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Operation Marginalia: Translations of Semiology and Architecture

This paper investigates translations of extra-architectural ideas into the discourse of architecture found in the Charles Jencks and George Baird edited *Meaning in Architecture*, 1969. *Meaning in Architecture* contains a distinctive feature: each chapter contains written fragments by the book's other contributors in the margins of its pages. These notes, keyed into the adjacent text at irregular intervals, each headed by their author's surname, range from praise, to criticism, to suggested further references for the eager reader. They both contribute to and conflict with their respective host texts. For our purposes, they can be seen as a site for the display of authorial positions.

Perhaps the most significant site of these marginal notes is Jencks' chapter one of the volume, "Semiology and Architecture", which serves as a wide-ranging introduction to the developing discourse of architectural semiotics for the book's non-specialist reader. The chapter contains the key illustrative figure, "The Semiological Triangle". The "Triangle" is an appropriation of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards' "triangle of reference", which featured in *The Meaning of Meaning*, first published in 1923. It helps Jencks position his theory in a vast critical space spanning from the abstract to the concrete, the academic to the practical. Jencks' elaboration of the "Triangle" draws commentary from both Baird and Geoffrey Broadbent. The responses Jencks gives to these critiques in the margins of the book reveal strategic defence and counter-attack.

This paper focuses on the points Jencks, Baird and Broadbent make around the "Triangle". It interrogates how these three scholars interpret "semiology" in their respective architectural projects, and explicates how the authors position themselves with respect to the history of ideas. The paper also helps characterise how the embryonic discourse of semiology was being positioned with respect to the broader field of architecture circa 1969.

One of the most striking features of the Charles Jencks and George Baird edited *Meaning in Architecture*, 1969, is the inclusion of comments written in the margins of the pages.¹ In the published artefact, each author's text is accompanied by annotations written by other authors. The formal use of what would otherwise be blank white space is representative of the discursive ambitions of the book: to open new territory in architectural theory.

In his "Preface", Jencks uses the margin strategy to introduce an overarching ideological position for *Meaning in Architecture*. He maintains that the English-language architectural collective at the time of writing did not have a unified set of standards or framework: that a "general crisis" had clouded the post-war community.² Plainly, the reflective, historical explorations of, for example, John Summerson, Rudolf Wittkower and Joseph Rykwert, the indomitable, progressive productions of Peter Reyner Banham, Alison and Peter Smithson and a generation of young avant-gardists, the so-conceived timeless, anthropological studies of Aldo van Eyck amongst others, and the strong leftist political agendas espoused by the architects of the London City Council and the likes of maverick Cedric Price, were pulling discourse in antipathetic directions. While the "general crisis", according to Jencks, saw "some authors wishing to jettison 'architecture' altogether",³ another, more "specific crisis" had spread "over what 'meaning in architecture' (or rather 'meanings') is relevant",⁴ or, in other words, where significance lay. Despite these pressures, Jencks argues that within this contested milieu and throughout their heated debate on "meaning", there was, nevertheless, a "joint belief" that the "rich plurality of views" that existed was something to celebrate and maintain - indeed, to intensify.⁵ *Meaning in Architecture* was to fulfil this function.

To aid in the proliferation of this "rich plurality", Jencks claims he and fellow editor Baird "consciously sought out views which contradict [their] own and each of the [other authors]".⁶ As a result, the chapters of the book do not present a coherent position; and, thanks to the marginal commentary, each chapter is itself subject to contestation. For Jencks, "[i]t is one thing to discuss pluralism and the open society and quite another to actively engage incisive criticism and continuously expose one's dearest views to the onslaughts of the opponent."⁷ The editorial position is thus that *Meaning in Architecture* should constitute a forum where exposure is at its most severe.

1 Charles Jencks and George Baird eds. *Meaning in Architecture* (London; New York: Barrie & Jenkins; Braziller, 1969; 1970).

2 Charles Jencks, "Preface," in *Meaning in Architecture*, ed. Charles Jencks and George Baird (London; New York: Barrie & Jenkins; Braziller, 1969; 1970), 7.

