

Deconstructivist architecture controversy



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Opinions about ' Deconstructivist Architecture' are controversial and often contradictory- some critics consider it as ' a purely formal exercise with little social significance and ambiguous meaning' whereas others see it as a way of locating ' the inherent dilemmas within buildings (and promoting) a serious and necessary criticism of unbridled consumer culture and media-driven hyper reality'.

In view of the debate surrounding the nature of Deconstructivist Architecture, discuss the ideas and philosophy related to it and argue in favour or against one of the opinions expressed above. Use examples as appropriate.

INTRODUCTION:

Deconstructivist architecture is a type of architecture developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Unlike any other type of architectural type, it escapes the conventional architectural pattern, breaking in that way all the rules of constructive theory. The leader of this movement was the French Philosopher Jacques Derrida, who as we shall see later, with his ideas and philosophy has much influenced other architects into accepting and applying this unpredictable type of architecture.

In this course of paper, we will make a discussion on the concept of ' deconstructive architecture' analysing at the same time its elements and background basic idea. Moreover, a historical development will be made on deconstructivism showing what are the origins of the movement. The philosophy will also be discussed behind this type of architecture and all will appear simultaneously with examples of buildings illustrating the concept of ' deconstructivist architecture'. In addition to the above, some criticism will

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be made on the subject showing that the debate surrounding the nature of this form of architecture is both controversial and contradictory. Examples and commentary will be given by architects that have given their personal opinion on the subject throughout the years.

MAIN PART:

As already mentioned above, deconstructivist architecture is a style of architecture that contradicts the conventional methods of architecture. While an architect would dream of pure form, by using geometric shapes as cylinders, spheres, cones etc. avoiding instability and disorder, deconstructivist architecture supports the exact opposite. This type of architecture marks a different sensibility, one in which this stability and uniformity is disturbed. And it is exactly this ability to disturb our thinking that makes these projects deconstructive.

The history and development:

Deconstructivist architecture has initially had two main facets-modernism and postmodernism. While those two schools have ruled almost all of the forms of architectural styles, deconstructivist architecture opposed to their rationality. The journal *Oppositions* (published 1973-84) in which postmodernist architects and deconstructivist architects published their theories alongside each other, has been the decisive separation between the two movements. While postmodernism followed the historical references of modernism, deconstructivism has gone the other way- rejecting its acceptance and idea of ornament as an after-thought or decoration.

Deconstructivism has also been influenced by the Russian Constructivism and Futurist movements of the early 20th century. Both tendencies were

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concerned with the radical simplicity of geometric forms, all expressed in graphics, sculpture and architecture. However, Constructivism has followed the ornamentation of building, whereas Deconstructivism refuted it. Maybe that is why this style of architecture is called 'deconstructivist'; because while it draws from Constructivism, it radically deviates from it. Some Russian artists from which Deconstructivism has been inspired, include Naum Gabo, Kazimir Malevich and Alexander Rodchenko.

The ideas and philosophy:

Deconstructivist architecture is characterised by ideas of fragmentation, and manipulation of a structure's surface or skin. It refers mainly to the architectural language being displaced and distorted with forms that are often set within conflicting geometries. Usually the building would be designed in parts or pieces in a weird manner with no attention or logic to be given to architecture norms. It would reflect pieces joined together to form unrelated abstract forms. Generally, the finished visual of the projects that illustrates the deconstructive styles, is characterized by a stimulating unpredictability and a controlled chaos.

The whole philosophy of deconstructivist architecture was created by Jaques Derrida's ideas influencing many later architects. Peter Eisenman and Derrida himself were concerned with the 'metaphysics of presence' and this can be said to be the main subject of deconstructivist architecture philosophy in architecture theory. One of the most important events in the history of Deconstructivism includes the collaboration between the two Eisenman and Derrida on the project of the Parc de la Villette competition, 1. Parc de la Villette, Paris, 1982-1998 documented in Chora I Works; and the

selected final project by Bernard Tschumi. Other seminal events include the 1988 Museum of Modern Art Deconstructivist architecture exhibition, organised by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley in New York, which crystalized the movement, and brought fame and recognition to its practitioners.

