

Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand 30, Open

Papers presented to the 30th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand held on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, July 2-5, 2013.

<http://www.griffith.edu.au/conference/sahanz-2013/>

Andrew P Steen, “Jencks’s Semiological History: ‘Pop – NonPop’” in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 30, Open*, edited by Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, Qld: SAHANZ, 2013), vol. 1, p 3-15.

ISBN-10: 0-9876055-0-X

ISBN-13: 978-0-9876055-0-4

Jencks's Semiological History

"Pop – Non Pop"

Andrew P. Steen

University of Queensland

"Pop – Non Pop" was written by Charles Jencks for his doctoral dissertation "Modern Architecture: The Tradition Since 1945," completed 1970. A slightly-modified version was subsequently included as "Recent British Architecture: Pop – Non Pop" in Jencks's Modern Movements in Architecture, first published 1973. In this chapter, Jencks presents the progression of postwar British architecture—from "Non-Pop," through "Non Pop – Pop," to "Pop"—as evolutionary; and his version of the events as a traditional and coherent history. "Semiology and Architecture" was written by Jencks while he was undertaking his PhD. It was included in the volume Meaning in Architecture, edited by Jencks and George Baird, published 1970. In this chapter, Jencks uses a semiological triangle based on the work of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards to try to denaturalize some assumptions that were structuring the prevailing mode of architectural criticism. "Semiology and Architecture" sketches a theory that questions the avant-garde, and challenges any claims to connotative and ideological neutrality. While these two chapters—one framed as history, one as critical theory—were concurrent, Jencks's historical work barely registers his theoretical agenda: "Pop – Non Pop" seems removed from the concerns of "Semiology and Architecture." This paper, however, investigates the relationship. It interrogates the manner in which these two chapters relate. It works from the hypothesis that the two are not separate intellectual projects, but rather critically inform each other: that Jencks's semiology, as written in "Semiology and Architecture," allows an understanding of Jencks's case history "Pop – Non Pop" that is otherwise obscured; and that "Pop – Non Pop" gives extension to the culture-based theory of "Semiology and Architecture" unwritten in that chapter. This paper will aid the composition of a forthcoming doctoral dissertation on the work of Charles Jencks, working title "Charles Jencks, Semiotics, Architectures," scheduled for completion in 2015.

Paper – Non Paper

This paper is a trial. It has been written to test a discursive position and methodological approach to be used more extensively in a doctoral dissertation on the work of Charles Jencks.¹ This larger document will focus on the intellectual bases to Jencks's texts of the nineteen-sixties and early seventies. These texts have popular appeal; but this has not translated into an esteemed scholarly reputation. Architectural authors generally regard Jencks as superficial and one-dimensional. The dissertation aims to remediate Jencks's position within the intellectual history of architecture by adding context, rigour and depth.

1. I began this PhD in February 2012 at the University of Queensland. The current working title is "Charles Jencks, Structures, Semiotics, Architectures."

In this paper we will perform a restricted operation on two pieces of writing that are, in Jencks's body of work, held in parallel. One of these texts is representative of a theoretical approach to architectural criticism. The other—more central to our concerns here at the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand—is representative of an approach to the writing of history. We shall see that Jencks does not actively seek to synthesize these two texts into one model, and indeed avoids such an act; yet we shall arrive at the conclusion that such a resolved position is not only possible to construct, but gives a richer account of both texts.

The goals of Jencks's publications are ambiguous, as are the means: Jencks is capricious with his use of methodologies, and vague with his nomination of critical sources and key references. This paper aims to highlight some of the inherent ambiguities in Jencks's work, and to question the underlying definitions of his practice; but also to constitute itself an exercise in style and structure placed squarely in the contexts of architectural history. First we must turn to the facts.

