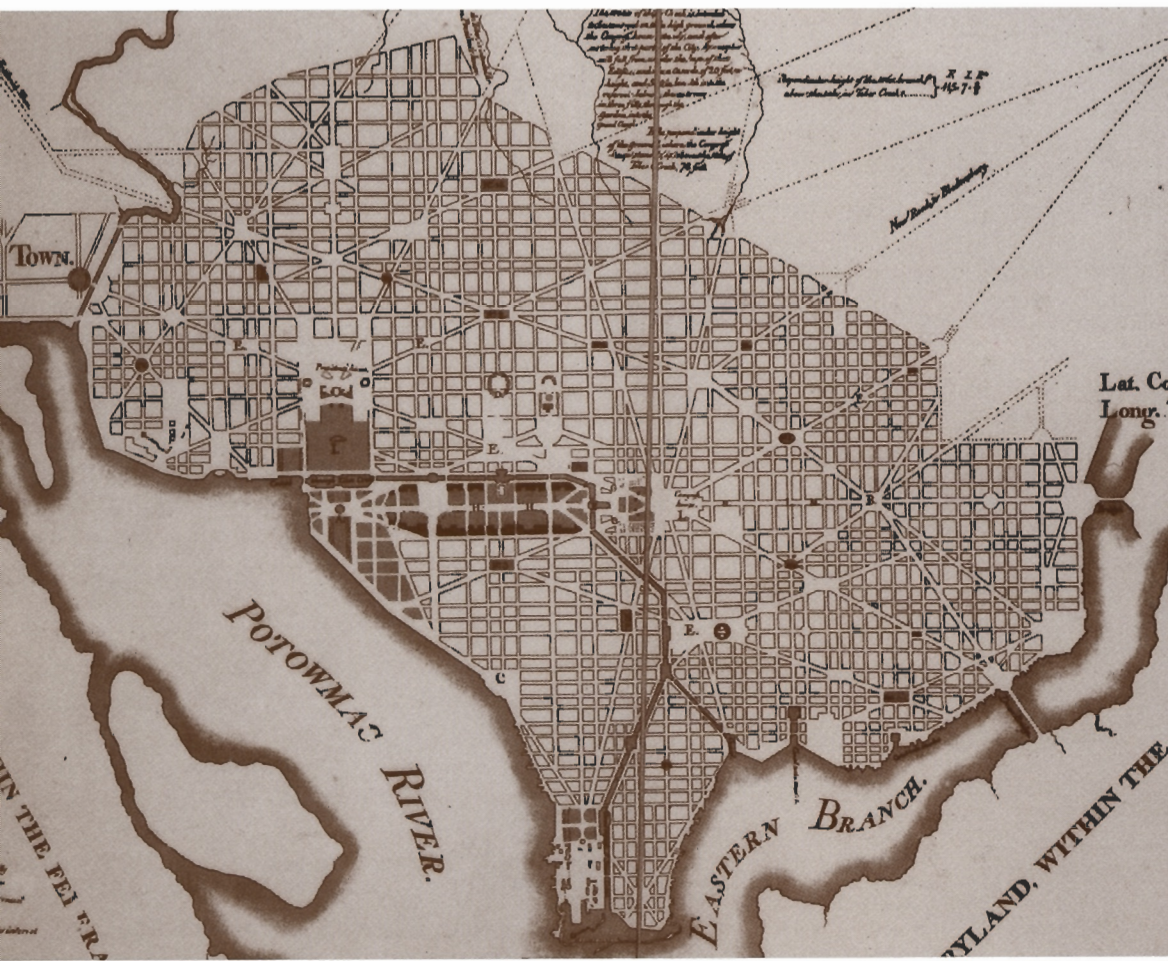
While this was happening to our cities, the same thing was happening to our suburbs. Although Frank Lloyd Wright was not responsible, he did provide the clearest image of this transformation with his Broadacre City project of 1932. Little houses sit at the ends of interminable roads, each one in its own acre of land, and all community grouping gone. All town gone. Architecture is spread out across the landscape like the contents of a wastebasket. It does not ever come together in any place where people are together.

Just one block north of New Haven's Oak Street Connector is an image of the way American towns were originally conceived with a green at the center, in common land. In Massachusetts it is called the 'common;' in Connecticut, the 'green.' It is hard to say which is the more beautiful word, for they both convey part of the meaning. Around the green are nine perfect squares, and the squares take shape with the individual American house on its lot. As the houses become more dense, they define streets. The central square remains open for everyone, and everybody looks toward each other. On the street, and facing the green is the meeting house where the inhabitants of the village all sit in the bright, clear light looking into each other's faces. Thomas Jefferson's national land survey of 1785 centuriated the United States, turning the nation into a great grid of states, and then a great grid of towns. Through his basic system of order, the idea of the green at the center was lost.