2. Frank Gehry's own Santa Monica residence, 1978

The idea is that architecture is a language capable of communicating meaning and of receiving treatments by methods of linguistic philosophy. The philosophy examines the nature of reality and the relationship between the matter and the mind. The individual is seen as a composite of linguistic and social sources and can therefore be 'constructed'. The dialectic of absence or presence is a part of the elements to be found and as Derrida notes, is to be found both in construction and deconstruction. According to him, any architectural deconstruction requires for a strongly-established conventional expectation to play flexibly against. Just as a building can be constructed by using the conventional rules of architectures, so a functional building can be built by using non-conventional methods of deconstruction. One example of Deconstructivist Architecture is the design of Frank Gehry's own Santa Monica residence. Beginning with an ordinary house in an ordinary neighbourhood, he changed its massing, spatial envelopes, planes and other expectations in a playful subversion.

3. Vitra Design Museum in Weil-am-Rhein, 1989

There have been many other examples of buildings illustrating the type of deconstructivist architecture over the years. Some of these would include the Turning Tosco in Malmo and the Vitra Design Museum in Weil-am-Rhein by Frank Gehry. Furthermore, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain and

the Mit's Stata Centre are some of the many buildings that were influenced and made from the deconstructivist architecture style.

It appears from the examples and analysis above, that deconstructivist architecture has established a different mode and type of architecture. This has been criticised both with good and bad commentary. The opinions around this matter are controversial and contradictory.

Controversial and contradictory opinions:

Some critics evaluate this type of architecture as a purely formal exercise with little social significance with ambiguous meaning. Certain architects such as Charles Jencks the famous American theorist, architect and designer, claim Deconstructivism as a new paradigm, whereas others questioned the wisdom behind this type of architecture and the impact it might have on future generations of architects and the built environment. It has been described as fundamentally destructive, because of its rejection of all architectural rules, and its lack to provide clear values as replacements of those.

4. Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, 1997

Moreover, Deconstructivist Architecture has been seen as an intentional aggression on human senses, using certain mechanisms in order to express discomfort and anxiety. More specifically, Nikos Salingaros, calls the Derrida philosophy a 'virus', that invades the design thinking in order to construct destroyed forms. He further claims that it is an attack on logic, which does not produce logical statements. According to his views, what deconstructivist architecture itself is; meaning the dismantling of structures, traditional

beliefs, logical statements and observations, it can easily resemble to the way in which a virus survives and proliferates. This occurs especially where deconstructivists insist on arguing that they are merely analysing and commenting on text. In infecting contemporary architecture, this virus attacks a form's internal organisation and coherence, leaving forms embodying disorganized complexity. One example of a building with which he condemns the philosophy and idea of deconstructivist architecture is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain by Frank Gehry. In his opinion, this vanguard style represents an unnatural imposition of free-flowing ribbon forms sheathed in a continuous, shiny metal skin. It also eliminates all components that would otherwise lead to coherence.

In general, architecture is everything Derrida rejects: beauty, consistency, coherence, functionality etc. in reality, deconstructivist Architecture rejects the reason for which architecture itself exist; for the expression of human needs. And therefore, an architecture that creates disorder, as in the case of Constructivist Architecture; is 'no longer' architecture.

In addition to the above, Kenneth Frampton, describes deconstructivist architecture as 'elitist and detached'. In his view this is justified by the self-alienation of an avant-garde without due cause. While Constructivism intended a synthesis, with the creation of a new architecture, Deconstructivist Architecture's anti-thesis, derives from the acceptance that global modernisation is pushing those norms beyond the barriers. The two aspects of critical theory are found in deconstructivist architecture; that is analysis and urgency. A building that illustrates this is the Wexner Center for the Arts, by Peter Eisenman. There is the tendency in Deconstructivism to <https://assignbuster.com/deconstructivist-architecture-controversy/>

set aesthetic issues in the foreground as of much importance. Huge buildings with extravagant materials and impressive colours would be just some of the characteristics. One building showing the Guggenheim Museum mentioned above. However, if that is made only for elite, and since such buildings are quite expensive to be built, it may increase the level of complexity while it will only attempt to reconcile modern architecture with local differences.