3 Jencks, "Preface," 7.

4 Jencks, "Preface," 7.

5 Jencks, "Preface," 7.

6 Jencks, "Preface," 7. *Meaning in Architecture* is the follow-up book to the *Arena* special issue, "Meaning in Architecture" (June 1967), for which Baird played a more central, and Jencks a more supporting editorial role. The book is far more eclectic and incongruous than the journal issue. This suggests that the desire for internal contradiction can be attributed primarily to Jencks.

7 Jencks, "Preface," 7.

It is notable that while some effort is made to widen the pool of author-opponents,⁸ the majority of the antagonists were part of the highly competitive London context later described by member Kenneth Frampton as a “crucible.”⁹

Jencks characterizes *Meaning in Architecture* through the adjacent-to-text critiques, contending that “the book is in the form of a controversy or a debate.”¹⁰ The exchanges do, at times, get quite hostile. Banham claims that “Baird’s uninformed sarcasm and much of his argument ... falls to the ground”; that “[n]either Baird nor [Martin] Pawley seems psychologically secure enough to admit ... human variability”; and that “[r]esponses [such as Baird’s] show very clearly ... which architectural theorists are card-carrying reactionaries.”¹¹ The “debate” is interrupted at other points with demonstrations of wit. Jencks claims monumentality would sneak into Banham’s “un-house” “through the electronic spaghetti”; and Baird, responding to a comment on the “privileged” positions of designer and critic, begins his response with the rhyming Shakespearean fencing reference: “A palpable hit’, I admit.”¹²

Not all of the margin comments, however, are personal or amusing. Most communicate contestable theoretical positions and ideas, issues contributing to or challenging a budding “semiology”-based discourse. Jencks – whether due to his position as editor, or to the less-objectionable content of this work – is spared personal attacks and jesting juxtapositions. But his chapter “Semiology and Architecture” is subjected to some significant comments and criticisms aired by Baird and Geoffrey Broadbent. We will focus on comments related to one specific conceptual apparatus in Jencks’ chapter, given a graphic presence by the figure “The Semiological Triangle” – the relation of thought-symbol-referent, or form-content-percept, or signifier-signified-thing – which he derives from C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards’ *The Meaning of Meaning*.¹³ The central text, the marginal comments, and Jencks’ marginal replies or lack thereof, allow us to assess the authors’ relation to each other and the discourse and discipline of architecture as it existed around the time of writing.

We proceed two-thirds through “The Sign Situation”, the second section of “Semiology and Architecture” containing “The Semiological Triangle”, where Jencks makes a short digression. Looking to architectural history for a buttress, he calls upon the relationship of the Gothic to the

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- 8 Francophone Françoise Choay and Italoophone Gillo Dorfles are included, as is the client of Gerrit Rietveld, Mrs. Truus Schröder Schröder.
- 9 Kenneth Frampton, “The English Crucible,” in *CIAM Team 10, The English Context*, eds. D’Laine Camp, Dirk van den Heuvel and Gijs de Waal (Delft: TU Delft, 2002), 113-29.
- 10 Jencks, “Preface,” 7.
- 11 Peter Reyner Banham, “The Architecture of Wampanoag,” in *Meaning in Architecture*, ed. Charles Jencks and George Baird (London; New York: Barrie & Jenkins; Braziller, 1969; 1970), 81, 118.
- 12 Peter Reyner Banham, “A Home is not a House,” in *Meaning in Architecture*, ed. Charles Jencks and George Baird (London; New York: Barrie & Jenkins; Braziller, 1969; 1970), 116; Jencks, “The Architecture of Wampanoag,” 101; George Baird, “‘La Dimension Amoureuse’ in Architecture,” in *Meaning in Architecture*, ed. Charles Jencks and George Baird (London; New York: Barrie & Jenkins; Braziller, 1969; 1970), 80. This figure of speech will be extended throughout the following pages.
- 13 Charles Jencks, “Semiology and Architecture,” in *Meaning in Architecture*, ed. Charles Jencks and George Baird (London; New York: Barrie & Jenkins; Braziller, 1969; 1970), 15. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1ed. 1923).

