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# Deconstructing learning spaces: applying derrida's theory in the design of higher education buildings

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**ABSTRACT**
This study aims to analyze and apply Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction in the context of higher education architectural design. The primary focus is on creating learning environments that not only support diversity in learning methods but also foster spaces that stimulate creativity and dynamic interaction among students. The research seeks to explore how deconstructivist principles can be implemented in modern learning space design, distinguishing it from more conventional modern architectural principles. The methodology includes a detailed comparative analysis between modern and deconstructivist architecture, critically assessing aspects such as design philosophy, space utilization, aesthetics, and the socio-cultural impact of both architectural approaches. Furthermore, the study employs experimental design, where various deconstructivist concepts are tested in learning space design, including through 3D modeling and digital simulations, to explore their potential in a real educational setting.The results reveal striking differences between deconstructivist and modern architectural approaches. Deconstructivist architecture tends to use asymmetrical forms, complex structures, and varied interpretations, in contrast to the focus on functionality, symmetry, and efficiency often found in modern architecture. The conclusion is that deconstructivist architecture, with its principles of challenging norms and exploring the potential of form and space, can significantly contribute to creating rich and stimulating learning environments. This approach not only enriches the aesthetic aspects of educational environments but also encourages critical thinking, innovation, and creativity among students.



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## INTRODUCTION

Conventional learning spaces on campuses often follow a more traditional design that may not support contemporary learning approaches effectively. These designs typically include rigid layouts, like rows of seats facing forward, which might not facilitate interaction or collaborative learning effectively. Transitioning to a more flexible, interactive, and responsive environment that caters to diverse learning needs can provide a richer and more impactful educational experience for students. Modern learning spaces in higher education are crucial for student comfort. A modern and adaptive design of learning spaces can

support various learning styles, encourage collaboration, and enhance student engagement. Flexible spaces and integrated technology enable more interactive and dynamic teaching and learning. Well-designed learning spaces can also improve students' mental and physical health by providing a comfortable and stimulating environment. This approach is essential to meet the needs of 21st-century education and prepare students for future challenges.

In architecture, deconstruction describes subjective reality and invites different interpretations. This theory encourages designs that challenge accepted architectural traditions such as "form follows function", exploring the opposite of these traditions. In architecture, deconstruction often involves the blending of fragmentation, asymmetric geometric forms, and the creation of dynamic spaces. It highlights the difficult absolute views in architecture and encourages the use of all senses, not just sight, when appreciating architecture. This approach assumes that the concept of learning spaces creates an environment conducive to creativity and dynamic learning.[1]. Architects attempt to understand architecture not just as a functional space, but as a rational inquiry into its meaning, which can be highly diverse. Bernard Tschumi, inspired by Derrida, is a concrete example of how architecture is understood as a language whose meaning is always ambiguous. Creativity, in the end, is an effort to continually explore the nature of architecture.[2]

Students are no longer confined to the four walls of a classroom. The process of learning in the virtual world, sometimes also utilized in some campuses, knows no formal and informal boundaries. Many websites offer quality programs to develop various student skills, but when students enter the virtual world, everything is at their fingertips, including inappropriate and dangerous sites. [3]. Furthermore, there is a recognition that higher education must continually adapt to technological and social changes. For example, the use of physical learning spaces in the future may place more emphasis on social interaction and collaboration, rather than just being a venue for knowledge dissemination. This could involve redesigning campuses to be more like dynamic hubs, where students not only attend classes but also engage in discussions and creative activities.

In contemporary architecture, Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction influences design by applying concepts like 'Trace' to genius loci, 'Logocentrism' as anti-form, 'Undecidability' in the separation of form and function, and 'Binary Opposition' and 'Iterability' in multifunctional design. Derrida, as a leading figure in the deconstructivist architectural movement, has advanced experimental and reflective approaches in architecture, proving that deconstruction goes beyond text criticism methods to shape modern architectural practice [4]. In deconstructivist architecture, four main principles from Derrida's philosophy are adapted by Michael Benedikt. "Differance" involves 'difference' in the distinction between objects and space, 'deferral' in the postponement of time and space, and 'differing' in the difference of opinions. "Hierarchical Reversal" relates to reversing or eliminating existing hierarchies. "Marginality and Centrality" examines the significance of objects and allows for the exchange of marginal and central positions. "Iterability and Meaning" focuses on the repetition and exchange of elements and meanings in architectural work, introducing flexibility in interpretation and representation. [5].