On the other hand, American planners, right up until the 1930s, had not been idle in developing the pattern of the grid to address the new problems posed by the railroad and the automobile. As part of the City Beautiful movement in the early years of this century, cars were carried, not in depressed connectors eight lanes wide, but along great boulevards and radiating avenues, the best way that has ever been worked out to move cars in the city. The boulevard is not divisive. It makes a place which is partly park, partly pedestrian. Buildings across from each other are not separated by the boulevard but are given a place which is also a common, wonderful place to walk and see other people, see the shops, and live the life of the city. There is no reason that the automobile has to travel at terminal velocity in the middle of the city. None at all. Great speed is acceptable in the open landscape, but when the automobile gets to the city, it ought to obey the city's laws like everybody else.



Plan of New Haven, drawn by James Wadsworth, 1748.



Plan for Washington D.C., by Pierre Charles L'Efant, 1791.

The City Beautiful plan, with radiating avenues cutting across the grid, is a great French classic invention originating in the design of 17th century French gardens. Versailles, designed by Le Nôtre, features radiating avenues across a grid, a hemicycle below a *parterre d'eau*, and a great axis to a grand *bassin*. At the beginning of our history, these gardens became the model for our most important town, Washington, D.C., which was designed by L'Enfant. L'Enfant's intersections probably are not quite as good as Le Nôtre's, but nevertheless the grid is overlaid with the two centers of power – the White House and the Capitol – from which a series of radiating avenues originate. In the beginning of the 20th century, with the great revival of the classical plan type with the City Beautiful movement, the McMillan Commission expanded L'Enfant's scheme with the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials and the reflecting pool. Washington grew up to the scale of Versailles and became the basic vocabulary of the great American planners.

Modernism made us forget that this concept ever worked. After Gropius and Breuer and the Bauhaus came and changed the climate of opinion, people like John Nolen, who designed hundreds of towns – all beautifully conceived with grids, axial avenues and hemicycles in the garden tradition – were made to think that nothing they had ever done was very important.

How the modernist transformation happened in New Haven is a great story. It involves a wonderful rotund little man with the rosette of the Legion of Honor in his buttonhole: Maurice Rôtival, a planner. He had started his career in Caracas, Venezuela where the grid, plazas and streets were based on the *Laws of the Indies*, the great Spanish tradition in the New World which is unmatched for urbanity. Rôtival ran an enormous Corbusian superhighway through the center of Caracas, and the basic planning problem in Caracas from that day to this is how to fill it in, how to fill it up, how to get the town back again.

In Rôtival's drawings, one is reminded of Hippodamos of Miletos, the first great planner and sociologist of cities. Hippodamos, as you remember, was burlesqued by Aristophanes in *The Birds* as a mad architect named Meton who flew with the birds and, looking down, plotted and platted out the whole ground below.

Rôtival moved from Caracas to New Haven around 1940. At that time, I was a very young instructor, and we were both in Jonathan Edwards College. Maurice would disappear for long periods of time. He would come back and we would say, "Ah, Maurice, where have you been?" And he would say, "I have been planning Madagascar." It was Meton, the hero planner and corollary of the hero architect of those days, who was destroying the world. It is incredible that people could then look with a straight face at Rôtival's drawings of crazy road proposals. Everybody said, "Oh wonderful!" The mayor would show the plans to the businessmen and the businessmen would say, "Oh paradise! Build it. Do it." As soon as they could get money from the government, they started. The intersection of I-95 and I-91 – two menacing shotgun barrels of road – was built and is a horror, even today. In addition, the plan was to extend the Oak Street Connector out into the open landscape where it would have destroyed – entirely by accident – the only African-American community in the area. It was part of the fatality of the vision because the black people were, in most cases, the poor people. It was the poor people who were being taxed for these great schemes, but who were being displaced by them. In New Haven, middle income housing was built to replace low income housing, so that people who had lived there previously would no longer be able to do so. It was marvelous political *jujitsu*. I used to call it 'middle class socialism.' Europeans never understood what I meant by that, and they always changed it in their journals, but it was a special American construction of redevelopment.

The proposed highways were eight lanes wide, not boulevards. In order to be able to drive through New Haven without slackening speed, the plan would have chopped the city up into tiny neighborhoods, until finally the city would be ghettoized by having all its intercommunity relationships cut apart. Yet, having achieved that, the ultimate irony is that the planners finally decided to bypass the whole city.

We fought Rôtival and stopped almost all of his proposals. The Department of Transportation told us we would have absolute gridlock in three years. That was thirty years ago. You cannot believe one thing the Department of Transportation ever tells you because they are so obsessed with the automobile that they cannot think about alternatives. There is no problem at all, and there never has been. This was a great dream of the planners. In countless American cities, redevelopment destroyed the very fabric of urban life – the texture of houses and comprehensible streets and avenues – and replaced it with what I call the post-modern landscape: a crazy tower surrounded by superhighways, asphalt parking, and emptiness with most of the population gone. New Haven had its only riot in 1967 in such a neighborhood called The Hill.

It was all an abstraction. The kind of housing that the architects and planners abandoned, that they thought there was no point in saving, was the typical New Haven vernacular of the frontal gabled two- or three-story houses with wonderful porches on tree-lined streets. The porches were like the galleries of French cathedrals behind the high, arching branches of the trees. These ingredients made a wonderful urbanism – quite dense – but also of comprehensible individual presence and scale. They cared not a whit for those. They got rid of them because they were not part of the abstraction. They were a vernacular which was not valued by high style, International Style architects.

