



# The Emergence of Deconstruction, from Philosophy to Architecture

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**Abstract:** *The first movements of deconstruction were in America which established through the literary criticism of new strategies for interpreting literary texts. Theorists and thinkers believe that Jacques Derrida (French philosopher, born in Algeria) on a wide range had a significant impact on the fields of philosophy, architecture, art and music and These wide impacts have caused him (Derrida) to be the integral part of deconstruction theory and any study in these areas requires the “recognition of the of his thinking and perspective”. These theories introduced in the late 1980s, by the American architect Peter Eisenman famous (American architect and theorist) in the form of a style of architecture to the world. The decline of modern architecture of the twentieth century provided an underlying for this style to find a prominent place and within a short time changed the Western contemporary architecture and created fundamental changes in its space. Therefore the present article by the use of bibliotheca and descriptive- analytic methods expresses the views of architects and theoreticians in this field and also aims to investigate the process of deconstruction emergence, its roots and the factors affecting it. Finally, it proposes suggestions for future researches on the impact of deconstruction on architecture of countries, especially Iran.*

**Keywords:** *Deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, Philosophy, Architecture, Post-Structuralism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

If we want to review the contemporary history briefly from late 19th to the late 20th century, we can say that from the time that attention has been paid to the human being and his social situation by scholars this area has been changed constantly. In other words, any area of attention was the same as a door opened to a method, space and new territory in understanding how anthropological researches should be done on it. In the late twentieth century following the human-centered philosophical movements a school with the aim of criticizing structuralist philosophy has been emerged. French philosopher Jacques Derrida was the mastermind of this school. Through phenomenology Derrida approached structuralism and deconstruction and by his ideas about language, knowledge, meaning and specially the nature of the text has attracted the attention of scholars whose aim is to investigate the relations. He was the student of structuralism and post-structuralism thoughts of Michele Fokou and criticized his thoughts mainly from semiotic approach and gained the attention of literary criticism academic circles and postmodern society. Derrida in his works reduced the gap between philosophy and literature and became a powerful literary critic. His theories had a great impact on postmodern philosophy and literary criticism which made a mass movement that through structuralist critique of philosophy was able to attract thinkers and theorists and therefore provides a new concept of humanism.

## 2. Statement of Problem

Since the architectural principles of deconstruction have directly been extracted from philosophy, the need for better understanding of this style of architecture is to be aware of the underling factors which can form the Derrida's thought. To get a better understanding of architectural deconstruction first of all it is necessary to explain the philosophy of deconstruction and identify its purposes in a general comparison with its theories. On the other hand we can say that deconstruction like modernism and postmodernism is a production of

ideology and accordingly raises its architecture. But it is important to limit the architecture to mere aesthetic approach. It should be noted that functional and structural issues of modern architecture and paying attention to outward and decorative aspects in post-modern architecture along with the theories of constructivism reduces architecture to an entity less than its generality. Each of these cases as a matter can be effective in designing and organizing space, but one cannot summarize the nature of the architecture and the human-social needs in this view.

### **3. Objectives of the study**

In order to explain the purposes of this study it can be said that the main objective is on the formation of deconstruction style in other words in this study we want to follow the formation of an architectural style that in recent decades has shaped the largest and most diverse architectures and always has been one of the main approaches in responding to the daily issues especially attractiveness and being at the present time. This process has been emerged by investigating the evaluations in critical approaches toward philosophies and principles which governing the modern and postmodern era of eighties and nineties and shaped itself in the form of a series of critical theories and principles.

### **4. Review of Literature**

The written history about post-structuralism architecture dates back to an article entitled “The median border” by Peter Eisenman in the eighties. A book entitled “deconstruction architecture deconstructarctium architecture” by Catherine Cook, Mark Weigel also has been published that was the result of dialogue between two architects named Peter Eisenman and Charles Jencks. “According to Eisenman, the value of Hegel’s argument regarding thesis, anti-thesis and San-thesis is not applicable in today’s world. Post-modern philosophers such as Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger and Derrida have changed our attitude and relationship towards the world [4]. “Eisenman believes that modernists claim that utopia should be searched in the future, Post-modernists, also followed this utopia in the past, but this utopia in modern architecture should be found in today’s condition. In this regard he uses a word named Presentness which means “Actuality” and believes that architecture at any time and place must be Actual and depends on the present time and place”[4].