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Deconstruction emerged to liberate architecture from narrow interpretations based solely on modern architectural principles like “form follows function,” “purity of form,” “truth to materials,” and others [6]. Deconstructing architecture, said to be a significant phenomenon in design evolution since its inception, falls under the postmodern/postmodernism era. It's an architectural design approach that views architecture from a different perspective [7]. According to existing theories, architectural deconstruction can be divided into three parts: deconstruction of meaning, construction of function, and construction of form. This process occurs through the destruction of meaning/function/form, followed by reconstruction, resulting in new forms [8]. The ambiguity between architecture and deconstruction can be resolved by analogizing architecture as a text. In this approach, Derrida himself explains that deconstruction is a way of thinking, not just deconstruction. It is a method of questioning the foundations that precede every construction [9].

Derrida's thought emerged in the 1950s-1970s, a period marked by a significant transition from modern to postmodern thought and from structuralism to poststructuralism. Derrida, along with Foucault, Vattimo, and Lyotard, played a pivotal role in this shift. These philosophers attempted to deconstruct worldviews in such a way that they tended to be entirely anti-worldview. The types of worldviews they sought to dismantle include self, God, purpose, meaning, truth, the real world, etc [10]. According to Derrida, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not static but is actually flexible and can be 'deferred' to create different or new relationships. This concept is known as 'differance'. The essence of 'differance' is the understanding that truth can always be deferred or delayed, implying that absolute truth essentially does not exist. Derrida argued that what we can find and understand is not the essence of truth itself, but only traces or indications of that truth [11]. This study aims to analyze and apply Derrida's concept of deconstruction in the architectural design of higher education, focusing on creating a learning environment that supports diverse learning methods and comparing it with modern architecture.

## METHOD

### Qualitative Method with a Comparative Analysis Approach

To highlight the differences between modern architecture and deconstruction, a comparative analysis is used that assesses both architectural styles based on various criteria such as design philosophy, approach to space and materials, as well as social and cultural implications. Comparative analysis is a study that determines whether a phenomenon is similar or different by comparing existing data, such as comparative morphological analysis, comparative historical analysis, and comparative cultural analysis [12].

### Experimental Design

In the context of designing learning spaces with the concept of deconstruction architecture, this method involves a creative and experimental process in planning. This includes sketching, 3D modeling, or digital simulations to explore how deconstruction principles can be applied in the context of learning spaces. In architectural research, experimental design models are an essential tool that allows architects to understand

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cause-and-effect relationships in their products. This is a crucial part of the experimental research methodology, providing a framework for anticipating the outcomes of design implementation in reality. Therefore, it is vital for prediction and in-depth understanding of design applications in architectural practice [13].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis between modern architecture and Derrida's deconstructivist architecture provides deep insights into two vastly different schools of thought in the world of architecture. While modern architecture is recognized for its functional, rational, and often minimalist approach, deconstructivist architecture, inspired by Derrida's philosophy, challenges these conventions with nonlinear form exploration and complex structures.

In this analysis, we will explore the fundamental differences between these two styles in terms of design philosophy, approach to form and function, interaction with context and environment, as well as their social and cultural implications. By comparing these two streams, we can understand how architecture reflects not only functional needs but also broader philosophies and cultural values, demonstrating how architectural practice continues to evolve and adapt to changing social and intellectual contexts.

**Table 1**. Comparison of Modern and Deconstructivist Architecture
(Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2023)

| Aspects | Modern Architecture | Deconstructivist Architecture Derrida |
|---|---|---|
| Design Philosophy | Based On "Form Follows Function" With A Focus On Clarity, Functionality, And Efficiency. | Challenges Conventional Structures And Meanings, Often Resulting In Ambiguous Forms And Diverse Interpretations. |
| Form And Aesthetics | Clean, Geometric, Often Symmetrical, Using Materials Like Glass, Steel, And Concrete.. | Asymmetrical, Complex, Often Fragmented, Experimental In The Use Of Materials And Forms. |
| Approach To Space And Structure | Organized And Logical, Using Space Efficiently | Fluid And Dynamic, Creating Uncertainty In Structure And Function |
| Relationship With Context And Environment | Integrates With Its Surroundings, Using Principles Of Harmony And Simplicity. | Provocative Towards Context, Often Creating Contrast Or Dialogue With The Environment |
| Social And Cultural Influence | Focuses On Universality, Seeking Solutions That Can Be Widely Applied | Reflects Diversity Of Thought And Context, Subjective And Personal. |

The above table comparing modern architecture with Derrida's deconstructivist architecture reveals significantly different approaches in these two architectural streams.

