

An Archeology of Postmodern Architecture:  
A Reading of Charles Jencks' Work

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**Abstract**

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A powerful sense of discontinuity and rupture, a simultaneity of theory and practice as well as a critique of bourgeois art forms are some of the common features that modern and postmodern discourses share. Despite the similarities between the two movements, they tend to be portrayed and defined in perfect opposition to each other. Charles Jencks is one of the more prominent theorists who emphasized the differences between the two movements and declared the failure of modernism as a sufficient reason to legitimize the advent of postmodernism.

This work attempts to understand the emergence of postmodernism through its relationship to modernism while examining the discursive dimension of the two movements. The goal of this thesis is not aimed at determining to what extent postmodernism was necessary or avoidable, definable or unintelligible, real or merely fictive. In deference to Michel Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*, it examines the reasons and conditions of its emergence, identifying the sites of continuity and rupture between modernism and postmodernism and studying the discursive formations within modernism that facilitated the appearance of postmodernism. It carries out this investigation through the writings of Jencks and in reference to three distinct yet overlapping phases that mark their evolving relationship; representing, defining and classifying.

*To my Father Kamel and my Mother Saida  
To my Sister Olfa and the newly born Adam.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In his 1969 book *The archeology of knowledge*, Michel Foucault tried to define his new method of historical investigation in the following terms:

Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules. It does not treat discourse as document... it is concerned with discourse in its own volume, as a monument. It is not an interpretative discipline: it does not seek another, better-hidden discourse. It refuses to be 'allegorical'.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the book, Foucault built his argument in support of a historical relativism that became even stronger in his later work. Foucault argued that different forms of truth do not emerge because of their valuable or eternal character but rather because one group had enough authority to legitimize the 'inevitability' of their own rise to power. Foucault inherited his relativism and critique of historicism from Nietzsche's views on knowledge and his arguments about humans' 'will to power'.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, he deduced from Kant the idea that that all knowledge is inevitably constrained and limited within the context of its production.<sup>3</sup> French Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan was an equally important influence, from whom he derived the idea that the subject can never know itself and that the latter is a construct that is always changing and 'in crisis'.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Foucault's suspicions about different narratives of truth is not exclusive to the author but related to a larger theoretical framework in which all attempts to define any sort of truth were rejected. This rejection of 'definitions' is one of the first bases

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 139.

<sup>2</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Walter Kaufmann. (1886; New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, the Introduction to the Hackett edition (London 1999).

<sup>4</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London 1997).

of what is today recognized as postmodern philosophy. The archeological method is then not an attempt to recover a certain authenticity or truth. Instead, it is an investigation aimed at understanding how the mechanisms of creation of truth existed and worked within a specific context.

This thesis uses the Foucauldian archeological method and thus does not aim at defining postmodernism but at understanding the reasons and conditions of its emergence. It will attempt to discover the emergence of postmodernism and its relation to late modernism while investigating the discursive dimension of the two movements. This archeology will focus on the period of time from the beginning of the postwar era to the period following the publication of Charles Jencks' *The language of Post-Modern architecture* in 1977.<sup>5</sup> The aim of this research is not to determine if postmodernism was necessary or avoidable, definable or unintelligible, real or merely fictive. It is concerned with understanding *why* it emerged and *what* were the conditions of its emergence. It will also focus on the discursive formations of modernism that helped the appearance of postmodernism and how modernism was later portrayed by postmodern architectural theorists. Finally, it will question the failure of modernism as a sufficient reason to legitimize the emergence of postmodernism.

In this archeology, particular attention will be paid to Charles Jencks' work given his status as the theorist who posed a clear terminology of postmodernism, codified its discourse and gave it semantic and linguistic features so it could be defined, used, followed, analyzed and criticized. Following this same logic of discursive analysis, the questions will not focus on what Jencks said but what made him say, with so much passion, that we are postmodern. The American theorist will not be considered an agent but rather a manifestation of the general late modern and postmodern discourse and of the need to transcend modernism that was amplified during the 1960s.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Jencks, *The language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).

Trying to portray postmodernism while avoiding a 'frontal' definition is symptomatic of almost all representations of postmodernism. Andreas Huyssen's article "Mapping the postmodern," published in 1984 is representative of the different attempts to understand the emergence of postmodernism while avoiding a direct definition of the movement. In his article, Huyssen argues that postmodernism exists as a shift or as a new sensibility and is, in fact, different from modernism without however claiming a radical rupture and break between both movements. Huyssen refuses an either/or dichotomy and clearly calls for salvaging postmodernism from its champions and its detractors. He states: "I will not attempt here to define what postmodernism is, the term 'postmodernism' itself should guard us against such an approach as it positions the phenomenon as relational."<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, while claiming that postmodernism 'exists', Huyssen remains skeptical towards a unique definition of the movement and describes postmodernism as relational and considers this volatility of the definition as part of the 'Derridean postmodernism.'<sup>7</sup> Huyssen then explains how the definition or the 'mapping' of postmodernism is inextricably related to modernism and notions of avant-garde, neo conservatism and poststructuralism. In the end, For Huyssen, postmodernism is not an object of study *per se*, rather, it resides in the intersection between other movements and tendencies. Indeed, the postmodernism Huyssen tries to describe evolved between the 1960s and the 1980s. The writer argues that the movement advanced from an American critical postmodernism that tried to revive early European avant-garde and criticize late modernism to a more European poststructuralist postmodernism.

Despite the complexity of the task of defining postmodernism, Huyssen argues that the early postmodernism was in reality 'modern' due to the many characteristics both movements shared. The

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<sup>6</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 10.

<sup>7</sup> Later in the article, Huyssen explains how the French thinker called for questioning the simple dichotomies amongst which the dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism.

first common feature between modernism and early postmodernism is the powerful sense of future, of new frontiers, of rupture and of discontinuity. This first modern and early postmodern emphasis on the idea of 'newness' is parallel to a critique of the ways in which art is produced, marketed and distributed in the previous contexts—a critique that was considered a second shared feature of both movements. According to Huyssen, the enthusiasm for the new can only come from a technological optimism that characterized the modern avant-garde as well as early postmodernists. The fourth and last characteristic shared between modernism and postmodernism that Huyssen mentions is the 'populist' side of the two movements and their critique of forms of bourgeois and high art.

Later in his article Huyssen explains how poststructuralism was also similar to modernism. For him, both movements were based upon the idea of a necessary coexistence and simultaneity of arts and theory. He thus argues that the themes initiated by poststructuralists are essentially modern. The intrinsic existence of modernism within postmodernism led Huyssen to examine Jurgen Habermas' famous article "Modernity versus postmodernity" and the German philosopher's critique of the role of neo-conservatism on building the postmodern discourse. In the article Huyssen tries to summarize Habermas questions about postmodernism:

His questions (Habermas) were these: how does postmodernism relate to modernism ? How are political conservatism, cultural eclecticism or pluralism, tradition, modernity and anti-modernity interrelated in contemporary western culture? To what extent can the cultural and social formations of the 1970s be characterized as postmodern? And further, to what extent is postmodernism a revolt against reason and enlightenment, and at what point do such revolts become reactionary? <sup>8</sup>

The questions raised by Huyssen here are very similar to those Hal Foster tried to introduce in his 1985 essay "(Post)modern polemics." Other insights concerning the possible 'definition' of

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<sup>8</sup> Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern ," 32

postmodernism are also shared by the two writers such as the evolution of postmodern theory throughout the period and the role of neo-conservatism in the construction of the movement. In this essay Foster makes a distinction between a neo-conservative postmodernism and a poststructuralist postmodernism. When discussing the first category, he states: "it is defined mostly in terms of style, is countered with a return to narrative, ornament and the figure. This position is often one of reaction, but in more ways than the stylistic."<sup>9</sup>

In opposition to the neoconservative postmodernism, Foster poses the postructuralist postmodernism that he argues assumes the 'death of man' as center of representation and history. He further describes it as "profoundly anti-humanist: rather than a return to representation, it launches a critique in which representation is shown to be more constitutive of reality than transparent to it."<sup>10</sup> This dispersion of the subject and its coexistence with a return of pastiche and ornaments are essential features of an evolving and fragmented postmodern discourse described by Foster.

It is worth noting that architecture took an important place in Foster and Huyssen's articles, where it is consistently used as a physical illustration of the postmodern philosophical and theoretical project. A central figure of postmodern architecture often mentioned in Huyssen's article is Charles Jencks, who is described as "one of the most well known popularizing chroniclers of the agony of the modern movement and spokesman for a postmodern architecture."<sup>11</sup> The central importance of Jencks in the construction of the postmodern discourse in architecture is, at least in part, related to his educational background and early publications. Born in Baltimore in 1939, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature at Harvard University in 1961 and a Master of Arts degree in architecture from the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1965. In 1966, Jencks moved to the United Kingdom

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<sup>9</sup> Hal Foster, "(Post)-modern polemics," *Recodings ; Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* ( Washington : Bay Press, 1985), 121.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>11</sup> Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," 14.

where he received his PhD in Architectural History from University College of London in 1970. Even though he studied under the supervision of influential modernist architectural historians and theorists such as Reyner Banham and Siegfried Giedion, Jencks developed his critique of modernism very early in his career with his 1973 book *Modern movements in architecture*.<sup>12</sup>

During his career, Charles Jencks wrote more than twenty books and numerous articles almost exclusively about postmodern architecture. Besides his critical and theoretical work, he worked on projects that he described as postmodern with the notable example of his Landform Ueda at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. Nevertheless, while considered a central contributor to the postmodern discourse, Charles Jencks remains a very contested and controversial figure over the last thirty years. For example, after acknowledging his importance in his article "Mapping the postmodern," Huyssen describes Jencks as a schizophrenic—a schizophrenia that he argues: "is symptomatic of the postmodern moment in architecture."<sup>13</sup> It is this place of Jencks as a central and controversial figure of postmodernism that makes his work instrumental to the project of an archeology of postmodern architecture.

In this thesis, the archeological method of Foucault will be used to analyze the theoretical work of Charles Jencks. It will be argued that that while constructing his postmodern discourse, Jencks proceeded through three different discursive strategies; representation, definition and classification. This thesis will be composed of three different sections, each one analyzing one of these strategies using Charles Jencks' most significant and influential historical and theoretical writings but also comparative works of other historians and theorists such as Nikolaus Pevsner, Reyner Banham and Heinrich Klotz.

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<sup>12</sup> Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture* (New York: Anchor Press, 1973).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



Figure 1. Charles Jencks, Landform Ueda, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 1999-2002.

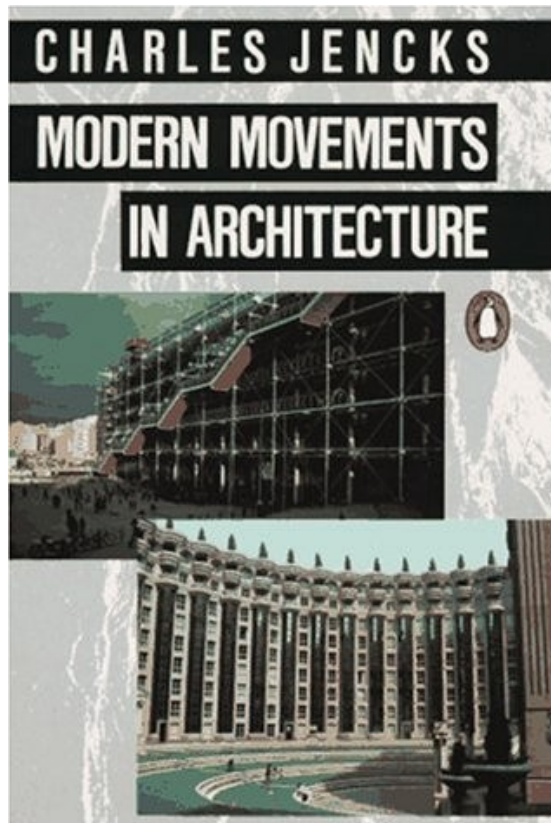


Figure 2. Charles Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 1985, cover

The first section of the thesis analyzes the first discursive strategy, representation, in which Charles Jencks tries to portray modernism and retain semantic control over the meaning of the movement. The 1973 book *Modern movements in architecture* will be a central component in this analysis. The ways in which Jencks discursively fragments the modern unity and later tries to reconstruct the narratives of failure and narratives of success in the modern movement will be studied in this early work of the writer.

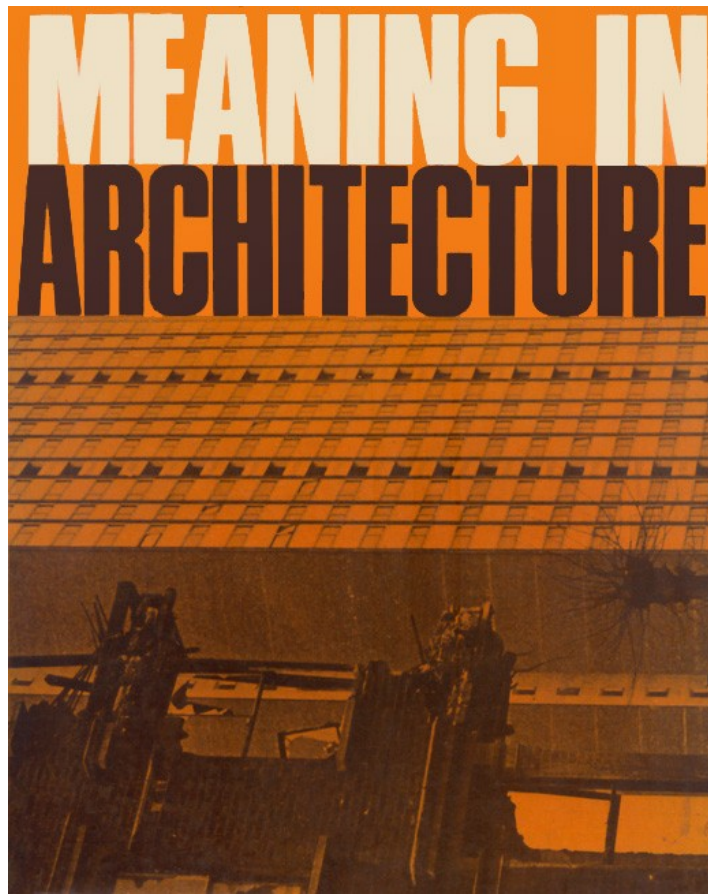


Figure 3. George Baird and Charles Jencks, *Meaning in Architecture*, 1969, cover.

The second discursive strategy, definition, found in the second section, was where Charles Jencks aims at creating an affirmative postmodernism, almost independent from its predecessor. This stage will be analyzed using the very first book of Jencks, *Meaning in architecture* (1969), which he edited with

Georges Baird. In this book, he wrote two articles, entitled "Semiology and architecture" and "History as myth." In both cases, he emphasizes the idea of complexity in architecture in opposition to what he perceived as a simplistic modernism. This chapter will analyze how Jencks defines postmodernism as a complex language and later tempers this complexity using a clear and proactive postmodern narrative.

The third and last section of the thesis will examine the last discursive strategy of classification, where the American theorist categorizes the various recent architectural productions. Through a clear system of inclusion and exclusion, Charles Jencks continually expands the notion of postmodernism permitting it to be more flexible hence absorbing more and more tendencies and movements. This classification and the control Jencks wanted to have over the meaning of postmodernism is clear in the different diagrams and 'evolutionary trees' he developed. This chapter will examine the evolution of these diagrams and compare them to the work of German historian and theoretician Heinrich Klotz, whose 1988 book *The history of postmodern architecture* used the same discursive tools as Jencks, but for radically different purposes.

The various attempts to understand, define and stabilize postmodernism are multiple and various especially during the last decades. Jencks himself, in his last book *The Story of Post-Modernism: Five Decades of the Ironic, Iconic and Critical in Architecture*, published 2011 tried to define—maybe for the last time—his own history of postmodernism. Numerous other books have examined other facets of the postmodern movement with the notable examples of Reinhold Martin's 2010 book *Utopias ghost: Architecture and postmodernism again* and Felicity Scott's 2007 book *Architecture or techno-utopia: politics after modernism*.<sup>14</sup> To a certain degree, these works do not aim at defining postmodernism or historicizing it, they rather represent an examination of the ways in which this movement was born and

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<sup>14</sup> See Martin, *Utopia's ghost: architecture and postmodernism again*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010; and Scott, *Architecture or techno-utopia: politics after modernism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007.

claimed its difference from its predecessor. It is in continuity with these scholar's arguments and in deference to Michel Foucault's work that this thesis will offer an 'archeology of postmodern architecture'.

## REPRESENTING

There are many narratives and representations of modernism, relating the same series of events in different ways and selecting, excluding and dismissing some facts while emphasizing others. The multiplicity of representations, their contradictions and oppositions are deeply rooted in the relation between the object represented and the agent of representation. This crisis within the modes of portraying the 'other' is extremely important to the formation of postmodern discourse in almost the same manner it was an essential component of modernism. This first chapter will deal with the different early and late representations of modernism and their relation to the 'creation of meaning' in postmodern discourse. Representations of modernism will be understood as a tool that allowed postmodernism to make sense within the conditions of its critical reception and made such an emergence 'normal', and to a certain extent, predictable.

This chapter will be built around a comparative reading of Nikolaus Pevsner's and Charles Jencks' writings. It will be argued that Nikolaus Pevsner and other early modernist writers such as Giedion and Banham tried to create a modernist unity of meaning through numerous reading of the past and of the present.<sup>15</sup> This 'fictional unity' needed to be constantly sustained through historiographies, monographs, publications and exhibitions.<sup>16</sup> The abundance and regularity of statements representing and defining modernism betrays the heterogeneous side of the discourse. We will see through the example of

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<sup>15</sup> See Giedion, *Space, time and architecture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969; Banham, *Theory and Design in the first machine age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980; Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*. New York, NY: W.W Norton and Company, 1932; and Pevsner, *Sources of Modern Architecture and Design*. New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger publishers, 1968.

<sup>16</sup> The 1932 International Style Exhibition at the MOMA is the most conspicuous example of sustaining this unity. During the same year the MOMA also announced an exhibition of modern architecture that will tour United states for three years. See also Giorgio Ciucci "The Invention of the Modern Movement." *Oppositions* 24 (Spring 1981): 68-91.

Pevsner how the need to emphasize the unity of modernism does not come from the 'real' homogeneity of the movement, rather from an awareness of its impending collapse. During the postwar period, different modernist writers, and in particular Jencks, described the multiplicity of discourses within the modern sphere and helped define a heterogeneous, fragmented modernism. It will be argued that this discursive explosion of modernism facilitated the emergence of postmodernist discourse. The main work of Jencks that will be studied here, *Modern movements in architecture* (1973), will be understood as a late representations of modernism as well as an early form of postmodernism. In this early work, written four years before *The Language of Postmodern architecture* (1977), Charles Jencks tried to tackle the issue of the modern discourse without offering an alternative to the movement. His representation of modernism, although very influenced in its form by writers such as Pevsner and Banham, helped fragment modernism as a 'unity', reversed the narratives of failure and success of the movement and prepared the way for the emergence of postmodernism .

### 1- *Fragmenting the modern unity*

In the introduction of *Modern movements in architecture*, Charles Jencks states that "this book was, in 1974, a polemic in favour of pluralism and against a restricted modernism, hence the S of its movements."<sup>17</sup> The pluralism denoted by Jencks aims to highlight the multiplicity of tendencies and approaches that were commonly accepted as modern. Later in the book, the author gives a critique of the unstable boundaries of modernism under which many architects and firms were accepted, despite their differences. In contrast with Pevsner who, in his 1936 book *Pioneers of modern design*, proposed a plurality of agents in spite of a unity of style, Jencks argues that there was, in reality, no single group of

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 7.

architects working within a unified modernism, but many modern movements, contemporary with each other.

In the introduction of his book, Jencks criticizes the conventional view that a unified theory and practice called 'Modern architecture' ever really existed and describes this all-embracing theory as a "single melodrama with heroes and villains who perform their expected roles according to the historian loaded script."<sup>18</sup> Later in the book, Jencks proposes his approach as different from the conventional modern reading of history. Instead of a single, unified and progressing modernism, he proposes to study this period as "a series of discontinuous movements."<sup>19</sup>

This view of modernism as heterogeneous has its corollary in the writings of modern historians and theorists. Despite this correspondence, the heterogeneity of modernism acknowledged by early modernists concerned the sources and formal manifestations of the movement but not the concept of the 'modern' itself. For writers such as Scully and Banham, modernism is constituted by a diversity of forms and manifestations within a unique and indivisible concept.<sup>20</sup> Returning to the example of Pevsner and his book *Pioneers of modern design: from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, the German author proposed a clear, yet varied account of the numerous influences that related to modern design. These sources went from the late 19th century British tradition of the Arts and Crafts movement with Morris and John Ruskin to the more contemporary example of Gropius in Germany, along the way touching upon Art Nouveau and Art deco influences. In the third edition of *Pioneers of modern design*, published in 1975, when describing his recent concern with the roles of some architects in forging the modern movement, Pevsner states:

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>20</sup> See Scully, *Modern architecture: The architecture of democracy* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1961); and Banham, *Theory and Design in the first machine age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980).

There were, however, places where I felt some slight shaking and had to do a securing job, in the surface, it seems as if there were no more than two: Gaudi and Sant'Elia. They had both led a humble existence in the footnotes so far and the necessity was unquestionable of raising them to prominent positions in the body of the work. This resurrection is symptomatic.<sup>21</sup>

Thirty years later in his book *The sources of modern architecture and design*, Pevsner proposes a much wider list of possible influences on modernism during its earliest stages. A special emphasis is placed on the work of architects like Antonio Gaudi, Victor Horta and Frank Lloyd Wright for their role in shaping organic and expressionist modern forms of architecture. This shift from listing the actual 'pioneers' of the movement to historicizing the 'sources' of modernism implicitly suggests that the movement had reached a stable 'classical' period where the vision became clearer and an accurate reading of the past was possible. At the end of *Sources of modern architecture and design*, Pevsner adds a last chapter under the title "Towards the international style." This chapter both assembles contemporary projects, despite their variety, under the category of the modern, and works as a manifesto for a future that would be, according to Pevsner, dominated by standardization and universality.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the multiplicity of influences and sources of modernism that were acknowledged by Pevsner in his book, this variety of influences is still grouped together under the same category of *the* modern movement. For Pevsner, Modernism is a unity that could accept a multiplicity of sources. In other words, modernism is a semiotic entity that could integrate a variety of influences into a single, well defined idea. In an article published in 1966, Pevsner states that: "to me, what had been achieved in 1914 was *the style* of the century, it never occurred to me to look beyond, here was one and only style

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<sup>21</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of modern design* (London: Penguin books, 1974), 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

which fitted all these aspects which mattered, aspects of economics and sociology, of materials and function.”<sup>23</sup>

During the 1960s, along with the publication of *Sources of modern architecture and design*, numerous articles and books were written about modernism by other scholars, who tried to create a larger context for the definition of the movement.<sup>24</sup> While Pevsner attempts to rediscover the variety of influences that helped construct a unified (and unifying) modernism, Reyner Banham, in his 1962 book *Age of the Masters*, offers a broader reading of who ‘modern architects’ were and could be. [Figure 4] Despite acknowledging the importance of Le Corbusier, Mies Van Der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Frank Lloyd Wright, he states: “Now that they are dead, it is difficult not to feel liberation as well as loss. While they lived they tyrannized the modern movement, monopolizing attention and preventing the recognition of other (not always lesser) talents.”<sup>25</sup>

A large portion of the book was dedicated to a chapter entitled "Practice" where Banham references a very different set of projects that he claimed were modern. Some of the most iconic buildings of modernism, such as the Seagram Building and the Unité d’Habitation, are mentioned with other less known examples such as the work of Brown Daltas and Associates or Ezra Ehrenkrantz. The list of projects proposed by Banham went beyond the Eurocentric circle of early modernism and offers projects realized in countries like Iran, Japan and India. The relatively broad diversity of projects presented in the last chapter of the book is preceded by a chapter named "Theory," in which Banham tries to provide a definition of modernism. This first chapter is divided into five parts : Modern, Function, Form, Construction, and Space and power with a clear emphasis on the morphological definition of the

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<sup>23</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, “Architecture in our time, the anti pioneers”, *Listener* (29 December, 1966), 953.