5. Wexner Center, Ohio State University, Columbus, , 1989

Moreover, there are those that argue that architecture is not a language capable of communicating.

However, there are those who believe that deconstructivist architecture is innovative and still has things to offer to architecture. It is however often misled. There is the presumption that such an architecture style is a demolition or a dissimulation. Maybe that happens because people often relate the taking apart of a structure to be deconstruction right away. However things are not like that. Deconstructive architecture on the contrary, gains all its force by challenging the values of stability, harmony and unity, and unlike other forms of architecture, proposing for a different view of structure; a structure in which flaws are intrinsic. Such flaws cannot be removed without firstly being destroyed, and therefore they are structural. For this reason, the deconstructivist architect simply locates the inherent dilemmas within buildings and promotes a serious and necessary criticism of unbridled consumer culture and media-driven hyper reality'. He is not a person that destroys or dismantles buildings; what he actually does is to examine deeply the pure forms of the architectural tradition and

examine the consequences and reactions where such forms are repressed. In taking those results, he creates something new yet structural.

For this reason deconstructivist architecture may not appear as bad as it is made. It is not always bad to try and experience and create something new by altering certain things in a building; this does not necessarily mean that a building cannot be structural or functional. This fragmentation and discontinuity for example of Frank Gehry could

Moreover, Deconstruction can be seen as a laughing matter. It is always ironic, playful, humorous and irrelevant about itself, a betrayal of the non-faith. This liberating dissection is what makes it so different from the existing constructions and orthodoxies. As Nietzsche puts it in the canonic Deconstructionist text, Thus Spake Zarathustra: ' He who must be a creator in good and evil- verily, he must first be a destroyer, and break values into pieces.' It can be seen as an essential part of the comic tradition where for a long period now unfinished buildings or rough materials are used.

Furthermore, Derrida in his interview, states that the impression deconstruction was given to the public by the media as an association with the ' end of philosophy' is misleading. The media has given the idea that deconstruction is destructive towards texts and traditions, as well as to philosophical heritage. He comments on this idea given, arguing that to create an institution, it must to some extent break with the past while at the same time inaugurating something completely new. Deconstructivist architecture does not mean that we are reproducing but also try something that hasn't been done before. For this reason it has been criticised as violent,

as it has no guarantee by previous rules. While it follows the premises of the past it creates something completely new, and this is risky. However, there is no need for absolute guarantee; we ourselves should invent the rules. In his opinion, that is what destruction is made for: not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something new, and a break.

In general, Deconstructivist Architecture, attacks conventions with its codified unconventionality. One strong example could be the cubiculum of a Roman House in Boscoreale, now found in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. However, it can have further social significance than the one already stated to have. It is a matter of fact that even if unconventional, it can be useful and helpful in tracing defects of the already established norms of architecture. Moreover, as Derrida's philosophy states, it is a method through which thinking can be communicated. Through the complicated and unconventional structure of the buildings, spaces need not always be the same, but also express the different emotions and feelings people have.

CONCLUSION:

Those who truly value Deconstructivist Architecture, it is for that creativity and inventive freshness that they create new rules in architecture. On the other hand, those who doubt this approach, are those who are always sure of the negative results and the anti-social nature of the activity. It could also just be a matter of self-denial.

After all, deconstructivist architecture may appear odd to some people due to its unconventional and out-of-barriers technique and looks, but it has managed to find its own place in the world of architecture. It has also proven that it still retains social significance and recognition amongst the public. This can be illustrated by the demand of consumers to more and more ask for modern and different impressive buildings. It can also be seen by the famous buildings made by well-known architectures. However, this could not be made without the bad or good criticism. Even though, the buildings still manage to impress and attract, as except of being functional and structurally stable, they are also unique.