### **5. Research Questions**

Derrida's theories in various fields including music, art, literature and architecture, created exquisite styles that are in need of more research and pose questions that responding to them will help the understanding of the formation of a style from philosophy and consequently architecture:

- 1- The post-structuralism ideas derived from Derrida were in which social and intellectual fields?
- 2- How principles and theories of deconstruction philosophy entered to the field of architecture?

### **6. Criticizing structuralism and emergence of deconstruction ideas**

Structuralism is the intellectual religion in the second half of the twentieth century which emerged in the realm of philosophy and humanities and was the source of several impacts. This religion was developed in the 1950s mainly in France and until two decades gained credit among researchers and academics in Europe and the U.S.A. and was helpful in philosophy, anthropology, aesthetics and literary criticism and even many political researches. The opposite point of this view can be introduced as post-structuralist philosophy. Deconstruction excelled the period in which negation of the foundations was ongoing, a period in which Derrida was one of its prominent spokesmans. Derrida broke the boundaries of philosophy and literature. He is an ecumenical philosopher with a particular literary, social, political school. Jacques Derrida's philosophy ignores all the theories of his previous philosophers, from Aristotle to Plato, Marx, Hegel and Freud. Derrida's thinking layers neither were in agreement and nor were in disagreement with his colleagues. He did not glorify or endorsed them nor rejected them. Derrida through criticizing the philosophy questioned the boundaries between philosophy and literature and entered the philosophy into areas such as art, architecture, law, politics, etc. So that discussed the issues of racism, national identity, feminist activities through

philosophy. Derrida's ideas are mainly as it follows: Central denial, rejection of contrasts, the disappearance of borders, deconstructing of text, the presence of audience, the negation of meaning [5]. The Derrida's essays were the fundamental criticism of philosophy. He questioned the current theories regarding truth and knowledge; he breaks traditional notions about the method and supply and puts into question the authority of philosophy. He believes that philosophy is primarily text, hence like literature depends on style and forms of language, form of speech, metaphor and even the layout. Derrida by criticizing the philosophy questioned the boundaries between literature and philosophy [6].

### **7. Deconstructarctium Movement**

Deconstructarctium School is one of the important branches of post-modern philosophy. Deconstruction is the criticism about structuralism and modern thinking. The school of deconstruction is also called post-structuralism since most of the scholars of this school were developed in structuralism courses. They question the Post-structuralists, radical structural logicism and extravagance of structuralists. Poststructuralists believe that “the importance and dynamicity of language” should be sought in unstable meanings [4].

Derrida himself says: “deconstruction of a text means to evoke logics and contrary deductions with the text itself”. In fact, it means the development of virtual perception [4]. Derrida through criticizing the teachings of Ferdinand de Saussure provides deconstructive idea through the language. According to Saussure we have written form only to introduce and explain the manner of speech and only the “been told” forms constitute the object of linguistics as a science” [8]. In general deconstruction is a kind of text inspection and extracting its implicit and explicit meanings from the text. These interpretations can be inconsistent with each other and the purpose of the author of the text can be different. Therefore, according to deconstruction approach, what is important is the implicature meaning which reader deducts and the number of readers, and there are different implications and the reader determines the meaning of the text, not the author. There is no fixed structure in text or its interpretation. The relationship between signifier and signified, and the relationship between text and interpretation is floating [4]. “A typical sample of deconstructive reading is to challenge the binary oppositions. From the perspective of deconstruction in all two classical binaries of Western thought, one has advantage over the other and has a central ratio. Examples in this regard can include cases such as speech over the paper, presence over the absence, consistency over differences and full over the empty. Jacques Derrida states that in such cases the first pair is the original, authentic and better known one while the latter one is assumed as a secondary pair. These binary oppositions or rough hierarchies and its other forms should be deconstructed [7].

