

Charles Jencks
The Language Of Post-modern Architecture

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Language in Architecture

- Every traditional architecture has its own form language. It has evolved from many different influences of lifestyle, traditions, and practical interests that work together to define the geometry that structures take on as the most natural visual expressions of a particular culture.
- **Architectural language:** The way in which an individual architect or the entire culture expresses values is the way in which individual words become forms, and the way in which these concrete parts are brought together is the structure of the sentence.

The Importance of Language in Architecture and Its Influence on Thoughts and Communication

- Language is a way of thinking, a tool of knowledge and communication.
- The language became a media to transfer and convey the thoughts. It's developing our building argument. It's a tool to prove the validity in philosophy.
- Saussure said that language is a link between thought and sound, where thought and sound combine to provide communication, and is a means for thought to be expressed as sound. Thoughts have to become ordered, and sounds have to be articulated, for language to occur.
- The Language is a form of verbal communication and architecture is a form of non-verbal communication.

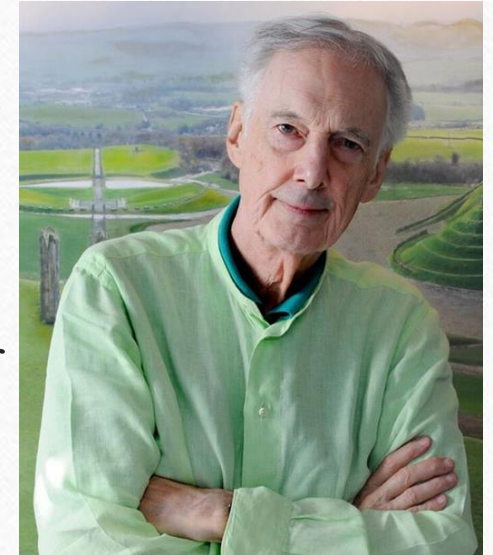
- Nonverbal communication, the communication of information through channels other than the written or spoken word, involves a vast array of behavior.
- Verbal communication uses a shared code (i.e., language), while nonverbal. One of the most powerful and obvious forms of nonverbal behavior is facial expression. The fundamental human significance of architecture stems from this.
- Nonverbal communication refers to the ways in which beings convey information about their emotions, needs, intentions, attitudes, and thoughts without the use of verbal language.
- As a form of non-verbal communication, an architect should understand well of how to communicate in this non-verbal language, so that the purpose and objectives of the building can be achieved.

Charles Jencks

The Language of Post-Modern Architecture

Modernists vs. Post-Modernists

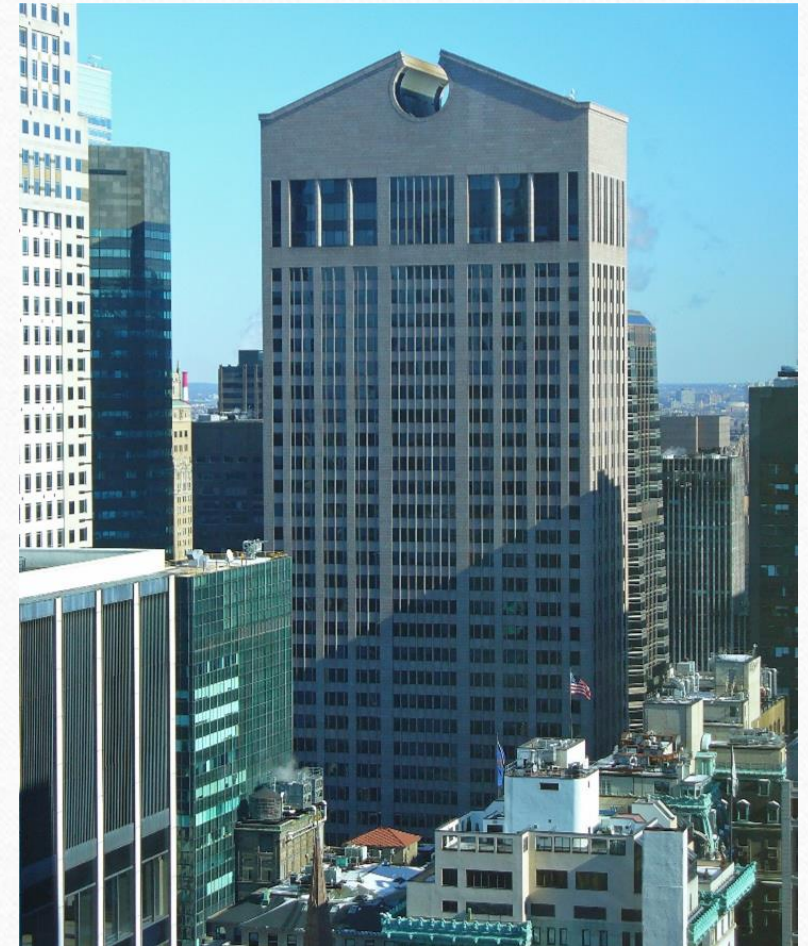
- Charles Alexander Jencks (21 June 1939 – 13 October 2019) was an American cultural theorist, landscape designer, architectural historian, and co-founder of the Maggie's Cancer Care Centres. He published over thirty books and became famous in the 1980s as theorist of Postmodernism.
- In his book, Jencks articulated his argument on the 'death of modern architecture', a death that he situated precisely on 15th July, 1972, the day the Pruitt-Igoe Housing in St Louis, a symbol of all that went wrong in modern urbanism, was demolished. He said; "The modern architecture was dead". It