<sup>24</sup> See Banham, *The new Brutalism: ethic or aesthetic?* (New York: The Architectural Press, 1966); and Hitchcock, Johnson, *Architecture 1949-1965*, (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1962).

<sup>25</sup> Reyner Banham, *Age of the masters* (New York: Icon Editions, 1975), 3.

movement. This initial part of the book provides a clear and unified theoretical framework for the diversity of buildings illustrated in the second chapter. When presenting modernism as a large set of projects, forms and buildings from different parts of the world, he acknowledges the unity and stability of modernism as a concept.

While Pevsner discusses the different sources and formal influences of modernism and Banham its different concrete realizations, both writers acknowledge a diversity that supports a unified and clear core of ideas that could be defined as modernism. In this literature, the modern discourse has a certain homogeneity and maintains its operative character. Modernism is then presented as a 'well defined entity' that is in constant development and that has to be followed. This operative discourse within writings on modern architecture, which began in the 1930s and continued well into the 1960s, worked as a manifesto, inviting different protagonists to participate in the inevitable evolution of this well-defined sphere.

It was in this context that Jencks published *Modern movements in architecture*, and as such he can be regarded as among the first who presents the modern movement as fragmented, heterogeneous and multiple. While acknowledging the multiplicity of influences and formal manifestations of modernism, as did Pevsner and Banham, Jencks defines a different core idea of the 'modern'. He claims the absence of a unique 'modernism' and proposes an open category of modernisms. In the introduction of the book, Jencks focuses on the difference between 'content' and 'form' and in his critique of Pevsner, Jencks states that:

Like so many of his generation, Pevsner believes that there is a deterministic relationship between certain content and form, or 'those aspects' which he mentions and the 'style' instead of adopting a more flexible notion that the relationship between style and content is 'unmotivated.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* ( London: Penguin books,1985), 12.

By dissociating form from content, Jencks is able to go beyond a simple exercise of acknowledging the diversity of modern forms in order to deconstruct the 'content,' the idea and the concept of the modern. Instead of a holistic entity, Jencks reduces modernism to a simple temporal framework during which different movements and concepts with particular relationships to each other have emerged.

In his reading of this period, Charles Jencks fragments modernism into six traditions and claims that all of these approaches and tendencies in architecture are related to political ideas and ideals. The Bauhaus, De Stijl, and the work of Mies Van Der Rohe, Behrens and Aalto were described as idealist; a deterministic school whose thought was very near to the German idealist philosophy.<sup>27</sup> According to Jencks, this tradition is very influenced by a Hegelian understanding of *Zeitgeist* as well as the notion of 'spirit of a time' and is the first 'modernism' to present the early twentieth century as the 'age of the machine.' As for the five other modernisms, Jencks links the idealist tradition to political visions and ideas and describes the idealist European Avant-garde as seeing "the machine in political terms: as the destroyer of class and national boundaries and creator of a democratic, collective brotherhood."<sup>28</sup>

The author also argues that, despite the transcendental character of the ideas defended by the architects belonging to this group, they were often versatile when opting for one specific political ideal. For instance, Mies Van Der Rohe is criticized for his work with the German communist party while, ten years later, working under the Nazi regime in the Bauhaus. This same inconsistency was described in Le Corbusier's thought as momentary periods of 'apolitical pragmatism.' Jencks asserts that the idealist modern movement has been taken to an extreme with what he presents as self-conscious modernism. The author argues that this tradition started with the submission to past models of architecture in the belief that these contain some universal ordering principles. This bureaucratic modernism as Jencks also

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<sup>27</sup> Jencks was mostly referencing the work of the German idealist philosopher Immanuel Kant.

<sup>28</sup> Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 34.

calls it, had its most representative buildings in Fascist architecture—the works of Speer and Terragni being mentioned as prime examples of this tendency within modernism. In contrast with this self-conscious tradition, Jencks offers an unselfconscious modernism that attempts to minimize and de-center the role of the architect, providing the premises of what will later be called the ‘do it yourself’ architecture.<sup>29</sup>

What is usually presented as the expressionist movement in architecture is very similar to what Jencks introduces as intuitive modernism. This modern movement is not based on any idealist approach and does not follow a specific zeitgeist or general ‘truth’. It is rather based on the individual creativity of the artist and the total freedom of the man of art. Nevertheless, Jencks sees a political project in what is usually presented as the expressionist anarchist ideals and stated that architects of the intuitive tradition “demanded a ‘spiritual revolution’ which would accompany the political one and hence they tended to attach what was known as Utopianism or expressionism to a leftist program.”<sup>30</sup> Despite some similarities in their political agendas, Jencks argues that the intuitive and the idealist tradition do not belong to the same core of ideas. The diversity of these approaches can only be appreciated under a deconstructed concept of modernism.

In the same manner that self-conscious tradition was an exaggeration of the idealist project, the fifth school of activist modernism is perceived by Jencks as an emphasis on the intuitive dream of changing society through the individual agency of the artist.<sup>31</sup> However, activist modernism is the only one that concentrated on the social means and agencies of change. This explains the development of the activist tradition first in the communist and Marxist environments. The constructivism of Tatlin and the early Russian communist projects are then considered as most representative examples of this tradition.

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<sup>29</sup> Jencks cited Fuller and Eames as Unself-conscious modern architects.

<sup>30</sup> Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 60.

<sup>31</sup> Tatlin and Lissitzky were mentioned as activist modern architects .

Lastly in the logical tradition, Jencks describes a modernism that tries to rationalize the Utopianism of groups such as Archigram giving an important role to the engineer and to the cybernetic technologies that emerged during the 1960s. In later books, Jencks has describes this tradition as the pioneer of what is today known as digital architecture.<sup>32</sup> The Metabolist group of architects in Japan are considered by Jencks as the most important figures of modernism. The work of Pier Luigi Nervi and Buckminster Fuller is also considered as part of this modern movement that gives a special place to the 'logical thinking' of the engineer and calls for substituting him for the politician.

This great variety of ideals and concepts that coexisted during the modern movement is illustrated by Jencks in a diagram representing the interconnections between the different traditions. [Figure 5] In this representation, the only real link between this accumulation of names, movements and tendencies is the period of time when they existed, which goes from the 1920s to the 1970s. For example, by locating the logical tradition at the top of the diagram and the activist at the bottom, Jencks assumes that there is no possible reading of Futurism and functionalism belonging to a same idea or concept of modernism. Rather, they are two movements that happened to exist during the same period of time and used the same technologies to offer very different results serving very different environments and goals.

Despite the difficulty of the diagram proposed by Jencks in *Modern movements in architecture*, this attempt to fragment modernism as 'concept' and not only as 'form' is very clear. The author is trying to question the already well-established understanding of a 'homogenous modernism' that accepts a multiplicity of sources, of 'heroes' and forms. The American theorist brings up the idea of fragmentation in the face of a modern discourse that is constantly putting forward 'unity' as one of its

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<sup>32</sup> See Jencks, *The new paradigm in architecture: The language of Postmodernism*, 2002.

major characteristics. One can argue that the conceptual core of modernism that remained relatively stable for decades is deconstructed in Jencks' reading of the movement.

Despite the different strategies and goals of Jencks and Pevsner in their representation of modernism, there existed a 'line of coherence' between both writers. This line that was a 'positive curve' that presents a unified modernism in constant progress that is replaced in Jencks' book by a negative curve of modernism's devolution. Both lines served an operative discourse that is using history to define the future. However, the future predicted by Banham and Pevsner is a continuity or improvement of modernism while Jencks is predicting a near end of the movement and its replacement by postmodernism.

## 2- *Isolating modernism*

Jencks' early work is representative of the contemporary need to dismantle the concepts of unity related to the modern movement that emerged in the 1960s.<sup>33</sup> This deconstruction of the 'idea' of the modern essentially happens through a historical reading of the movement. Historical narratives were used as a tool for distancing contemporary architectural production from the modern movement. However, the use of history as a guide for the present or a manifesto for the future rather than simply an interpretation of the past has always been one of the main discursive features of modernism. One of the roles of historical readings was to anchor modernism in a specific historical strata. While Pevsner's history of modernism started with Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, Kauffman presents the root of Modern architecture in the work of Ledoux and Giedion claimed modernism has an antecedent in

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<sup>33</sup> See Malcolm Millais, *Exploding the myths of modern architecture* (New York: Frances Lincoln, 2009).

the Renaissance.<sup>34</sup> This form of representing modernism leads to an almost exclusive use of genealogical readings of history with a clear prescriptive function. Nevertheless, while linking it to a previous 'golden age', Modernism is always presented as an end of progression, an ultimate last step, a zenith after which only minor developments could be registered and tolerated. In the Introduction of his *Sources of modern architecture and design*, after asking the question if the sources of the twentieth century is in the invention of clocks with wheels and printing with movable type, Pevsner answered: "Yes they are, for without printing and clocking-in, there could be no twentieth century."<sup>35</sup>

He adds later on in the text:

Mass communication and mass production are among the things distinguishing ours from all preceding centuries. However, it is only the quantitative exploitation which belongs exclusively to us, not the invention itself. And that is indeed a phenomenon to rank high in force among the sources of the twentieth century and therefore of modern art.<sup>36</sup>

This positioning of modernism in history and its role within a historical continuity is countered in Jencks' narrative by a simple history of the internal changes modernism had known. The postmodern theorist insulates modernism from its predecessors and shifts from early genealogical forms of representing modernism to a simple history of the modern era. The first chapter of his book *Modern movements in architecture* does not start with a preliminary study of the sources modernism could have had, but rather with a critical reading of the movement's most prominent architects.<sup>37</sup> In his analysis of modernism, Jencks has moved the limits of the historical study from one that starts in a 'golden age' and finishes with the promise of a bright future, to one that focuses exclusively on modernism, isolating it

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<sup>34</sup> See Kaufmann, *Architecture in the age of reason* (New York: Dover publications, 1968); and Giedion, *space time & architecture: the growth of a new tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

<sup>35</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *Sources of Modern Architecture and Design* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1968), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>37</sup> Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 8.

from any predecessor and then, later, attacking it as an independent entity. To do so, the American theorist had to reconstruct the 'models' of modernism, reconsidering what has to be considered as successful and worth being followed from the 'anti-subject' that was presented as a counter-example.

### 3- *Reconstructing the narratives of failure and narratives of success*

In his early writings, Jencks proposes a picture of modernism as multiple and heterogeneous, but also focuses on the incoherence of its different versions. The narratives of idealism were almost in total opposition with those defended by what he calls the intuitive modern architects and it will be also very difficult to find some common ground between the unself-conscious and the logical traditions. Jencks' portrayal of modernism actually allows very little room for possible ideological and stylistic common ground. It is also interesting to note that all traditions are described as 'modern' in their way but there is no definition of 'modernism' itself. The concept of 'the' modern is not only deconstructed, it almost disappears into the multiplicity of traditions proposed by Jencks.

In this reading of modernism as isolated and fragmented, Jencks maintains a discursive duality between a narrative of failure and a narrative of success. In returning to the comparison between Pevsner and Jencks it is clear that both writers keep a clear opposition between 'good' and 'bad' architecture. For instance, in his book *An outline of European architecture*, first published in 1945, when describing the modern movement Pevsner states:

It had been established by a number of men of great courage and determination and of outstanding imagination and inventiveness. They had achieved a revolution greater than any since the Renaissance had replaced Gothic forms and principles five hundred years before, and their daring appears almost greater than that of Brunelleschi and Alberti; for the masters of the

quattrocento had preached a return to Rome, whereas the new masters preached a venture into the unexplored<sup>38</sup>.

This presentation of modernism is added, in the same book, to a deteriorating discourse concerning historicism and early 19th century architecture. The author, while giving a whole chapter to all 'conventional' movements from the Gothic to the Renaissance, chose to name the period of time going from 1760 to 1914 as "the Romantic Movement, Historicism and the Beginning of the Modern Movement."<sup>39</sup> What is interesting here is not Pevsner tracing back the beginning of modernism to such a remote source but the feeling that the author could not dedicate two hundred years of European architectural history to merely 'historicism and romanticism.' One can argue that he felt the need to supplement this 'deficient' period of time by placing the distant roots of modernism within it.

When describing this period of time, Pevsner presents the work of a few architects who were commonly recognized as 'ancient fathers' of modernism such as Boullée, Ledoux and Shinckel. The rest of the architectural production in the nineteenth century is dismissed or very briefly mentioned. It is through minimizing the importance of particular buildings or periods, silencing certain productions and emphasizing others that the narratives of failure and success are produced.

Very similar to Pevsner's 'disdain' for 19<sup>th</sup> century's architects, is Jencks' critique of Gropius and Wright for what he has called their 'collapse into formalism.' Jencks qualifies the late work of the two architects as "influential and disturbing, especially that their early buildings and statements were directed against style as end in itself and the divorce between function and form."<sup>40</sup> Jencks attempts to explain the formalism of Gropius through what he calls his "mixed intentions." The author also

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<sup>38</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *An outline of European architecture* (London: Penguin books, 1963), 404.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 112.

<sup>40</sup> Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 109.

references a rare text written by Gropius in 1919 where the German architect, known for being one of the most prominent figures of functionalism, considered the rise of functionalist approaches as "the curse and not the spirit of the age."<sup>41</sup> Jencks argues that this shift in ideals and beliefs is not particular to the early work of Gropius but to his entire career and ultimately to all other modern architects. The project of Baghdad Mosque is proposed as the latest illustration of the architect's 'mixed intentions'. [Figure 6, 7] Distant from the more canonical descriptions of a strong and coherent modern architect, Jencks states that: "it appears that much of Gropius's contribution to architecture was more the result of external pressure than internal willpower."<sup>42</sup> The critique of Gropius's fictional coherence led the writer to tackle the issue of the Bauhaus as a well-defined modern institution. In his reading of the history of the school, Jencks depicts an important shift from an expressionist-utopian period to a functionalist Bauhaus that occurred in 1922. The reason for this shift is explained by Jencks by the simple pragmatism of German modernism. Gropius and the others actually had always accepted compromises and believed above all in teamwork, collaboration and the relativity of truth. The last example of this willingness to compromise was illustrated according to Jencks in the description Gropius gave of modern architecture to the Nazi regime as a genuine German architecture.<sup>43</sup>

The same discontinuity Jencks claims to find in the work of Gropius was to be found in the work of Le Corbusier. He argues that:

There is a fundamental difficulty, which all critics seem to encounter, in trying to interpret and hence judge the work of Le Corbusier, they do not know exactly what standards to apply – whether rationalist, poetic, both or neither, because all of them work at a point and then fail to be either fitting or inclusive.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>43</sup> [It is worth noting that Italian architects in the 1930s proposed that Rationalism should be a "state art." See Diane Ghirardo, "Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist's Role in Regime Building." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 39, 2 (May 1980): 109-27.

<sup>44</sup> Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 141.

Jencks asserts that the inability to entirely grasp Le Corbusier's work comes from the 'dualistic positions' of the architect. Le Corbusier is described as often adopting antagonist positions, claiming to be both rationalist and scientist and having dogmatic and uncritical positions. For Jencks, this dual position of the architect is represented by 'his double identity (part the peasant Jeanneret, part the urbanite Le Corbusier) or his ironic building (part geometric, part biomorphic) or in his tragic persona (part daemonic, part humane). The author adds that: "This last conflict, perhaps the most fundamental, is certainly the most fundamental, is certainly the most important because it led Le Corbusier to a basic antagonism with society which was completely beyond reconciliation."<sup>45</sup> For Jencks, this continual shift in Le Corbusier's ideals is not due to a natural developments of the architect's positions, it is rather presented as a strategy he adopted to gain a larger audience. The author states:

First of all, on a tactical level, the appeal to objectivity allowed him to gain credence in an age most gullible to anything scientific. Secondly, the dualistic position allowed Le Corbusier to undermine the extreme, unitary positions on either side; he could criticize the academy for falling into an irrelevant stability which couldn't deal with modern technology, while at the same time he could fault the functionalists for accepting technology without accepting.<sup>46</sup>

If Le Corbusier was adopting a strategic 'dualistic approach' and Gropius had 'mixed intentions', for Jencks, Mies Vand Der Rohe was simply 'wrong'. In a chapter entitled "The problem of Mies," the author states:

The problem of Mies van Der Rohe for critics and inhabitants of his architecture alike is that he demands an absolute commitment to the platonic world –view in order to appreciate his buildings. Without this commitment, the technical and functional mistakes which he creates are

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 147.

so damaging that one can no longer accept the platonic form as being 'perfect' or 'ideal' or even plausible. Rather it becomes merely beautiful and sometimes even trite.<sup>47</sup>

For Jencks, Mies was masking the underlying formalism of his work behind his imperturbable idealist philosophy. In reality, the work of Mies is much more related to subjective formalist choices than to an imagined transcendental world of forms. The supposed unity between the form and the content in Mies's work is contested throughout the whole chapter and is even sometimes described as humorous or as a farce. Jencks returns at the end of the discussion and tries to find a possible justification for Mies's idealism relating it back to the German roots of the architect and the Neo-Thomist education he has received at the cathedral school of Aachen. It is supposedly there that the German architect developed his intellectual clarity and learned about the equation of beauty with truth.

This critique of Mies's work is first illustrated through a picture of his Lafayette Park project (1955-1963) with Jencks' comment that in the picture: "Bathroom vents, television aerials, etc. shatters the pretensions of a 'perfect form'."<sup>48</sup> The reference to TV antennae can be linked to Robert Venturi's Guild house project, realized during the same period. The influence of Venturi on the critique by Jencks of modernist figures is also clear in the subtitle of the chapter, where Jencks simply opposed "Less is more" (Mies) with "Less is a bore" (Venturi).<sup>49</sup> The opposition between the two architects is clear in the rest of the text where Jencks prefers what he calls 'multivalence' of meanings in architecture over the fake unity of form and content proposed by Mies. The author's preference for multiplicity and oppositions in meanings is also clear in the last chapters of the book dedicated to recent American and British architecture. Although a few architects such as Louis Kahn and I.M. Pei are criticized for their

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 95.

formalism, most of the work cited in these chapters is considered a new and 'high' form of modernism that represents the seeds of a new movement.<sup>50</sup>

When depicting the differences between the masters of the modern movement, the heterogeneity of their discourse and the fallacies within their claims for unity, Jencks adopts a clear pattern of opposition between a narrative of failure and a narrative of success. This same opposition between what 'should be avoided' and what 'should be done' is very similar to the approach modernist theorists used to illustrate their own movement.<sup>51</sup> To a certain extent, the same projects Pevsner and Banham use to illustrate the greatness of modernism are used by Jencks to show the problems of modernism. In the example of the 'Memorial for Rosa Luxembourg' designed by Mies Van Der Rohe, the project is used by Banham as an illustration of the ability of modernism to illustrate ideas of courage and faith in abstract forms. [Figures 8 , 9] The same project is used by Jencks to criticize the 'dual aesthetic' of the constructivists.<sup>52</sup> These modern projects thus turned out to be empty signifiers that could be filled with specific meanings according to the goals of the writer. The group of architects and projects that demonstrated the 'success' of modernism in Pevsner's writings take the role in Jencks' book of representing the 'failure' of a modernism that needed to be transcended.

In this reading of key figures in modern architecture, Jencks tries to deconstruct the notion of 'success,' as a 'good' modernism is not related to specific architects or periods. He proposes the 'problem' of Mies and , at the same time, describes the Farnsworth house as a successful example of an idealist modern architecture. In other words, for Jencks, good and bad modernisms cannot be summarized in certain names and locations. This reading of modernism remained the same until Jencks saw the need to create a postmodern alternative, where he was obliged to invent a specific modern

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>51</sup> The most notable example here is the theoretical work of Le Corbusier; see Le Corbusier, *Towards a new architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1985).

<sup>52</sup> Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 39.

entity to attack. 'Late modernism' is the scapegoat used by Jencks to save modernism and move beyond it without dismissing half a century of architectural production.

#### 4- *Inventing 'late modernism'*

In the introduction of the second edition of his *Modern movements in architecture*, Charles Jencks, states:

I developed these [critiques against modernism] in 1975 to the point where my initial sympathies with modernism were seriously checked if not altogether rejected, a development which parallels that of the postmodern architects themselves. I mention all this not only because there is still widespread misunderstanding and controversy on the matter, but also to make my own position as author clear to the reader. Postmodernism does *not* reject Modernism totally, as traditionalist might, but develops its own hybrid language partly from its predecessor.<sup>53</sup>

In this same edition, the writer has added a postscript entitled "Late Modernism and Post-Modernism," presenting the first as a late version of this movement in which all the mistakes are summarized and the second as the movement that transcends this temporary failure of modernism while recuperating a genuine Pre-Modernism. In proposing his postmodern alternative Jencks claims that: "The best Postmodern architecture is hybrid, like the best Pre-Modernism of the generation practicing in 1900; it is trying to stitch together past and future without compromise, without giving up the commitment to the Modern world."<sup>54</sup>

In this Statement, in addition to claiming Modernism as part of Postmodernism and offering an all inclusive version of the movement, Jencks invents a 'Pre- modernism' without giving any further

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 7; The first edition of the book was published in 1973.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 8.

explanation of what he means by the term. This fragmentation of the movement into a 'good/bad' version is supplemented by an invention of a 'Pre/late' opposition.

Like most of other modernist genealogies, a historical reference to a specific authentic past is used to legitimize the new and link to a historical continuity. What the Renaissance is for Giedion and the work of Ledoux is for Kauffman, 'Pre-Modernism' is for Jencks. Nevertheless, the attachment to an old genuine predecessor of the new cannot be completed without an interstitial space representing all that the new is not. This 'scapegoat' is found in Jencks' work in the unity of 'late modernism'.

This use of Late modernism as a "receptacle of bad experiences" is clear in the definition given to the movement by Jencks in his book *Late Modern architecture* where the author states: "Late Modern arose in 1977 as a convenient label to distinguish one group of creative architects from another, from the group with which they were often confused, Post-Modernists."<sup>55</sup> This need to distinguish late modernism and postmodernism is explained by the spatial and temporal coexistence of the two movements. This common ground where all these movements are acting obliges Jencks to clearly define and establish clear boundaries between them. In the postscript he added to his *Modern movements in architecture*, Jencks tries to briefly give a definition to Modernism describing it as: "a universal international style stemming from the facts of the new constructional means, adequate to a new industrial society, and having as its goal the transformation of society, both in its taste, or perception, and social make-up."<sup>56</sup> Parallel to this definition of Modernism, Jencks defines postmodernism as a movement that:

includes a variety of approaches which depart from the paternalism and utopianism of its predecessor, but they all have a double coded language—one part modern and part something

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 373.

else. The reasons for this double coding are technological and semiotic: the architects seek to use a current technology, but also communicate with a particular public.<sup>57</sup>

When it comes to defining Late modernism, Jencks adopts a more critical, often ‘apocalyptic’ reading of a movement tirelessly announcing its own death. He states: “Late Modern architecture is pragmatic and technocratic in its social ideology and takes many of the stylistic ideas of modernism to an extreme in order to resuscitate a dull (or dying) language.”<sup>58</sup> Jencks even adopts a satirical tone later in the book when trying stating that it is ironic to try listing late-modern monuments since this movement always tried to “consciously eschews monuments”<sup>59</sup>.

Beyond the sphere of pure criticism, Jencks offers several characteristics of the new movement. First, Late modernism is singly-coded in contrast with the double coded postmodernism. The writer proceeds to state that late modernism “takes the ideas and forms of the modern movement to an extreme, exaggerating the structure and technological image of the building in its attempt to provide amusement or aesthetic pleasure.”<sup>60</sup> He adds later that this exaggeration would have been found ‘unacceptable’ by early modernists and compares it to the ‘extension of styles and values’ that occurred during the Late Baroque and Late Gothic period.<sup>61</sup>

While describing actual examples of the movement, Charles Jencks talks about “extreme logic, extreme repetition of modular elements, an exaggerated emphasis on constructional details and structure, some amusing but unintended metaphors and a sensuous imagery.”<sup>62</sup> The most recurrent examples Jencks uses when analyzing late modern representative buildings are Piano and Roger’s

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>60</sup> Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 373.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 8.