### **8. The Definition of Deconstruction**

Derrida's term has been made by adding De- to term Construction and always has emphasized on its positive sense [3]. Thus it seems that Jacques Derrida texts strangely are tied to the word deconstruction. Deconstruction is one of the commonly known terminologies which was formed out of new philosophical, cultural and artistic theories by Derrida with the strains of criticism on Saussure and structuralist semiotics in the late 1960s [2]. The term deconstruction in contemporary philosophy of the west was highly resistant against formal definitions. In another definition of deconstruction it can be said that it can be considered as a series of techniques that have been developed by Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and other theorists of this school to read texts. This technique is in turn is associated with a set of philosophical claims about language and meaning. Of course, deconstruction is used as a synonym for the expression of criticism or show lack of integrity in a position.

### **9. Decline of modern architecture and the emergence of deconstruction style**

Rarely theories and ideas can be found in the architecture that like deconstruction can face severe emotional shock and in a relatively short period face public attention. Even Jacques Derrida was shocked about the attention paid on deconstruction in architecture [8]. In stating the reasons for the decline of modern architecture the theory and text decline can be considered as the main reasons, which was related to the philosophy of the nineteenth century.

Besides that, from that time until now in all fields of science, especially humanities changes that have taken place; many theories like Einstein's relativity theory in physics, Werner Heisenberg uncertainty principle have been rejected and the philosophy of rationalism has tended toward humanism. This need was also felt in architecture, which was a fundamental change. Architecture over time has moved on a par with other sciences and updated itself as a science. The forefront of this movement and transformation was Peter Eisenman. Peter Eisenman had non-religious thinking and such thinking in modern conditions gives the impression that is completely separate from religious issues. In his article, he has criticized the modern architecture and the rules governing on it and with architectural literature and his special theories indicate

the requirement that the modern architectural structures should be changed and transformed (deconstruction style).

In 1988, a milestone in the formal acceptance of deconstruction in architecture was occurred. it was started from the gathering of architects and critics in London's Tate Gallery and later with the publication of a special issue of the Journal of architectural design or AD in this regard and subsequently formed Deconstructive architecture exhibition at New Arts Museum in New York's by Philip Johnson and based on the discussions and negotiations about the things and dedicating Deconstructivist name to the architects participating in this exhibition, was explained and stabilized [3]. Twenty years after the first publication of Jacques Derrida's philosophical books, his ideas were considered by architects and architectural critics and for a decade from the late 1980s to the late 1990s was followed with indescribable enthusiasm in the world of architecture. Deconstruction now can be considered an integral part of the theory and experiment history of architecture [2]. In 1970, a number of young architects tried to make fundamental changes in established architectural structures. Among them are the architects such as Peter Eisenman, Richard Meyer, Zaha Hadid and Bernard Tschumi. In 1988, Philip Johnson and Mark Weigel held an exhibition named deconstructive architecture. The exhibition acquainted audience with some post-modern architectural activities such as Eisenman, Hadid and Tschumi. The common feature of all these people despite their differences was in their unconventional architecture which was previously accustomed to it. That's why more than anything else deconstructive architectural is the text suspension of structuralist architecture. François Mitterrand in the years 80 and 90 started one of the largest architectural activities and allocated some projects to the architects who were thinking about deconstructed architecture some of these projects were the completion of the Louvre Museum, National Library and Bastille Opera. These activities created an architectural breakthrough in France architecture and other countries; development which was consistent with cultural and philosophical developments offered by thinkers and critics such as Derrida [2].

Deconstruction in search of places that structure is unstable in them. When the structure becomes deconstructed the center does not hold components in one place and binary oppositions arise among. This is not merely an attempt to eliminate the center, but an attempt to replace a center with another. Derrida's ideas in architecture date back to 1988. It was said that in this year an exhibition entitled deconstructivist architecture was held by the efforts of Philip Johnson in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. In this exhibition architects such as Peter Eisenman, Bernard Tschumi and Daniel Libeskind had different approaches toward the fundamentals of architecture. Based on the ideas of Derrida they believed that building is not an independent statement. But any building only in relation to its surrounding areas gains importance. Since the building because of its relationship and differences with other buildings makes sense, therefore, it cannot be experienced independent of the location that gives it form and identity. As a result, the deconstructed buildings ignore the boundaries between the spaces and enter into the dialogue with their surroundings and in another structure other than what they were display themselves. In other words, in text-based architecture architectures should always provide new reading according to the requirements of project.