Renaissance to instantiate his theory of cultural inversion.¹⁴ The forms of the Gothic - developed “over two hundred years without the content drastically altering” - were, according to his analysis, reinterpreted at a critical juncture by Renaissance scholars as “barbaric, ugly, [and] irrational.”¹⁵ Jencks stresses here that form and content have no natural and unbreakable relationship. What a building or building type “means” is purely determined by convention; and the conventions can, under external pressure, be overturned.

Jencks introduces Pop Art (and in a throwaway mention, also Neo-Dada) as a contemporary exemplar. As the Renaissance to the Gothic, the Pop movement disrupted the previously established, more-classically-“Modern” system, leaving “the older generation annoyed (even repulsed)” and “the new generation ... confused.”¹⁶ But due to the Pop and Neo-Dada artists’ - or the period’s so-called avant-garde’s - “addict[ion] to the notion of change and the animated state of muddled suspension”, the system’s relational mechanisms were left, in Jencks’ assessment, functioning improperly. His point is that the “new” had become a “logic” in and of itself: a driving force that destroys the ability for conventions to delineate meaningful action. According to Jencks, “the present situation” at the turn of the 1970s sees “the conventions change faster than they can be learned or used.”¹⁷ The significance of the established parameters that structure the practice of reading architecture is thus placed in focus, as is the position of the critic - and thus Jencks himself.

Alongside the paragraph lies a comment:

“BROADBENT: This will only disturb us if, for the sake of our own security, we *need* to find simple absolutes in aesthetic matters. But stylistic changes of the kind which Jencks describes suggest that such absolutes do not, in fact, exist. Nor need they; all men, presumably, are born with similar appetites and instincts, but even these can be sublimated and there is not the slightest reason to suppose that they are also born with the same interests and ideals. Provided, say, that one’s need for food and shelter are satisfied the actual *kind* of food, or *form* of shelter, is a very secondary matter. One’s response to it will depend very much on one’s previous experience, the things to which one has become habituated, and so on. Certainly the physiology and psychology of perception bear this out. What one perceives is a *transaction* between a pattern of stimuli on the senses and one’s previous experience. Each modifies the other and is also modified by the other. The Pop artists, following Duchamp, have merely demonstrated the fact of “cultural relativity”; what one perceives in art depends entirely on one’s frame of reference. But again, why should one *want* it to be otherwise?”¹⁸

14 I explore this inversion theory in “Jencks’ Semiological History: ‘Pop-Non Pop,’” in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand 30, Open*, ed. Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, Qld: SAHANZ, 2013), vol. 1, 3-15.

15 Jencks, “Semiology and Architecture,” 16.

16 Jencks, “Semiology and Architecture,” 16.

17 Jencks, “Semiology and Architecture,” 16.

18 Broadbent in Jencks, “Semiology and Architecture,” 16. Typological error amended.

Broadbent's critical perspective, his interpretation of the ideological territory ordered by "The Semiological Triangle", differs from Jencks in three respects. Each difference is evident through an *attaque au fer*. The first sees Broadbent deflecting Jencks' "needy" relationship to stable "conventions". Broadbent takes this as a representation of a desire for fixed ideals: universals or "simple absolutes in aesthetic matters". One might read into this stance an extension of Geoffrey Scott's aversion to the "meticulous observance of 'pure styles'."¹⁹ Broadbent patently challenges reliance on any stable formal arrangements, implying a possibility of, and certainly advocating for, the production of cultural constructions without reference or relation to any underlying system or a priori. In a sense, he is arguing against translations in favour of spontaneous production, somehow expressive of transcendental principles.²⁰

To further support Broadbent's first lunge, we can refer to a later critique of Jencks he delivers in a margin note on Platonic forms. The note responds to Jencks' small section detailing "intrinsic theory".²¹ Jencks describes "intrinsic theory" as an intellectual program seen in the many reprisals of Platonism - including those by Carl Jung and Le Corbusier - and the "quite recent" examples of psycholinguists who "have posited various inherent limitations on the mind which make certain language forms universal."²² The section proceeds quite quickly through "intrinsic theory" to "extrinsic theory", but nevertheless allows Broadbent to write, "these universals and absolutes, as Plato himself said, have to be *imposed* on the world by the brain which is trying to comprehend it"²³ - and hence stress that they have no physical existence as actual objects. In all this we see the essential issue: Broadbent's resistance to conceptualizations of "things," the world of referents.