Tradition – Non Tradition

Charles Jencks's *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 1973, is an adaptation of his PhD dissertation, "Modern Architecture: The Tradition Since 1945,"² completed between 1966 and 1970 at the University College London, under the supervision of Peter Reyner Banham. The titles of these two publications reveal Jencks's key preoccupations of the period; the basic components of archi-

2. Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973); Charles Jencks, "Modern Architecture: The Tradition Since 1945," diss. University College, London, 1970; awarded in 1971.

3. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 239-298; Jencks, "Modern Architecture," 170-221. "Pop – Non Pop" was also published in two parts in *Architectural Association Quarterly*, issues 1:1 and 1:2, Winter 1968-69 and April 1969. This text is, ignoring slight changes in images and formatting, the same as the PhD copy. There are some small but important differences between the dissertation and book versions of the chapter, but these differences will not unduly preoccupy us here.

4. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 239.

5. Charles Jencks and George Baird eds., "Meaning in Architecture," *Arena: Architectural Association Journal*, 83 (June 1967); Charles Jencks and George Baird eds., *Meaning in Architecture* (London; New York: Barrie & Jenkins; Braziller, 1970).

6. "History as Myth" will be analyzed through relation to Lévi-Straussian "myth" in my dissertation.

7. Essays by these two—Françoise Choay, "Urbanism and Semiology"; and Gillo Dorfles, "Structuralism and Semiology in Architecture"—are amongst those compiled in *Meaning in Architecture*. Other theorists using sign-based apparatus in the period include Emilio Ambasz, George Baird, Geoffrey Broadbent, Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas.

8. The caption Jencks places under figure 52 of *Modern Movements* reads: "Mies van der Rohe: Gallery of the Twentieth Century, Berlin, 1962—8. The absolute form of a two-way grid supported on exterior columns was used across many different projects, and in each case the most important functions, here the permanent art collection, were suppressed in the basement." This description can serve as an analogy: the established structure of "architecture" suppressing the "most important functions", namely the active workings of architecture—including the products of Jencks.

tectural history with which he was wrestling at the time: the "Modern" "Tradition." His book and dissertation approach these concerns through a number of case studies. One such case study focuses on Jencks's adopted homeland: chapter 7 of the book, "Recent British Architecture: Pop – Non Pop"; chapter nine of the dissertation, simply "Pop – Non Pop."³

"Pop – Non Pop" charts postwar developments in Britain's architecture – from Townscape and New Humanism, through the Independent Group and New Brutalism, to Cedric Price and Archigram; from the post-war rise of "Compromise," to the late-1960s proclamation, "Architecture is Dead." Jencks writes "unlike the cyclical situation in America ... the architectural movement in England really is ... a coherent development from one position to another, a sequence of ideas and forms."⁴ He consciously presents "Pop – Non Pop" as a work of conventional history.

Concurrent with his PhD, Jencks was undertaking another project with his fellow UCL doctoral student, George Baird: the promotion of architectural semiology. The *Arena* special issue "Meaning in Architecture," 1967, and follow-up book *Meaning in Architecture*, 1970—both co-edited by the pair—developed a structuralist position from which to criticize and theorize architecture.⁵ While Jencks's contribution to the journal is limited to editing, he writes the "Preface" and two chapters in the book: "History as Myth" and "Semiology and Architecture."⁶

"Semiology and Architecture" presents a model of meaning—a triangular relation of symbol, thought, and referent (or signifier, signified and "thing")—with which Jencks attempted to destabilize the entrenched system of referentiality within architecture: the commonsense ideals and seamless translations of architectural criticism. The use of semiology—by Jencks and Baird but also other proponents such as Françoise Choay and Gillo Dorfles—was one reaction to a general post-war dissatisfaction with modern architecture.⁷ The lingering conservative influence of architects like Mies van der Rohe and critics like Nikolaus Pevsner was limiting less-established practitioners.⁸ Semiology was one of several discourses appropriated from outside architecture to counter this influence. It provided a framework with which to rethink and restructure the whole of the intellectual field; and Jencks was at the forefront of this endeavour around the year 1970.