had no meanings, no relations, no communication, similar to
each other and had no language

- According to him, in modernism, the connection between architecture and its public has been lost, and ultimately for failing to ‘communicate’ in a legible language, and architectural post-modernism favours pluralism, complexity, double coding, and historical contextualism.
- Charles Jencks in his book “The Language of Post-Modern Architecture “shows various similarities architecture shares with language, reflecting about the semiotic rules of architecture and wanting to communicate architecture to a broader public. The book differentiates post-modern architecture from architectural modernism in terms of cultural and architectural history by transferring the term post-modernism from the study of literature to architecture.
- Modern architecture is univalent in terms of form, in other words it is designed around one out of a few basic values using a limited number of materials and right angles. In contrast, post-modernist is characterized by double-coding, the inclusion of messages to be understood by the buildings’ users and inhabitants and a separate set of messages to be understood by other professional architects.

- Post-modern double-coding is ironic. For example, [AT&T Building in New York](#) City looks both like a traditional glass and steel skyscraper and at the same time like the crest of an old grandfather clock or Victorian bedpost. Its facade is left right reversible, includes a lot of 90° angles, its ground level includes pillars, and there's a simple capital in the top horizontal row of windows. By reflecting and distorting many of the other modernist buildings in its vicinity, this building does not have a problem blending in. The AT&T Building's pink granite covering provides a greeting ironic break from the dull colours of its repetitive neighbors.



AT&T Building in New York

- In Post-Modern architecture, there were historical thoughts to interpret. There were layers in meanings, history, and language. Using double coding in layers to enrich the meaning. Therefore, a gap is created through layers to create many interpretations.
- Post-modernist architects post a more relative, reliant message of what their housing projects can accomplish, while modernist architects have an idealistic, utopian view. Post-modernists highlight multivalent messages, which essentially do not present a single, unified meaning.
- Post-modernists consider the contexts of their buildings, whereas modernists build independent skyscrapers, ignorant of the surrounding buildings. For example, Hans Hollein's Haas House in Vienna is next to gothic, baroque, and 1950s modern buildings, and Haas House functions like a “chameleon building” intervening between the complex and contradictory styles surrounding it.

- The stone portion of Haas House's facade with the repeated square windows merges into the style of the adjacent building. This stone gradually gives way to a glass curtain wall covering a cylindrical “tower” that not only evokes an ancient church of strength, but literally reflects the mediaeval cathedral across the square.
- Haas House merges into pale green building next door with stone that fits together with colours in the neighboring building and repetitive window motifs that evoke the adjacent building's windows. At the same time, it achieves the apparently impossible goal of merging in with the cathedral across the square—quite an achievement.



Hans Hollein's Haas House



- In the case of Haas House, the citation is ironic because it strives to merge in with the mediaeval cathedral across the square and yet Haas House contains shops, offices, and restaurants. There is really no reason for it to look like a mediaeval cathedral, given the building's purpose. But that is exactly the point: post-modernists' inter-textual citations and references are often ironic. These ironic inter-textual references are also plentiful in post-modernist literature.
- Whereas modernists strive to create new, independent works of art, post-modernists merge several genres and styles, often borrowing components from other texts. Post-modernists put together these borrowed elements to new effect, sometimes creating an imitation. They incorporate inter-textual references to other literary texts and sometimes borrowing entire characters.
- Modernists believed that there is a single, unified definition of good, organized and healthy behavior and that an architect has the power to instigate his sense of social values on his building's inhabitants, whoever they may be.

- Pruitt-Igoe housing project, the buildings' modernist architects felt that clean, organized buildings would result in clean, organized inhabitants and they felt that intelligently planned space would encourage healthy behavior.
- By contrast, post-modernists self-consciously deconstruct modernists' hierarchical system, in favor of pluralism and complexity. Modernist skyscrapers all look quite similar to each other. They are all variations on a basic box structure with similarly recurring, standard window patterns and a limited number of construction materials.



