

Abstract

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Form Classification: Architect's Understanding of the New Complexity Paradigm

The objective of this study is to investigate how architects think and understand form. In particular, it examines three main questions: how do architects classify forms? Is there agreement among architects on form? Do they share the labeling of theoreticians, do they have their own vocabularies? The research adopted a survey that included photographs of buildings representing Charles Jencks' classification of postmodern architectural forms that he labelled the "New Complexity Paradigm". The paradigm is used as a system for the exploration of contemporary architectural forms. In every survey, participants were presented with nineteen photographs representing the forms Jencks used in his classification. Participants were asked to sort the photographs twice: freely and directly, this was followed by a self-administered questionnaire. The analysis of the sorted pictures, and responses to the questionnaires regarding agreement/disagreement with Jencks' classification was through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The study findings showed no agreement among participants on classifying form in free sorting while they agreed with Jencks in directed sorting. Moreover, they have the same ideas about form but they use different and synonymous vocabularies to explain it. The disagreement may be explained in terms of participants' diverse personal, social and academic backgrounds. However, a more plausible, theoretically informed, explanation suggests that the plurality of postmodern architectural forms resists a single formal classification.