The project the modernists wanted to do for a new government center on New Haven Green was a different function, but the same style: a high tower and low flat-roofed buildings defining an enormous open courtyard. The scale of the space was so vast that the definition of the green would have been destroyed. The post office by James Gamble Rogers was to be demolished, as was the 19th century city hall. These two buildings are emblematic of New Haven. The post office represents the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment: clear, geometric, neat, clean, and tidy. The Romanesque town hall, with its polychromatic brickwork and its active and undisciplined composition, stands for all the rest of us. In these two buildings can be seen the life of the town, the complexity and contradiction which is the life of a city and which the modernists' proposals would have destroyed.

Another building which would have been destroyed was the public library, the most important building in New Haven for everyone who grew up there. That library was the door to freedom. When we were in school, my friends and I would go regularly to check out as many books as allowed and scuttle home to read them all. We went many times through that great door which is door out, the door up, the door to liberation. And it was right on the green, where it was supposed to be. The library was designed in 1908 by a great architect, Cass Gilbert. It was designed contextually to get along in scale with the old churches on the green. He designed the Woolworth Building in New York City a few years later, but because it was in a different context, it was a different style. Gilbert's library makes a place which reinforces the continuity of the city. It gets along with other buildings. They shape the space. He did not try – as the modern architect who added to it recently did – to make it all his, totally different from everything else. He tried to make the library fit into its context in a civilized way.



Gordon Wu Hall, Princeton.

Just as we were starting to discover these things in New Haven through fighting redevelopment in the 1960s, an architect who I think is among the greatest modern architects was learning the principle of contextuality again: Robert Venturi. His Guild House of 1963 modestly tries to get along with the pre-existing brick and white-trimmed buildings on a common street in Philadelphia. He gives the building a little specialness, an arch lifting up to what he called a television aerial. By calling it a television aerial up front, he drove everybody mad with rage. The reason he did it, of course, was to increase the valence. He could have said, like a good Bauhaus designer, "This is by the well-known Hungarian abstract sculptor, so-and-so," and everybody would have said, "Yes, that's fine, that's good, that's art." Call it a television aerial, and people go mad.

The Guild House fits in, and this was a new departure. The great modern masters would not have done this. The great modern masters in America hated the pre-existing urban fabric and wanted a primitivized image of a kind of barbaric power to intrude into the city. In the extension to the Whitney Museum, Marcel Breuer built a concrete wall so that he did not have to look at the windows of the brownstones next door. His one-eyed Cyclops gawks down the avenue. Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum, although a much more genial and gentle building, does the same thing. Wright always said, "Don't think of the Guggenheim as being on Fifth Avenue; think of it as being in the park." But it is on Fifth Avenue and the reason it looks good, which I think it does, is because civil architects did common, clear buildings defining the street. The ordinary, unremarkable buildings give the Guggenheim a frame in which it can act out its contortions. If they were gone and you had more Guggenheim, you would have a strip and you might as well forget it.

Venturi revived all that had been forgotten. He thinks of himself as a modern architect. Wu Hall at Princeton, completed in 1983, is very much a modern building. It could even be called a kind of International Style building. The columns are set back behind the non-bearing wall, and the brick and glass skin makes a taut, thin surface. However, this thin surface suggests Tudor details because it is built in the context of Tudorish buildings of the 1920s. It wants to



Sainsbury Wing, National Gallery, London.

make a place with them. It wants to be special if it can, and it would like to be witty the way Venturi's buildings always are. But most of all, his responsibility is to make that individual place a little better on its own terms. Then – unlike Frank Lloyd Wright, or Corbusier, or Mies – not preoccupied with the developing purity of his own individual style, Venturi will turn around and do another style. For the Institute of Scientific Information in Philadelphia, he uses Le Corbusier's *fenêtre en longueur* and decorates the facade with a computer print-out because it is a building that is full of computers and is surrounded by International Style buildings on a fast automobile street.

In other words, the principle all of a sudden becomes not style, but context. This is a very important shift because the modern age from the early 19th century on has been preoccupied with the idea of style. We have a special life, therefore, we must have a special style. I am reminded of the story about Talleyrand in which a young man asked, "Monsieur Talleyrand, I would like to start a new religion. How shall I set about it? Can you give me any advice?" Talleyrand said, "It's very simple. All you have to do is die and rise again on the third day." Now styles are a little like that. They do not come when they are called and, if they do, they arrive in very diminished form. Mies, I think, created the greatest style of the modern age: so limited, so reduced, so exact, so perfect – and nevertheless, so limited and so reduced in the end.

In any event, we have a new principle now, one that the great modern architects hated the most: the principle of eclecticism. Use all kinds of different styles depending on the place and on what is required to make the place itself a little better on its own terms. In England, to the hatred of the English critics, is Venturi's Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery whose colossal pilasters and engaged columns pick up the best elements of the Wilkins building adjacent. But the great gesture which controls the space of Trafalgar Square is the very modern gesture of the big abstract cut with darkness inside, like the work of Lutyens or Louis Kahn. Here is an architecture which, in Venturi's hands, is always about context, about community, about the place where it is built.