Pruitt-Igoe housing



- Post-modernist skyscrapers stand out amongst their modernist neighbors precisely because they do not fit the modernist form. They are united by how different they are from each other. In fact, they frequently include a variety of styles within a single building so that a single post-modernist building does not even fit into its own form.
- While modernist architecture is serious, informative, and exclusive, post-modern architecture tends to be humorous, entertaining, and populist. Modernists completely disregarded the ability of regular people, including a building's users or inhabitants, to understand the messages of their architecture. Jencks wrote, "the better the Modern architect, the less he can control obvious meanings"
- This results in the unfortunate fact that non-architects misinterpret a building's symbolism. By contrast, post-modernists pay far more attention to the messages a building sends to its average observers. Realizing that people see buildings in the context of the other surrounding architecture, post-modernists acknowledge the styles of surrounding buildings. Post-modernist

- Jencks regards semiotics as the fundamental science on which he bases his approach. The objective of semiotics is the analysis of all kinds of signs and sign processes. The fundamental idea is that sign processes are involved in everything we do. We have to understand the sign processes in order to understand what we are dealing with when we address something.
- Jencks starts by suggesting while mixed-up perhaps there are visible languages in architecture. Likewise there are various similarities architecture shares with language itself, and he intends to look at 'words', 'phrases', 'syntax', and 'semantics' discussing the similarities as communicational means.
- Language can in principle be understood as the relationship between something that designates (the significans) and something that is designated (the significate). In the same way that a word stands for a certain meaning, a particular architectural element – an architectural expression – must, according to Jencks, also stand for a certain architectural meaning: “architecture must have a signifying reference”.

• Architecture as Communication Language

- Jencks saw communication as the main problem of modernism as modern architects abandoned the traditional 'language' of architecture and tried to design 'functional' buildings.
- Post-modernism is characterized as 'double-coding', highlighting multivalent, unlike modern architecture which was criticized as univalent in terms of form. While modern architecture strives to create new, independent works of art, postmodern architecture embraced diversity with the merge of ideas, styles, and characters to promote parody, humor and irony.
- Deconstruction, on the other hand, challenges the values of harmony, unity, and stability, and proposing instead a different view of a structure that the flaws are intrinsic to the structure. A Deconstructivist rejects the presence of metaphysics, as well as the function, scale, and context.

- **Metaphor as a Language of Post-Modern Architecture**

- Buildings are translated as physical descriptions in space as messages which imply their primary function as signs coded differently within different backgrounds. This means the same building may indicate different things when read from an internet photo, and when read as confronted in space and including its cultural weight.

- [Kisho Kurokawa's Nagakin Capsule Building](#) serves as an example – for Jencks it was a mere merging of washing machines, until he met the building's author who explained him that the leading metaphor here were bird boxes as a response to the come-and-go character of the buildings users.

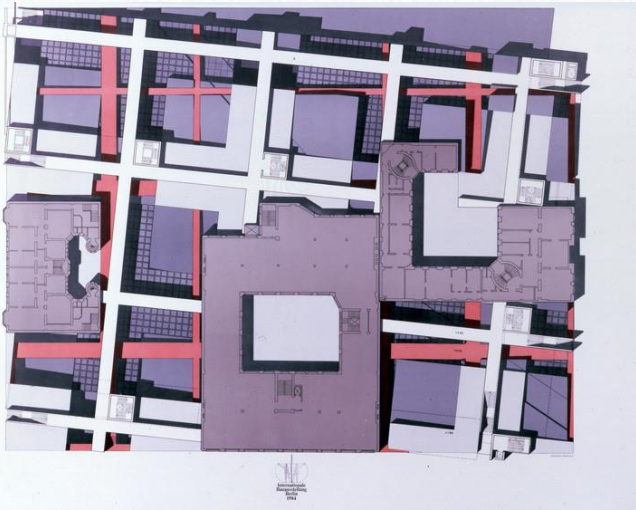


- Metaphors apply the same to Post-Modern as to Modern buildings. The only difference is that the latter ones tended to deny this natural humane capability. The acceptance of fact that buildings are commonly read as metaphors, as Jencks strengthens, was a breaking point in many modern architects' careers. Jencks rounds off the section on metaphor mourning the contemporary shift away from plain metaphor to a desire to achieve "function and economics". Thus the unintended metaphor comes across as one of function and economy.