Charles – Non Charles

It is striking, then, that semiology is not significant within “Pop – Non Pop.” The chapter’s single mention of arguably the founding father of semiology, Ferdinand de Saussure, forms the apparently casual and misguided aside, “as the linguist Saussure pointed out, since the connections between form and content are largely arbitrary, they can be changed at any point.”⁹ There is no elaboration of this point here; it is merely stated in the manner of background commonsense. Saussure does not appear again in the chapter, nor indeed in the broader projects within which it lies—PhD or book. The father of semiology is mentioned this one time, and then pushed aside.

This is not, however, a singular event: semiology is marginalized in Jencks’s historical works. I.A. Richards, who with C.K. Ogden constructed the “semiological triangle” upon which Jencks formulated his relation of “Semiology and Architecture,” is named in *Modern Movements* only as an interpreter of S.T. Coleridge’s ideas on imagination and poetry, and with two quotations: the second chapter’s enigmatic epigraph, “[e]very critical opinion is an ellipsis; a conditional assertion, with the conditional part omitted. (I.A. Richards)”; and, partly paraphrased, “the English critic I.A. Richards opened his *Principles of Literary Criticism* with the remark ‘a book is a machine to think with.’”¹⁰ There is no mention, in *Modern Movements*, of any of the key figures of modern Anglo-American sign-based theory such as Charles Peirce, Charles Morris, or even Charles Osgood.¹¹ The evidence suggests Jencks’s historical practice is consciously removed from his semiology.

Texts – Non Texts

But are these two projects distinct? Are they best understood separately, or does each inform the other? Can Jencks’s “history” and “semiology” be merged in one epistemological construct? The relation between these two intellectual armatures provides context to a broader object, that which Jencks is undoubtedly best known for: namely, post-modernism. Jencks’s work from the period preceding his announcement of the post-modern has been largely overlooked; and his dissertation, “Modern Architecture” has remained unexamined. We will here begin an interrogation

9. Jencks, “Modern Architecture,”

196. Jencks’s paraphrase of Saussure is questionable: the relations between form and content are, for Saussure, entirely arbitrary—but they cannot be simply changed at any point, as they are established as conventional. As we shall see Jencks’s textual practice is more faithful to Saussure than his theory.

10. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, endnote 381; 11; 32.

11. The least well known of these Charles Osgood, the semanticist, features in Jencks, “Semiology and Architecture,” 22. Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco are mentioned by Jencks in later theoretical works of the period, but not in historical ones. The one mention of a related figure in *Modern Movements* is a credit stating that Jencks’s “Evolutionary Tree, 1920–70” diagram is based on the work of the structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss; but this credit carries an endnote referring the reader to Jencks’s *Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods*. It seems clear that, for Jencks, *Architecture 2000*, 1971, is more connected to a structuralist paradigm. Another theoretical work of the time, Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver’s *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation* (New York: Random House, 1972), is also strongly informed by Claude Lévi-Strauss: his conceptualization of bricolage underpins the design methodology presented by Jencks and Silver.

into the underpinning of Jencks's pre-post-modern thought, with a view towards speculating, outside this paper, how Jencks's account of history might sit with respect to his post-modern project.

This paper's objective is thus to explore the relationship between Jencks's history project—formed around his PhD and resulting in *Modern Movements*—and his contemporaneous theory project—semiology, as seen in *Meaning in Architecture*. The paper will argue the two do not co-exist as separate projects, but are rather implicitly co-implicated; thus, that Jencks's history “Pop – Non Pop” is not history in the traditional sense, but is rather inherently “semiological.” As such, in the following pages, we will relate “Pop – Non Pop” to conceptualizations from Jencks's structuralist framing of architecture, and his sign-based understanding of culture. Further, this paper will argue that “Pop – Non Pop” is indeed not best understood as a rough approximation of semiology, but as representative of a more sophisticated theory than that consciously presented by Jencks in his work of sign-based theory. To achieve its goals, the paper will oscillate between “Pop – Non Pop” and “Semiology and Architecture.” We will begin with the former.