The second of Broadbent's thrusts at Jencks in a sense follows on from his reductions of the role of "convention", and the significance he claims, quite inaccurately, that Plato has for Jencks' project. This extension not only attacks Jencks' analytical position, but also the cultural complexity of the subject under consideration. Broadbent asserts that what "[t]he Pop artists, following Duchamp, have merely demonstrated is the fact of 'cultural relativity'."²⁴ Leaving aside the historical question of whether the Pop artists should be said to have followed Marcel Duchamp, Broadbent, in this sentence, claims not only that the interpretation he offers is a "fact", but that it is a "mere" fact. The allusions are quite clear: Jencks' argument is not only potentially non-factual or wrong, but

19 Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A study in the History of Taste* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 204.

20 In the terms of Ernst Gombrich - another source supplied by Jencks - we might define this as "making" without any "matching".

21 Jencks gives no source for this term, but investigations suggest it is derived from art historian Erwin Panofsky. See Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

22 Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture," 17. It is highly ironic that in later years Broadbent takes on some aspects of Noam Chomsky's innate acquisition linguistic theories as he develops his semiotic position. See Geoffrey Broadbent, "The Deep Structures of Architecture," in *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture*, ed. Geoffrey Broadbent, Richard Bunt and Charles Jencks (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1980).

23 Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture," 17.

24 Broadbent in Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture," 16. This assertion remains entirely unsubstantiated - this may be excused (even encouraged?) by the structural logic of the margin comment: limited space, limited evidence.

is in any case overly complicated. The basic issue, he implies, is simple. It has been explained already in previous acts of artistry and scholarship, and with established concepts of art history. Fundamentally then, to Broadbent, the project of "Semiology and Architecture", the use of this external discourse, is redundant and flawed - hence the operation implied in the title of his later chapter in *Meaning in Architecture*: pushing semiology or meaning "into" architecture.²⁵

Broadbent's third interception is similar to the second, almost a *redoublement*, though less theoretical and more practical - or perhaps "practically-minded". It can be seen in the framing of the "actual kind of food, or form of shelter" with respect to the basic human requirements of "food and shelter" - the "kind" or "form" here being of little significance. Broadbent thus presents Jencks' "semiological" concerns as "very secondary matter[s]". In the contexts of Jencks' claim on the "thing", this is an important contest: Broadbent rhetorically confronts the so-called "reality" of referents with plain reality, implying Jencks' concerns are, at base, insubstantial, overwrought, gratuitous, and thus irrelevant.²⁶

The three aspects of Broadbent's attack are typical critiques of theory in architecture. Universalism based on abstraction, non-recognition of established facts attributed to obfuscation and lack of commonsense based on removal from "the real world" are components of the mode that gets referred to (by Jencks, Banham, and many others of the period) by the broad pejorative "academicism". Thanks to the work of Wittkower and his fellows at the Warburg, an Academic approach to "architectural principles" had re-established a foothold in the discourse post-war. Histories tracing back through Palladio and Alberti, to Vitruvius, and back to Ancient Greece, framed architecture with mathematical and musical harmonics and Platonic ideals. Such concerns engender time-honoured ideological suspicions akin to those directed toward Academies and Institutes reaching back far beyond the Académie des Beaux Arts to the Platonic Academy of Florence, sponsored by the House of Medici. Though Broadbent invokes Plato, it is clear he is differentiating himself from him and this longer history. It seems the philosopher and his ideas were *passé*.

The one *Meaning in Architecture* author who seems not to mind being associated with "academicism" is the Canadian George Baird. We can see this disposition in his abstract, detached, elitist, and superfluous margin note that appears above Broadbent's extended, threefold attack on Jencks. It keys into a description of the semiological triangle. "[T]he main point of the semiological triangle", Jencks asserts with an ambiguous pun, "is that there are simply *relations* between language, thought and reality ... [e]ach semiologist points the arrows in the direction he believes in, but, as the diagram shows, the relations are always two-way and never absolute."²⁷ Baird embraces the figure:

25 Geoffrey Broadbent, "Meaning into Architecture," in *Meaning in Architecture*, ed. Charles Jencks and George Baird (London; New York: Barrie & Jenkins; Braziller, 1969; 1970), 51-75.

