

ARCH 465 | Contemporary Architecture and Theory
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Report 5 | Deconstructivism

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INTRODUCTION

This report will investigate the fifth lecture of the ARCH465: Contemporary Architecture and Theory course. This lecture begins by explaining the deconstructivist approach with several courses that had an impact on the development of deconstructivist understanding such as Eisenman's Guardian House, the new artistic approach called "Abstract Expressionism", MoMA Exhibition, Malevich, and so on. It is important to note that Deconstructivism is not a style, and the projects do not share an aesthetic; deconstructivism is only a way of working. Although there are a lot

of definitions of deconstructivism, one common property for all of them would be that this is a movement that the de-construction that comes from the form itself, not by outer damage. Wigley's (1988) writing states the following:

"Its disturbance does not result from external violence. It is not fracturing, slicing, fragmentation, or piercing. To disturb a form from the outside in these ways is not to threaten that form, only to damage it."
(p. 16)

The lecture then proceeded with the writings of Tallack, Haddad, and Wigley, and their words on

Deconstructivism. One of the most important parts of the lecture was the exhibition called “Deconstructivist Architecture” at MoMA on the 23rd of June 1988, and its impact on this movement. The lecture moves on to the examples of this movement from different perspectives such as Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, and Morphosis. This report aims to evaluate the writings of the authors mentioned above and the works of architects who contributed to this movement to understand Deconstructivism from the cumulative relationship between Deconstructivism, and the movements and styles before it.

THE TRANSITION TO DECONSTRUCTIVISM:

When discussing Deconstructivism in Architecture, the prior styles and movements inevitably had an impact on how this movement molded in a particular way. The social and economical event, the paradigm shift in architects, and the cumulative history of architectural and artistic heritage led to Deconstructivism that people observe today. Therefore, three movements will be discussed in three subtopics in terms of their relations with Deconstructivism and the impacts they had.

Compare Contrast 1: Modernism:

While discussing Deconstructivism and Modernism, it would be beneficial to mention the contrasting relations

they have to further understand what has changed between them. For instance, it is observed that the high modernism of Mies, Johnson, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in the 1940s and 1960s studied functionality in the service of greater form purity. These studies impacted the deconstructivist tendencies in Tatlin, Rodchenko, and Krinskii by suppressant, and led to the establishment of continuity between Constructivism and International (mostly American) modernism that transcended a variety of political and historical contexts (Tallack, 1996, p. 73). This smooth transition is visible in the works of these architects. For instance, in some projects, there are

visible modernist functionality-expressed plans in the grid. It is visible to see this transition in Eisenman's "House" projects as he shifts his approach by re-organizing masses on his diagrammatical expressions. Additionally, it is also seen that the grid plan does not work as planned such as in Park de la Villette by Bernard Tschumi Architects, 1982 (Tallack, 1996, p. 73). In Tschumi's Park de la Villette, the grid that was meant to have a modernist functionality lacks this emphasis since each point and intersection on this grid has a different concept of functionality, leaving the grid not as consistent and easier to understand as modern architecture. Lastly, with its Chippendale

pediment, Johnson's AT & T skyscraper in New York (1979-84) laid aside the serious programmatic of the International Style and the demanding concept that a building's meaning might be pared down to the bare minimum. Tallack's (1996) writing mentions the following:

"To Mies' solemn pronouncement, 'Less is more', Johnson replies 'Mies is such a genius! But I grow old! And bored!'" (p. 69)

With these examples in mind, it would not be wrong to state that the shift from modernism to deconstructivism was not clear-cut; it has smooth and radical transitions from project to project.