History – Non History

A casual assessment of “Pop – Non Pop” might suggest it was a standard historical account. The chapter seems to follow a rough timeline, starting around 1945 and ending around 1970. A typical Hegelian reading would project one movement towards an idealistic telos. In his introduction, Jencks presents the chapter as the story of “creative evolution.”¹² Such an ideal is aligned with the historiographic position of Jencks's supervisor, Banham. Faith in this model could gain support from the evidence of the general trajectories of the chapter: at the linguistically literal level, the chapter's three subsections—“Non-Pop,” “Non Pop – Pop,” “Pop”—chart a serial progression towards “Pop.” The quick reader may see no conflict in the composite trajectory, and connect the three parts into one development.

A more careful reading however reveals that within this apparent progression lies three distinct timelines. The first subsection, “Non-Pop”, takes us from the *Festival of Britain*, 1951, to Leslie

12. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 239-40.



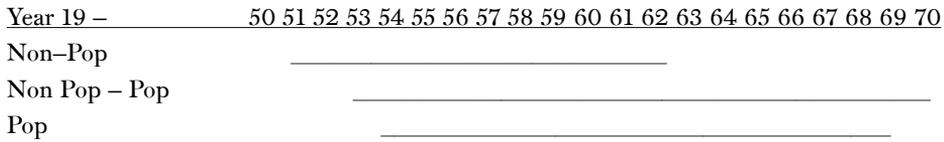


Figure 1. Timelines of “Pop-Non Pop” submissions

Martin, Colin St. John Wilson and Patrick Hodgkinson’s Caius College, 1962; the next subsection, “Non Pop – Pop,” back, from *Parallel of Life and Art*, 1953, to James Stirling’s Florey Building, 1966–71; and the final subsection, “Pop,” back again to Independent Group meetings, 1954, to Archigram’s Instant City, 1969. We can form a diagram placing these timelines in parallel lines (see fig. 1). We see that in proceeding from “Non Pop” to “Non Pop – Pop” to “Pop,” the chapter jumps backwards and forwards with no regard for chronological coherence. A reader seeking a straight history is left estranged.

Each subsection forms its own independent narrative. Already we can see Jencks presents an idiosyncratic “history.” Two markers in “Pop – Non Pop” that delineate this object: following his supervisor Banham, Jencks insists historians should write the “close history” of a period—one that encompasses “the microscopic scale of creative intention where choice and motivation become comprehensible”;¹³ and, as a more detailed methodological pointer, Jenck—again referencing Banham—further requires historians “adopt a narrative method which can follow the development (controversy) at each stage.”¹⁴ But as we shall see Jencks’s historiographic practice is no mere extension of Banham’s “close history.” To expand, we must turn to “Non Pop” and “Pop.”

13. Jencks, “Modern Architecture,” 171.

14. Jencks, “Modern Architecture,” 171.

Spirit – Non Spirit

Jencks commences the subsection “Non-Pop” with a description of the “mood” prevailing in England after World War Two.¹⁵ The term “mood” tempts associations with conventional architectural history’s assumption of the zeitgeist as elaborated by Heinrich Wölfflin, Paul Frankl, Sigfried Giedion, and so on;¹⁶ and hints at a diachronic study, assessing longitudinal changes, realized from period to period. The picture is embellished by Jencks with the aesthetic of “townscape sketches” and the caricaturish quaint “cosiness” of the “People’s Detailing”: “pitched roofs, brickly

15. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 242.

16. Andrew Leach, *What is Architectural History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010): 35.

17. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 245. Inverted commas around “People’s Detailing” in original.

18. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 243.

19. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 271.

20. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 270.

21. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 270-71.

materials, tacky-tacky, cute lattice-work, little nooks and crannies, picturesque profiles all snuggled within a cardboard-like rectitude.”¹⁷ If we avoid the lure of this romantic description, Non-Pop is positioned through opposition, “under the basic dichotomy ‘Art or Social Service’ ... [:] one thing or the other.”¹⁸ Definition occurs here not through essence, but through difference. Political alternatives are placed next to each other, in conflict. The London City Council architects department housing developments were decidedly not bold avant-garde architectural statements. Non-Pop is definitive: it is socially responsible architecture; and it is non-art.

In the subsection “Pop” Jencks describes a very different psychological disposition: not a “mood,” but a “sensibility”—or, tellingly, an “anti-sensibility,” recognized by some authorities as “infantile, barbaric, [and] regressive.”¹⁹ It is produced from a “radical levelling of distinctions” and an “insistence on the possibility of anything.”²⁰ If here we avoid the lure of this decidedly unromantic, iconoclastic description, the key to the subsection—and here we can draw on Jencks’s loose representation of Saussure, stated above—is, “[i]n short, whatever happens in cultural history could be different; ... and since the connections between form and content are largely arbitrary, they can be changed at any point.”²¹ Pop is loosely defined as “outside” and “other”—conceivably “anything” within the kaleidoscope of culture—and only gains definition with respect to the conservative status quo, to which it sits in “anti”-pathy. As a physical reality, this relativity is perhaps best shown through one of Jencks’s early examples, Alison and Peter Smithson’s House of the Future; but most Pop architecture, like Archigram’s Walking City, remains purely conceptual. We can say, then, that Pop is socially irresponsible architecture, or art.

In these non-contiguous sections, “Non-Pop” and “Pop” are established in ideological opposition. The former, with its dichotomous framework of black-or-white, clashes with the latter, with its flattened framework, and its vivid-colour continuum. The two situations, based on two opposing psychic states—“moods” or “sensibilities”—are in an inverse relationship. Non-Pop and Pop, however, share one characteristic: they are both consciously framed on ideals. In other words, the two are underpinned with theory; and, leaving the subsection “Non Pop – Pop” until a little later, it is towards Jencks’s sign-based theory that we now proceed.



Meaning – Non Meaning

“Semiology and Architecture” is chapter one of *Meaning in Architecture*, the volume Jencks edited with Baird. Both this book and Jencks’s PhD dissertation were finalized and published around 1970; and as Jencks’s first serious involvement with semiology dates back to his co-editorial role for the *Arena* special issue “Meaning in Architecture,” it seems safe to characterize these two interests as being concurrent. “Semiology and Architecture” sees Jencks deliver two critical aspects of his theoretical framework: the principles of his semiological understanding, and a characterization of the avant-garde under these semiological premises. These factors loom as important building blocks to Jencks’s intellectual system.

Under the first heading of “Semiology and Architecture”—“Meaning, Inevitable Yet Denied”—Jencks presents his basic position. After recounting an anecdote involving a cathedral spire, Jencks comes to a sharp point. Potentially “the most fundamental idea of semiology and meaning in architecture” is that “the whole environment, including language, is always in [an] ambiguous state of limbo—somewhere between life and death.” He adds, axiomatically: “[e]very dead form that one can perceive is a sign waiting to be resuscitated.”²²

After presenting this “fundamental idea”, Jencks provides the two tenets that ground his essay, and underlie his semiological outlook: “(1) that every act, object and statement that man [*sic*] perceives is meaningful (even ‘nothing’) and (2) that the frontiers of meaning are always, momentarily, in a state of collapse and paradox.”²³ The former is, for Jencks, the very “justification for semiology”:²⁴ the condition of “meaningfulness” is inescapable, so we might as well try to conceptualize its functions. The latter informs the constructs with which one might conceptualize the world of signs, but also allows Jencks to polemically assert that “avant-garde ideas, from a semiological ... viewpoint, are demonstrably false.”²⁵

These assertions allow Jencks not only to label the falseness of previous avant-garde ideas, but also to depict the futility of all modern avant-garde positions. Jencks suggests the modern avant-garde serially engaged in “conscious denial[s] of connotations”: provoked by “the glib reduction of their work,” they have repeatedly attempted to undermine such practices by “insist[ing] on the intractability of the new and confusing.”²⁶ Most prominently for

22. Jencks, “Semiology & Architecture,” 11. The idea of a limited world of dead forms is relevant to Jencks’s use of Lévi-Strauss’s conception of ‘bricolage’, the focus of *Adhocism*. An analysis of this work assessed against the frameworks of Lévi-Strauss will be included in the dissertation.