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Modern architecture, with its focus on functionality and structural clarity, reflects a paradigm where the form of a building is determined by its function or purpose. This translates to clean, geometric, and often symmetrical designs, creating an orderly and organized appearance. In modern architecture, the relationship between architectural elements tends to be logical and practical, with the use of materials being efficient and decisive. Simplicity and universality are key, aiming to create architectural solutions that are widely applicable and acceptable across various social and cultural contexts.

Modern architecture represents a development stage in architecture where space becomes the primary object of manipulation. While previous eras placed more emphasis on facade, decoration, and other physical qualities, the modern architecture era prioritizes non-physical qualities. This shift signifies a move towards a more abstract and conceptually driven approach to architecture, where the focus is on creating spaces that are not just physically appealing but also functionally effective and universally relevant [14]. Conversely, Derrida's deconstructivist architecture emphasizes the exploration of form, ambiguity, and the dynamics of space, often resulting in designs that are more provocative and subjective. Rooted in Derrida's philosophical theories, deconstructivist architecture challenges traditional conventions of structure and meaning. Building forms in deconstructivist architecture are often asymmetrical, complex, and fragmented, creating an unconventional impression that draws attention. This approach reflects a desire to explore deeper and more diverse meanings of space and structure, often resulting in designs that provoke dialogue and reflection.

In deconstructivist architecture, the relationship with context and the environment is not always harmonious or integrative; instead, these designs can be provocative, challenging assumptions and eliciting questions. The social and cultural aspects of deconstructivist architecture are more personalized, often reflecting the diversity of thought and the uniqueness of a specific context. Deconstruction as a critical endeavor or method is not just about dismantling theoretical structures or working on elements, structure, infrastructure, and context. More so, it involves the power that plays into this concept: stripping its properties completely, tracing its origins and development, seeking relationships with other concepts, and considering it as a possibility. The possibility of location and its influence on everything. This approach to architecture goes beyond mere physical form; it delves into the philosophical and conceptual realms, challenging the viewer to engage with the structure in a deeper, more intellectual way. Deconstructivist architecture, therefore, is not just about creating a physical space but also about creating a space of thought and exploration, where the architecture itself becomes a medium for questioning and understanding the world [15].

## Experimental Design

In the context of deconstructivist architecture adopting the principles of Jacques Derrida's philosophy, here's a brief explanation of the principle of Differance:

### Difference and Deferral

Concept: Derrida's concept of differance highlights the ideas of difference and deferral in language, meaning, and structure. It underscores that meaning is always in flux and cannot be understood as fixed or final. Differance plays on the dual meaning of the

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French word "différer" which means both to differ and to defer. This concept suggests that meaning is not only derived from the differences between words (or elements) but also from the temporal deferral, indicating that understanding and interpretation are always evolving.

Application in Architecture: In deconstructivist architecture, the principle of differance is reflected in designs that create ambiguity, variation, and multiple interpretations. Building structures under this concept might invite questions about their meaning and function. The design often breaks away from traditional architectural forms, challenging the viewer to reconsider their understanding of space and structure. The idea is to move away from the notion of a building as a static entity with a single, fixed purpose and towards a more fluid conception where the form, function, and meaning of a building are open to interpretation and change over time. This approach can lead to innovative and thought-provoking architectural solutions that engage the observer in a continuous process of interpretation and re-interpretation.


**Image 1.** Illustration of the principle of differance in deconstructivist architecture.

Illustrate an interior design that reflects Derrida's concept of differance in deconstructivist architecture, focusing on a space within a higher education building. The design should depict ambiguity, difference, and multiple interpretations, challenging traditional views of form and function in an educational setting. The design is unique for exploring ambiguity, difference, and double interpretation, challenging traditional views about form and function in an educational environment. This design not only reflects aesthetics but also a deep philosophy about how space and form can influence our perception and understanding. In this design, every architectural element - from room layout to material choice and lighting - is selected and placed in a way that provokes questions and interpretations.