Compare Contrast 2: Post-Modernism

While discussing Deconstructivism, it is crucial to give a reference to Post-Modernism and how this movement encouraged the freedom and flexibility Deconstructivism carries. The linkage between postmodernism and deconstructivism is inevitable. Although the connection between deconstructivist and postmodern architecture differs depending on definitions; both are fascinated by what cannot be abstracted and reduced for the sake of recognizability (Tallack, 1996, p. 70). Both deconstructivist and postmodern architecture recognize and even appreciate their role in the already built environment; they

do not reject the past or former techniques -in contrast with modernism- and accept the cumulative history of architecture. Charles Jencks, the chief publicist for postmodern architecture, cites Frank Gehry as an example of a deconstructivist architect, whose Wosk House in Beverley Hills (1982-4) criticizes one type of postmodernism (Michael Graves' Public Services building in Portland, 1979-82), only to develop another. This exemplifies the variety and similarity between these two movements. To further elaborate, James Wines' SITE group's work demonstrates the idea of instability and, with it, contrasts the distinction between deconstruction and postmodernism. The Gehry House

elicited an oddly comforting response at the Façade showroom in Houston, Texas (1974-5) with its built-in mock-destruction, with a screen of bricks (Tallack, 1996, p. 72). It is visible to see that this is a postmodernist approach to design since it does not fit the philosophy of deconstructivism - the structural outcome of an inner disturbance, not external violence that disturbs a form from the outside, slicing, and piercing-. Therefore, the inevident relationship between these two approaches to architecture is coexisting and differentiating with each other simultaneously due to their distinct understanding of disturbance.

On Russian Constructivism, planting the seeds of Deconstructivism

Deconstruction, according to Philip Johnson, is best understood as an adjectival mode and as a later step in a non-teleological procession of architectural forms with roots in Russian Constructivism (Tallack, 1996, p. 69). The unorthodox approach that Russian Constructivism founded by Tatlin envisioned the younger generation to come up with differentiating ways that a form can fracture in itself as it finds a form. Inevitably, the works of Russian Constructivism and especially the paintings of Malevich had an impact on how architects approach deconstructivism. Wigley (1988), like Johnson, regards Russian Constructivism as a "key

turning point" in which "the architectural heritage was warped so dramatically that a crack opened up through which some troubling architectural possibilities first became obvious" (p. 11). We can see the works of Malevich and constructivism in the designs of Zaha Hadid such as the inner-fragmented "Vitra Fire Station", Germany, 1991. Thus, the geometrical configurations and explorations of Russian Constructivism had a significant impact on Deconstructivism.

CONCLUSION

Up to this point, I have mentioned prior styles and movements and how they had an impact on how Deconstructivism molded in a particular way. How the paradigm shift in architects and

the cumulative history of architectural and artistic heritage led to Deconstructionism that people observe today. In this article, three movements were discussed in three subtopics. While discussing Deconstructivism and Modernism, it would be beneficial to mention the contrasting relations they have to further understand what has changed between them. For instance, it is observed that the high modernism of Mies, Johnson, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in the 1940s and 1960s studied functionality in the service of greater form purity. In Tschumi's Park de la Villette, the grid that was meant to have a modernist functionality, however, lacks this emphasis is exemplified, and showed that it would not be wrong to state that the shift from modernism to

deconstructivism was not clear-cut; it has smooth and radical transitions from project to project. In the second title, the example of James Wines' SITE group's work is mentioned to show how the project demonstrates the idea of instability and, with it, contrasts the distinction between deconstruction and postmodernism. Both deconstructivist and postmodern architecture recognize and even appreciate their role in the already built environment; they do not reject the past or former techniques -in contrast with modernism- and accept the cumulative history of architecture. In the last subtopic, the definition of deconstruction as an adjectival mode and as a later step in a non-teleological procession of architectural forms with roots in Russian Constructivism is

discussed. It is mentioned that the works of Malevich and constructivism in the designs of Zaha Hadid such as the "Vitra Fire Station", Germany, 1991. In short, this report demonstrates how it is visible that one movement of architecture is an outcome of many forms styles, and movements the architectural heritage has faced over the years.

REFERENCES

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