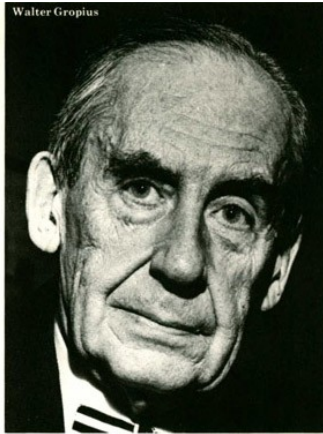
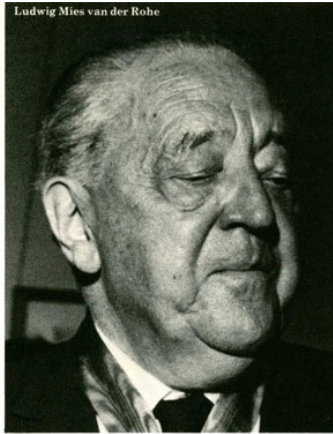
Pompidou centre in Paris, Arata Isozaki's Gunma Museum and Norman Foster's Sainsbury centre. [Figure 10]

In the analysis Jencks gives of this last project he states: "Foster, like other architects, is reacting to the disenchantment with modern architecture and trying to evolve a more accessible language of form. But he, and late Modernists, do not give up the commitment to technology and abstraction which characterized the previous period."<sup>63</sup> It is clear in this case that the formal distinction between a single coded and a double coded building is easy to find and locate. However, the blurriness of the boundaries between late modernism and postmodernism is due to other ideological values related to the connection with a *Zeitgeist* and universalism. It can be argued here that 'late modernism' is not a clearly stable entity that exists independently from Jencks's postmodern discourse. As it is clear in the second edition of the *Modern Movements in Architecture*, the period of late modernism is only added to the list of modern movements after postmodernism is presented by Jencks as a new movement a few years later. The Late Modern period acts more as an empty signifier that could be filled with different meanings in accordance to the ultimate goal of defining postmodernism.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 8.

Ludwig Mies, who later added his mother's name Van der Rohe, was born in Aachen in 1888, worked almost entirely in Berlin until 1937 when he transferred to Chicago for the rest of his life. Although his most famous buildings were probably the German Pavilion in Barcelona in 1929, and the Seagram building in New York (see p 112), his influence can be seen in every square glass office-block in any downtown in the world, and he finally paid handsome tribute to the Berlin tradition in which he grew up with the great museum there (see p 164) completed not long before his death in 1969. Readings: Arthur Drexler, *Mies van der Rohe* (Brazilier, Masters of Modern Architecture series), Werner Blaser, *Mies van der Rohe* (Thames & Hudson, 1965).



The life of Frank Lloyd Wright is becoming the best known of all architectural biographies. Its long span - he lived from 1869 until 1959 and just failed to reach ninety - covered more than half the history of the USA, and embraced sundry periods of his own professional activity. Of these the first notable one ran from 1893, when he set up in independent practice, until 1910 when he left Chicago for Berlin under a cloud. The next did not begin until after 1930 when his fortunes as an architect at last began to revive, and he then enjoyed nearly thirty years of floodlit senescence, of which the first two decades produced some of the best buildings of his whole career, and the last five years some of the silliest projects ever conceived by an old man, anywhere.

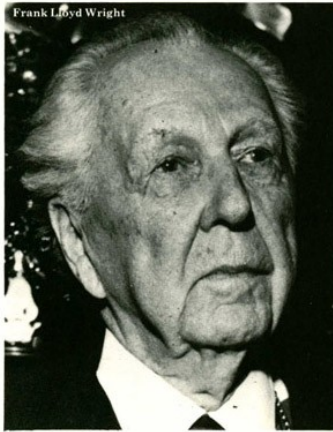


Figure 4 Portraits of the 'Modernist masters.' Reyner Banham, *Age of the masters*, 1962.

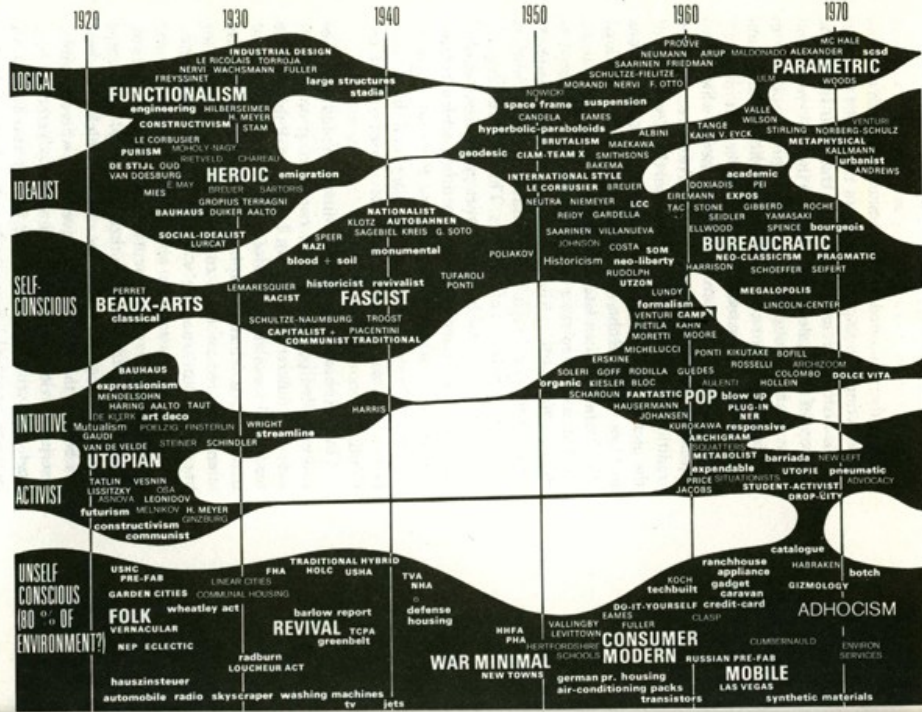


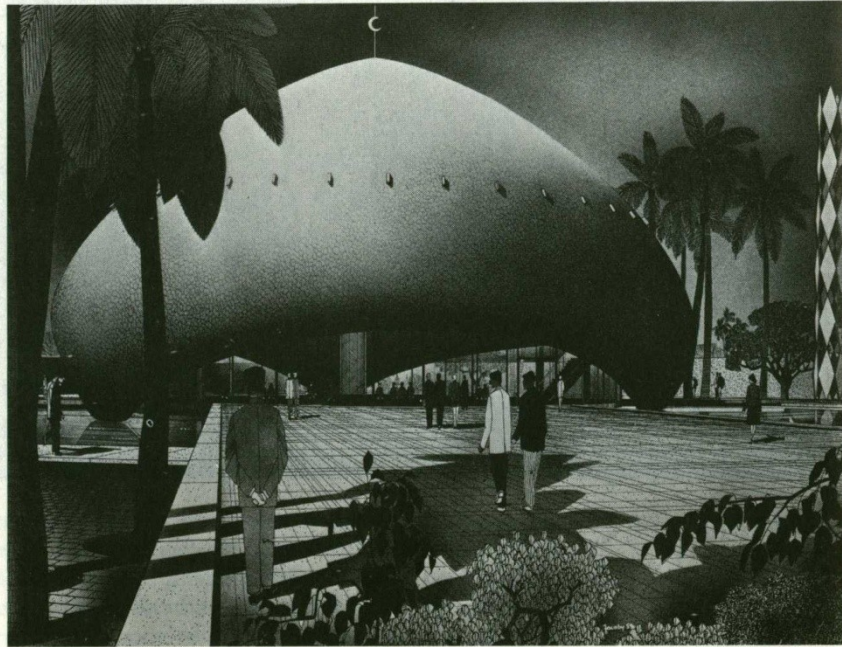
Figure 5. The modernist traditions, Charles Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 1969.



Figure 6. Gropius, Bauhaus at Dessau, 1926, Reyner Banham, *Age of the masters*, 1962.

class, collegiate Alhambra where Moslem ornament and symbols of power are treated with such wooden abandon that they seem like vestigial afterthoughts soon to dry up and disappear for good. The attempt to go half-way with these traditional symbols only ends up as condescension and mockery, as exemplified in the treatment of the Mosque [67]. Traditionally the mosque was at the centre of community life, opening on to a square, a bazaar where

67. Walter Gropius: Baghdad Mosque. The bombé shape, the crescent moon and the minaret are all quite attenuated, but the image is so consistently absurd as to have a certain perverse integrity, as in Camp architecture.



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Figure 7. Gropius, Baghdad Mosque, 1957, Charles Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 1969.

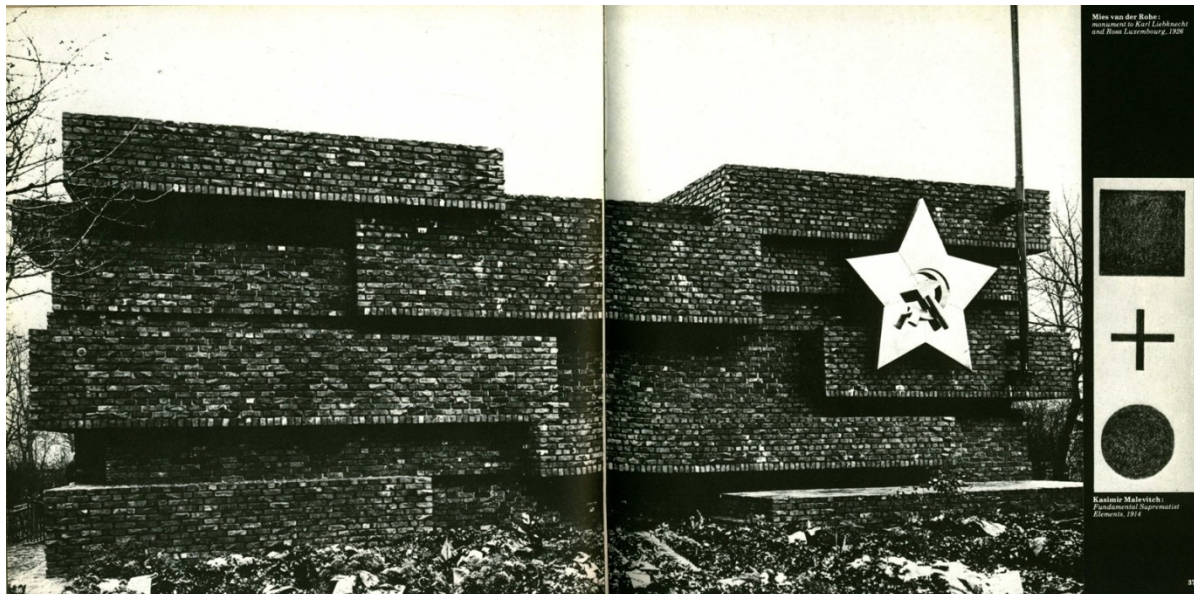


Figure 8. Mies, memorial for Rosa Luxemburg, Berlin, 1926, Reyner Banham, *Age of the masters*, 1962.

15 (opposite). Ernst May:  
Bruchfeldstrasse  
low cost apartments,  
Frankfurt, 1926-8.

The zig-zag blocks enclose a U-shaped garden court and culminate in the community centre. The 'sun, space and greenery', along with the white planes, flat roofs and ribbon windows, became conventional signs of socialist architecture and were attacked by Hitler as 'Kulturbolschewismus'.

16. Mies van der Rohe:  
Monument to Karl  
Liebknecht and Rosa  
Luxemburg, Berlin,  
1926. Hovering, purist  
shapes with a tacked-on  
conventional emblem  
carrying out the dual  
aesthetic of the  
Constructivists.



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## 2. THE PROBLEM OF MIES

Less is more. (MIES)  
Less is a bore. (ROBERT VENTURI)

The problem of Mies van der Rohe for critics and inhabitants of his architecture alike is that he demands an absolute commitment to the Platonic world-view in order to appreciate his buildings. Without this commitment, the technical and functional mistakes which he creates are so damaging that one can no longer accept the Platonic form as being 'perfect' or 'ideal' or even 'plausible'. Rather it becomes merely beautiful and sometimes even just trite. There are a few cases - the Barcelona Pavilion and the Farnsworth House - where this is not true, where his Platonic statements of pure form and transcendental technology are plausible and even appropriate, because the purpose and surrounding landscape provide the context for an 'ideal' solution. But in other cases - the Chapel at Illinois Institute of Technology or the town houses at Lafayette Park - the purity of form leads to an inarticulate architecture, or one extraneous element, a bathroom vent, leads to monumental bathos [49]. There

49. Mies van der Rohe:  
Lafayette Park, Detroit,  
1955-63. Bathroom vents,  
television aerials, etc.  
shatter the pretensions of a  
'perfect form'.



Figure 9. Mies, Memorial for Rosa Luxembourg and Lafayette Park, Detroit, 1963 and Charles Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 1969.

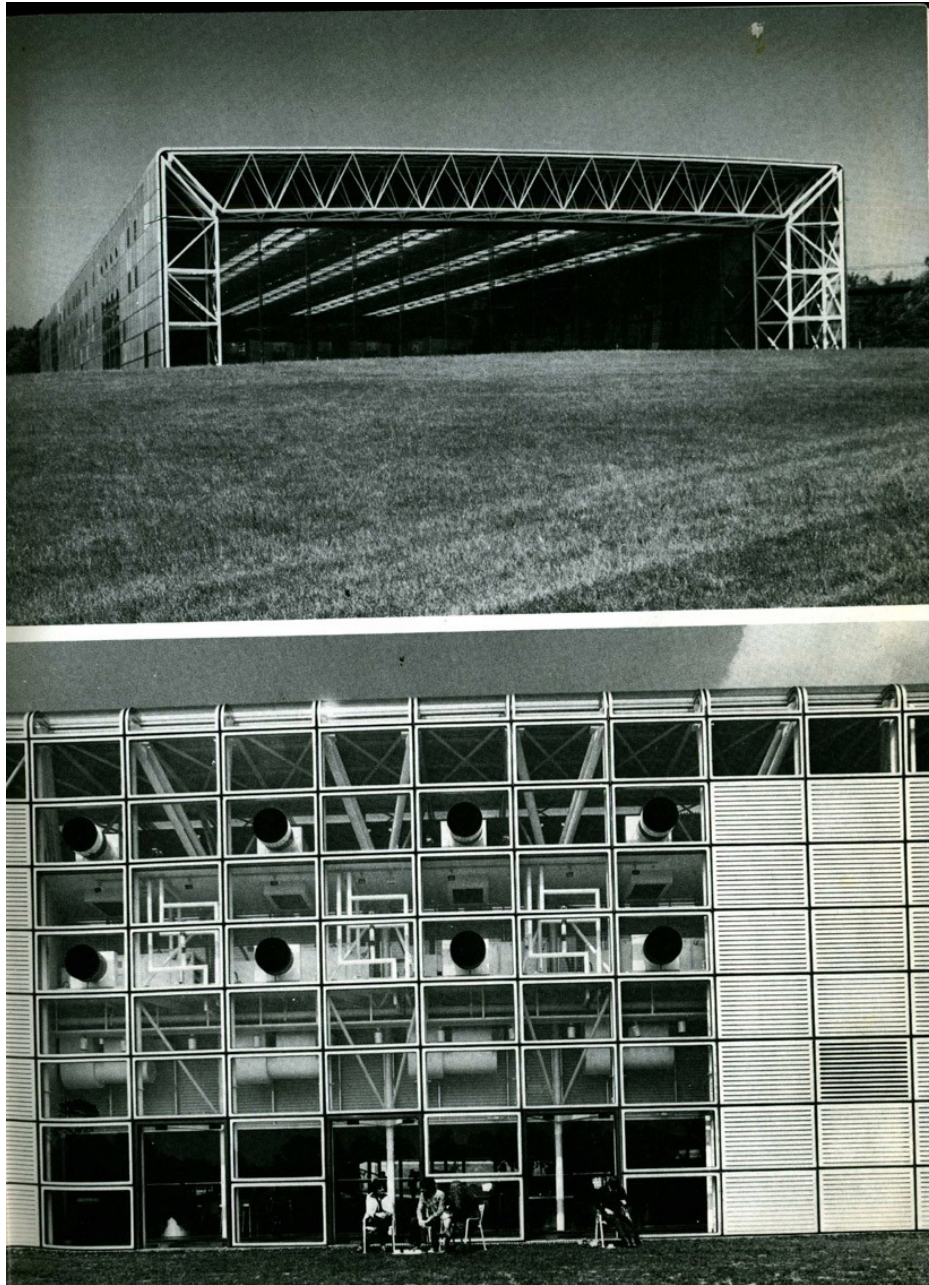


Figure 10. Norman Foster, Sainsbury Center, Norwich, 1978. Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture*, 1980.

## DEFINING

An affirmative postmodernism emerged during the 1970s, quite distant from a reactionary movement that found its legitimacy in its critique of modernism. The 'new' and self-referential postmodern discourse attempted to define itself almost independently from the critique of modernism. Jencks was aware of the movement's inability to totally break away from its predecessor due to the hegemony the latter had on the notion of 'newness'. Therefore, Jencks, when posing his definition of postmodernism, accepts modernism for 'semiotic balance.' After controlling its meaning through representation, he includes modernism as part of the solution. This 'concession' was legitimized by the new movement's claims for complexity.

The definition of postmodernism was possible through the construction of the movement both as 'language' and 'narrative'. In his early publications, Charles Jencks expresses a serious interest in semiology and what this field could bring to architecture.<sup>64</sup> According to Jencks, the significant contribution of semiology to architecture is the complexity it could bring to the discipline. Thus, when defining his new movement, Jencks starts first by posing postmodernism as 'language.' The new movement is then presented as a 'porous' tendency, open to different interpretations and influences including modernism and claiming inclusiveness as one of its major features. However, the notion of intricacy of meanings could hardly be used as a central component for a movement that tries to impose itself as a new 'solution'. This complexity has to be tempered and simplified and it is here that Jencks creates the concept of multivalence and the idea 'of modes of architectural communication'. These concepts, while moderating complexity, brought its richness to a more positive and 'workable' level.

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<sup>64</sup> Charles Jencks, "Semiotics and Architecture" in Charles Jencks and George Baird, ed., *Meaning in Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 11-27.

Despite these 'simplifying elements' of double coding, multivalence and modes of communication, the postmodern architectural production remained very heterogeneous and difficult to reassemble under a single unity. Coherence between the different postmodern productions was necessary and it was the 'narrative' of postmodernism that provided this general frame in which postmodern language could evolve. Jencks' narrative for a 'new' architecture originates with the notions of Camp and Pop architecture and gradually progresses to become postmodernism. The new movement's narrative presents complexity and inclusion as its central features and, at the same time, defines specific rules for this inclusion. The 'tolerant' and homogenizing postmodern narrative of inclusion and 'eclecticism' offers a proper environment for the complex language of postmodernism to develop. In the end, defining postmodernism simultaneously as both a 'narrative' and 'language' essentially aimed at mitigating the complexity inherent in the new discourse and offering a general coherence to the different productions and actors that were considered postmodern.

## ***1/ Postmodernism as language***

### *1- Semiology and Complexity of meanings*

First published in 1971 in London, *Modern movements in architecture* was, in an earlier form, the Doctoral thesis of Charles Jencks completed in 1970 under the supervision of Reyner Banham.<sup>65</sup> Although published immediately after his graduation, this book is not Jencks' first work. In 1969 when he was still a student at the University College of London, he edited *Meaning in architecture* with Georges Baird.<sup>66</sup> In this first book, Jencks contributed an article entitled "Semiology and architecture." The first section of the book has the same name as Jencks' essay and includes articles by Françoise Choay, Gillo Dorfles and

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<sup>65</sup> Charles Jencks, "Modern Architecture: The tradition since 1945" (PhD Diss, University college London, 1970).

<sup>66</sup> Charles Jencks and George Baird, ed., *Meaning in Architecture*.

Geoffrey Broadbent. These writers discuss the different possibilities of using semiology in architectural and urban theory. Ferdinand De Saussure, Roland Barthes and Claude Levi Strauss are referenced in most of the articles and the influence of structuralist philosophy and linguistic theories are very clear in the book.<sup>67</sup> Although referenced in varying ways and for different purposes, semiology is often described as necessary tool for a new reading of postwar architectural production. Besides the richness of its methods, it is the 'complexity' of semiology that is mostly emphasized in comparison to a flat and superficial modernism.

In her essay, entitled "Urbanism and Semiology," Françoise Choay argues that the theory of signs is fundamental to the understanding of '*villes nouvelles*.'<sup>68</sup> According to this view, the analysis of the recent urban production has to use the current epistemological tools which, for the French writer, means 'structuralism.' By stripping away all the metaphysical implications that may have been attached to it, structuralism could offer a theoretical framework with which to study the city. When clarifying her goals behind this method, the author argues:

My problem in this article will be to examine whether the urban environment can be considered, as have other human products, as a semiological system. In other words, whether we can study the urban scene with a method derived from general linguistics and consider it as a non-verbal system of meaningful elements."<sup>69</sup>

At the end of the article, and with some caution, Choay concludes that, thanks to its ability to offer a clear reading of the new and complex urban situation, a linguistic understanding of urbanism can offer an alternative to classical readings of the city.

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<sup>67</sup> Aldo Rossi's work is of great importance to urban semiology, see Aldo Rossi, *L'architettura della città*. (Padova: Marsilio, 1966).

<sup>68</sup> Françoise Choay, "Urbanism and Semiology," in Jencks and Baird, ed., *Meaning in Architecture*, 27-38.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

The article of Gillo Dorfles, entitled "Structuralism and semiology in architecture," belongs to the same French school of linguistic and semiotic theories.<sup>70</sup> In this essay, Dorfles claims to be among the first thinkers to understand the benefits theorists can have when considering architecture as a sign system. When quoting himself in one of the first articles on this issue in 1959, he states: "The problems of architecture, if considered in the same way as the other arts, as a 'language', are the basis for a whole new current of thought, which allows it to be treated in terms of information and communication theory."<sup>71</sup> In his analysis of the possibilities of a semiotic reading of architecture, Dorfles acknowledges the limitations such a reading could have since it is bound to many *a priori* and subjective aspects of perception such as the sensation of depth and other experiential aspects. To avoid the relativism of a semiology of architecture, Dorfles proposes to make a difference between two types of semiotic analysis and states:

If we want to systematize architectural analysis from a semiological standpoint, we shall have to say that there is the possibility of a twofold semiological distinction: one kind of semiographic analysis based on the elements of notation and of symbolic transcription of its language (in a certain way similar to certain primitive ideographic writings) and another kind linked to the work itself and to its constitutive elements (spaces, rhythms, volumes).<sup>72</sup>

Although the distinction between the two types of analysis is sometimes unclear, the desire to dissociate what is relative from what is considered more solid or objective reflects the book's claims concerning the usefulness of a semiotic reading of architecture and urbanism. With his enthusiasm for the new analytical method, the Italian thinker offers a few minor criticisms, which notably are systematically countered by Jencks' side notes. For instance, while acknowledging his doubts about the meaning of an 'architectural sign' and the limits of this word, Dorfles asks: "What is meant by

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<sup>70</sup> Gillo Dorfles, "Structuralism & Semiology in Architecture," in Jencks and Baird, ed., *Meaning in Architecture*, 39-50.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

'architectural sign'? A step, a staircase, an entire façade or the whole complex? Where does the subdivision end?"<sup>73</sup> In a note, Jencks simply argues that the question "misses the point," explaining that linguistics never claimed the stability of concepts and has always accepted the role of the context in shaping meanings. This same fervor is also clear in a note Jencks wrote in Françoise Choay's article. When the French writer criticized the inability of modernism to keep up with the fast pace of the development of meanings and described this modern problem as 'anachronistic,' Jencks considered the argument as "extraordinarily relevant."<sup>74</sup>

In addition the notes where Jencks assesses or defends the semiotic or linguistic understanding of architecture, the most prominent justification of this method is in his own article "Semiology and architecture."<sup>75</sup> The first part of the text is entitled "Meaning, inevitable yet denied," where the author argues that the use of semiological analysis is necessary in almost all fields. Jencks explains that meanings are inevitably assigned by people to everything and states: "the minute a new form is invented it will acquire, *inevitably*, a meaning."<sup>76</sup> He also explains that the function of certain objects in a given society are converted into signs of themselves. For example, the use of a raincoat is to give protection from the rain, but this cannot be dissociated from the signs of an atmospheric situation. In other words, using a raincoat when there is no rain is not only functionally but also 'socially' problematic. In the article, Jencks always emphasizes the inevitable character of this process of creating signs and often describes societies as 'condemned' to meaning. In this discussion, Jencks never considers the option of an 'absence' of meaning. Rather, he argues that we only have a choice between becoming aware of how these meanings work through semiology or remaining content with our intuition.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>74</sup> Choay, "Urbanism and semiology," 31. In this footnote, Jencks states: "I find this argument extraordinarily relevant, particularly because it is not made by other critics who tend to fault architecture for being a poor sort of technology or fashion ( just as one could criticize a cow for being a poor sort of horse) ."