23. Jencks, “Semiology & Architecture,” 13. Jencks’s fixation with “paradox”—a concept to which he refers on many occasions—is notable; and may have significant dependence on the “Cretan Liar Paradox,” of which, *op. cit.*, he gives a concise if overly-simplistic definition: “If the statement is true, then it is false; if false then true.”

24. Jencks, “Semiology & Architecture,” 13.

25. Jencks, “Semiology & Architecture,” 13.

Jencks's modern avant-garde architects, this insistence took the form of a rejection of the production of meaning, which Jencks, again, labels "paradoxical": "[i]n their denial of meaning, they create it."²⁷ For Jencks, semiology exposes the "avant-garde" as within the architectural system, never outside or ahead of it.

26. Jencks, "Semiology & Architecture," 11-12.

Ideal – Non Ideal

Conveniently for our purposes here, Jencks specifically draws the Pop movement into his "Semiology and Architecture" pairing. The chapter uses Pop to elaborate the process of change with relation to form and content. Jencks claims "Pop theorists and artists" effected an "inversion", "calling all the previous detritus and trivia significant and vice versa":²⁸ American cars, science fiction films and comics were now relevant; garden cities, new towns and social realism were not. This process of resignification—which, for Jencks, occurs "[i]n any new movement"—is accompanied by a cultural process: "the pre-existing relations have to be destroyed and also, by definition, the older generation annoyed (even repulsed)."²⁹ The change, as described, is not the development into a new positive paradigm, but the overturning of the existing one: not evolution, but revolution. Jencks's Pop protagonists in "Semiology and Architecture" invert form–content relations and, concomitantly, social–system relations. Previously significant figures become "non-significant".

27. Jencks, "Semiology & Architecture," 12.

28. Jencks, "Semiology & Architecture," 16.

29. Jencks, "Semiology & Architecture," 16; 16.

30. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 239. The chapter's introduction in the dissertation gives an extended explanation for this "Pop"-based process of deconstruction and reconstruction, referencing Gombrich's conception of thresholds, as detailed in "Meditations on a Hobby Horse or the Roots of Artistic Form" (1963). As argued here, Jencks goes beyond this idea.

31. Jencks, "Modern Architecture," 171.

32. Jencks, "Modern Architecture," 170.

This formulation is supported by the introduction of "Pop – Non Pop". Here Jencks writes of the "provocations" of shock tactics—like nudity, as illustrated by Banham and François Dallegret in their Un-house of 1965—that have been used in recent British architecture in order "to break down the accepted conventions and generate change."³⁰ Further on, when extending the subject of change into the practical architectural realm, Jencks claims "when the Archigram group started to design housing that resembled cars and oil refineries, then all the other designers who had been at the front of battle"—i.e., the New Brutalists — "were forced to occupy another position, either more technically sophisticated or more relaxed and private"³¹—such as St. Hilda's College, Oxford.

Jencks presents architectural culture as an oscillating wave, a "continual march from one position to another as the new forms are acquired, understood and finally used up."³² A connection to Banham's theorization of "expendability" is evident here; but the



destruction is not limited to form: Jencks describes the recent British architecture scene as littered with the social consequences of friendly fire, arising from the volatile and “highly interactive situation in which one *parti-pris* may be exchanged for its reverse.”³³ Jencks’s key example is Alison and Peter Smithson’s transition “from Pop to Non Pop”:³⁴ Banham lamented the Smithsons’ lack of fidelity to the “ethic” of New Brutalism; Jencks merely notes their shifting place within the inevitable-yet-denied system.