26 This kind of attack, one that appeals to the reader's "commonsense," is popular within the architectural discipline; but it is one that, under a cross-examination from one who advocates for "building" and questions the relevance of architecture absolutely, is, in my estimation, always vulnerable.

27 Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture," 16.

"BAIRD: The "semiological triangle" strikes me as a brilliant construction, in the way it accommodates and explains so many historical positions so clearly. And I know of no other observer previous to Jencks, who has seen the three corners of the triangle as having equal weight."²⁸

The triangle, in other words, relegates "referents", or the world of "things", to a non-privileged status, equal with the physio-psychological process of perception and the socio-cultural phenomenon of form and language. For Baird there is no weighting to the equilateral triangle. This reading reveals Baird's lack of familiarity with the Logic-grounded Anglo-American semiotic tradition, a tradition including Ogden and Richards, Charles W. Morris, Charles S. Peirce, and a lineage reaching back through Francis Bacon, to Aristotle. Baird's interpretation fails to take account of the different arrow types in Jencks' "Triangle" that connect the three points: those between thought-symbol and thought-referent are heavier, their shafts only broken once in the middle; but that between symbol-referent is finer and dotted, and the reader might assume, more loosely related, even inferred. The full significance of this difference can be seen in the original "triangle" used by Ogden and Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*.²⁹ The relation between symbol and referent is, they say, "imputed", and concerns "truth"; whereas those between symbol and thought, and referent and thought, are direct, in some way "causal", and concern "correctness" and "adequacy".³⁰

Whether he is aware of this distinction or not, Jencks does not take Baird to task on the issue. Indeed he makes no reply to Baird's marginal note within "Semiology and Architecture". In the contexts of "Academic" discourse, this absence seems as significant as his extended reply to Broadbent, to be recounted below. Perhaps to protect his stated "brilliance," Jencks does not make further comment on the intellectual lineage of the semiological triangle, nor its finer points – such as the arrows – which compromise the clarity of his "simply" relational diagram. Jencks' aim seems to be to distance himself from the "behaviourists" (who focus, according to Jencks, on reality, or the referent), the "Whorfians" (who focus on language, or symbol), and the "Platonists" (who focus on thought, or concept) equally;³¹ and further elaboration might jeopardize this delicate balance.

A related issue is, however, played out in the margins of Baird's chapter in *Meaning in Architecture*, "'La Dimension Amoureuse' in Architecture." Here Baird reveals his affiliation with the French and Slavic theory-of-signs tradition – based within the discipline of linguistics, indebted to the seminal work of Ferdinand de Saussure, and the foundation to the work of Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes, among many others. Baird's Saussurean model of architectural semiology is based on the abstract relations of langue/parole and signifier/signified. While searching for love in architecture, he claims that "for semiology, there is no 'getting to the bottom of' any social phenomenon."³² But such a lack of physical bedrock is, for Jencks, entirely objectionable.

28 Baird in Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture," 16.

29 The "triangle of reference" – in Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 11.

30 Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 11, 95, 101-02.

31 Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture," 16.

32 Baird, "'La Dimension Amoureuse' in Architecture," 86-87.

"JENCKS: I find this obscure, and where not obscure, wrong, for the reasons which I.A. Richards criticized Saussure in 1923: i.e. one must make a triple distinction between signifiers, signifieds and *things* (Baird here conflates the last two as did Saussure).