<sup>75</sup> Jencks, "Semiology and architecture," 11-26.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 11.

After explaining the usefulness as well as the inevitability of semiology, Jencks proceeds to outline the main concepts of his new method. The first issue the author tackles is the complex character of the relationship between thought, language and reality. He explains that, despite all the attempts to find a clear connection between these elements and to answer the question of which comes first, the issue has no outcomes and there is no linear relationship between them. Rather he proposes his 'semiological triangle' in reference to Charles Ogden and Ivor Richards's 'triangle of meaning' published in their 1923 book *The meaning of meaning*, in which they tried to describe the interplay between thoughts and the way in which they are expressed and received.<sup>77</sup>

The model Jencks is drawing upon offers a continual interaction between the language produced, the thought to which it is bound and our perception of reality. All arrows point in two directions and, as a result, the diagram has no real beginning or end. After explaining the difficulties of finding a hierarchy between the constitutive elements of meaning, he proposes what he calls an 'intrinsic and extrinsic explanation.' According to Jencks, the intrinsic meaning is related to an objective 'platonic' understanding of things. In Kantian terms, it is connected to an internal nature of the 'thing itself.'<sup>78</sup> Due to its 'clarity' and objectivity, this meaning is easy for people to grasp. In contrast, an extrinsic explanation of meaning supposes that things do not possess a specific meaning 'in themselves', rather they obtain it from external social conventions, contexts and local codes.

In establishing his distance from the first idealist understanding of meaning, Jencks offers a more relativistic explanation and states:

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<sup>77</sup> Ogden and Richards, *The meaning of meaning* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1989) "“Whenever we hear anything said, we spring spontaneously to an immediate conclusion, namely, that the speaker is referring to what we should be referring to were we speaking the words ourselves.”, 15.

<sup>78</sup> See Kant's description of the 'Noumenon' in his *critique of Pure Reason*, Chapter 3: 'Ground of Distinction of Objects into Phenomena and Noumena'.

Contrary to the 19<sup>th</sup> century thought, it is impossible to see 'brute facts' or 'things', as in themselves they really are. Contrary to what Marx, Gropius and Banham wished, it is impossible to get rid of all preconceptions. All we can do is substitute one pre-concept for another and bring it closer to a percept. It simply means that we can never know with certainty 'absolute truth'.<sup>79</sup>

The relativism of Jencks and his skepticism toward modern idealism can be perceived as his first published critique of the modern movement. While including Gropius and Banham to the list of thinkers who wrongly believed in the existence of a fixed eternal truth, Jencks adopts one of his first attacks against the pioneers of modernism. Semiology, understood by the author as nihilistic and complex, was a tool that could be used to discredit modern utopian and 'simplistic' narratives. Most of the arguments presented in the article assert that the complexity of a semiological analysis can (and will) deconstruct the rigid narratives of modernism. This idea was later used in the book *Modern movements in architecture* where Jencks develops his critique of prominent architects and proposes a complex modernism supporting a plurality of meanings and interpretations.<sup>80</sup>

The significant interest Jencks has in the questions of language and meaning and the degrees of complexity they could bring to architecture is very clear in his essay. However, one can argue that despite the tribute Jencks paid to a semiological study of architecture, the complexity he was advocating was inevitably leading him toward a nihilistic interpretive process that could hardly be translated into a viable project or alternative. The absence of truth and the triumph of hermeneutics could certainly support Jencks' criticism of the rigidity of modernism but could not constitute a 'new' discourse for architecture. This dilemma could only be overcome by posing complexity as a 'simple' style. In other words, instead of trying to express a wide array of meanings independently from each other, Jencks proposes to represent 'complexity' itself architecturally. Complexity is then reduced to a simple 'style'

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<sup>79</sup> Jencks, "Semiology and architecture," 20.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 11-13.

and the endless list of possible interpretations and meanings would be captured in the word:  
multivalence.

## 2- *Multivalence and the simplification of complexity:*

The terms multivalence and univalence were introduced by Jencks in the last part of his article “Semiology and Architecture” as essential parts of a semiological understanding of architecture. Given the centrality of the argument to his essay, he chose to illustrate it in a three dimensional diagram he called the “Semantic space of current architects.” [Figure 11]

The diagram is formed by three axes representing the ‘semantic space’ of form, function and technic. Each axis has a positive and a negative side and the names of architects are written on different parts of the diagram illustrating their relationship with formal, functional and technical approaches in architecture. In an effort to be consistent with the relativism he supported at the beginning of the article, in describing his diagram he states: “We should know there are simply no rules or standards for good architecture, and all I have done is frozen my own prejudice and, as if this were not bad enough, had the naivety to make it clear.”<sup>81</sup> It is exactly this contradiction between the ‘complexity’ of architecture and the need to simply and ‘objectively’ analyze it that Jencks wants to surpass through the concept of multivalence.

The very first introduction to the idea of multivalence in Jencks’ work is in this diagram. The architects— such as Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier and James Stirling—that are most valued—and thus on the positive side of all three axes—are understood as having an equal concern for form, function and technic. Jencks presents this ability to work on three axis as ‘multivalent’ and states: “this ambiguity or

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<sup>81</sup> Jencks, “Semiology and architecture,” 24.

tension creates a multivalent experience where one alternates from meaning to meaning always finding further justification and depth.”<sup>82</sup> In other words, the more an architect is able to clearly represent the tension between the different meanings of a project, the more the architecture will be considered as multivalent and therefore ‘good.’ Multivalence could then be described as the clear and simple representation of complexity. On the other hand, univalence is quickly summarized as “experienced when the object is the summation of past forms which remain independent, and where they are joined the linkage is weak.”<sup>83</sup> According to Jencks, a good example of a univalent architecture would be the work of Yamasaki and Oscar Niemeyer. The author ends the article by emphasizing his preference for multivalence and described it as “the greatest value in imaginative works and hence architecture.”<sup>84</sup>

This introduction of multivalence as a sort of ‘clear form of complexity’ in "Semiology and Architecture" is later extended in his next book *Modern movements in architecture*. As explained earlier, in this work, Jencks tries to fragment the modern unity and open the movement to a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. In this context, the concept of multivalence is used as a referent for judging what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ modern architecture.<sup>85</sup>

Jencks presents here the difference between what he calls an ‘influential architecture’ which has an importance because of its place as reference in a wider movement or style and the ‘perfected architecture’ that has value in itself, almost independently from the context of its production. The richness of such a ‘perfected’ architecture exists in the internal interaction of meanings within the same building. These multiple meanings, when properly articulated, produce a multivalent architecture. To put it in other terms, the more multivalent the building is, the more ‘perfected’ its architecture. Jencks then

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>85</sup> Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 11.

states: “For instance, the multivalent work of Le Corbusier, James Stirling and Aldo Van Eyck is so significant in itself that historical narrative has to stop and analysis of internal relations take over.”<sup>86</sup>

This quote can in reality be understood as representing an internal contradiction in Jencks’ argument. Claiming that certain works could transcend their historical context to become ‘timeless’ is in opposition to the author’s call for historicizing modernism. Here, the example of Le Corbusier is on the margin between the ‘eternal’ character of the architect’s work on the one hand and a ‘dead’ modernism on the other. This contradiction, amongst others, is inextricably linked to the notion of ‘complexity’ in architecture. Jencks’ ‘favorite’ architecture is neither old nor new, neither modern nor anti-modern, reassembling opposites and thus constantly risking internal contradictions. Multivalence is a stable and simple way of restraining and sometimes ‘masking’ these contradictions. Multivalence thus becomes an ‘accepted’ categorization of the inner and inevitable conflicts within Jencks’ theory of complexity. It is true that ‘creating’ a complex architecture can be considered as substantially paradoxical and incorrect. In the end, how can we simply and self-consciously create a form of ‘chaos’. Multivalence becomes an *alter-ego* of complexity, a half hidden synonym that avoids this paradox, at least, in its linguistic form.

Before analyzing projects he thought representative of the difference between a multivalent and univalent architecture, Jencks tries to give more details about his definition of multivalence. He states:

To be more precise, multivalence consists of four distinct qualities: imaginative *creation*, or the putting together of parts in a new way, the amount of parts so transformed, the *linkage* between the parts which is the cause of this creation and which allows the parts to *modify each other*.<sup>87</sup>

A good example of multivalence proposed by Jencks is the *Unité d’habitation* by Le Corbusier (1952). [Figure 12] The first ‘multivalence’ he assigns to the building is its ability to elevate the everyday

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 14.

domestic life to the level of a public monument. He sees that this ambiguity between the private and the public, the individual and the group has its corollary in the ancient Greek temple. However, while the Greeks tried to bring the private into the public space of the agora, Le Corbusier brought the public space into the building. This 'inversion of classical values' and the complexity it generates is also supplemented by what Jencks describes as:

unusual combinations of past traditions: the columns taper downwards instead of up, the landscape and garden are on the roof instead of the ground, the streets are in the air and internal instead of being external and on the ground, and the shopping center is on the seventh floor instead of being connected with the commercial life of Marseilles.<sup>88</sup>

In total opposition to the rich and complex multivalence of meanings in the *Unité d'habitation*, the Liverpool church by Frederick Gibberd is presented as the perfect example of a poor architecture.<sup>89</sup> [Figure 13] First, the building is described as a bad composition of different references going from Niemeyer's work in Brasilia to Perret's church in Le Havre. For Jencks, the architect failed to find a good linkage that would have generated multivalence instead of the series of unrelated references he ended up creating.

When criticizing the use of motifs in the facades of the Liverpool Church, Jencks argues: "the fact that these motifs are borrowed is not so disturbing as the fact that nothing original is done with their interrelation by way of either contrast or integration."<sup>90</sup> The same lack of cohesion described in the outside of the building is also found, according to Jencks, in the interior. The author complains about the absence of any discovery or surprise inside and about the large central space that reduces the number of possible meanings the building could have provided. At the end of his critique of Gibberd's church,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 18.

Jencks tries to explain what he meant exactly by a lack of coherence and linkage: “one of the simplest ways of finding out if a work is weak in internal linkage is to probe it from an ironic and unsympathetic position with different metaphors to see if it can withstand this attack by offering counter meanings.”<sup>91</sup>

The Unité d’habitation is therefore a good example of multivalence because when confronted with criticisms of its functions or its form, the element criticized is flexible enough to find another possible meaning different than the one criticized. However, in the cathedral, the ‘crown of thorns’ at the top of the building would always and inevitably be considered as a metaphor of the majesty of Christ. Using these two examples, Jencks proposes multivalence as an ‘ambiguity of meanings’ that could make the critique of a specific building difficult. This ‘inability’ to easily read and criticize a particular work due to the intricacy of its meanings is described by Jencks as the proper result of a good multivalence; a concept that, throughout the book, came to describe a readable and simple complexity.

From Jencks’ first article about semiology and architecture to his work on modern movements, the concept of multivalence develops from being a tool used to classify and categorize the work of certain architects to become, three years later, a crucial element in the conception of a ‘new’ architecture. In his *Language of Post-Modern architecture*, published in 1977, this same concept of multivalence became the central component of a new alternative to modernism. The main reason Jencks uses to legitimize his call for multivalence is what he perceives as the impoverishment of architectural language caused by modernism. This weakened modern architecture is described as univalent in the introduction of the book, where Mies Van Der Rohe is accused of creating the most univalent formal system. For Jencks, Mies’ use of a right angled geometry with a reduced number of materials resulted in the the glass and steel box becoming the most used form in modern architecture—and this form could only and inevitably signify ‘office building.’ It is the impossibility to support any other meaning but the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 24.

simple 'function' of the building that makes Mies' work univalent. At the same, the other messages suggested by the building are not multiple and well-linked but simply 'wrong.' Jencks states "this reduced style was justified as rational (when it was not economic) and universal (when it suited only a few functions)."<sup>92</sup>

For Jencks, the univalent character of many modern buildings not only comes from their reduced number of meanings, but also from the poor relationship between them. It is thus not solely the multiplicity of meanings in a single building that makes it multivalent; it is also the good and proper rapport between them. For Jencks, the perfect example of an accumulation of badly articulated meanings is the IIT campus in Chicago By Mies Van Der Rohe (1943-1957). [Figure 14] In this argument he expresses his disapproval with a building that has a rectangular form of a cathedral, with a central nave and two side aisles expressed in the eastern front, which turns out to be the boiler house of the campus. Jencks calls this ambiguity a 'universal language of confusion' and states:

So we see the factory is a classroom, the cathedral is a boiler house, the boiler house is a chapel, and the president's temple is the school of architecture, of course Mies didn't intend these propositions, but his commitment to reductive formal values inadvertently betrays them.<sup>93</sup>

Jencks argues that the simplistic use of meanings that creates the 'univalence' found in Mies' work, influenced other postwar architects such as I.M.Pei, Philip Johnson and SOM. He states that the influence of Mies on Postwar architects is very clear in Gordon Bunshaft's Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, which opened in 1974. [Figure 15] In this project, instead of meanings of power, awe and harmony, journalists from *Time* magazine saw a concrete bunker. For Jencks, this same problem is also found in the work of contemporary Italian rationalist architects who, in trying to continue the

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<sup>92</sup> Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 15.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-19.

classical patterns of Italian cities, ended up reproducing the authoritarian Fascist architecture of the 1930s.<sup>94</sup> Jencks thinks that the general problem of the postwar period related to the misuse of obvious meanings touched all important architects of the 1960s such as Arata Isozaki and Ricardo Bofill. After explaining the 'semantic confusions' of these architects, Jencks explains how these same 'problems' were paradoxically considered by modern architects as important part of their architectural vocabulary and sarcastically states "at the end, the better the modern architect, the less he can control obvious meanings."<sup>95</sup>

For Jencks, the problem faced by postwar architects comes from the fact that language is 'radically schizophrenic' by necessity, partly rooted in tradition and in the past and partly rooted in a fast changing society. For him, modern architects misunderstood the inevitably multivalent nature of language and only take into consideration one part of the entire picture. Jencks asks for reestablishing a new and genuine architectural complexity that acknowledges the different facets of architecture. However, he argues that the complexity of language has to be translated into simple concepts and solutions that could actually be used and that the notion of 'multivalence' is able to offer a such a balance between the simple and the complex. It is the coexistence between the 'complexity' offered by semiology and the 'simplicity' produced by the concept of multivalence that is the main characteristic of Jencks' use of language in architecture. It should be noted, however, that an interest in the interplay between language and architecture is not exclusively related to the American theorist and the new movement of postmodernism. For example, Bruno Zevi and Aldo Van Eyck used a semiological understanding of architecture in relation to modernism. The difference with Jencks' postmodern language of architecture, however, is its acknowledgement of the complex and hybrid nature of a language. Jencks does not try to create a new language for a new architecture as modernists did, rather

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<sup>94</sup> The work of Aldo Rossi is used here to illustrate the argument, Jencks, *The Language of post-modern architecture*, 20.

<sup>95</sup> Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 21.

he offers a way to comprehend an existing language and a method to act upon it. Understanding the complexity of the context and being able to communicate new meanings using existing signs is the one of the central points of his semiological approach. For Jencks, the coexistence between complexity and multivalence is necessary and can be translated using specific tools he defined as "modes of architectural communication."<sup>96</sup>

### 3- *Communication in architecture*

In the introduction to *The Modern Language of Architecture* (1973), the Italian theorist Bruno Zevi presents his work as a response to John Summerson's book *The Classical Language of Architecture* (1963).<sup>97</sup> The definition of a modern 'language' was described by Zevi as necessary, urgent and "already long overdue."<sup>98</sup> When trying to explain the origins of his 'linguistic' understanding of architecture and presenting its communicative role, he states: "without a language, we cannot speak. What is more, it is language 'that speaks us' in the sense that it provides the instruments of communication without which it would be impossible even to work out our thoughts."<sup>99</sup> The language proposed by Zevi is presented as necessary to 'structure' modernism and avoid its reverting into Beaux Arts archetypes. What Zevi means here by Beaux Arts archetypes is a fragmentation of rules and discourses that leads to a 'general confusion' in architectural production. In the face of this fragmentation, architects tend to create meaningless archetypes to fill the void created by the absence of a 'real' language. Zevi argues that this confusion, which was felt during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was provoked by the dissolution of the 'classical language of architecture.' For the Italian theorist, the only way to go beyond a strong classicism and

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>97</sup> Bruno Zevi, *The Modern Language of Architecture* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1978); and John Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture* (Cambridge MA: MIT press, 1966).

<sup>98</sup> Bruno Zevi, *The Modern Language of Architecture*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 3.

avoid the trap of a weak Beaux Arts tradition is to create a new and clear 'language of modern architecture'. The linguistic approach is understood by Zevi as offering a 'transmissible' art and a real alternative to classicism.

In Zevi's book, Modern architecture is presented in the form of a clear set of rules and formal codes that communicate a 'modern message.' A modern architect is the one who understands, articulates and 'speaks' this language. In his critique of contemporary architects' misuse of a still unclear language, Zevi states: "Indeed, most people who are designing and building today can barely mumble. They utter inarticulate meaningless sounds that carry no message. They do not know how to speak. They say nothing and have nothing to say"<sup>100</sup>

Zevi presents this language as being formed by a vocabulary, a grammar and a syntax, while he also understands it as an anti-language in its opposition to classicism. This new method would inevitably be built on 'invariables' that can be extended if we avoid internal contradictions between them. The invariables mentioned by Zevi range from asymmetry, dissonance and anti-perspective to what he calls four dimensional decomposition. However, in the sixty pages where Zevi explains the invariable elements of a modern language, the concepts he presents are reduced to formal rules or stylistic suggestions. In fact, despite the very strong influence of structuralism on the book, there is no real attempt to find an architectural 'system of meanings' that could regulate modern design in the structuralist tradition.<sup>101</sup> Instead of proposing a language with all the freedom a language permits, Zevi ends up offering a simple list of criteria that could determine if an architect is modern or not. That being said, one can argue that the restrictive character of his modern language is related to the clarity and precision imposed by the modern discourse itself. The narratives of progress, power and harmony

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>101</sup> Zevi's use of structuralism was sometimes reduced to some terminological borrowings and to the simple use of linguistic theories in architecture.

preached by modernists could hardly fit into a complex understanding of language. It is this last issue of the simplification of the notion of language that Charles Jencks confronts four years later in his *Language of Post-Modern Architecture*.

After claiming the death of modernism in the first chapter of his book, Jencks proceeds to give his own semiotic reading of architecture in a chapter entitled "The Modes of Architectural Communication."<sup>102</sup> In opposition to Zevi's language and his 'invariables,' Jencks' 'modes' are directly inspired by semiology and are distinct from the formal solutions Zevi proposed. The modes offered are metaphor, words, syntax and semantics and their definitions are very close to those existing in contemporary linguistics studies.<sup>103</sup> Jencks took the semiotic analogies in architecture to such an extreme that the differences in terminology between linguistics and architecture became unclear if not indiscernible. The choice to 'overuse' linguistic analogies in his book can be related to Jencks' emphasis on the idea of complexity in architectural language. He tries to see more in the similarity between language and architecture than the simple solutions proposed by Zevi. In architectural language, Jencks perceives a complexity and instability similar to those found in spoken languages. Hence, the modes of architectural communication take the form of a simple set of rules to create complexity, the ultimate goal being always the production of multivalence.

In his list of possible manners of communication in a postmodern architecture, Jencks begins with the modes that have been the "most commonly disregarded in modern architecture."<sup>104</sup> The first one presented is the 'architectural metaphor,' which was described by Jencks as the way a building is designed in reference to something else. The more unfamiliar a modern building is, the more it would be compared metaphorically to something else. In the same way that the attribution of meaning was

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<sup>102</sup> Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 39-79

<sup>103</sup> See Jakobson R., *The Framework of Language*, 1980.

<sup>104</sup> Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 39.

described as necessary in "Semiology and architecture," the process of constructing metaphors in this essay is described as obligatory and inevitable.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, the role of the architect is not to give a possible metaphor to a building since this meaning will be assigned by users. Instead, the role of the architect is to 'play' with these metaphors and offer a complexity of possible readings and meanings that would create the multivalence Jencks argues is necessary. He states: "a general point about communication: the more the metaphors, the greater the drama, and the more they are slightly suggestive, the greater the mystery. A mixed metaphor is strong."<sup>106</sup> The concept of univalence is here again used to describe a one sided, non-mixed metaphor, as in the example of a hot dog stand in the shape of a hot dog—a clear and obvious reference to Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour's 'duck, from their 1972 book *Learning from Las Vegas*.<sup>107</sup> It is in this context of describing architectural metaphors that Jencks presents for the first time the idea of 'coding' as a possible solution. The concept was later developed in the second edition of the book as 'double coding,' which describes the possibilities of merging different meanings or metaphors in a single building.<sup>108</sup>

For Jencks, this use of codes is the solution for the multiple problems faced by architecture. The most obvious among these issues is the perpetual shifts and changes in architectural meanings for which Jencks proposes that: "the architect must over-code his building, using a redundancy of popular signs and metaphors, if his work is to communicate as intended and survive the transformation of fast changing codes."<sup>109</sup> The ambiguity of the solution proposed by Jencks, in comparison to Zevi's clear diagrams and rules is indicative of his intention to preserve a certain complexity to his 'language.'

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<sup>105</sup> Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture" in *Meaning in Architecture*, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 42.

<sup>107</sup> See Robert Venturi *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1972, 17.

<sup>108</sup> it is important here to acknowledge the influence of Venturi's work and the concept of "both-and" he developed in his book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*.

<sup>109</sup> Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 58.

Although very inspired by the modernist linguistic approach, Jencks tries to distance himself from modernism by adopting a less despotic and a more malleable semiotic proposition.

Beyond the metaphors that for Jencks are the most important mode of architectural communication, he sees architecture as also composed of 'words' or units of meaning. Each unit or word carries a specific signification. As in the spoken language, shifts and alterations occur in these units and a specific word can transmit different meanings. In fact, a specific word can acquire a 'symbolic' meaning and, according to Jencks, this symbolic dimension of a word has been dismissed by modernists in their attempt to create what Jencks called an "Esperanto of cross cultural usage."<sup>110</sup> He argues that to change a culture's behavior, as modern architects tried to do unsuccessfully, one has to use the existing language and then change its meanings rather than changing both at the same time. The feeling of alienation of Pruitt-Igoe users, for example, comes from this modern attempt to create a new language as well as new meanings. In the remainder of the section, Jencks explains how these 'words' need to be joined in a clear 'syntax' that gives a general logic to the whole. This logic is also presented as complex and relative to the context in which it was produced. Jencks ends his description of architectural modes of communication with semantics, which he describes as the process of creating meaning in a specific architectural language.<sup>111</sup>

In the same way that Zevi's book counters Summerson's classical language of architecture, Jencks poses his language in opposition to the modern language of architecture of Zevi. Despite the differences between these views, the idea of using semiotics and linguistics in architecture remains a fundamentally

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 69.

modern project. As a matter of fact, although Summerson's book is considered an anti-modern narrative, it was written in 1964 in the midst of modern and structuralist influences.<sup>112</sup>

As a reflection of the complexity of this internal dialogue between classicism, modernism and post-modernism, in a footnote at the end of the introduction of his book, Zevi wrote:

Four years after the publication of the Italian edition of this book, a most amusing essay by Charles Jencks has been published with the title the language of post modern architecture. It shows that the post modern, opposing the modern, goes back to the premodern, that is, to academic classicism, perhaps this book should be retitled 'the post post modern language of architecture.'<sup>113</sup>

The threat Jencks represented to Zevi, as an *alter ego* to his own views, is very clear in the satiric tone of his comment. However, this 'competition' between the two writers is also very indicative of the degree of similarity between them. In fact, Zevi and Jencks were both acting within an analogous framework and had the same goal of linguistically structuring architecture. Jencks simply takes this linguistic analogy to a different extreme where architecture is expressed in terms of words and metaphors and aims to have a complexity comparable to that found in spoken language. However, his method, his goal and the tools he uses remain fundamentally modern.