When I began to think about these issues at Yale just after World War II, we were as far from the idea of community as we could get. Indeed, the most important building was built near us right at that time. It was Philip Johnson's Glass House of 1950, and in one way this was the absolute climax, in my view, of the Modern Movement, of that side of the Modern Movement that deals with the liberation of the individual. By plugging the individual into the going sources of power, heating and light, you could liberate him from all styles, from all community, from all family and place him in the midst of nature. Basically, it is a one-man house. The individual all of a sudden – because he feels safe or seems to be taken care of with those fragile devices – can be open to nature. He does not need the town; he does not need the city. The Glass House represents the free individual. It is no accident that Johnson has a replica of Poussin's painting of the funeral of Phocion hanging in the house. In Plutarch, Phocion was the conservative statesman who was put to death during the restoration of the Athenian republic and buried outside the city. He was not allowed to remain in the city. He was the individual aristocrat, alone.



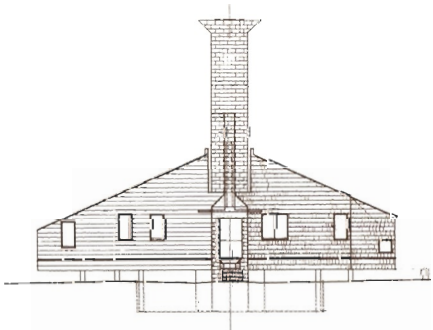
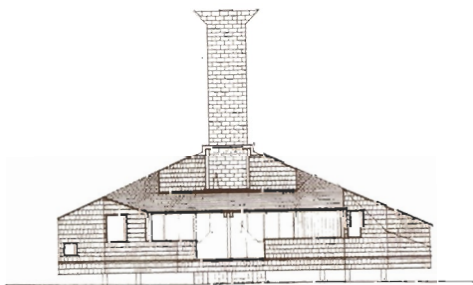
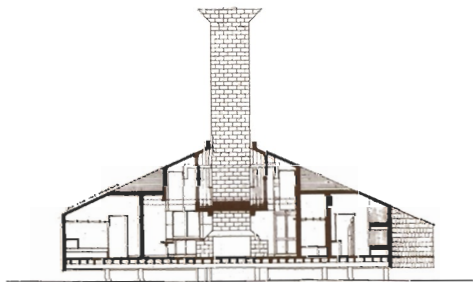
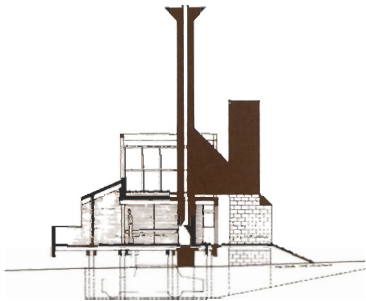
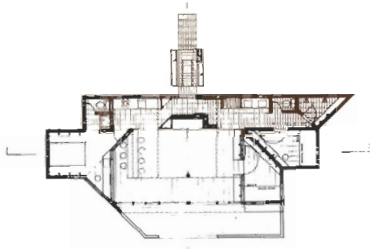
Glass House, New Canaan, Connecticut.



Low House, Bristol, Rhode Island.

I, not aristocratic at all and with no money, also wanted exactly that in 1950. I built a house for \$9.00 per square foot which was as much like Philip Johnson's Glass House as I could get on no budget and with wood frame construction. I wanted it to be in the woods because I could not afford to buy half the state of Connecticut the way Johnson did so that he could be alone, but I could not bear to look at any of the Cape Cod houses that were going to be built out there. I could not have stood it, so absolutely marinated in modernism as I was at the time.

It is interesting to me that I should have taken that attitude because I had just written about the American vernacular in my dissertation of 1949. Subsequently, in my book *The Shingle Style*, first published in 1955, I wrote about what I call the stick and shingle styles of the 19th century vernacular tradition. But the American porch was as far as I could go in using plank and beam construction in my own house. That is really what I was building, just a porch like Andrew Jackson Downing's stick-style of the 1850s. I never conceived of building anything that had to do with the shingle style. Why? Because I could not imagine using windows, or doors, or enclosing the whole house, and I certainly could not imagine using a gable shape. The reason I wrote my dissertation was because I saw the Low House in Bristol, Rhode Island which had been published by my master, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, in *Rhode Island Architecture* in 1939. I thought, "Oh, that's powerful!" I had been looking at the International Style and I liked the big strong geometric shapes, but the Low House seemed to me to be a kind of American architecture. However, it never occurred to me to use it. That is the point. There was an absolute barrier between me and it.



Beach House Project.

That is where Venturi comes in again. Ten years later, in 1959, he broke that modernist barrier with his first great project, the Beach House, which was modeled on the Low House. It is shingled, and the great big gable shape with the articulated chimney gestures above the dunes. But that is not the whole story. This project is an example of the principle of condensation which Freud talks about in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. So many great works of architecture – the Parthenon, Hagia Sophia, and the nave of Chartres – come from what Freud called condensation, the putting together two opposites nobody ever thought of combining before to make a new unity. Venturi condenses the gable and the shingles with the modernist architects that we all love. The Beach House does not have windows really, but instead a long void in a thin wall with an open square window above. The house is raised up on *pilotis*. He condenses the vernacular with Villa Savoye. He condenses old and new.