33. Jencks, “Modern Architecture,” 173.

34. Jencks, “Modern Architecture,” 173.

Thus far, “Non Pop” and “Pop” combine to sit uncomfortably as “history,” but in accordance with the inversion theory of “Semiology and Architecture”. This is not, however, the complete picture of “Pop – Non Pop.” Jencks’s historiographic account of British architecture does not simply describe a succession of opposites, or imply an oscillation between two opposing form–content and social-system relations. Jencks’s epistemological interaction with historiography and postwar Britain is complicated with the inclusion of a third category: not “Non-Pop” or “Pop,” but “Non Pop – Pop.” It is to this key subsection we now turn.

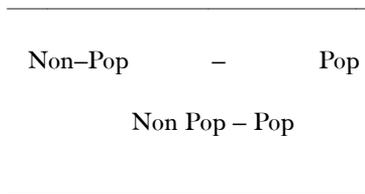


Figure 2. Relation of constituents

Inverse – Non Inverse

Jencks notionally positions “Non Pop – Pop” between his ideological opposites, “Non Pop” and “Pop.” He establishes it, however, with a critical difference: it does not rest on ideological grounds. In his description of “Non Pop – Pop,” Jencks assures us that “[t] here is ... another viable attitude to take towards process and form”—that is to say, towards social constructions *and* cultural manifestations, art *and* social service — one that is “less idealist and more casual.”³⁵ It is this attitude which, for Jencks, underpins “Non Pop – Pop.” This position within his recent British architecture is not based on any idealized doctrine or abstracted intellectual basis. Rather than developing an antagonistic stance by confronting an existing ideal with its opposite, this position is ambivalent (see fig. 2).

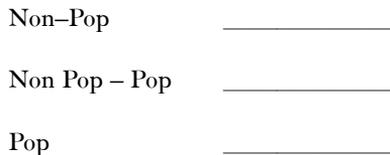
35. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 255.

“Non Pop – Pop” is not accounted for in “Semiology and Architecture.” The “extreme left” and—presumably—right flanks of Jencks’s semiological theory are outmanouevred in his history. “Non Pop – Pop” disrupts the oscillation of ideological opposites: it is non-ideological. Within this subsection, the form–content relations that are established in “Non Pop” and later opposed in “Pop” collapse. Without any significant consequence, the battlelines taken by the two opposing positions—“Non Pop” and “Pop”—can be ignored; both partis-pris avoided; both art and social service definitions bypassed. As such, “Non Pop – Pop” is ahistorical.

Though “Non–Pop,” “Non Pop – Pop” and “Pop” show a linguistic development, Jencks does not write a history that develops diachronically depicting a cultural evolution. On the contrary, one historical line cannot be extracted from the three positions. The overlapping periods are expressive of an underlying systematic ahistoricism. “Non Pop,” “Non Pop – Pop” and “Pop” are not three stages but three conditions within one stage or state, each having recognizable, conventionally-established form–content relations. Their relation is structural; the underlying temporality thus synchronous. We can abstract the situation into a diagram, removing the years, and extending the three positions to fill the extent of the period (fig. 3).

Rather than telling a chronological story—even a “close” one; or three—Jencks’s text relies on cuts made perpendicular to the timeline. The result generates a period, the account of which becomes his so-called “history.” Though unstated in his texts, Jencks’s historiography thus not only supports his semiological theory, but extends it. Rather than describing a Banhamesque progression or a procession bound by linear, time-lined inversions, Jencks avoids the diachronic and presents a synchrony.

Figure 3. “Recent British Architecture” period



Conclusion – Non Conclusion

The conclusion to the dissertation’s “Pop – Non Pop” includes Jencks’s assertion that “in spite of all the claims, there is very little change.”³⁶ This argument seems tenuous when 1950s LCC housing developments are placed next to Archigram’s Plug-in City. How can this juxtaposition of proposed opposites be seen as a stable continuity?