Although Jencks tried to change the way semiology was understood and used in architecture following his 1969 article "Semiology and Architecture"—and in that sense made a radical proposal—his attempt to linguistically structure architecture was, in fact, closely aligned with architectural discourse in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, beyond Zevi's work, various attempts to read architecture as a language were made during this time period. For example, several years before the publication of *The Modern Language of Architecture*, Sven Hesselgren published his book *The Language of Architecture* (1967?).

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<sup>112</sup> Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture*, 12.

<sup>113</sup> Zevi, *The Modern Language of Architecture*, 6. (the original Italian edition was published in 1973.)

This work is essentially composed of illustrations with captions that explain the concepts and ideas behind the images. In its interpretation of an architectural language, the book is not different from other modernist manifestos, claiming a possible common solution for different problems and using science and especially the psychology of perception to 'detect' the units of a possible language.

In the introduction of the book, the writer explains the different possibilities that perceptual psychology could offer to create a stable and scientific language of architecture. The author then studies the different perceptions of space and the way a user could link a specific meaning to an architectural form. In a chapter entitled "Architectural expression," Hesselgren creates a 'system of meaning' in diagrams that illustrate the process through which a specific signification is produced, almost invariably and independently from any other factor.<sup>114</sup> In his explanation of systems of meaning, he offers the figure of the triangle proposed by Jencks in his article "Semiology and Architecture." Composed entirely of images, Hesselgren's language moves from color diagrams to the image of the handle of an iron that, according to the writer, "expresses perfectly its function."<sup>115</sup>[Figure 16]

The language proposed here is mostly 'scientific' and hardly prone to variations and interpretations. Like the arguments of Zevi, Hesselgren's modern language is 'positivist' and work as either manifesto or a list of analytical tools and solutions. In these examples, there is no real place for any deep linguistic investigation such as the possible shifts in meanings and semantic alterations. Instead, architectural languages are considered as a stable and clear collection of unchangeable and simple meanings. In other words, modern architectural languages are reduced to a positivist structuralism applied to define specific rules for a new postwar modernism.

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<sup>114</sup> Sven Hesselgren, *The language of architecture*, (Addis Abeba: Haile Sellassie University, 1964), 112.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

Drawn from lectures he gave during the 1970s, Donald Preziosi's book *The Semiotics of the Built Environment* develops the modernist understanding of structuralism and language toward an extreme positivism that transforms architecture into a set 'equations' and diagrams.<sup>116</sup> The very dense and complex illustrations found in the book are used to explain what the author called 'architectonic systems.' [Figure 17] These systems are defined as the set of internal relationships and formations within an architectural phenomenon. The author explains that meanings are produced invariably and inevitably through specific 'formulas.' The way in which different parts interact will, immediately create a predictable 'architectonic meaning.' These meanings are themselves related to architectonic 'types' or functions that create a 'functional correlativity.' This very well-structured language based on a rational and 'scientific' understanding of semiology is most clearly articulated in the conclusion of the book, which Preziosi calls "The systematicity of the built environment." In this discussion the author expresses his optimism towards the expansion and success of the semiotic reading of the built environment when he states:

The systematic study of the built environment as a system of signs—as a semiotic system—is just beginning. But it is already evident that the architectonic code shares a number of important design features with other human sign-systems, particularly with regard to the nature of its formative processes.<sup>117</sup>

The clarity of modern language(s) could easily be categorized within a 'functional' modernism. After all, the idea that every building carries a meaning, and that this meaning is built, can be read through the very modern duality of form and function—where meaning is reduced to a building's function.

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<sup>116</sup> Donald Preziosi, *The Semiotics of the Built Environment* (Indiana: Indiana Univ Press, 1979).

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

This same modern interest in semiology can be found in Geoffrey Broadbent's 1973 article "A Plain Man's Guide to the Theory of Signs in Architecture."<sup>118</sup> The essay tries, as its name indicates, to provide an introduction to semiology and its application in architecture, which he describes as "something of a growth industry."<sup>119</sup> The article offers a "basic division of the field" relating it mostly to the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce. Throughout the article, Broadbent explains that semiology had always existed in architecture without ever being expressed as a new and independent field—and that this task is urgent. He even traces the conversation about signification and meaning in architecture back to Vitruvius and antiquity. Despite this historical reference, the reading of semiology Broadbent offers is still very modern in its belief in the 'simplification' and facilitations the semiotic method would offer architecture.

The enthusiasm of modernists for a scientific reading of semiotics and its use in architecture as a tool for stabilizing modern formal production was contested within modernist circles at the beginning of the 1970s. In an article published in 1977 and entitled "Semiotics and architecture: ideological consumption or theoretical work," Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas criticize the confusion architects tend to have between semiotics and communication theory.<sup>120</sup> According to the writers, the confusion does not only come from the different natures of the two fields, but also from the difference in their object of study. Therefore, the writers argue that theorists should be cautious with the recent proliferation of linguistic theories in architecture. However, rather than putting an end to the use of semiotics in architecture and instead of importing linguistic terminologies, they argue that semiotics should be seen in the larger context of 'meaning and architecture.'

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<sup>118</sup> Geoffrey Broadbent's "A Plain Man's Guide to the Theory of Signs in Architecture," *Architectural Design* 47, no. 7-8 (July/August 1978): 474-482.

<sup>119</sup> Kate Nesbitt, Editor, *Theorizing a new agenda for architecture – An anthology of architectural theory 1965 – 1995*, (New York: Princeton architectural press, 1995), 124.

<sup>120</sup> Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas, "Semiotics and architecture: ideological consumption or theoretical work," *Oppositions I* (September 1973): 93-100.

An even more significant critique of the use of linguistics in architecture is Manfredo Tafuri's article "*L'architecture dans le boudoir, the language of criticism and the criticism of language.*"<sup>121</sup> In this article published in *Oppositions* in 1974, he discusses the place of language in architectural criticism, posing three different possibilities of criticism that connect 'language' to the object criticized. In the first approach language is mostly neutral, in the second language is almost absent or 'dissolved' and in the third language is perceived as 'irony.' Even though Tafuri does not refer directly in his essay to the influence of semiotics in late modern architecture, he calls for the organization and 'structuring' of architecture. This renewal of architecture's structure aims first of all to liberate the discipline from the ineffectiveness of the modernist ideology. According to Tafuri, the modern malaise comes partly from the fact that architecture has been reduced to the restrictive space of 'language' and became bound to the limits of semiotics. Tafuri sees then that the recent return to semiotics in architecture as a new regressive step and calls instead for a semiotics of criticism that will have a "repressive character" and "liberate all that which is beyond language."<sup>122</sup> Throughout the article, Tafuri criticizes the architects' obsession with questions of meaning and signification but did not call for a total rupture with semiotics. Instead he references thinkers such as Foucault and Barthes and calls for a more proactive innovative and new use of linguistic theories.

Despite these criticisms, the linguistic analogies in architecture enjoyed a significant proliferation during the 1970s with the most notable example being Charles Jencks' 1977 *Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. Despite its use by Jencks and other anti-modern or post-modern critics, the linguistic understanding of architecture remained an important feature of the modernist discourse. Arguably the only difference between Jencks and modern theorists is the complexity he wanted to generate and then simplify—which was the same complexity they wanted to eliminate. That modernists had to avoid

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<sup>121</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, "*L'architecture dans le boudoir, the language of criticism and the criticism of language,*" *Oppositions* 3 (May 1974): 112-129.

<sup>122</sup> Michael Hays, ed., *Architecture Theory since 1968*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 146.

acknowledging the complexity of language is understandable for 'practical' reasons since it is true that it is difficult to build a 'modern' paradigm based on an uncontrolled density of meanings. This same paradox was faced by Jencks as well, however the postmodern theorist attempted to resolve it using the conceptual tool of multivalence and its modes of communication. Nonetheless, it can be argued that Jencks knew a simple new linguistic approach to architecture was not sufficient to build a new movement, located as it was on the margin between the complexity of language on the one hand and the 'simplifying' concept of multivalence on the other. In its initial formulation Postmodernism was weak and could not be more than a simple new modern phenomena like structuralism and brutalism. It is at this point that Jencks sustains his linguistic formulation through a narrative—something he notably adds to his second edition of the *Language of Post-Modern Architecture*.

## ***II / Postmodernism as a narrative***

As we have seen earlier, in his article "Semiology and Architecture," Charles Jencks focuses on the question of complexity and how it can be produced through a linguistic understanding of architecture. Meaning is presented as inevitably shifting and unstable and the idea of 'context' has a new important role in interpreting architecture. However, the emphasis on questions of meaning, language and their instability leads Jencks to a relativism that could scarcely be translated into an architectural movement, with a clear set of rules. Besides the problem of complexity in languages, Jencks also adds a new problem related to his skepticism towards the notion of 'truth.' While denying the possibility of 'truth' in contemporary architecture due to its linguistic nature, Jencks refutes the idea that any form of truth could have existed in the past.

This view was further developed in his second article published in the book *Meaning in architecture* entitled "History as Myth," where Jencks argues that all historical narratives in modern

architecture are mere myths that could never be related to a single, eternal truth.<sup>123</sup> His first argument against the existence of 'history' is founded on the constant changes in historical readings of modern historians, such as Banham and Hitchcock. For example, the article begins with the description of a 1966 radio talk given by Nikolaus Pevnsner where he describes the architecture of the sixties as 'anti-pioneer' in reference to his own earlier book.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* has constantly been republished over the years and the list of 'pioneers' has changed considerably between the first (1936) and last edition (1975). The inconsistency of historical readings and, at the same time, the way these readings are always presented as 'true' descriptions of the past, leads Jencks to describe history as a myth. In response to these shifts in historical interpretation he creates a diagram of 'mythical transformations' to uncover the correlations between the most important modern narratives and major historians of modernism. [Figure 18] The diagram also reveals the contrast between Jencks' interest in the work of modern historians and his belief in the absence of truth.

Jencks' cautious relativism can be clearly seen at the end of the article where he offers a possible alternative to the sharp opposition between a platonic world of meanings and a modern nihilism, stating:

What we can do is project into each world only to leave by the other side: we must experience Corbusier's architecture as clean and rational, Wright's architecture as heavy and strong, Futurists as light and flexible, Brutalists as tough and honest, because all these terms define the meaning and point to a common centre of moral experience. This experience where meanings converge however is not a place of mutual exclusion: no one set of meanings or myth is sufficient for man or even final.<sup>125</sup>

The confusion found in the article is again representative of the paradox Jencks faces between his great interest in a linguistic understanding of architecture and the nihilism that this method creates.

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<sup>123</sup> Jencks, "History as Myth" in Charles Jencks and George Baird, ed., *Meaning in Architecture* 245-266.

<sup>124</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, "Architecture in our time, the anti-pioneers," 953.

<sup>125</sup> Jencks and Baird, *Meaning in architecture*, 265.

The confusion inevitably linked to the understanding of architecture as a language could only be resolved with the construction of a specific 'narrative' that would offer the homogeneity necessary for the development of a 'style.' The solution brought by Jencks is his 'postmodern narrative,' primarily developed in his book *The Language of postmodern architecture* but also in his earlier work *Modern Movements in Architecture*.

In this book, there is a clear attempt to set the primary boundaries for an 'alternative' to modernism. After describing the different fallacies and potential failures of modernism with Le Corbusier, Mies Van Der Rohe and Gropius, Jencks starts a sixth chapter entitled "Recent American architecture: Camp – Non Camp."<sup>126</sup> In this section of the book, he shifts from describing a recent past to define a more contemporary condition with what he calls 'camp' architecture. The utilization of this term is quite significant and cannot be viewed as a simple textual decision made by the author. In reality, for the first time Jencks takes the role of defining and 'creating' a group instead of merely describing or criticizing an already existing tendency.

Jencks defines camp attitude as "a mental set towards all sorts of objects which fail from a serious point of view. Instead of condemning these failures, it partially contemplates them and partially enjoys them."<sup>127</sup> It is an architecture that accepts the habitual products of mass production as a norm without trying to change them. For Jencks, Camp is a way of accepting the imitation and enjoying it by finding beauty in the "fantastic hidden in the banal."<sup>128</sup>

The interest Jencks shows in what he defines as camp architecture is related to the place of 'camp' in modern architecture. The new tendency is then described as a deformation of modern icons into new, exaggerated and metaphorical forms. Organic architecture is considered by Jencks as a good

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<sup>126</sup> Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in architecture*, 185-238.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

example of the new camp tendency in modernism. Buildings claiming to be organic are described as 'camp' because of their emphasis on producing simple and naïve forms of astonishment within those who use the building. Jencks then explains that a camp attitude could be found in the work of certain postwar architects and argues that this concept provides a common ground for the various forms of contemporary architecture, and avoids the recent "confusion of styles."<sup>129</sup>

The attempt to homogenize the different contemporary approaches is illustrated by Jencks in a diagram relating different American architects to each other through what he calls a 'numerical taxonomy.' [Figure 19] In this diagram, the author defines six major schools of contemporary architecture which range from the Academic school to the pragmatic tendency and also include the technical, environmentalist, organic and formalist ones. In this taxonomy, architects like Venturi and Kahn are considered part of the academic school while Mies Van Der Rohe and I.M. Pei are considered formalists. Jencks does not give more details about the criteria he used when creating these categories. Certain omissions lead to a general sense of ambiguity and a problem in the reasoning behind the choice and categorization of certain architects. For example, while it is possible to see Venturi as an 'academic' because of the importance his writings and books had on academic research, Khan, would seem out of place in this same category. In a sidenote concerning the diagram, Jencks classifies the six tendencies as either camp or non camp.<sup>130</sup> For example, formalist and pragmatic architecture are described as univalent camp with Minoru Yamasaki, Eero Saarinen, Philip Johnson and SOM as major representatives. On the other hand, academic and environmentalist architecture is described as 'Non camp' and represented by architects such as Richard Neutra, Marcel Breuer and Robert Venturi.

No matter how arbitrary or ambiguous the classifications, the homogenization of different architects and approaches into a new general style of 'camp' (or non camp), initiated by the author is

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 189.

representative of the new effort to produce a unified discourse. The attempt to unify and homogenize different tendencies under the umbrella of a single identity makes it possible to argue the narrative of 'camp' is a preliminary form of what will later be called 'postmodern discourse.'

Beyond the close resemblance between camp and postmodern architecture as 'discourses,' at least in their form and their ultimate goal, both had many common stylistic points and the argument presenting camp as an early form of the postmodern is arguable here as well. Jencks presents camp's major statement as 'it is good because it is awful' as a preparation for the 'pop' influence of postmodernism. The author later defines camp architecture in these words:

The point about high camp work is that it aspires to the condition of greatness, but fails to reach this level rather completely. The resultant gap between pretension and performance is so incredible that the work oscillates back and forth between the interpretive levels of the sublime and ridiculous.<sup>131</sup>

The place of camp as a pre-postmodern is very clear when the author questions the use of references and metaphors in recent American architecture and takes the example of the Michigan Consolidate Gas Company Building in Detroit by Yamasaki (1962) where the architect topped the building with a volume having gothic motifs and where a blue gas flame was supposed to be burning (there is no picture of the building with actual flames). Jencks then asks "why should a gas company look like a Greek Gothic cathedral (since none has ever existed)? Why should a drug company resemble a tweedy castle? Indeed there is no reason except that all architectural is metaphorical and must by necessity look like something."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 194.

This questioning was the first introduction by Jencks to issues related to the double-coding of architecture. Later on in this chapter he proceeds to justify the necessity of metaphors and their inevitability when it comes to interpreting and understanding architecture. He describes how metaphors are transformed into clichés through a process of ‘overcommunication’ and that it is this perpetual creation of clichés that forms the basis of ‘camp’ architecture.

Despite his interest in camp architecture, it is depicted by Jencks as ‘amoral’ for its similarities with Pop culture and art and its primary emphasis on the personal fame of the ‘creator’ of the object. He explains that with its constant preoccupation with trends, camp architecture can be destructive to its own public status. He states: “While a Camp architect can be honest to the private sphere and create objects which are vital and striking (because personal) he cannot create a lasting public work which endures beyond his own career.”<sup>133</sup>

At the end of the section where he describes American architecture of the 1960s, Jencks presents what he thinks is a ‘non camp’ architecture—an architecture that was, according to the writer, still predominant on the American architectural scene.<sup>134</sup> In this section, Jencks describes the camp architect as ‘morally cool’ explaining later that there is no attempt to follow or belong to a general trend or narrative. His work is based both on his personal ‘taste,’ that of the client and in a more general sense that of contemporary architectural production. In opposition to a camp architect’s superficial ties to common ‘moral’ narratives, the non camp architect is described as ‘morally hot’, he is trying to be in touch with a general discourse that prescribes common solutions.

Following his typically metaphorical way of illustrating concepts, Jencks describes the difference between camp and non camp in these words:

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>134</sup> With the most notable example of Robert Venturi’s work. Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 218.

One might say that Camp is force grown in a hot-house and that Non Camp grows slowly according to its own laws, the laws of imagination, which produce unlike a hot-house, a flower which smells. The camp flower is pretty, but the Non camp flower is sturdy and actually gives off an odor.<sup>135</sup>

The first example given of a non camp architect was of Robert Venturi, whose work is described as "complementary in intentions"—a consistency that exists between his different buildings as well as among the different parts of each building. According to Jencks, it is this coherence that makes Venturi categorized as a 'non camp' architect. At the same time, Jencks also criticizes the description of Venturi and Moore by some critics as camp architects. He explains:

It is partially this allusiveness and incorporation of elements into architecture which has mistakenly led many people to classify Venturi and Moore as *the* Camp architects above all. But this classification by thematic matter is as wrongheaded as assuming that Stravinsky is a Pop composer because he used popular work in his material.<sup>136</sup>

It can be deduced here that 'camp', as a concept, is essentially related to the emergence of a Pop culture in architecture during the 1960s and to the proliferation of Kitsch elements, in opposition to the purity and simplicity of modern architecture.<sup>137</sup> However, in this new architecture, according to Jencks, there were designers who tried to offer coherence within this new variety. This specific category is described as a 'morally hot, multivalent non-camp architecture'. In other words, a non-'camp architect' is influenced by historicism and Pop culture and trying, while at the same time, providing a coherence and a general framework for this new diversity.

It is this same category of 'Camp' architects with equivalent criteria that four years later are described as 'Postmodern', in *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* (1977). After a first chapter

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>137</sup> See Jencks's analysis of Hans Hollein's work in *modern movements in architecture*, 52.

announcing the death of modern architecture and a second introducing the new linguistic modes of architectural communication, Jencks finishes the first edition of this book with a chapter entitled "Post Modern Architecture."<sup>138</sup> Notably, this section, which directly tackled the issue of defining postmodernism, is the only part of the book that kept evolving throughout the seven different editions.

In the very first edition, the chapter entitled "Postmodern architecture" was composed of only thirteen pages that, to a great extent, reproduced the definition of camp and non camp introduced in *Modern Movements in Architecture*. Architects such as Robert Venturi and Charles Moore who were described as representative of the 'non camp' tendency in *Modern Movements* are here presented as good examples of a postmodern architect. Notably the categories of 'camp' or 'non camp' completely disappeared. Instead, the author summarizes all the early ideas of camp, Pop and multivalence under the new category of 'inclusive architecture.'<sup>139</sup> Indeed, the work of Venturi is presented as a perfect illustration of 'inclusiveness.' Jencks praises the talent of the American architect to master the difficult task of unifying different materials and tasks instead of following the modern tendency to homogenize meanings and styles. The author argues later that this 'inclusiveness' and complexity is closer to human nature and behaviors and compares the richness of the new style to Greek tragedies. He states:

The rare inclusive building, does not sublimate unattractive aspects of the world, it can include ugliness, decay, banality, austerity, without becoming depressing. It can confront harsh realities of climate, or politics without suppression, it can articulate a bleak metaphysical view of man – Greek architecture and that of Le Corbusier – without either evasion or bleakness. Inclusive architecture and tragedy simply, are the pinnacles of expressive modes: there is nothing else as rich, mature and honest towards the complexities of life.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern architecture* , 87.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*,90.

Jencks acknowledges that this hybridity or 'inclusiveness' existed in the work of certain modern architects such as Le Corbusier but in a very tentative and primitive form compared to what Venturi proposes. Jencks then presents 'radical eclecticism' as part of this inclusive and multivalent architecture. In opposition to an eclecticism that transposes different styles without trying to bring coherence to the whole, 'radical eclecticism' offers a semantic justification for the different parts that compose a building. According to Jencks it is: "variegated rather than homogeneous, witty rather than somber, messy rather than clean, picturesque but not necessarily without a classical, geometric order (usually it is made from several orders in contrast)."<sup>141</sup>

In elaborating on this form of eclecticism, Jencks proposes that architects should be competent in four or five different styles and traditions as well as being trained as an anthropologist. This stylistic and cultural facility would permit the architects to use the relevant architectural codes for each particular context. With an ability to manipulate local metaphors and symbols, the postmodern architect of Jencks should also remain deeply modern. Thus, the architect should always be aware of the latest inventions and technologies of building and methodologies of planning and always aim to work on a global scale. In the last sentence of a relatively long description of the profile of the new architect, Jencks states:

Schizophrenia is the only intelligent approach. The architect should be trained as a radical schizophrenic (everything must be radical today), always looking two ways with equal clarity: towards the traditional slow changing codes and particular ethnic meanings of a neighborhood, and towards the fast changing codes of architectural fashion and professionalism.<sup>142</sup>

Charles Jencks finishes his book with a conclusion in the form of manifesto that called for a new 'theory' and a new paradigm in architecture. He describes the recent development and changes in

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 97.

architecture as a form of 'crisis' that would inevitably lead to a new movement that transcends modernism and all the malaise and disenchantment it created for architects and the general public. Jencks insists that this could not happen without architects being involved in the creation of their own theories and discourse and asks for a return to the period of time when architects took responsibility for their rhetoric. In this same conclusion Jencks insists that the architect should use semiotics to master the communicational modes of his buildings. Theory would then offer coherence to the whole and work as 'unifying agent' to the different forces that shape the building.

It is exactly this notion of 'coherence' and unification that prevailed in all the definitions Jencks gave to postmodernism in architecture. In contrast to the second chapter of *The Language of Postmodern architecture*, which describes the complexity of a semiotic reading of architecture, the 'narrative' of postmodernism attempts to transcend the dilemma of complexity caused by linguistics. It is clear that Jencks has a great interest in the richness of the semiotic approach in architecture, however, he is also aware of the difficulties one can encounter when trying to produce a clear narrative claiming 'complexity' and multivalence as essential features. The role of the narrative is then to 'soften' and simplify the complexity of the language. The coexistence of a clear and simple narrative along with a complex set of communicational tools remains a constant element of the postmodern discourse in Charles Jencks' work.