Venturi's project also connects with the very beginnings of the American preservation movement in the 1870s during the Grant administration. At that time, Americans wrote over and over again, "America has gotten too large, too corrupt. We must look back to the values of the time when we were smaller." They went to Newburyport, Newport, and Nantucket to find those values and they saw vernacular shingle style houses. The first colonial house that was published in an architectural periodical was in the *New York Sketch Book* of architecture of 1874 and featured a long sloping shingled roof. That led to the Watts-Sherman House, the Low House and finally Venturi's houses.

I do not think Venturi would have seen the gable if he had not been deeply involved with the great architect, Louis I. Kahn. Kahn wanted to be a modern architect; he wanted to be the most modern of all. He wanted to reinvent the wheel in every building. He did not care about context. What he cared about was starting from the beginning, always saying, "A good question is better than the best answer." As a consequence, his buildings all have a kind of primitive probity of geometry and structure, which are the very basis of architecture. The play of circles in squares, the big pyramidal shapes, and the basic geometry and fundamental structure of Kahn's Jewish Community Center at Trenton are the kind of thing that emboldened Venturi to go to the big gable. On the other hand, the relationship of Kahn and Venturi is very much a high modern story of the relationship of the young architect to the older one – a relationship which sometimes resulted in real agony and real hate on both sides because of the tension of their convictions. Kahn went on and did wonderfully primitive buildings without glass. He hated glass. He loved the ruins of Rome. He wanted the primitive, the void in a brick wall full of tension, full of drama.



Frank Lloyd Wright home and studio.

When Venturi came to design his mother's house, he had to work his way free from Kahn and, in doing so, produced hundreds of drawings for this single project. You can see how he gets free of Kahn: the lintel splits, the building splits, the tension splits, and the big structure of the arch becomes just a gesture. However, because the circle of the arch jumps over the square void, you feel the circle in the square. It is a powerful image: two big geometries being split laterally apart, coasting along the lintel on the front facade. Ironically, the house is built of factory cinder block, but it is painted to look like the cardboard models that Louis Kahn always used in his office. Kahn is still there.

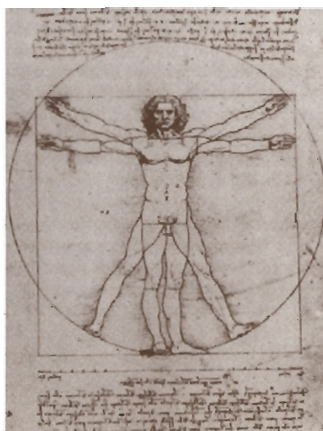
There is another ghostly presence in Venturi's work that every American architect has had to deal with: the archetypal father figure of Frank Lloyd Wright. What Venturi saw was what Harold Bloom has written about so well. A smart young poet, or young architect, does not emulate the work of the master in full career when he has made his reputation, but instead looks to the work of the master's beginning. Venturi's mother's house is fundamentally derived from Frank Lloyd Wright's 1889 house in Oak Park for his family: the gable, the Palladian motif of the half-round thermal window that Jefferson loved so much, and the frontality. It is all there. Venturi transforms the residue of the Palladian window and makes a big feature, splitting it across the front of the house, and then puts his mother in it sitting in a kitchen chair.

This was a very dangerous thing to do in 1962. At that time everybody was so psychoanalyzed, it was dangerous even to admit you ever had a mother. Venturi places his mother in a kitchen chair where the heroic male figure had stood ever since the time of Vitruvius. The notion of the heroic male figure as emblematic of universal order has obsessed western aesthetics, as witnessed by hundreds of drawings like Leonardo da Vinci's great drawing of the male figure inscribed in circle and square. In 1962, Venturi places his mother in circle and square, and in so doing, makes a feminist statement. This move, like his partnership with his wife Denise Scott Brown, is clearly part of the feminist movement of the period. He destroys the major myth of male heroes, special and oppressive, destroyers and creators all themselves. I ended my book *Modern Architecture* in 1961 with an aggressive image of Le Corbusier which speaks of the male force of power, primitivism, and brutalism. Venturi threw it all out, and architects for a long period of time could not forgive him.



Vanna Venturi House, Philadelphia.

Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1510.





Trubeck and Wislocki Houses, Nantucket.

This move also released Venturi from the myth of invention. The myth that everything had to be invented afresh each time was tearing our buildings apart. Venturi consequently is able to turn directly to the shingle style. The shingle style lies behind his mother's house, but he does not reveal it. With the Trubeck and Wislocki houses of 1970 on Nantucket Island for two sisters and their husbands, the shingle style becomes overt. The two houses turn toward each other, Venturi says, like Greek temples. But most of all, they become very common. One still has Frank Lloyd Wright's Palladian window, and the other is a funny, dumb little building with square windows like eyes. Venturi had just written *Learning from Las Vegas*, so people were deriding the Nantucket houses as 'learning from Fort Dix.' But that was the point. In lieu of inventing something special, Venturi wanted to get to the essence of the simplest, straightest type. The type is where the power lies.