BAIRD: I see the point of this distinction; and as I say elsewhere in this margin, I admire the elegant explanation offered by the 'semiological triangle.' The danger in Jencks' formulation is, of course, that it may inadvertently encourage lazy followers to assume they have the option of dealing with Richards' 'things' directly, 'as in themselves they really are'.³³

We see very clearly here Baird's stance: he prefers to avoid objects, the safest scholarly option; but, when pressed to extend his Saussurean *garde* into the realms of the referent, he stresses the importance of keeping "things" conceptual, mediated, and phenomenologically unsettled. Jencks accuses Baird of "conflating" the signified – his "thought" – with the referent or percept; Baird, *in quartata*, does not want to find a place for physical objects in perception, stressing the omnipresent psychological aspect of interpretation. In rehashing a forty-six-year-old argument, Jencks and Baird reveal the inherent compatibility issues between the triadic Anglo-American and the dyadic French-Slavic theory-of-sign schools.³⁴ But Baird conspicuously extends his *langue/parole* and signifier/signified pairings through an implicitly "intrinsic" passage. His Academic position resists intellectual laziness: he prefers a series of intangibles in a chain of infinite regression, floating in an abstract and relational world. So if Baird is Academic, and Broadbent is anti-Academic, where does Jencks fit in?

Jencks' response to Broadbent's three-pronged comment reveals his position is based on a relation to convention. He contests Broadbent's allegation that "simple absolutes" ground his argument, not directly refuting the claim, but placing it in its diametrical context. He describes the situation of theoretical "absolute relativism" that, in his view, underlies a culture without convention. It is clear that Jencks has a strong desire to avoid a field with radical normlessness, without any stable referents. He wants to avoid a constructivist system of knowledge; one in which the definition of all things is completely culturally relative.³⁵ For Jencks, Broadbent, "like some early Dadaists," represents a position "that depends 'entirely on one's frame of reference'." This position, according

33 Baird, "'La Dimension Amoureuse' in Architecture," 86-87. Ibid. Jencks and Baird fail to acknowledge Ogden's contribution in these quotations.

34 This incompatibility is to some degree resolved in Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1976). Whether or not Jencks actually captures "reality" through his theoretical armature is moot. At times Jencks claims "things" as such. At other times it seems his "reality" is more reflective of Peirce's tripartite process of "semiosis", which involves a "representamen" or sign, an "object", and an "interpretant". In this system, John R. Lyne asserts, "'objects' are objects-of-signification, and are of relevance only insofar as they can be taken up semiotically[, and] should not be confused with material referents, as they include such things as feelings and intended effects" – John R. Lyne, "Rhetoric and Semiotic in C. S. Peirce," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980), 157. In *A Theory of Semiotics*, Eco quotes Peirce's description of "infinite regression" of semiosis, and asserts that "a cultural unit never obliges one to replace it by means of something which is not a semiotic entity, and never asks to be explained by some Platonic, psychic or objectal entity" – Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 71. Such an understanding challenges Jencks' concern for "things." It may, however, satisfy Baird.

35 We should note Jencks' position would have been reached relative to the contributions of post-war English constructivists like Victor Pasmore.

to Jencks, allows one to “justify any sort of flap-doodle or atrocity”: it effectively means that “one man’s ‘imposition’” – or for us, perhaps, “translation” – “is as good as any other’s, when there is no third court of appeal, reality.”³⁶ Jencks thus attempts to leverage his “Semiological Triangle” diagram to claim the ground of “reality” within architecture – a ground ceded, in his framework, both by avant-garde “Neo-Dadaists” (and Broadbent), and by Saussure-based architectural semiologists (like Baird). This is not without consequence: as we have seen, Jencks’ agenda requires him to slow dance to “intrinsic theory” with a dangerously-close Platonic partner – and in some “style” – when he might have focused on an entirely abstract and intellectual duel involving language.