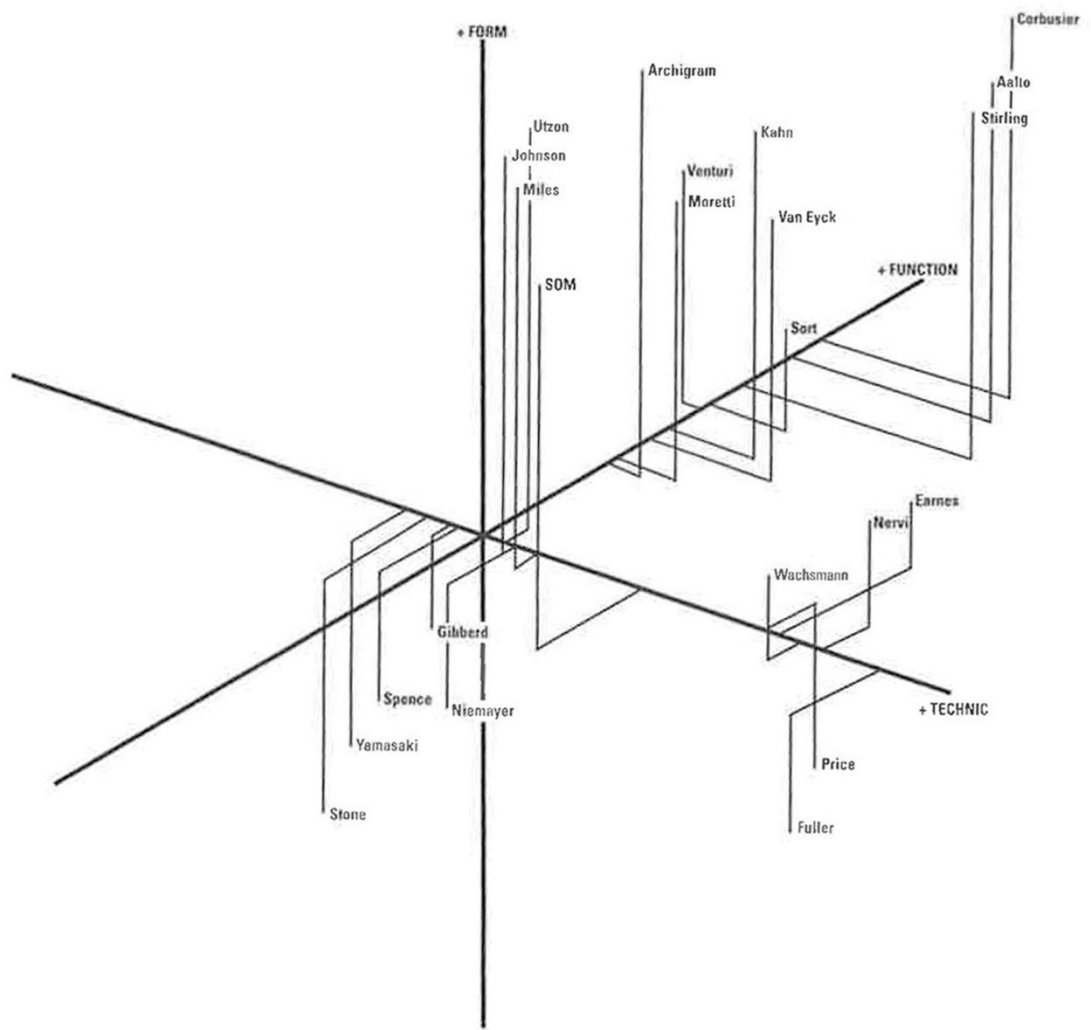
In the 1978 edition of *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, the author keeps the same structure of the first two chapters but completely changes the third section. Rather than a simple description of a new theory of architecture, Jencks provides an analysis of all the tendencies that are actually 'postmodern.' Somehow between 1977 and 1978, postmodernism progressed from being a potential project to become an actual 'reality.' While the first edition opens with a section entitled 'recent departures' and concludes with a manifesto for a new architecture, the third chapter of the

second edition is three times longer and composed of a very clear survey of the different tendencies of the new postmodern architecture.<sup>143</sup> Jencks begins by explaining that the beginning of postmodernism can be related to the historicist movement of the 1960s with architects such as Yamasaki and Venturi. Jencks then describes what he calls 'straight revivalism,' the neo vernacular, ad hoc urbanism and radical eclecticism. All these movements are explained thoroughly through specific examples of architects and buildings as well as their interaction.

In contrast to the complexity of a 'postmodern architectural language,' the postmodern narrative is built around the concept of unity and coherence. All architects and buildings described in the book, despite their differences are assimilated under the same category and broadly defined as postmodern. Obviously, it was very difficult to keep track of all the new movements and approaches in architecture. Beyond his efforts to constantly clarify the narratives of postmodernism, Jencks had to regularly categorize these new movements, frame the new changes and give a new terminology to every architectural production he thought part of postmodernism. This categorization of all new architectural trends happened throughout different editions of *The Language of Postmodern architecture* with the help of what later became his famous evolutionary tree diagrams. When the American theorist was categorizing postmodernism's different manifestations to enable the narrative to survive and continue, a similar process of categorization and classification was being produced by other authors, such as Heinrich Klotz, to historicize the movement—an effort that would finally permit architects to transcend it.

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<sup>143</sup> These tendencies as illustrated in the book are: Historicism, straight revivalism, Neo-Vernacular, Adhocism, Metaphor and Metaphysics, Postmodern space and radical eclecticism.



Charles Jencks, *Semantic Space of Architects*, 1968

Figure 11. Diagram of semantic space of current architects. Charles Jencks, *Meaning in Architecture*, 1969.

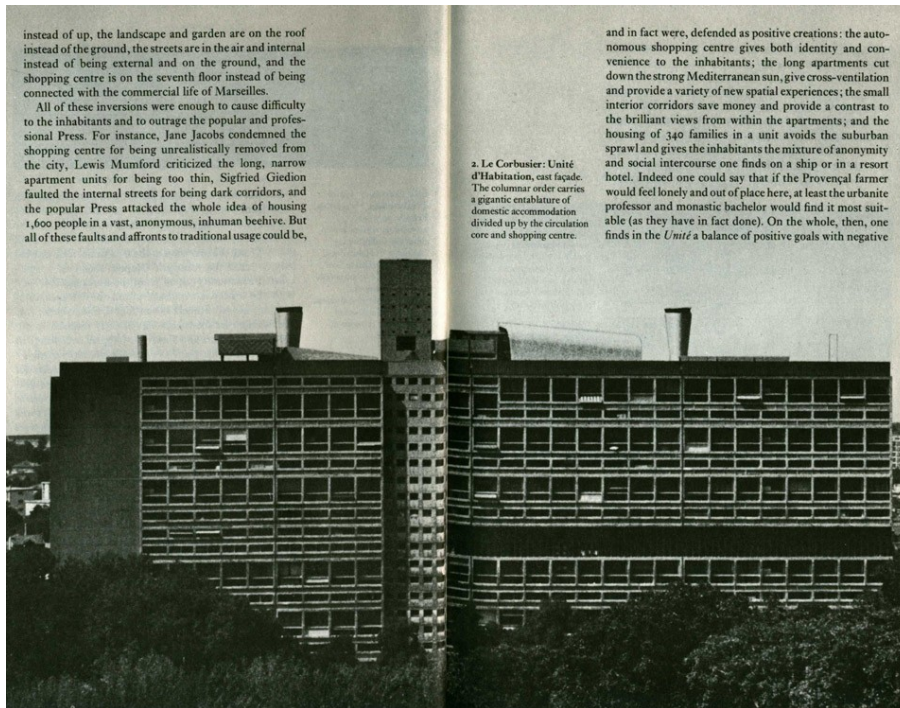
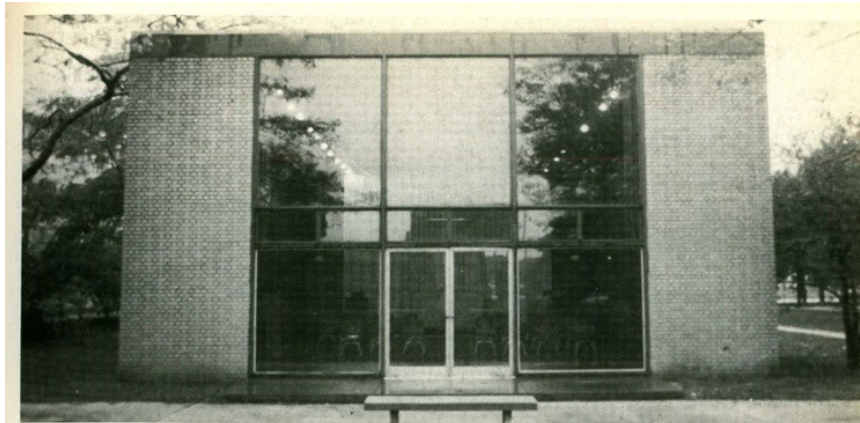


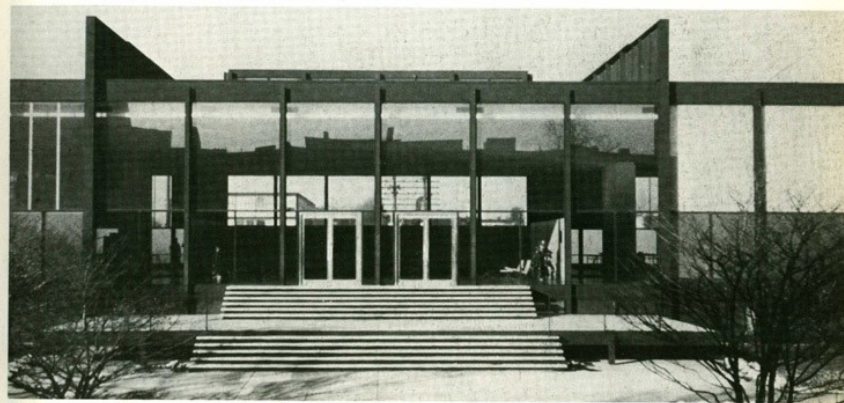
Figure 12. Le Corbusier, Unité d'habitation, Marseille, 1952, Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 1973.



Figure 13. Frederick Gibberd, Liverpool church, Liverpool, 1967, Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 1973.



21 MIES VAN DER ROHE, *IIT Boiler House* |Church. A dumb box vernacular. Blank on three sides and lit by a search light – clearly this placed to either side of high-rise buildings, which are in the same is the boiler house.



22 MIES VAN DER ROHE, *IIT President's Temple* |School of Architecture, Chicago, 1962. The black temple hovers miraculously from horizontal steps also break the law of gravity. The building occupies a major point on the campus, as the President's house should. (John Winter).  
a giant order of steel trusses and a minor order of I-beams. The white

Figure 14. Mies, IIT Campus, Chicago, 1947, Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 1977.

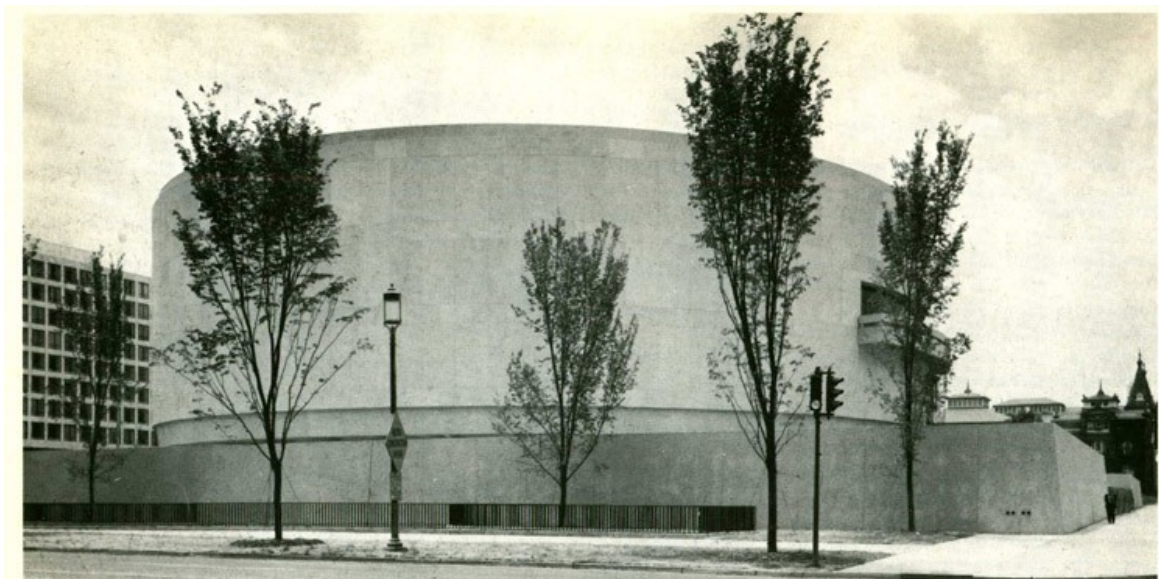


Figure 15. Gordon Bunshaft, Hirshhorn Museum, D.C, 1973 Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 1977.

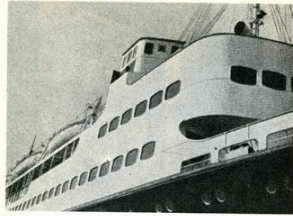


Fig. 30: 1. The passenger steamer 'Prince Baudoin'. Engineer, Raoul Grimard, architect, Henry van de Velde.

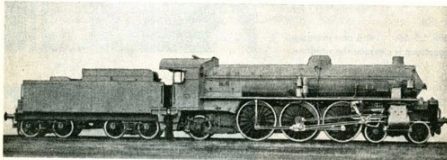


Fig. 30: 2. This locomotive from the Italian Government Speed Train Railways is considered to be one of the most beautiful steam engines in the world ...

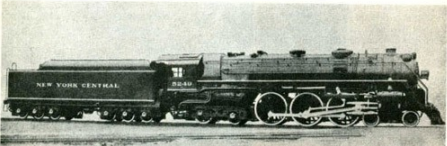


Fig. 30: 3. ... the other being this New York Central's Hudson Locomotive. (After Ahlberg)



Fig. 30: 4. The handle of the irons expresses its function, to be grasped by the hand.



Fig. 30: 5. A handle to push ...



Fig. 30: 6. ... and one to pull. Designer, Egon Møller-Nielsen.



Fig. 20: 7. A hue interval within the "first ambiguity".

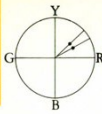


Fig. 20: 10. A hue interval between two reddish-blue colours.

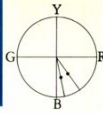


Fig. 20: 8. A hue interval within the realm of "similarity".

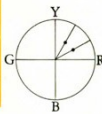


Fig. 20: 11. An equally big interval, but the two colours are placed, one on each side of the primary blue.

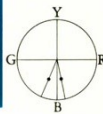


Fig. 20: 9. Too small an interval to be pleasant?

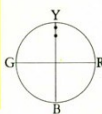


Fig. 20: 12. An equally big interval, but the two blue colours are both greenish.



	$\oplus$ J	$\oplus$ L	$\oplus$ P	$\oplus$ LP	$\oplus$ LPL
$\otimes$ i	$\otimes$	$\otimes$			
$\otimes$ l	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	
$\otimes$ p		$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$
$\otimes$ lp		$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$
$\otimes$ lpl			$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$

Fig. 20: 13. Johansson's systematization of the hue interval characters. For explanation of the signs used in this scheme see the text.



Fig. 20: 14. A: Two reddish-white colours, C: Two greenish-white colours, B: One reddish and one greenish-white. In spite of the fact that A and C shows greater colour intervals than B the colours in each of these cases show a relationship which is not found in B.

Figure 16. Sven Hesselgren, *The language of architecture*, 1969.

	a		b		c
AKHL A	lightwell (?)	/C/	porch	/PDP/	hall
KN HCS	lightwell	/PDP/	porch	/PDP/	hall
KN RV	lightwell	/C/	porch	/PDP/	hall
KN HF	lightwell	/PDP/	porch	doors*	hall
ML DA	lightwell	/C/	porch	/PDP/	hall
ML ZA	garden	/C/	porch	/PDP/	hall
TYL A	lightwell	/C/**	porch	/PDP/	hall
TYL C	lightwell	/C/	porch	/PDP/	hall

\*Apparently originally a /PDP/.  
 \*\*L-shaped colonnade, or "/C/".

Table 1. Formal Cellular Realization

The internal syntactic aggregation of all examples is the same, but there are alternative formal realizations, as the Table above indicates:

- (1) the (a-b) boundary may be either /C/ or /PDP/;
- (2) the (a) cell is invariably an "outdoor" or unroofed cell (or a cell with a clerestory roof), but may be either an enclosed open area ("garden," as in ML ZA) or a relatively small lightwell. Hence there may be alternative formal realizations. In the hall systems of the two large "palaces" of Mallia and Phaistos,<sup>7</sup> we find both a lightwell and a "garden."
- (3) The (a-b) boundary realized formally as /C/ may be either L-shaped (TYL A) or unilinear (all others).
- (4) In the example of KN HF, the (a-b) boundary is not only a /PDP/ and not a /C/, but it is only partly a /PDP/.

In our examination of TYL A and C we arrive at the tentative conclusion that there was an apparent invariance within the hall systems with respect to relative size of cells: at TYL, the (b) cell was the smallest, the (c) cell the largest.

But if we take all of the examples into consideration, it will be evident that this size-ratio is not invariant. In the next Table, "1" = largest cell, "2" = middle-sized, and "3" = smallest cell:

	a	b	c
AKHL A		all equal in size	
KN HCS	3	2	1
KN RV	2	2	1
KN HF	2	1	3
ML DA	2	2	1
ML ZA	1	3	2
TYL A	2	3	1
TYL C	2	3	1

Table 2. Relative Size

Evidently, then, the relative size of the (a-b-c) cells is not invariant. Consequently, there will be alternative material realizations with respect to size (modularity), or what may be termed contextual variance.

Let us look at several other aspects or features which may be invariant across our examples. With respect to the manner of access to the hall system—i.e., its syntactic position with respect to other aggregates—it will be seen that primary access (i.e., from cells leading to the building's entrance) is as follows:

	a		b		c
AKHL A	x	and	x		
KN HCS			x		
KN RV	x			or	x
KN HF	x	or	x		
ML DA					x
ML ZA			x		x
TYL A					
TYL C					x

Table 3. Primary Access

Evidently, access from the outside may be gained into any of the three cells, and in two cases into more than one: at AKHL A, entrance-vestibule (b) has a door opening into (a) and one opening into (b); at KN HF, house vestibule (f) has two doors: one leads into a corridor (c-d) leading to (a), another into a series of cells (b-i) which lead into cell (b).

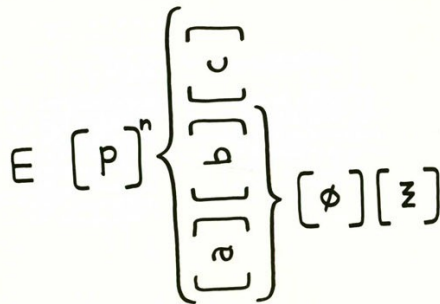
But what is invariant, however, is the fact that in all examples, access is lateral to the longitudinal axis of the system.

It will be noted that in all cases, the hall systems do not open directly onto a street or primary house entrance, but are at least one cell removed from that entrance; in the following Table, the access to the system is shown with respect to how many thresholds (doorways) separate it from the primary house entrance (E).

	Number of thresholds including house door	
AKHL A	2	(= 1 cell separation)
KN HCS	2	(1)
KN RV	2	(1)
KN HF	4	(3)
ML DA	3	(2)
ML ZA	4	(3)
TYL A	4	(3)
TYL C	4	(3)

Table 4. Separation from Outside

In other words, there is invariantly a minimum of one cell between hall system and house door (or two doors), and the system may be as many as three cells removed, possibly more depending on the size of the house. But no matter how small the house, there is always at least one intermediary cell.



E : EXTERIOR P : PRIMARY ACCESS  $\emptyset$  : ONE CELL Z : STAIRWELL

Figure 1

(understanding the range of formal and material alternative realizations of (a-b-c)). Hence the formative features of the Minoan hall system include

- the specified set of components (a), (b), (c), and their formal (and material) contextual variants;
- an ordering or structure of those components, as specified in Figure 1.

Included in both (A) and (B) are series of formal, material and syntactic constraints as specified in the discussions in this section. Thus, the specification of lateral access to the system in (B) implies the formal realization of at least one doorway in at least one wall of one (or two) cells, and so forth. The specification of (a) as lightwell implies the material realization of formal item—as here, viz., floor—as a cement or stone pavement, etc.

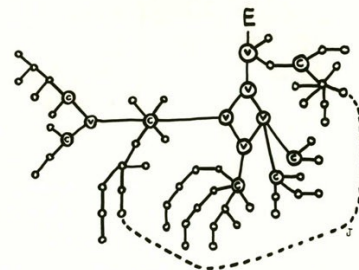
Let us now consider a comparative example and examine the manner in which other houses in another corpus are organized in terms of formative features.

Plates IX. and X. are plans of two Egyptian houses, at el-Lahun and Amarna. The former, dated to the reign of the Pharaoh Sesostri II, in the Nineteenth Century B.C. is a row house in a

planned village built in association with construction of that Pharaoh's pyramid. That at Amarna is a detached house in a yard, the residence of a bureaucrat known as the vizier Nakht.

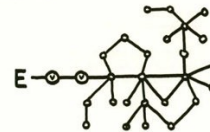
The latter is considerably smaller than the former, and has many fewer rooms; it was constructed in the Fourteenth Century B.C., or some five or six centuries after the former.

Despite wide differences in size and layout, the two houses reveal a number of similarities—pillared halls of several types, for example, arranged in sequence. But the interrelations of the various cells appear very different in the two houses:



E : EXTERIOR  
 V : VESTIBULE  
 C : COURT / LIGHTWELL

EL LAHUN



AMARNA

Figure 2

Figure 17. Donald Preziosi, *The Semiotics of the Built Environment*, 1979.

DIAGRAM I MYTHICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

			MYTHEME A		MYTHEME B	
			rationalism/social utopianism		Purism/Expression-ism	
I-I	CORBUSIER	(1923)	+	+	+	-
	Gropius	(1925)	+	+	+	-
	Hilberseimer	(1926)	+	+	+	-
	Platz	(1927)	+		+	
	Giedion	(1928)	+	+	+	-
	B. Taut	(1929)	+	+	+	
	Sartoris	(1932)	+	+	+	-
I-II	Mumford	(1924, 1931)	-	-	-	+
	Hitchcock	(1929)	-	-	+	+
	Cheney	(1930)			+	+
	HITCHCOCK & JOHNSON	(1932)	-	-	+	+
I-III	Kaufmann	(1933)	+		+	
	P. M. Shand	(1934)	+		+	
	PEVSNER	(1936)	+	+	+	-
	Behrendt	(1937)	+	+	+	-
	Richards	(1940)	+	+	+	-
	GIEDION	(1941)	+	+	+	-
			rationalism/cultural interpretation			
I-IV	Zevi	(1945, 1950)	-	+	+	+
	Rowe	(1947, 1950)		+	+	+
	Summerson	(1949)		+	+	+
	Wittkower	(1950)		+	+	
	Mumford	(1952)		+	+	+
	Dorfles	(1954)		+	+	+
	Jaffe	(1956)		+	+	+
	BANHAM	(1960)	+	+	+	+
			rationalism/social utopianism			
I-Va	Whittick	(1950)		-	+	+
	Hamlin	(1952)		-	+	+
	Sartoris	(1957)		-	+	+
	HITCHCOCK	(1958)		-	+	+
	Joedicke	(1959)		-	+	+
			rationalism/cultural interpretation			
I-Vb	Benevolo	(1960)		+	+	+
	Kidder-Smith	(1961)		+	+	+
	Banham	(1962)		+	+	+
	Hatje En.	(1963)		+	+	+
I-VI	V. SCULLY	(1961)		+	+	+
	MAS Sym.	(1964)		+	+	+
	Collins	(1965)	+	+	+	-
	N.-Schulz	(1965)		+	-	+
	Jacobus	(1966)			+	+
	Sharp	(1966)		+	-	+
	BANHAM	(1966)	+	+	-	+

Figure 18. Mythical Transformations. Jencks and Baird, *Meaning in architecture*, 1969.



## CLASSIFYING

In the previous chapters, we have seen how the modern movement in architecture was portrayed and represented in Jencks' work and how the American theorist later defined postmodernism as a new autonomous movement, independently from its predecessor. This work of representation and definition was sustained by a simultaneous work of classification. Throughout his work, Jencks always tried to categorize different architectural productions under different labels and names. This work of classification is clear in the diagrams and evolutionary trees he prepared and constantly realized in different editions of his books. This same attempt to classify postmodernism into different simple categories is also clear in the work of another prominent theorist of the 1980s: Heinrich Klotz.

This chapter will be built around a comparative reading of Charles Jencks and Heinrich Klotz's writings on postmodernism. It will be argued that the different classifications of postmodernism in Jencks' work aimed at retaining a certain 'semantic control' over the meaning of the movement. It will also be sustained that the regular renewal of Jencks' classifications through his evolutionary tree diagrams meant to avoid the movement's fragmentation and death. On the other hand, Klotz's 1988 book *The History of Postmodern Architecture* used the same tool of classification but, this time, to historicize postmodernism and implicitly claim its death.