A little later, Aldo Rossi in Milan was doing exactly the same thing. His Fagnano Olona School of 1973 has dumb square windows with dumb cross mullions. Rossi tells the story about his teacher at the Polytechnic in Milan who reacted to the square windows by saying, "Aldo, you're like some poor dumb peasant from the Abruzzi. You're just a mason." And Rossi responded, "Finally you understand what I am after."

Venturi and Rossi are in search of the type. The type always says 'mankind,' like the bathing pavilions of Elba that Rossi loves which are like people gesturing in a crowd. They are vertical, seemingly eyed, and symmetrical. Our bodies do empathetically associate with that dumb thing of a type. Venturi's Nantucket houses are indeed like Greek temples, but the point of a Greek temple is that each has to be like all the others so you can read the differences between them that can only be read between beings of the same species. They are a type. Considering for example the two temples at Paestum, one is wider and lower and the other is narrower, denser and bigger. They are like two different people. They can be read in that way because they are the gods in human guise, because there is an empathy between the body and the column. They are a conceivable clear type shape that never changes, like our bodies, although there are differences among us. And that is what Venturi is saying. Windows move a little bit, but only within the type where the real tension of difference makes sense.



Trubeck and Wislocki Houses, Nantucket.

All pre-Greek and non-Greek types say 'nature.' They all say 'mountain,' like the pyramids or Teotihuacan. The Greek type says 'humankind.' It intrudes; you feel it. It has been our type and connected with the gods in one way or another ever since the time of the Greeks. The Trubeck and Wislocki houses are like Greek temples, one taller but narrower, and the other flatter but wider. They act in relation to each other. An English painter who visited the site with me called them silver gods. The way they are seen in the fog, they are like birds in the sea wind. They are two stunned little beings, mute and dumb under the wind. On a site in northern Delaware, another Venturi house fits into a different kind of landscape: soft and verdant and warm. The house is not only contextual with the history and character of the landscape type, but also with the social history and culture of the place.

The first person outside Penn who understood Venturi and admired him was Robert A.M. Stern. While still a student at the Yale School of Architecture, Stern brought out a double issue of *Perspecta*, the Yale architectural magazine, in which he printed the first chapter of *Complexity and Contradiction* which was subsequently published in 1966. Stern was Venturi's first real follower, and he also knew the shingle style. In 1965, when he wanted to follow Venturi, Stern thought in terms of originality, in terms of invention. He took a house and deconstructed it, tearing it apart and recombining the pieces. The result was like something never seen before.

However, as he grew, as he worked, as he tried to learn how to build, Stern began to see that the thing for him at any rate was to build a type. You could learn how to do the type and with the type you could really put buildings together because they are speaking the same language, the way people in a community do. His houses of the 1980s go together as naturally as a group of nineteenth century shingle style houses in Newport.

Stern achieved something else for which he has never received adequate credit. After moving to traditional architecture, he took up the cause of traditional urbanism and was truly the first architect to do so. He conceived the great idea of a subway suburb. He saw an opportunity in the South Bronx after it was burnt out. Nobody wanted the land, yet the infrastructure of services and public transportation remained intact. Stern's proposal of 1976 was to build a typical American community, to build what everybody – including the inhabitants of center city – has always wanted and what all Americans have been told they could have: a one-family house on its own little plot of ground with the car parked in front. Stern laid out the neighborhood on traditional principles and based his house types exactly on New Haven's fundamental frontal gable stick and shingle style type, the 19th century vernacular. Stern's scheme was never realized, but HUD itself – without the underpinning of the urban plan – did build a number of single family houses there, and they were snapped up. In tragic areas in New Haven, you see a few of these little houses that have been built by Habitat for Humanity, and the love you feel is there. Modern architects say, "That is not the way people are supposed to live. They are supposed to live in a dense high-rise city. Single family houses are probably fascist, and certainly *retardataire*."

When Stern designed the South Bronx scheme, Andres Duany had been working in his office. Duany and his wife, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, had come to Yale Architecture School in the early 1970s from Princeton. They would take my class down to New Haven neighborhoods and they would show us how well porches worked in relation to streets. They spoke about a particular relationship of house to plot, and to sidewalk, trees and curb. They understood that it was possible to park on the street and yet houses could still dominate the street. They saw how the great gables are individual and powerful.



Seaside, Florida.

What Duany and Plater-Zyberk did for me then was what Venturi had done in part before. They broke that invisible membrane that I, even as an historian, had between the past and me. I was so involved with Modernism I could not believe we could ever use the past again. All of a sudden I realized, why not? Out of that experience came Seaside in Florida, and now there are hundreds of designs of new towns in this country and around the world based on this new thinking about the vernacular. By definition, the vernacular at Seaside is of the place. It is the Redneck Riviera, stretching from Panama City to Pensacola. It is a particular kind of urbanism, but within the same type as New Haven. Houses dominate the street and work together to make a sense of community.

The plan of Seaside is the revival of traditional American planning principles. It is the revival of John Nolen and of vernacular and classical traditions of urbanism. Seaside even has a little post office in the center designed by the developer, Robert Davis. Like Jefferson, he goes to his books, gets the details and puts them together. Everyone wants to get their letters stamped there now. It has an identity.