What is at stake here? On the one hand, Jencks’ position with regard to cultural relativity is determined by his position with regard to judgment: Broadbent’s “early Dadaist” conception of aesthetic equivalence allows no avenues for criticism – at least none Jencks finds suitable. Jencks asserts the validity of finite knowledge. Through Jencks’ defence of his critical position, we thereby flirt with the dangers of elitism: the right to judge the work of others from a superior intellectual or moral position. The spectre of academicism is raised. On the other hand, Jencks’ commitment to Ogden-Richardsonian models – and by extension, the broader Anglo-American logical tradition – allows a coherent challenge to a philosophical position of “explicit nihilism”.³⁷ The inclusion of concrete “reality” as a “thing” rightly or wrongly helps Jencks mount a challenge to the concept of the “new”: Neo-Dadaists, Pop Artists, and any other would-be avant-gardists will be held accountable under the “third court” of Jencks’ scheme. While Baird’s Saussurean framework establishes the connection between form and content or “meaning” as inherently conventional and ultimately arbitrary, Jencks’ pragmatist position sees signification established through a kind of finite semiosis – a process that establishes both “adequate” and, importantly, “true” relations in reference to real-world objects; and thus, some dimension of objective “meaning”.³⁸ The most fundamental bases of criticism are involved in these disputes and negotiations over convention and style, “reality” and “truth”; as is the ability of Jencks to write anything, and to be taken at his well-crafted word.

From within the “rich plurality” of positions, Baird, Broadbent, and Jencks thus neatly form three vertices of a triangle. Within the sign-theory discourse, on the basis of their arguments, they can be taken to stand for symbol, thought, and referent, or signifier, signified, and “thing,” respectively. The positions of Baird, Broadbent, and Jencks are dependent on basic theoretical associations with Saussure, against Saussure, and with Ogden-Richards (-Peirce). The translations each author brings to his position, however, are adapted to their cut-and-thrust milieu; and they changed under its conditions of parry-and-riposte.

36 Jencks, “Semiology and Architecture,” 17. Jencks concludes his retort by saying “[p]erhaps the best way to refute those impaled on the apex of the semiological triangle is to kick a stone à la Samuel Johnson, or even better tickle their feet and tell them it is merely their ‘frame of reference’ which is laughing.” We do not have time to investigate the relevance of this mixed-reference witticism here.

37 Jencks, “Semiology and Architecture,” 16.

38 This might theoretically require the imposition of something like Peirce’s “ultimate logical interpretant” – see Anne Freadman, *The Machinery of Talk: Charles Peirce and the Sign Hypothesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 211.

Under pressure to account for the world of referents, Baird extends his dyadic framework, opening the door to infinite semiosis. His program of adding an “amorous dimension” to architecture was short-lived, however; and under the shadow of academicism, he escaped the crucible of London and returned to his native Canada even before *Meaning in Architecture* was published. Obviously concerned to distance his discourse from academicism, Broadbent criticizes convention of all kinds and promotes a radical and arguably inarticulate normlessness. But in the following decade, due to the constraints of the discursive landscape, he would become more involved with semiotic discourse, adopting a more pragmatic, systematic and arguably Platonic position in his formulation of a “Plain Man’s Guide” to the discursive territory.³⁹ Jencks’ use of the “Semiological Triangle” succeeds in establishing “relations” between the warring historical and progressive camps, but not, as he proposes, between “language, thought and reality.” He would subsequently move from an architecture answerable to the “third court of appeal” to one that “obediently follows the definer’s wish ... like a woman of easy virtue”,⁴⁰ and written in a Post-Modern language.

The marginal comments in *Meaning in Architecture* did little to resolve a theoretical discourse in the throes of formation. They did, however, give architectural authors a new medium in which to *prise de fer*. “Semiology” in architecture in 1969 was not the domain of “card-carrying reactionaries”, but merely part of the broader London-based context. It was a vehicle through which combatants repositioned themselves in relation to centuries-old debates around pragmatism and idealism, with respect or disrespect to the Academy and the real word, and, perhaps most strikingly, in opposition to each other. That the forms of so-called architectural semiology were soon to become “barbaric, ugly, [and] irrational” as the demand for the “new” continued to prevail may diminish Jencks’ editorial goal of realizing a “controversy” in the public domain; but this triangular analysis has shown that time has not diminished the effectiveness of *Meaning in Architecture*’s forms as intensifiers of debate.

39 Geoffrey Broadbent, “A Plain Man’s Guide to the Theory of Signs in Architecture [1977],” in *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995*, ed. Kate Nesbitt (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996). With Jencks and Richard Bunt, Broadbent would co-edit *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons) in 1980.

40 Charles Jencks, “The Architectural Sign,” *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), 71.