## 1- *Charles Jencks and the unending renewal of postmodernism*

In his preface of his *Post-Modern reader* (2009) entitled "Post Modernism – The Ism that returns" Charles Jencks states that: "most Isms become Wasms and, it is the argument of this anthology, Post Modernism is one of the few that did not."<sup>144</sup> Forty years after having claimed the death of modernism, Jencks refutes the idea that postmodernism could be surpassed. Jencks' 'conservatism' was made possible with the help of a system of classification and inclusion that touched almost all recent architectural production even when it did not recognize the postmodern lineage. This continual effort to categorize and classify all sorts of architectural 'Isms' as Postmodern has been a central element in Jencks' writings.

The effort to classify architectural work into clear and definable categories started very early in Jencks' work. In his 1969 article "Semiotics and architecture" he tries, for the first time, to classify different architects in a diagram that represents the 'semantic space' of their work. Although the article is essentially presenting the degrees of complexity found in a semantic reading of architecture, and the benefits of such a reading in the face of a flat and simplistic modernism, Jencks diagram itself could be criticized as a simplification. This dilemma, of giving a precise account of diversity, is one that Jencks very often encountered throughout his work. In retrospect, the diagram is nothing but the first in a long line of efforts at classification, that tried to accurately describe complexity under the threat of its destruction.

In the same book,<sup>145</sup> the author includes another diagram of architectural theorists who took part in the construction of modern historical 'myths' in architecture. In this illustration, the work of individuals such as Giedion, Pevsner, Kaufmann, Zevi and Banham were reduced into four simple

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<sup>144</sup> Jencks, ed., *The Post-modern Reader*, (London: Wiley editions, 2010), 7.

<sup>145</sup> This diagram also appears in Jencks' article "History as myth", *Meaning in architecture*, 256.

categories of rationalism, social utopianism, purism and expressionism.<sup>146</sup> [Figure 20] Through classifying the work of these theorists according to specific topics and then describing how they were constantly shifting from one category to another, Jencks tried to point out the volatility of historical narratives in modern architecture. In this critique of historical studies of architecture, Jencks related the ‘mythical’ character of architectural narratives to the inevitable complexity of events, sources and power structures. This same complexity did not prevent Jencks from presenting another diagram at the end of the same article where he establishes a clear representation of the interaction between a specific set of architectural historians and topics.

In *Modern movements in architecture*, Jencks reproduces this same intricacy in his first version of an ‘evolutionary tree’ diagram.<sup>147</sup> In this drawing, Jencks tries to represent the different tendencies in modern architecture and their sub-styles. [Figure 21] In the vertical line of the diagram, the author lists the six ‘traditions’ of modernism and in the horizontal dimension presents a time line that goes from 1920 to 1970. The diagram has an organic black shape with a white background where the names of architects and styles appear. Basically, the diagram is constituted by one single shape that allows all movements and architects to be connected. Indeed, although some architects are more close to each other all are, in the end, merged into a single image representing ‘modernism.’ It is possible to argue that the amorphous and organic shape of the diagram refers to the complexity of relations between different styles and traditions in modern architecture advocated by Jencks. Although there are many critiques that could be made of this diagram, what seems most obvious is the radical and arguably unfounded system of inclusion and exclusion that has been established. In fact, when trying to describe complexity, Jencks categorizes modernism according to six traditions and automatically dismisses the possible

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>147</sup> This diagram follows the already well established tradition of similar diagrams explaining the traditions in Modern Art by Miguel Convarrubias (1933), Alfred Barr (1936) and Ad Reinhardt (1946).

emergence of any other 'modernism.' Moreover, in his reduced timeline he implicitly rejects any reading of the movement that will relate it back to a period prior to 1920.

It is clear that prior to the emergence of postmodernism as independent narrative, Jencks had already developed a unique way of describing and representing complexity through diagrams and evolutionary trees. Despite its claims of accuracy, this system includes numerous fallacies and dismissals. Four years after 'limiting' modernism to six traditions and a large yet restricted set of actors in his *Modern movements in architecture*, Jencks designs a diagram of the "crisis of modern architecture" in his first edition of the *Language of postmodern architecture* (1977).<sup>148</sup> [Figure 22] Here, he describes three systems of architectural production. The first is private, the second is public and the third is described as related to the developer. Following this discussion, different variables were listed, such as the economic sphere, the method of design, and the size and type of the building. For example, and when describing the size of the projects in the three different systems of architectural production, the private system is described as offering small projects, the public system offers 'some large' buildings and the developer system is only able to produce projects that were 'too big.' Here again, without taking into consideration the examples of private projects that could have been 'too big' or small public projects, Jencks issues some quick and arguably unfounded conclusions just to argue for the existence of a problem.<sup>149</sup> The 'scientific' aspect of the diagram helps Jencks simplify the late modern situation and quickly assert the reality of a potential crisis within modernism.

Arguably the different diagrams and visual representations allow Jencks to finally retain a certain semantic control over the meaning of modernism. Despite the complexity of the movement described by Jencks, it was a simple and very limited modernism that he ended up portraying. This strategy of simply

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<sup>148</sup> Charles Jencks, *The Language of post-modern architecture*, 12

<sup>149</sup> See diagram, Figure 19.

reading and classifying what is already presented as complex was an important feature of Jencks' later construction of postmodernism.

In a diagram he presented in his (1980) book *Late-modern architecture*<sup>150</sup>, Jencks examines the transition from Modernism, to late modernism and postmodernism.[Figure 23] The name of the diagram, "classifying movements according to thirty variables," and the number of variables taken into consideration are very representative of Jencks's effort to offer a middle ground between a complex situation and its clear portrayal.<sup>151</sup> In this diagram, Jencks categorizes his 'thirty variables' into ideological, stylistic and design sections. For example, in the stylistic section, modernism is considered as 'simple,' late modernism 'ambiguous' and postmodernism 'complex.' In a similar way, modernism was anti-representational while postmodernism is described as pro-representational. What is also interesting is that the simplification of a rather complex notion of style is presented by Jencks as 'revolutionary.' In comparison to other historian's work, he states: "Architectural historians usually classify movements according to a few stylistic categories, but here a more extended list of variables is used to bring out the complexity of the situation."<sup>152</sup> In his work, Jencks proposed a wide variety of diagrams that explain his reading of particular situations. However, it is the 'evolutionary trees' of Jencks and their internal evolution through time that had the biggest impact and influence in his project of classifying modernism and postmodernism.

The first evolutionary tree drawn by Jencks represents modernism and its six traditions and was prior to the emergence of postmodernism as an independent new movement. In the 1980 edition of his book *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, Jencks added a new evolutionary tree with the same structure as the earlier one. Instead of representing the different traditions of modernism, it represents

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<sup>150</sup> Charles Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture*, 32.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

the evolution of postmodernism [fig 24]. The six traditions of modernism were replaced by postmodernism's six tendencies. The timeline that went from 1920 to 1970 covers the period from 1960 to 1980 and has a vertical line that lists the postmodern concepts of historicism, straight revivalism, neo vernacular, ad-hoc urbanism, the metaphor, as well as metaphysical and postmodern space.

The overlap between the modern and postmodern evolutionary trees is particularly interesting for the study for his view of the transition between the two discourses. In fact, the two diagrams are covering a common period of time from 1960 to 1970. In this shared space, many names and movements have changed positions and roles. For example, James Stirling shifts from being an idealist modernist to be an ad-hoc postmodern architect. In a similar manner, Robert Venturi changed from being a logical modernist of the late-1960s to being considered a historicist postmodernist of the 1970s. Adhocism leaves the unself-conscious modern tradition to become an independent postmodern tendency that includes some elements of its modern outcome. For instance, handmade buildings and the self-built architecture shifts from being part of unselfconscious modernism to become an Ad-hoc postmodern architecture.

Clearly, it is interesting to see how different architects and movements have their place and role and sometimes even names changed from a modernist to a postmodernist reading. What is even more interesting is that certain names simply disappear in the passage from the first to the second list. For example, we find no place for Archigram and the Metabolist school in the postmodern diagram despite the important place they have in the first modern diagram. More important dismissals are camp and Pop architecture. These two movements form the first nucleus of what would later be called postmodernism. Camp and Pop architecture, initially considered a part of modernism, were significantly close in their description to what Jencks later presents as postmodernism. However, these two 'movements', while having an important place in the modern diagram, simply disappear or are reformulated as

'postmodernism.'. To sustain an argument advanced earlier, the absence of Pop and camp movements from the postmodern sphere is not due to the incompatibility between them but to the fact that they are, in reality, similar if not identical.

In later versions of *The language of postmodern architecture* and the 1985 book *What is postmodernism?*<sup>153</sup>, Jencks extends his evolutionary tree to encompass the 1980s and 1990s. The diagram maintains the same structure with many more names and movements being included. The new extension of postmodernism gives a much bigger place to different 'classicisms.' Particularly noticeable is the emergence of vernacular classicism represented by the Aga Khan awards, and what Jencks calls 'constructivist classicism' with architects like Mario Botta and Giorgio Grassi. A new 'urbanist classicism' section is added and even a 'fundamentalist classicism' is listed, which contains figures like Rafael Moneo, O.M. Ungers and Aldo Rossi.

What is worth noting here is that most of the architects included in these 'new classicisms' are also 'new' to the diagrams and were not mentioned in the earlier version. One can argue that the new categories are not describing changes occurring within postmodernism. Rather, Jencks 'imported' new names and tendencies to include them in the list. The author was not conceiving his postmodernism as a mechanism of closed categories that was subject to internal shifts and changes. Instead, he designed a generalized system that could very easily embrace all new architectural productions. Classification and evolutionary trees were amongst postmodernism's tools to expand freely and with almost no restrictions. This system in perpetual growth included all sorts of architectures even those that were *de facto* against postmodernism. What can be called a 'dictatorship of classification' was then used as a discursive tool to constantly 'revive' postmodernism and permit its intensification.

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<sup>153</sup> Charles Jencks, *What is Postmodernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1985), 37.

The final version of a postmodern evolutionary tree was presented in the seventh edition of the *Language of postmodern architecture*<sup>154</sup>, published in 2002. [Figure 25] In this diagram, almost all that had been produced in architecture between the years 1960 and 2000 is presented as postmodern, including a new emphasis on the work of Eisenmann and Gehry. The two architects are, however, not categorized as deconstructivist and deconstruction as a movement is cited as part of the 'postmodern space' category and only represented by Bernard Tschumi. What is now commonly called Digital architecture is also distributed into different categories such as datascape, folding and fractal architecture. Rem Koolhaas' Heterotopias are a major part of the ad-hoc postmodern tendency. In fact, beyond the strange absence of figures from the 'sustainable architecture' stream, almost all architectural movements, buildings and protagonists of the last fifty years are included in Jencks' most recent postmodernism.

The peculiar progression of the evolutionary trees is representative of the role classification can have in the construction of this particular discourse. Postmodernism, to be able to maintain a certain place in the general framework, had to constantly renew itself and redefine its boundaries. This process happened sometimes through an 'invasive' classification that absorbed all sorts of tendencies and included them in the general new mainstream. Jencks' postmodern system was porous enough to accept the new architectural productions that were then redefined, named and renamed with the help of these classifications.

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<sup>154</sup> Charles Jencks, *The new paradigm in architecture: The language of Postmodernism*, (New York: Yale University Press, 2002).

## 2- Klotz and the 'death' of postmodernism

In the introduction of his 1988 book *The History of Postmodern architecture*, Heinrich Klotz entitled the first section "Architecture as a Vehicle of meaning."<sup>155</sup> The title might lead the reader to believe in a common interest between Jencks and Klotz in a semiotic reading of architecture and perhaps other shared views concerning postmodernism. It will however take only few lines to realize the substantial difference between the two writers. Very early in his book Klotz describes postmodernism as a 'pre-modernism' that seeks to return to a state antecedent to the Enlightenment. Societies, argued Klotz, had withdrawn their trust in the new and were trying to derive security from the past. He then proceeds to ask a series of questions that reveal his skepticism about postmodernism:

By returning to axial symmetry, are we not seeking an order that ultimately delivers not security but new control and oppression? By endorsing an intimidating neo-monumentalism, do we not surrender the humanness of an environment shaped for ease and transparency; do we not relinquish democratic architecture's openness to experience in favor of new muscular, boastful posturing of power?<sup>156</sup>

Klotz's position against postmodernism is also clear when he opposes a 'progressive modernism' to a 'reactionary postmodernism.' He states in the introduction: "Along with the advent of postmodernism comes the demise of truth. All at once everything seems lost – modern architecture, humanity, democracy and morals."<sup>157</sup> Klotz defines the biggest problem of postmodernism as its denial of 'progress.' He even argues that it is crucial to 'unmask' the defeatists and the reactionaries and calls for a defense of progress and modernism. However, even while criticizing postmodernism, Klotz defines

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<sup>155</sup> Heinrich Klotz, *The History of postmodern architecture* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

the 'reactionary attitude' of this movement as normal and foreseeable. In fact, Klotz sees postmodernism as a natural critique of modern architecture's lapse into rampant functionalism and urban erosion. Nevertheless, the German historian espouses the idea of a 'corrective postmodernism' as an internal critique of modernism without the 'backward fall' into historical furnishings and nostalgic moods. Klotz argues for revisiting modernism and a redefinition of the meanings that have usually been attributed to modern architecture, thus providing a new semantic reading of the movement. His argument here is very close to Jencks' contention concerning the problems of signification in modernism. Klotz's question: "do forms have fixed symbolic contents, to be associated with them for all time to come?" could easily have its place in Jencks introduction of *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*.<sup>158</sup>

When constructing his argument, Klotz clearly places himself as a 'modern' narrator. He often uses the pronoun 'we' when acknowledging the mistakes made by modernism as in the following statement: "For many decades, we were indifferent to the meanings of architectural forms, either because we were totally opposed to them or because we could afford to ignore them."<sup>159</sup> Later in the text, Klotz expresses his desire that the critiques made against so-called postmodernism would instead be directed towards modernism. This last wish represents the need of modernist historians and theorists (and among them Klotz) to bring back modernism as a subject of investigation and avoid its possible 'loss' if all textual production would be centered around postmodernism. Throughout the book, Klotz incessantly calls for redirecting postmodernists' autonomous discourse towards modernism in the form of a critique of the latter.

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

In the second section of the Introduction entitled "The concept of Postmodernism" Klotz begins by classifying modernism in two periods: a first 'classical modernism' represented by important figures or masters such as Le Corbusier, Gropius and Mies Van Der Rohe and a second Postwar 'economic functionalism.'<sup>160</sup> This last period is very close in its definition and description to Jencks' 'late modernism.' Although the same architects and same buildings are referenced in both categories, the underlying reason behind this fragmentation of modernism is different. In fact, throughout the book, Klotz makes this distinction to ask for a conservative return to origins, while Jencks uses it to illustrate the sterility of modernism and the urgent need for change. In his definition of postmodernism, Klotz insists that the definition of this movement should never be dissociated from the discussion of modernism. He argues that, after all, this was also Jencks' position. He states:

I insist that with the advent of postmodernism architecture was not simply severed from modernism. Charles Jencks has arrived at a similar view, even though he has not realized that with the slogan calling for a sequel to modernism the end of modernism was proclaimed.<sup>161</sup>

His belief in the inherent relationship between modernism and postmodernism leads Klotz to begin his history of postmodernism with a 'history of modernism,' thereby emphasizing the contrasts, differences and similarities between the two movements. It is interesting to see how Klotz attempts to classify postmodernism by actually 'de-classifying' it from the list of independent and autonomous styles. Klotz presents postmodernism then as a normal and healthy internal critique of modernism that would be welcomed by modernists if postmodernism accepts its place as part of modernism.

While defining his understanding of 'classical modernism' the argument Klotz uses is very similar to Banham's reading of this period as an illustration of the machine age. However, Klotz argues that the

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 4.

new aesthetics of the early Modernists was sometimes too radical and difficult to accept by the general public. He states:

How difficult nevertheless was to rescue a generally comprehensible horizon of meaning for the purified elementary forms after the renunciation of the classical orders and stylistic ornament was shown by the public reaction to the Weissenhof Siedlung, built in 1927 in Stuttgart.<sup>162</sup>

Klotz argues that the difficulties the modern Avant-garde encountered in the face of a general public that was reticent to accept their work opened the door for compromises. He thus felt that the late 'utilitarian orientation' of modernism is very distant from the early modernists for whom new architecture had to be combined with subversion. This shift or 'simplification' of modernism led to a relative impoverishment of architectural production in comparison to the early realizations and the 'meanings' they held. He says "what was left, in the end, of the symbolic forms that had been brought into opposition was the general formal character of modern architecture."<sup>163</sup>

An important part of Klotz's history of postmodernism hinges on this modernist early 'mistake' and problematic relationship with meanings and the general public. The narrative Klotz proposes becomes then a portrayal of the successive alterations that victimized early modernism, which begins with Alvar Aalto and ends with later self-proclaimed postmodernists. This early crisis in modernism is considered by Klotz as the very first source and reason for the emergence of postmodernism. The second chapter entitled "Subterfuges and reorientations" is representative of the notion of crisis in Klotz's reading of modernism and postmodernism.<sup>164</sup> The title itself shows to what extent the author considers the work of architects like Cezar Pelli, Philip Johnson, Helmut Jahn and Superstudio as mere deceptions that avoid the general modern crisis. For Klotz, the various attempts to overcome the crisis in meaning in

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 39-96.

architecture prepared for the emergence of postmodernism. This has been amply explained in his third chapter "Preconditions for Postmodern architecture." In this section, the work of Structuralists as well as architects like Louis Kahn and O.M. Ungers was analyzed.

The largest part of the book is dedicated to a chapter entitled "Postmodern architecture" in which Klotz attempts to provide a final and precise definition of the movement. The chapter is divided in fifteen sections, each one treating the work of a specific architect or group. [Figure 26] Klotz's analysis proceeds from Venturi and Charles Moore's work to Italian Rationalism and the work of the New York Five (Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk and Richard Meier). The diversity of figures presented here makes it almost impossible to see a real unity between these protagonists besides their coexistence in the same western context during the same era. However, the great variety of methods and approaches adopted by these architects was not a good enough reason to dissuade Klotz from providing a very accurate reading and critique of these architects' work. For example, Venturi's 'less is a bore' was considered as "the turn away from modernism."<sup>165</sup>

After going through Venturi's work and his theories of complexity and contradiction, Klotz places him in a quite unusual category of 'realism.' Klotz's realism is very similar to the definition of the word in Art History and is related to the ability of the artist to find a particular strength and beauty in the different forms of 'everyday life.' It is important to pose the question of whether Venturi's work on Las Vegas and on pop culture would support his categorization as a 'realist'. However, a more important question to raise concerns the 'necessity' of categorizing Venturi as a realist as well as a postmodernist. This classification of postmodern architects and the reduction of the complexity of their work into specific categories was a central feature of Klotz's history of postmodernism. Following the thread Klotz proposes, Venturi's urban realism led to Moore's understanding of 'urban places' which, in its turn, led

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 142.

to what the author defines in a third section as 'American Postmodernism' with Robert Stern and Gordon Smith as major representatives.<sup>166</sup> The classification of different architects into small and very well defined categories continues in this same manner throughout the whole book.

The paradoxical character of this detailed survey of postmodernism's complexity is made clear at the introduction of the third chapter and where Klotz describes postmodernism as "a concept that covers everything over a historical process whose most characteristic trait is that it is spread out in many directions and is determined by the most divergent tendencies."<sup>167</sup> Klotz's representation of postmodernism is situated between the clarity of the portrayal and the acknowledged complexity of the movement. In fact, Klotz's classification of postmodernism and its various internal movements and tendencies is not very different from Jencks' work. Without offering explanatory diagrams, Klotz gave a very detailed description of all architectural production of the thirty years that preceded the publication of the book and it is with the same accuracy as Jencks that he offers his own reading of postmodernism.

Despite similar interpretations and terminologies of both authors and the apparent correspondence between the two discourses, their ultimate goal is very different. While Jencks is trying to construct a movement and to define its boundaries, Klotz is trying to avoid the possible hegemony and independence of this same movement. The complexity Jencks describes was to emphasize the diversity, richness and also supremacy of the movement. A similar complexity presented by Klotz illustrates the absence of structure and coherence in postmodernism. Jencks classifies postmodernism's productions to construct a movement; Klotz describes the same diversity to deny the very existence of this same movement.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 191-209.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 128.

The difference between the two writers' goals and their use of the same tools of analysis is clear in the critique they make of certain works of architects. The example of Robert Venturi is quite relevant in this regard. In fact both theorists acknowledge the importance of Venturi's work and his leading role in the architecture of the 1960s. However, Jencks presents Venturi as a modernist who wanted to revolutionize modernism but did not use all the necessary tools he needed to do so. Venturi is probably an interesting figure of modernism but not 'good enough' to be part of the postmodern core. Jencks states :

Venturi, like the typical modernist that he wishes to supplant, is adopting the tactic of exclusive inversion. He is cutting out a whole area of architectural communication; duck buildings (iconic signs) , in order to make his preferred mode, decorated sheds (symbolic signs) that much more potent. Thus, we are being asked, once more by a modernist, in the name of rationality, to follow an exclusive, simplistic path. Clearly we need all modes the of communications at our disposal.<sup>168</sup>

This same idea of the 'duck and decorated shed' was used by Klotz in his analysis of Venturi's work. [Figure 27, 28] However, while Jencks considers Venturi a modernist, Klotz, paradoxically considers the same architect a postmodernist; a postmodernism that is, again, perceived as part of an internal critique of modernism. In a chapter entitled "Breakthrough to Postmodernism: Robert Venturi" Klotz states: "Venturi attacked the strongest side of modern architecture, which was also the weakest. Certainly, the reduction of forms and the simplification of functions had been the essential feature of architecture in Mies's epoch."<sup>169</sup> In fact, in their classification of the American architect's work, Venturi shifts from being a reactionary modernist for Jencks to be an excellent postmodernist (and therefore a good modernist) for Klotz.

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<sup>168</sup> Charles Jencks, *The Language of post-modern architecture*, 45.

<sup>169</sup> Heinrich Klotz, *The History of Postmodern Architecture*, 142.

It is very clear that classifying, as a discursive tool, can operate either to assert or to negate the coherence of a specific architect or building. It is the discourse accompanying this process of categorization that is used to 'revive' and actualize the movement or to simply historicize and therefore neutralize it. As a matter of fact, the arguments that inform Jencks' early diagram asserting an internal implosion of modernism and then, historicizing it through excessive categorization and interpretation, are very close in their form to Klotz's history of postmodernism. To return to the quotation by Jencks at the beginning of this section about 'isms' and 'wasms', it could be argued that the 'will to transcend' and the fear of being transcended are the principal engines of this work of classification. In other words, the object of categorization is always volatile, even fictional. We only categorize to build what is yet to come or to deconstruct what has actually never existed. It is always a way to fix and stabilize what is here as well what 'should be here' and has sometimes little to do with the 'subject' of categorization itself. Perhaps, a perfect description of the relative unimportance of the 'object' classified in comparison to the 'act' of classifying can be found in Foucault's words: "I don't say things because I think them, I say them so I will not have to think them anymore."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>Clément Ghys, "L'interview retrouvée de Michel Foucault," *Journal Libération* (Paris, France) April 4, 2014.

DIAGRAM II THE MAJOR HISTORIANS—

HISTORIAN	MYTH	MYTHEME A-MYTHEME B	RESOLUTION	CONSISTENT OMISSION
PEVSNER	SPIRIT OF THE AGE 'the style'	RATIONALITY-EXPRESSIONISM clarity-fantasy standardization-ornament <i>Sachlichkeit</i> -confusion social responsibility-art for art	GROPIUS	CHOISY Gaudet; until 1960 Gaudi, Sant 'Elià
GIEDION	SPIRIT OF THE AGE 'balanced outlook'	TRADITION-SCHISM balance-imbalance unified artist-dissociated society cons. facts-trans. facts	BAUHAUS	EXPRESSIONISTS Gaudi, Scharoun, Mendelsohn, Dutch Exp.
BANHAM	FUTURISM 'entirely radical'	FUTURIST DYNAMISM-ACADEMIC CAUTION change-symbols technology-convention speed, danger-stasis mechanization-classical trad.	NO resolution, presents opposites	GAUDI Scharoun English Garden City Movement
SCULLY	EXISTENTIALISM 'image of democracy'	ROMANTIC CLASS-ROMANTIC NAT. Baroque order-Fragmented Eclecticism Rationalism-continual flux	CORBUSIER Kahn	SHORTNESS precludes pattern of omission

Figure 20. The Major Historians. In Jencks and Baird, *Meaning in architecture*, 1969.