What is more interesting is the fact that Seaside is conceived as a town, not as a typical Florida gated development. There is no gate. Instead, the coast highway goes right through the town, and the speed of cars is greatly reduced. Cars can turn up the streets, but nothing is done to make it easy for cars to make the big swing. In fact, they have to stop in order to turn, and then have to proceed slowly up the street. And why not? Also following tradition, the beach is public and free for everyone, even for people who do not live in Seaside. Nobody owns the beach. People come from their houses, cross the road or use the wonderful pedestrian alleys, and go to the beach. But what really counts is the street. If the street were not narrow, and if houses did not have to come up to the street, and if there were open garages or carports on the street, there would be no sense of community, no sense of being together. Up and down the coast, there are towns imitating Seaside. They have vernacular architecture and picket fences, but they do not have the clout or the guts to fight the fire department and the DOT for the narrow road. Perhaps they do not even realize its importance. Consequently, there is no feeling of community.

A friend of mine, Frank Gehry, calls this kind of urbanism 'nostalgic.' On the other hand, he designs a beautiful house in Brentwood, California which he says he wants to be like an Italian village. It looks like Seaside. The style is different, but the type and the scale are much the same. Gehry can succeed because he is designing all the buildings in the 'village.' But it would be a mistake to have one person design all the buildings in the city, so you need a law. You need the building code. Architects like Gehry do not want to submit to the code, but you have to have the code if you are going to have the kind of order you have in the individual rich villa in the town. The genius of Duany and Plater-Zyberk is that they have drawn up building codes which allow considerable freedom with regard to style – from modern to what-have-you at Seaside – but the type holds together. Gehry, for example, should recognize the fact that the Italian hill towns that he loves, and which are so beautiful, have the shapes they have because of political process, not because of free inventive design. In San Gimignano, a town which everybody loves, two towers are cut off because the noble family that owned them tried to block the loggia between the square with the fountain and the square with the church. The town rose up and cut off the heads of that family. The whole story of the politics, of the history of the town, is in those formal relationships.

Indeed, the most beautiful image of urbanism that has ever been created, in my view, is the fresco from the 1340s in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. It has always been called *The Allegory of Good Government*, and it is about how government makes a town possible. It could have been called *The Ideal Republican City in its Landscape*. You can go all the way back to Homer, who sees the hard wall of the city cutting into the soft, rounded, natural shapes of nature as a very dangerous thing, as a hubristic thing. Those, like Hector, who trust in the city, fall before heroes like Achilles who are compared to fire and water, the forces of nature. It is a tense relationship, but a great one out of which the ideas of human immortality begin. The myth of Gilgamesh arises in the first cities in Mesopotamia where the king realizes that the only immortality he has is what he builds in the town because it outlasts his life. As he builds in relation to the dead, and those who come after build in relation to him, human beings in the city carry on a conversation across time which in part defeats death, defeats nature.



The Allegory of Good Government, Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

This is all in Lorenzetti's fresco. The figure at the center is called *Securitas*. Security of the law makes it possible for people to travel, for the peasants to beat the grain in peace, and for people to trade in the town. Another fresco shows us what happens with bad government. The city falls to bits, is burned out, torn down, and people are mugged and raped. Though painted in the fourteenth century, the imagery is very close to home. Everything about preservation law is in this beautiful little allegory which shows how, if individuals give up freely a little bit of their originality, they can exercise their originality in peace because they are protected by law. The figure representing the commune, the town, holds a golden cord, and all the citizens of the town – each one in special dress – hold it voluntarily. The cord is the law, and it is the law that makes the town. The building code side of the law and the preservation side of the law make it possible to plan and to have the town. Indeed, the beautiful Siena itself is all the result of such a code. Inhabitants were not allowed to project balconies, for example, so you get that wonderful thin surface as if the space in the Campo were pushing back and distending the Palazzo facade – the kind of thing that Duccio paints so well. Law makes that possible.



Seaside, Florida.

Law, of course, makes Seaside possible and creates a vernacular like that of the Italian town because everyone is basically speaking the same language. I think in Seaside there just is a little of that feeling that I have talked about – that is, about architecture mediating between human beings and nature. Nature is seen, not from the picture window of modernism, but across the roofs of the town. The little honeymoon cottages by Scott Merrill are like Greek temples – very man-made, facing the immensity and might of nature. When great storms blow up in the gulf and across the town, you feel that basic truth of the majesty of nature and – however limited – the brotherhood of mankind. I think we feel it in all our greatest works.

As you know, developments of Duany and Plater-Zyberk have been criticized largely by people saying they are only enclaves for the rich. Seaside is rich now, but it did not start that way. Seaside has become rich because it is so popular; it is where people want to be. Those who can afford it want community. The poor, who need it most, have not yet benefited except in a few instances. For example, in Cleveland, an African-American neighborhood has been rebuilt by Duany and Plater-Zyberk – not on the principles of the old project – but on the principles of the house, the picket fence, the street and the American town.