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The spaces are created non-linearly and asymmetrically, challenging traditional concepts of harmony and balance in architecture. The use of color, texture, and light focuses on creating surprising and thought-provoking effects that encourage space users to question and explore their surroundings. Furthermore, this model illustrates how the principle of differentiation can be translated into the physical context of higher education, where certain standards and norms tend to be followed. With this approach, the design becomes not just an aesthetic object but also a critical and educational tool that invites reflection and dialogue. It creates a learning environment that is not only functional but also intellectually stimulating and reflects the values of a deconstructivist approach to education and architecture."

**Hierarchical Reversal**

Concept: Hierarchical Reversal, a key aspect of Derrida's deconstructivist philosophy, involves challenging and reinterpreting the established hierarchical structures in architectural design. This concept encourages architects to question the traditional order and dominance of certain elements or spaces over others. It's about subverting the usual priorities and relationships within a building's design, thereby creating an architecture that fosters inclusivity and diverse perspectives.

**Application in Architecture:**

1. Inverting Spatial Priorities: This application involves reimagining the significance of different spaces within a building. For instance, areas typically considered secondary, like corridors or utility rooms, could be given prominence or a unique design treatment, thus challenging their conventional roles.
2. Redefining Form and Function Relationships: In a hierarchical reversal, the relationship between form and function is rethought. Forms that are traditionally seen as purely functional might be given aesthetic prominence, and vice versa, thus blurring the lines between utility and aesthetics.
3. Material and Structural Innovation: Utilizing materials and structural elements in unconventional ways to challenge their traditional hierarchical roles. For example, using a material typically reserved for finishes as a primary structural component.
4. Encouraging User Interaction and Interpretation: Designing spaces that encourage users to interact with the architecture in unconventional ways, thereby facilitating a variety of experiences and interpretations. This might involve creating multi-functional spaces that can be used and interpreted differently by different users.
5. Integrating Environment and Context: Considering the building's context and environment in a non-traditional manner, possibly by contrasting the building with its surroundings instead of attempting to blend in, thus creating a dialogue between the structure and its locale.

Through these applications, Hierarchical Reversal in architecture aims to create spaces that are thought-provoking and inclusive, challenging the conventional understanding of architectural design and encouraging a more dynamic interaction between the space, its users, and its context.

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**Image 2.** Illustration of the principle of Hierarchical Reversal in deconstructivist architecture

The image above represents an interior design that clearly illustrates the concept of hierarchical reversal in the field of deconstructivist architecture. This model is specially designed and tailored for use in a university building. With its innovative approach, the design boldly challenges and critiques the long-standing hierarchical structures in traditional design, offering a new and fresh perspective. The design strives in each of its elements to foreground the values of inclusion and openness that are so crucial in today's educational environment. This is achieved through the efficient use of space, where communication and collaboration among users can occur in a more dynamic and flexible manner. Each design element is intentionally aimed at promoting values of inclusion and openness, important for creating a conducive and modern educational environment. This is achieved through efficient and dynamic utilization of space, enabling more interactive and flexible communication and collaboration among users. The design employs elements such as innovative lighting, versatile furniture, and engaging visual components to activate the space and encourage active participation from its users.

**Marginality**

The concept of Marginality in the context of Derrida's deconstructivist philosophy and its application in architecture refers to the idea of challenging and re-evaluating the importance of elements, spaces, or ideas that are typically considered marginal or peripheral. It's about bringing attention to what is often overlooked or undervalued, thereby questioning the established order and conventional priorities in architecture. Marginality in this sense is not just about physical location but also about conceptual and perceptual aspects.

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**Image 3.** Illustration of the principle of marginality in deconstructivist architecture

Application in Architecture:

1. Focusing on 'Marginal' Spaces: This could involve giving prominence to areas of a building or urban space that are typically ignored or undervalued, like alleyways, rooftops, or basements. By redesigning and reimagining these spaces, architects can create new, unexpected, and valuable experiences.
2. Incorporating Unconventional Materials: Using materials that are not traditionally associated with high-value or prominent architectural elements. This can include recycled or unconventional materials, which brings a new aesthetic and meaning to the structure.
3. Challenging Conventional Views: Marginality in architecture often means challenging the conventional views about what constitutes the 'main' vs. the 'auxiliary'. It can mean rethinking the hierarchy between the front and back of a building, or between public and private spaces.
4. Creating Spaces for Diverse Users: Designing spaces that cater to diverse groups of people, particularly those who might not typically be the primary focus of architectural design. This can involve creating inclusive and accessible environments for all users.
5. Conceptual Marginality: This involves exploring themes or ideas in architectural design that are often considered peripheral or unconventional, thereby expanding the discourse around what architecture can be and do.