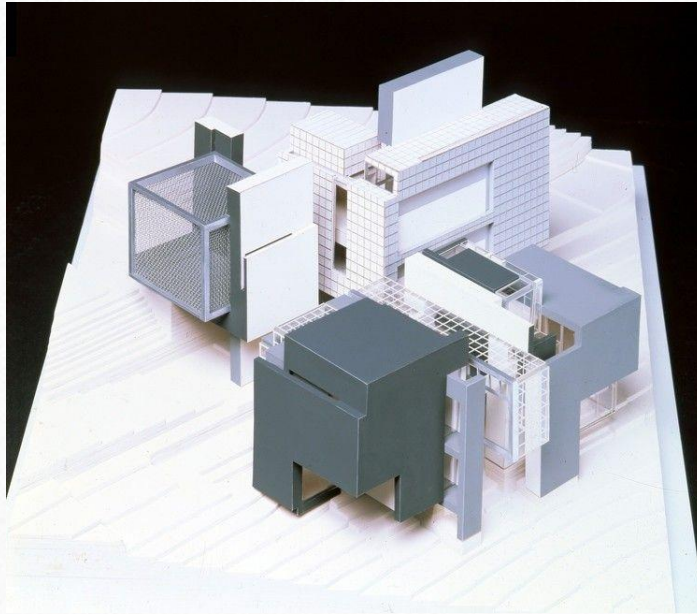
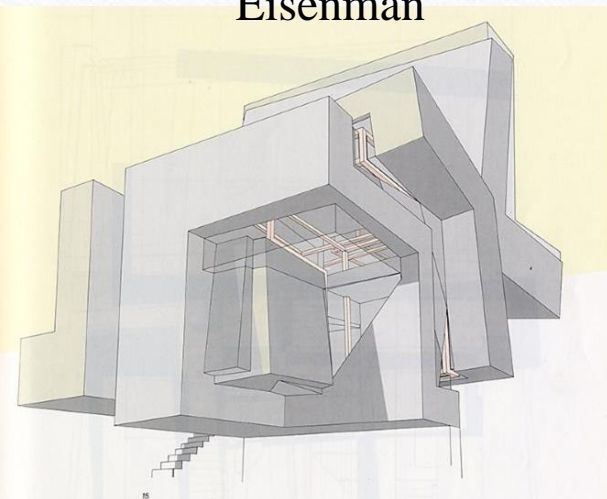


- Words, Syntax, and Semantics in a Language of Post-Modern Architecture

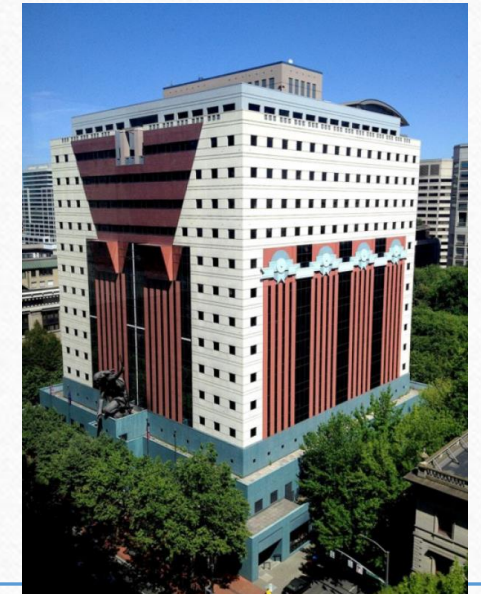
- Word is the fundamental component of a spoken language. Seeing architecture as a spatial language implies that its elements function as words. In so much as does a word have different meanings, do the architectural words change their meanings together with their application in different contexts. The war between traditional pitched roof and flat roof favored by Modernists depicts tensions in understanding the architectural word transmitting safety and homeliness.
- **Syntax:** The acknowledgement of a likely logic of architecture, similar to the language of logics, drove the Post-Modern architecture into discussion of a possible architectural syntax. Syntax is the more mundane 'construction' of language/architecture. Jenks showed apparent disregard for those that experiment purely in syntax (Eisenmann, Graves). The pure realm of syntax is only applicable perceptually when it is integrated into semantic fields.



Syntax, new subjectivity, distortion
and the deconstructivism – Peter
Eisenman



Denver Public Library – Graves



Portland
Building –
Michael
Graves

- One could loosely tie Jencks' idea of semantics to the more common term of 'style'. But further than that it refers to also a rooted appropriateness of a particular style. And the case of particular styles being understood to be appropriate to and suggest different meanings across times. "It is the differences between contrasting elements which constitute one of the bases for their meanings - not the natural overtones inherent in the elements themselves".
- Jencks holds that language is the classic sign system: "Language dominates all sign systems". Architecture can therefore be understood in direct similarity with language and thus reconceptualized in semiotic terms, with architecture based, instead of words, on "visual codes". Just as different languages have been spoken and used by different groups of people in different eras, different architectural codes have been used at different times by different groups. Jencks calls these "semiotic groups": "usually a complex mixture of ethnic background, age, history and locale". Jencks's main similarity is that each of these semiotic groups thus 'speaks' their own 'architectural language'.

Thank You