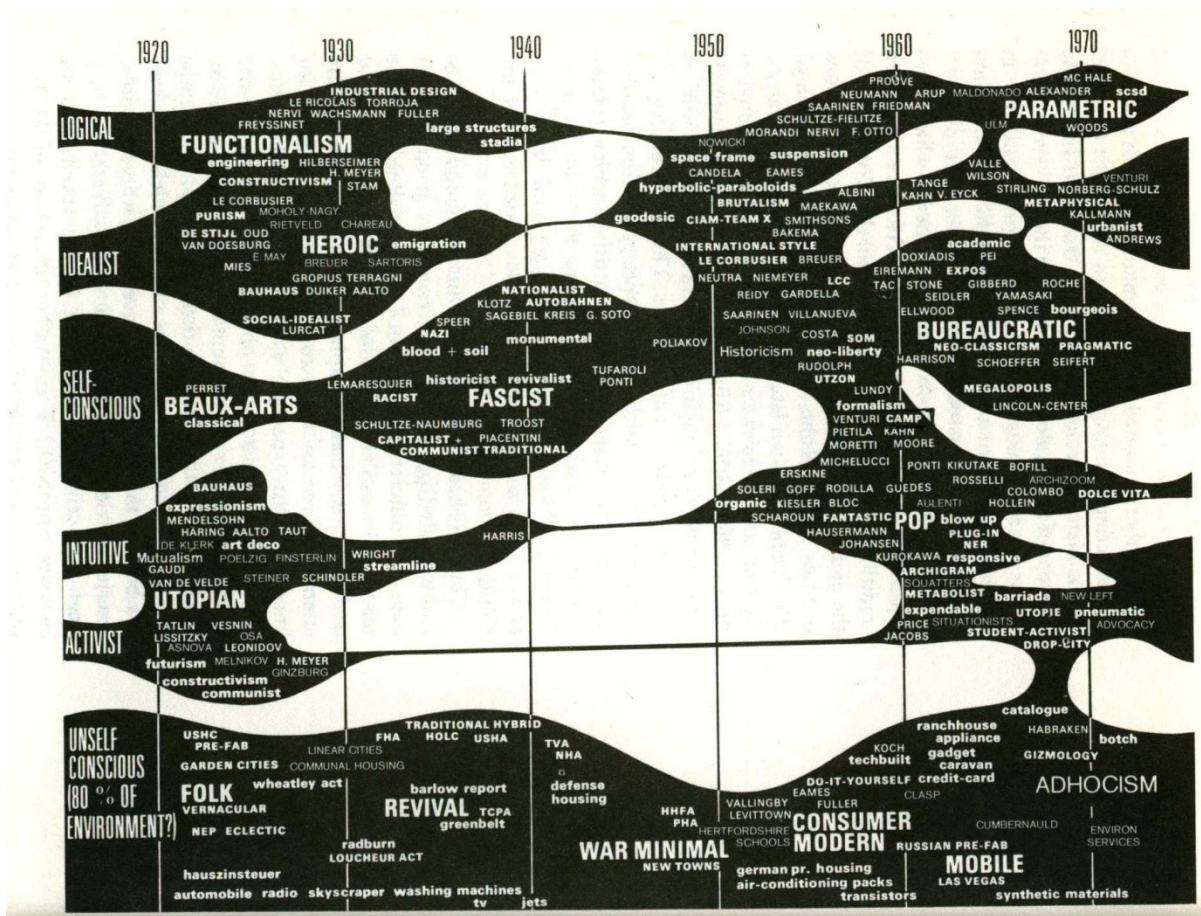


Figure 21. Evolutionary tree 1920-1970, Jencks, *Modern movements in architecture*, 1973.

	<b>SYSTEM 1 — PRIVATE</b> private architect   client is user	<b>SYSTEM 2 — PUBLIC</b> public architect   client and users differ	<b>SYSTEM 3 — DEVELOPER</b> developer architect   client and users differ
<b>1 ECONOMIC SPHERE</b>	<b>Mini-Capitalist</b> (restricted money)	<b>Welfare-State Capitalist</b> (lacks money)	<b>Monopoly-Capitalist</b> (has money)
<b>2 MOTIVATION</b>	aesthetic ideological   inhabit use	solve problem   user's housing	make money   make money to use
<b>3 RECENT IDEOLOGY</b>	Too various to list	progress, efficiency, large scale, anti-history, Brutalism, etc.	Same as System 2 plus pragmatic
<b>4 RELATION TO PLACE</b>	local architect   client user in place	remote architects   users move to place	remote and changing draughtsmen   absent clients
<b>5 CLIENT'S RELATION TO ARCHITECT</b>	<b>Expert Friend</b> same partners small team	<b>Anonymous Doctor</b> changing designers large team	<b>Hired Servant</b> doesn't know designers or users
<b>6 SIZE OF PROJECTS</b>	"small"	"some large"	"too big"
<b>7 SIZE/TYPE OF ARCHITECT'S OFFICE</b>	small partnership	large centralised	large centralised
<b>8 METHOD OF DESIGN</b>	slow, responsive, innovative, expensive	impersonal, anonymous, conservative, low cost	quick, cheap, and proven formulae
<b>9 ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	to client-user	to local council and bureaucracy	to stockholders, developers and board
<b>10 TYPES OF BUILDING</b>	houses, museums, universities, etc.	housing and infrastructure	shopping centres, hotels, offices, factories, etc.
<b>11 STYLE</b>	multiple	impersonal safe, contemporary, vandal-proofed	pragmatic cliché and bombastic

Figure 22. Crisis in architecture, Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 1977.

	MODERN (1920–60)	LATE-MODERN (1960–)	POST-MODERN (1960–)
<b>IDEOLOGICAL</b>			
1	one international style, or 'no style'	unconscious style	double-coding of style
2	utopian and idealist	pragmatic	'popular' and pluralist
3	deterministic form, functional	loose fit	semiotic form
4	<i>Zeitgeist</i>	Late-Capitalist	traditions and choice
5	artist as prophet/healer	suppressed artist	artist/client
6	elitist/for 'everyman'	elitist professional	elitist and participative
7	wholistic, comprehensive redevelopment	wholistic	piecemeal
8	architect as saviour/doctor	architect provides service	architect as representative and activist
<b>STYLISTIC</b>			
9	'straightforwardness'	Supersensualism/Slick-Tech/ High-Tech	hybrid expression
10	simplicity	complex simplicity – oxymoron, ambiguous reference	complexity
11	isotropic space (Chicago frame, Domino)	extreme isotropic space (open office planning, 'shed space') redundancy and flatness	variable space with surprises
12	abstract form	sculptural form, hyperbole, enigmatic form	conventional and abstract form
13	purist	extreme repetition and purist	eclectic
14	inarticulate 'dumb box'	extreme articulation	semiotic articulation
15	Machine Aesthetic, straightforward logic, circulation, mechanical, technology and structure	2nd Machine Aesthetic extreme logic, circulation, mechanical, technology and structure	variable mixed aesthetic depending on context; expression of content and semantic appropriateness towards function
16	anti-ornament	structure and construction as ornament	pro-organic and applied ornament
17	anti-representational	represent logic, circulation, mechanical, technology and structure frozen movement	pro-representation
18	anti-metaphor	anti-metaphor	pro-metaphor
19	anti-historical memory	anti-historical	pro-historical reference
20	anti-humour	unintended humour, malapropism	pro-humour
21	anti-symbolic	unintended symbolic	pro-symbolic
<b>DESIGN IDEAS</b>			
22	city in park	'monuments' in park	contextual urbanism and rehabilitation
23	functional separation	functions within a 'shed'	functional mixing
24	'skin and bones'	slick skin with Op effects wet look distortion, sfumato	'Mannerist and Baroque'
25	<i>Gesamtkunstwerk</i>	reductive, elliptical gridism 'irrational grid'	all rhetorical means
26	'volume not mass'	enclosed skin volumes, mass denied; 'all-over form' – synecdoche	skew space and extensions
27	slab, point block	extruded building, linearity	street building
28	transparency	literal transparency	ambiguity
29	asymmetry and 'regularity'	tends to symmetry and formal rotation, mirroring and series	tends to asymmetrical symmetry (Queen Anne Revival)
30	harmonious integration	packaged harmony, forced harmonization	collage/collision

Figure 23. Classifying monuments according to thirty variables, Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture*, 1980.





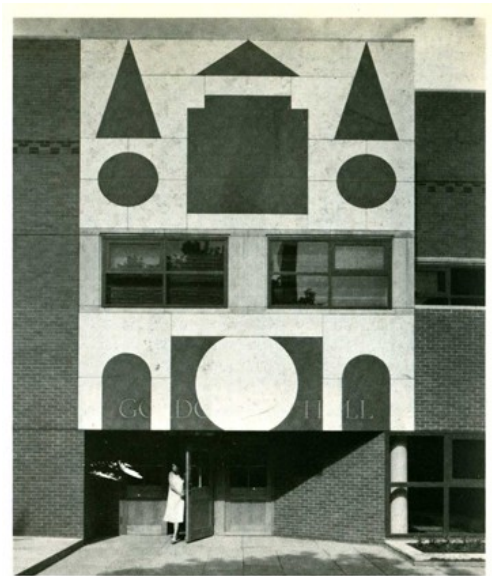
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Figure 26. Index from Klotz, *The History of Postmodern Architecture*, 1988.

**Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown**  
**Institute for Scientific Information**  
**Philadelphia**  
**1978**



Figure 27. Venturi, Institute for scientific information, Philadelphia, 1978, Klotz, *History of postmodern architecture*, 1988.



297 VENTURI, RAUCH and SCOTT-BROWN, *Gordon Wu Dining Hall*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1981-3. Serlian ABA motifs hang symbolically to announce an entrance and contrast strongly with the flat ribbon window. The billboard approach of the Sixties is still being used ironically on a campus with other Free-Style Classical revivals, but these are of a more naive kind. (Venturi, Rauch and Scott-Brown).

Figure 28. Robert Venturi, Gordon Wu Dining hall, Princeton, 1983, Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern architecture*, 1984.



## CONCLUSIONS

The large number of diagrams and 'evolutionary trees' Jencks produced and his constant effort to 'adopt' new movements is arguably not a sign of the freshness or vivacity of Jencks' postmodernism. Rather, it is an indication of an 'empty' postmodernism that needed a large number of representations and a constant effort in categorization. Classification can certainly be perceived as an important part of a 'healthy' process of defining an emerging artistic tendency. It could also be considered a false accumulation of disparate ideas that reflect a hollow and deteriorating movement. In other words, if postmodernism offered a clear and stable direction for architects, Jencks would not have felt the need to constantly classify it. This 'fear of dissolution' could probably be read in one of Jencks' last evolutionary trees. Here, the author tries to represent the evolution of architecture during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century and postmodernism was inexplicably represented as an isolated movement during the 1970s and 1980s. Equally notable was the fact that for the first time, Jencks' name is mentioned in his own diagram. The reasons for this sudden relativism are numerous but one can argue that the American theorist, in the face of a overexposed yet empty postmodernism, tried to return to a more 'reasonable' and thus comfortable place.

If Jencks' classification of postmodernism went from an all-encompassing *zeitgeist* to a simple architectural trend, it is due to his skepticism about the force of his theorization of this movement. This is a question that is difficult to answer and that will probably need some biographical excavation. However, what is very clear is that classification was used by Jencks to constantly give life to postmodernism and avoid its decay because of a long period of 'stagnation.'

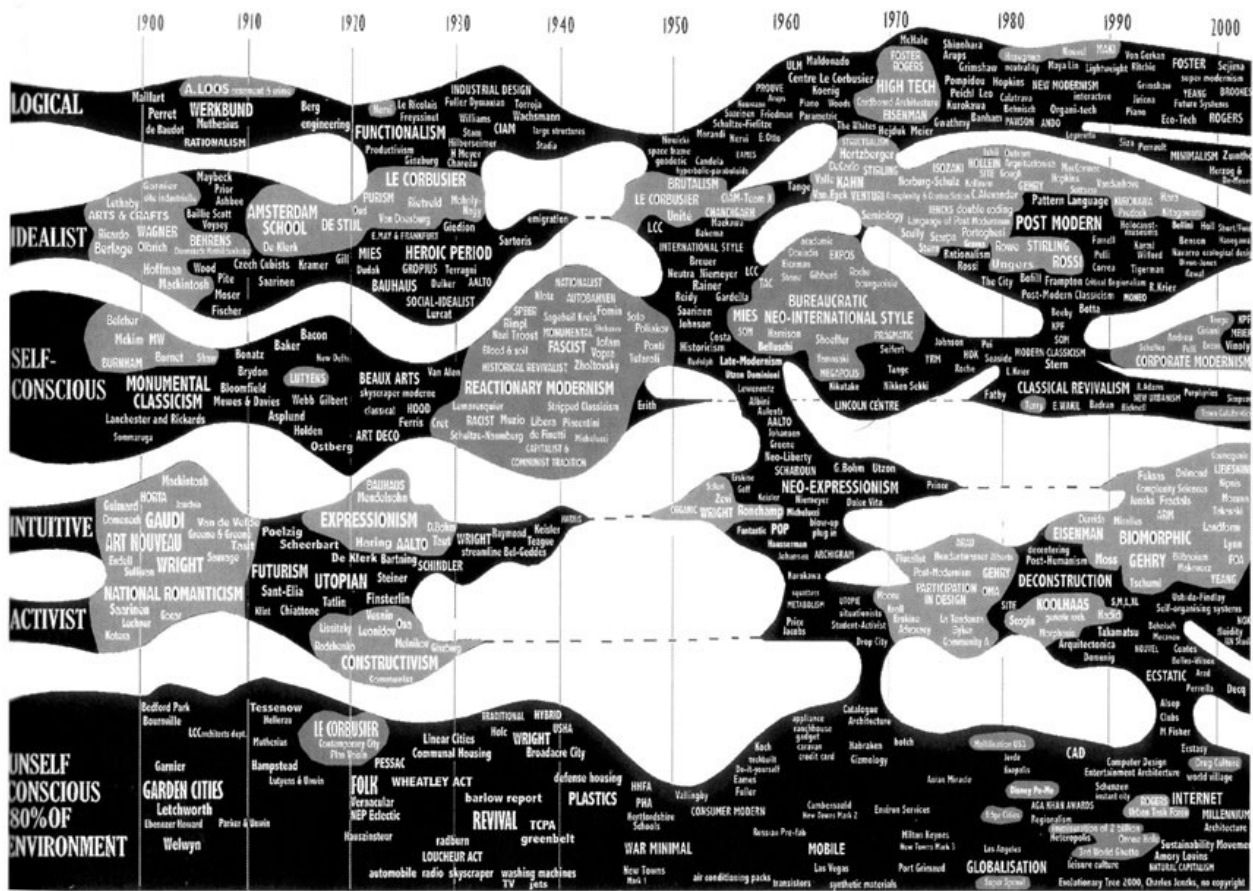


Figure 29. Diagram of twentieth century architecture, Charles Jencks, *Architectural Review*, April 2000.

One of the paradoxes of Jencks' various attempts at categorization is their claims of inclusion when it is, in the nature of classification as a process, to exclude those who are not on the list. It goes without saying that facing the impossibility of classifying 'everything,' the attempt to categorize a wide variety of works is essentially reductive. In his diagrams, while trying to classify dissimilar works, Jencks has restrained architectural production within the limits of styles and categories and transformed postmodernism into a restricted form of authoritarian democracy. However, this process of exclusion

through classification is not particular to Jencks' intellectual work, as it can easily be traced back to earlier efforts at classification of modernism

Indeed, Jencks' categorization of postmodernism so very similar in its form and its goals to the way in which historians and theorists classified modernism, the difference being the tools of classification and exclusion. What Jencks' diagrams were for postmodernism is what architectural historiography was for modernism. Modern historians classified architectural works and sometimes historicized the very period during which they lived, even including contemporaneity as the 'last chapter' of a continuing, definable movement.

In the first texts of modern writers such as Le Corbusier, Bruno Taut and Ludwig Hilberseimer, history is broadly referenced to consecrate the emergence of a new movement. For example, in 1927, Gustav Platz published his *'Die Baukunst der neuesten zeit'*. The book begins with a chapter entitled "The morphological chaos of the nineteenth century" and ends with the "international solidarity of new building."<sup>171</sup> In his description of the various architectural productions, Platz uses history to describe, explain and legitimize the emergence of modernism. In a similar manner, in 1929 Bruno Taut wrote a book entitled *Modern architecture* where he tries to categorize all contemporary architectural productions that could be considered modern.<sup>172</sup> The work of Le Corbusier and Gropius are well illustrated, however, as the book is also, to some extent, a monograph of the architect with 25 illustrations dedicated to his own work.

Thirty years later, Leonardo Benevolo wrote his *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (1960), entitling its last chapter "the new international field" and stating in the introduction that "a history of modern architecture is naturally centered on the present, and the basic point of reference for this whole work is

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<sup>171</sup> Gustav Platz, *Die Baukunst Der Neuesten Zeit* (Berlin: Propylen-Verlag editions ,1927)

<sup>172</sup> Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (New York: A. & C. Boni editions, 1929)

the architecture of today.”<sup>173</sup> Other examples of ‘contemporary histories’ of modern architecture can be cited but the common ground between all these texts is their historical codification and classification of contemporaneity. Modern historiography reiterates and insists on defining modernism and sometimes uses a fictive historical continuity to point out the supposed cohesion and rational progress of the movement. In his early scholarly work, Charles Jencks was part of this modern tradition and his book *Modern movements in architecture* is representative of his attempt to merge historical narratives with contemporary readings. While Modernist historians used history to re-actualize the movement, Jencks is describing a fragmented and deteriorating phenomenon that is prepared to be transcended. The already existing historiography of modern architecture was a categorization of contemporary works that aims to give a new life to the movement, whereas Jencks’ history of modernism is a ‘representation’ that attempts to solidify its meaning and permit its successor to emerge.

This process of ‘representing’ the other in order to maintain semantic control over its meaning and permit the emergence of a new alternative is not particular to Jencks’ work. The example of Le Corbusier’s abundant descriptions of 19<sup>th</sup> century revival movements and eclecticism in his various writings is enough to make the reader realize that the ‘representation’ of the other is, primarily, a modernist discursive tool. In the same manner Le Corbusier describes eclecticism as ‘chaos’ and its buildings as “toys to be discarded”, Jencks represents modernism as fragmented and heterogeneous.<sup>174</sup> The similarities can even be advanced further, as one can argue that it is also in the same way that Le Corbusier tries later to define modernism independently from its predecessor, that Jencks wants to identify postmodernism as autonomous and ‘self-sustainable’.

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<sup>173</sup> Leonardo Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), Introduction, Second volume.

<sup>174</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1985), 5.

Jencks' definition of postmodernism was established in his very early writings and kept evolving and changing for more than twenty years. It could be argued that the multiplicity of definitions during this period is indicative of the problems the theorist faced in reinforcing the movement. The difficulty resides partly in facing the paradox of defining an architectural tendency that was presented, from the beginning, as complex and multifaceted. As noted in this thesis, the complexity of postmodernism was flattened using different tools and strategies. The 'simplification of complexity' led to the production of a clear set of rules and codes that can be used to create a postmodern architecture. This same 'prescription' for a new architecture is very similar to the definition of modernism and it could even be argued that, to a certain degree, Jencks' four 'modes of architectural communication' are similar in their function and form to Le Corbusier's 'five points of a new architecture'.<sup>175</sup> In fact, despite all claims of complexity, Charles Jencks ended up offering a simple and clearly structured definition of postmodernism that was very similar to early definitions of modernism.

From a discursive perspective, the construction of postmodern discourse happened in three distinct yet overlapping phases. During the phase of *representation*, Jencks tried to offer a specific portrayal of modernism and control the meaning of this movement. A second phase of *definition* occurred when, almost independent of modernism, Jencks tried to identify the new movement and establish its main characteristics. The final phase of *classification* was when Jencks tried to categorize the different architectural productions into a growing and all encompassing postmodernism. However, the self-conscious approach adopted by Jencks while constructing an architectural movement is not a postmodern phenomenon. In reality, these same phases or 'discursive strategies' were used by Modernists architects and theorists to build their own movement.

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<sup>175</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*.

A cycle of 'representation, definition and classification' is thus shared by modernism and postmodernism. In the same way that modernism represented 19<sup>th</sup> century eclecticism, defined itself as 'new alternative' and later categorized its different variations, postmodernism represented modernism, identified itself as the legitimate successor of a dying movement and categorized all new architectural productions as postmodern. In the same manner Jencks represented modernism to transcend it, Klotz historicized postmodernism to call for a new architectural movement. This thesis does not try to hide the fact that the differences between modernism and postmodernism are significant when it comes to forms and aesthetics. However, from a discursive point of view, it argues that postmodernism and modernism are identical and modernism has a central yet rarely acknowledged presence within the postmodern discourse.

The inexorable presence of modernism within postmodern discourse is one of the more compelling reasons behind the 'violence' of the 'death of modernism' in Jencks's early work. Indeed, the necessity of setting a date and identifying an event to claim the end of modernism is indicative of the difficulties postmodernism had to clearly and methodically define itself. One can argue that, in saying that modernism died in St. Louis on July 15, 1972, Charles Jencks did not proclaim the death of modernism so much as he aggressively tried to kill it. It should be mentioned here that, even though Jencks' description of the exact hour of Modernism's death is considered the most representative statement of the writer's definition of postmodernism, the need to 'end' modernism from within has always existed within the modern discourse. "The death of Modernism" is the name of an article published on November 1934 by the British poet John Betjeman in the *Architectural Review*. In the article, the writer states that "the word modern is becoming old fashioned, it is used by one writer to

describe the latest effort of the oldest old stager, by another, some building of Le Corbusier”<sup>176</sup>. At the end of the text, Betjeman explains that “traditional architecture, while conscious of the claims of humanism, draws its vitality from the needs inherent in construction. This is the Gothic characteristic, and it is leading to the true Gothic revival”. As we know today, Modernism had a ‘great life’ after this article was published and its self-proclaimed successor was far from having any real Gothic stylistic influences. What is important here is not to point out the interpretive error of the British writer, but instead to see one of the various attempts to end modernism ‘from within’ that preceded Jencks claims by forty years and to argue that, even while trying to transcend modernism, postmodernism remained deeply modern.

Claiming the death of Modernism and then implicitly announcing the birth of postmodernism assumes that the boundaries between the new and the old are clear and sharp, and that the new mainstream is existing, somewhere, completely shaped and independent, and ready to emerge. This reading of the birth and life of new architectural movements is fictional and extremely romanticized. As explained in this thesis, a clear rupture between a purely modern age and an exclusively postmodern era is not as ‘real’ as it was presented. The intelligibility of the distinction between modernism and postmodernism could easily be contested when analyzing the common discursive grounds between the two mainstreams: postmodernism inherited its discursive strategies from its predecessor.

In a final conclusion, this thesis attempts to respond to the following questions: how did the postmodern discourse emerge? And what are the discursive strategies that permitted its dissociation from modernism? This work argues that postmodernism is in reality a ‘new’ form of modernism that adopted new architectural forms but maintained the same discursive tools and features. The cycle of representations, definitions and classifications that modernism adopted has been used by

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<sup>176</sup> John Betjeman, ed., *The recovery of the modern, Architectural review, key texts and reviews* (London: Butterworth architecture, 1996), 9.

postmodernism as well. The self-consciousness that characterizes the modern discourse is felt in all the movements that claimed to succeed it. It could even be argued that all movements that claimed being different from modernism did so in a simple formal aspects and never substantially and discursively. Modernism has an ownership on the 'new' but also on the discourse that permits the emergence of the new to the point that it will be legitimate to ask: can we ever transcend modernism?

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