

Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley: *Deconstructivist Architecture*
New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988

Architecture has always been a central cultural institution valued above all for its provision of stability and order. These qualities are seen to arise from the geometric purity of its formal composition.

The architect has always dreamed of pure form, of producing objects from which all instability and disorder have been excluded. Buildings are constructed by taking simple geometric forms ... and combining them into stable ensembles, following compositional rules which prevent any one form from conflicting with another. No form is permitted to distort another; all potential conflict is resolved. The forms contribute harmoniously to a unified whole....

... Any deviation from the structural order, or any impurity, is seen as threatening the formal values of harmony, unity, and stability, and is therefore insulated from the structure by being treated as mere ornament. Architecture is a conservative discipline that produces pure form and protects it from contamination.

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Deconstruction ... is often misunderstood as the taking apart of constructions ... On the contrary, deconstruction gains all its force by challenging the very values of harmony, unity, and stability, and proposing instead a different view of structure: the view that the flaws are intrinsic to the structure. They cannot be removed without destroying it; they are, indeed, structural.

A deconstructive architect is therefore not one who dismantles buildings, but [instead is] one who locates the inherent dilemmas within buildings ... [and who] identifies the symptoms of a repressed impurity. The impurity is drawn to the surface by a combination of gentle coaxing and violent torture: the form is interrogated.

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The modern movement attempted to purify architecture by stripping off the ornament of the classical tradition to reveal the naked purity of the functional structure beneath. Formal purity was associated with functional efficiency. But the modern movement was obsessed by an elegant aesthetic of functionalism, not by the complex dynamics of function itself. Rather than use the specific requirements of the functional program to generate the basic order of the projects, they merely manipulated the skin of pure geometric forms in a way that signified the general concept of function. By employing the machine aesthetic, they produced a functionalist style. Like the classicists, they articulated the surface of a form in a way that marked its purity. They restored the very tradition they attempted to escape, replacing the classical skin with a modern skin but not transforming the fundamental condition of the architectural object....

[Disturbance in deconstructivist architecture] does not result from an external violence. It is not a fracturing, or slicing, or fragmentation, or piercing. To disturb a form from the outside in these ways is not to threaten that form, only to damage it. The damage produces a decorative effect, an aesthetic of danger, an almost picturesque representation of peril—but not a tangible threat. Instead, deconstructivist architecture disturbs figures from within.... The internal disturbance has actually been incorporated into the internal structure, the construction. It is as if some kind of parasite has infected the form and distorted it from the inside.

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The disquiet that these buildings produce is not merely perceptual; it is not a personal response to the work, nor even a state of mind. What is being disturbed is a set of deeply entrenched cultural assumptions which underlie a certain view of architecture: assumptions about order, harmony, stability, and unity. Yet this disturbance does not derive from, or result in, some fundamental shift in culture. The disquiet is not produced by some new spirit of the age; it is not that an unsettled world produces an unsettled architecture. It is not even the personal angst of the architect; it is not a form of expressionism—the architect expresses nothing here. The architect only makes it possible for the tradition to go wrong, to deform itself. The nightmare of deconstructivist architecture inhabits the unconscious of pure form rather than the unconscious of the architect. The architect merely countermands traditional formal inhibitions in order to release the suppressed alien.