The underlying synchrony of “Pop – Non Pop” demands such stability. The plurality of Jencks’s British architecture chapter requires fixity. These basic characteristics lead to an epistemological shift. Linear histories such as Banham’s assume change a priori; but successive events occurring along a diachronic can only describe change, not explain it. By stacking “close history” upon “close history,” Jencks perhaps inadvertently assembles an idiosyncronic system based on a stable matrix of form–content relations. Significance does not rely on altering relations to thresholds of age and novelty, but relative value. Effectively, Jencks gives us a “static history.”

The denials of the avant-garde and “change” are symptomatic of Jencks’s avoidance of the diachronic axis. It is inevitable: as change occurs between structures or states and not within them, there can be no transition within “Pop – Non Pop.” Jencks’s static history does not allow for diachrony; neither evolution nor revolution can be revealed in its structure. In this context, Jencks’s focus on Pop architecture—the period’s extreme of unconventionality—can in fact be seen not as a challenge to architectural history, but as a subconscious reinforcement of the place of historically-determined convention—a support of diachrony.³⁷ The chapter’s structure provides the potential for recognizing “change” in other studies.

A critical point follows: “Pop – Non Pop,” though a chapter in Jencks’s *Modern Movements in Architecture*, should not in fact be considered a movement: it is, rather, a stasis. The “movements” of Jencks’s “history” cannot form in moments of revolution, through acts of simple inversion. Movements must form around the casual positions existing outside of time, positions evolutionary within a broader system, visible in a longer historical trajectory.³⁸

36. Jencks, *Modern Movements*, 298; Jencks, “Modern Architecture,” 220.

37. Archigram—Jencks’s most recent avant-garde—are said to be both “rooted in its plastic blow-ups, its ‘pneu-world’” and exploding “the masonry pile-ups of ‘ye olde’ monumental world” (“Modern Architecture,” 220). For Jencks, this exposes the supposedly-exceptional avant-garde: progressives proving a lack of progress. For us, it exposes structure.

38. How this synchronic “history” relates to Jencks’s diachronic “Evolutionary Tree” diagrams is complex. The “Trees” and *Architecture 2000* will be analyzed in my upcoming dissertation, with the help of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss.

Semiotics – Non Semiotics

In his dissertation version of “Pop – Non Pop,” Jencks draws on one other “recent” example from architecture culture politics. Tomás Maldonado—who, according to Jencks, “had just routed the enemy at Ulm and taken over the academy” (i.e., the Hochschule für Gestaltung) — and Bruce Archer—who “occup[ied] the Royal College of Art” (in London)—with the support of Christopher Alexander—whose rationalist intellectual apparatus “not only had its built-in moral justification . . . , but also one which could make all other positions look absurd”—re-assembled as the protagonists of a new “imperial,” moral programme, which charged the supposedly-rational establishment with “the most heinous of crimes[:] preconception.”³⁹ A new paradigm was installed; and “[s]uddenly everyone’s position was threatened from the far left as it appeared that objective design, one dream of the modern movement, was about to be realized.”⁴⁰ Rationalism was collapsing, outdone by rationalism; the former paradigm, for decades intellectually superior, was now “non-rational”.

39. Jencks, “Modern Architecture,” 185. The original uses a comma; I have changed this punctuation for emphasis.

40. Jencks, “Modern Architecture,” 185.

The epistemes that grounded this objective threat were systems theory and theories of signs – in large part, semiology, or, more accurately here, semiotics. In Jencks’s account, this ideological pivot echoes the inversion-point of “Non–Pop” to “Pop,” as taken from “Semiology and Architecture.” Following the analysis above, however, a fuller, more structural account of this—“historical”—subject would add to “Non–Semiotics” and “Semiotics” the critical third, “Non Semiotics – Semiotics.” The significance of this last position—the ambivalent and casual alternative—will be essential to my forthcoming dissertation.