Figure 2 – Picture of Vaksnr- Peter Eisenman Art Center



Figure 1 – Picture of Vaksnr- Peter Eisenman Art Center

According to Eisenman, architecture should avoid the tenacity of structural value, embedded binary oppositions like the traditional oppositions between structure and decoration, form and function, form and texture, abstraction and formation. Architecture can explore within these categories. Therefore, architectural deconstruction creates disturbance on the surface of implications and in this regard uses the strategy of differences in which meaning distinguishes its self and gets away from the expected and standardized definition. It may seem that deconstruction causes trouble in its definition and it even goes further and never wants to blurt out what is not. In fact, deconstruction will not give exact parameters, but permanently questions and develops by the means of criticism that moves [3]. Eisenman in his article named “The median

border” uses the word catachresis which means equivocal or ambiguous. The equivocal is the median border. There is no priority in bilateral or ambiguity. It is either this or that; it is neither this nor that. Eisenman in this article writes: ambiguity splits the fact and will allow seeing that what has been repressed the truth. In that time, conventional aesthetic values and beliefs of contemporary arts of west especially the visual arts as a result of the onslaught of the Dada movement has been transformed into the traditional aesthetics foundations of West and its impact has been applied on arts [1]. Tschumi also believed that “there should be something in the plans that cannot be seen at first glance and reading”. His scrupulously careful consideration revealed contradictions, ambiguities, marginal interpretations and problems. The reason is that architecture must have its mentality and time vision. Deconstruction of architecture as a universal style had a relatively short life and did not exceed more than a decade but had a significant and fundamental impact on the way of designing and interpretation of meaning in the field of architecture. What followed this style started with the theories of Deleuze and it was folding architecture.

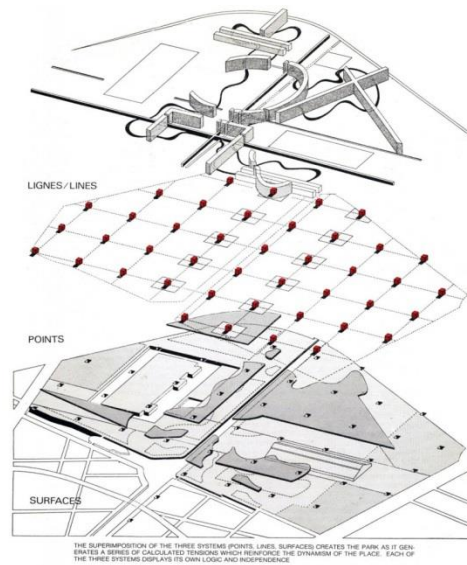


Figure 4 – perspective of Parc de la Villette- Bernard



Figure 3 - Image Parc de la Villette Park - Bernard Tschumi

## 10. Conclusion

The philosophy of deconstruction emerged with totally different and transformed views in a situation in which modern western society was in need of a new and different perspective than what have been imposed on them in the past. The philosophy of deconstruction criticized the governing principles of western society, including hierarchical system, binary oppositions and postmodern attitudes and by challenging these views has changed the aesthetic perspectives in the fields of architecture, art, painting and even music and has created styles in every field. Although the architecture derived the theoretical perspective and views of a philosophy sometimes is not consistent with the desires and needs of consumers of architecture formed. But it is necessary that architecture should be updated like the rest of sciences. Promoting such processes in which a text from the realm of theory goes into the body of architecture requires much skill and experience. Architects like Eisenman and Tschumi at time in which architecture was in need of strong modifications in the structure of the rules governing on it provided a new style which in addition to introducing new concepts such as binary oppositions and belonging to present time and etc. made architectural progress more attractive than before. According to Derrida's theory about text and polysemic approach this polysemy can be seen in architecture as well. The works of deconstruction architectures in the physical and space dimension can represent this polysemy. Therefore the visitors can have multiple perceptions by the form of a building.

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