In Los Angeles, Liz Moule and Stefanos Polyzoides – another husband and wife architect team as so many of these new teams are – are designing Playa Vista, an enormous development which will have thirty percent affordable housing. They are rewriting the true vernacular of Los Angeles. Los Angeles vernacular is not a few modern houses – lovely as they are – by European architects hiding up in the impassable roads at the edge of the canyon, but basic Mediterranean courtyard types which originally made wonderfully planned communities in the region all connected by light rail and trolleys. Los Angeles was once as beautiful as Tuscany, with special planned places connected by public transportation. That all disappeared in the face of automobile sprawl. Peter Calthorpe, another of this group of new urbanists, is advising on the rebuilding of a neighborhood in central Chicago. His proposal includes reviving the light rail connection. The revival of public transportation is clearly fundamental to the idea of a new urbanism.

Many years ago, when Duany was showing us those buildings in New Haven, he was saying, "Once we did architecture right in the United States, and now we are doing it wrong." The best vernacular housing we have in the United States is not contemporary. It was built by the government as low cost emergency housing in World War I. In Bridgeport, Connecticut, there were seven big, beautiful developments built for the lowest paid workers in the war industries. All of them are still lived in, loved and cared for by their people, in a town which otherwise is a burnt out disaster area. Most of these developments were done under the direction of John Nolen. One development in 1918 called Seaside Park was by Hepburn and Shurtleff who then went on to work for Rockefeller at Williamsburg.

The government built similar housing up and down the East Coast, around the Great Lakes, and on the West Coast. In every case, they said, "Let it be the vernacular of the region." They did not have a preconceived style in mind. So, in Jacksonville, Florida, there is a wonderful cracker vernacular drawn from the American stick style of the 19th century. In Bridgeport, Seaside Park is built on the principles of colonial architecture with single family houses around a green. Each house is subdivided into small though very handsome units to achieve greater density without losing the identity of the single family house as a type. The front door is man's identity; it connects us with the gods.

At the end of the World War I, there was a congressional investigation into wartime housing and the senate decided that there should not be any more built and that the government should get right out of building housing because it was socialistic. The architects of Seaside Park in Bridgeport were specifically chided for "undue elegance in design." By the time of World War II, a development across the street from the pristine and well-loved Seaside Park was built which successfully avoided all that undue elegance in design. Modernism had struck: flat-roof barracks in a bubbling asphalt wasteland, and no detailing, no basic identification, no reason to be anywhere rather than anywhere else.

An architectural historian from Los Angeles – which in my opinion has been very badly served by its critics -- has said, “This new urbanism is nonsense. Everyone knows the environment has no effect on human beings.” How any architect, historian or critic could say that the effect of environment on human beings is a myth, I cannot imagine. What we did to our poor is unforgivable, and it is unbelievable that they have forgiven us. We put them in developments where their whole neighborhood structure was destroyed, and those buildings themselves subsequently had to be destroyed, like Pruitt-Igoe and others. In Europe, under similar circumstances, fortresses of the working class were built which cast out the rest of society, like the Karl Marx Hof in Vienna. The American worker and the unions, with almost no exceptions, have never really done this. What American workers want is what we always told them that every American could have: bread and roses, a little house, and a law – a zoning law, a building law – that protects them as well as the rich. With those ideas in mind, and with the sense of preservation that we must physically preserve what we are so that we will remember, I think it is very possible that we will do it again.

Vincent Scully
February 1996





Raoul Wallenberg Lecture

The Raoul Wallenberg Lecture was initiated in 1971 by Sol King, a former classmate of Wallenberg's. An endowment was established in 1976 for an annual lecture to be offered in Raoul's honor on the theme of architecture as a humane social art. The following distinguished architects and historians have been invited to present the Wallenberg lectures to the College of Architecture + Urban Planning at the University of Michigan:

- 1972 Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, C.B.E.
- 1973 Eric Larabee
- 1975 Reyner Banham
- 1976 Rudolf Arnheim
- 1978 Jacob B. Bakema
- 1979 James Marston Fitch
- 1981 Carl Levin
- 1983 Edmund Bacon
- 1984 Charles Correa
- 1985 Grady Clay
- 1987 Joseph Rykwert
- 1988 Spiro Kostof
- 1989 J. Max Bond, Jr.
- 1990 Elizabeth Hollander
- 1991 Joseph Esherick
- 1992 Denise Scott Brown
- 1993 James Ingo Freed
- 1994 Jorge Silvetti
- 1995 Daniel Libeskind
- 1996 Vincent Scully

Raoul Wallenberg Scholarship

The Raoul Wallenberg Scholarship is awarded through a design competition which is held annually for undergraduates in their final year of study in the College of Architecture + Urban Planning at the University of Michigan. The following students have been awarded the scholarship:

| | |
|-----------------|------|
| John DeGraaf | 1988 |
| Matthew Petrie | 1989 |
| Elizabeth Govan | 1990 |
| Paul Warner | 1991 |
| Dallas Felder | 1992 |
| Eric Romano | 1993 |
| Charles Yoo | 1994 |
| Matthew Johnson | 1995 |
| Jo Polowczuk | 1996 |

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This talk has been edited and illustrated by the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, and the author respects the heroic attempt to turn a spoken lecture into written prose. Professor Scully, with some reservations, has consented to publication in this form but reserves the right to publish the material in another form elsewhere.

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