This design highlights the innovative use of spaces that are often overlooked, transforming them into an integral part of the learning environment. It showcases how spaces that are typically neglected or underutilized in conventional designs can be transformed into functional areas that are both engaging and inspirational. The design follows the principle that every corner of a building has the potential to contribute to a rich and varied learning experience. Through this approach, the design aims to explore and emphasize the aesthetic and functional value of marginal spaces, giving them a new identity and purpose.

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The layout pays special attention to areas usually considered as extra or minor spaces, such as corridors, building corners, or even under-stair areas. Design elements like creative lighting, versatile furniture, and interactive art installations are used to activate these spaces, encouraging interaction and collaboration among users. This design prompts users to view and interact with the space from different perspectives, opening up new opportunities for learning and idea exchange. Overall, this design not only creates an aesthetic and functional learning environment but also inspires new thinking about how space can be effectively utilized to support learning and intellectual growth.

**Centrality**

The concept of centrality refers to elements or areas that are considered the center or focus in a particular context.

In Architecture: In deconstructivist architecture, the principle of centrality might inspire designs that create alternative centers or challenge traditional ideas of what constitutes the center in a building's space. This can manifest in various ways:

1. Creating Multiple Focal Points: Instead of having a single, dominant focal point, a deconstructivist approach might involve designing multiple areas of interest, thereby decentralizing the traditional concept of centrality.
2. Reimagining Central Spaces: Spaces that are traditionally central, like main halls or lobbies, might be designed in unconventional ways, challenging their usual significance and function.
3. Fluidity of Space: The concept of a fixed 'center' is often replaced with a more fluid understanding of space, where the importance and function of areas can change depending on context and use.
4. Interactive Elements: Incorporating elements that encourage movement and interaction can also challenge the conventional notion of a central, static space, making the entire building a dynamic and ever-changing environment.

By adopting these principles, deconstructivist architecture seeks to question and redefine traditional architectural norms, creating spaces that are not only functional but also intellectually stimulating and reflective of a more dynamic understanding of space and structure.

**Image 4.** Illustration Of The Principle Of Centrality In Deconstructivist Architecture

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The image above showcases an interior design that represents the concept of Centrality in deconstructivist architecture, particularly in the context of higher education. This design challenges traditional notions of the architectural space's center and offers an innovative perspective on what is considered crucial in an educational environment. By incorporating deconstruction principles, the design prompts users to rethink the role and function of space in education and encourages a more open and inclusive approach to the design and use of educational facilities.

Overall, the image demonstrates a forward step in architectural design, where the concept of centrality is no longer viewed just as the physical core of a space but as an idea that can emerge and evolve anywhere and at any time, creating a more vibrant and interactive educational environment. By adopting deconstructivist principles, this design actively challenges its users to rethink the role and function of space in an educational context. It facilitates a more open and inclusive approach to the design and utilization of school spaces. This design encourages critical thinking and creativity, not just in terms of learning but also in how space is used and perceived.

**Iterability and Meaning**

The concept of Iterability refers to the ability of elements within language or structure to be repeated without retaining a fixed meaning. In deconstructivist architecture, the principle of iterability can be reflected in designs that incorporate elements which can be repeated in various ways to create different and continually changing meanings. In Deconstructivist Architecture:

1. Repetition with Variation: This involves the use of architectural elements in a repetitive manner but with slight variations in each iteration. These variations could be in form, size, material, or orientation, leading to a dynamic and evolving perception of the structure.
2. Layering and Superimposition: Iterability can be expressed through layering different elements or superimposing them in a way that creates a complex, multifaceted aesthetic. This approach allows for different interpretations and experiences as one navigates through the space.
3. Modularity and Flexibility: Using modular elements that can be rearranged or adapted over time reflects iterability. This can result in a building that can change its function or appearance, thereby challenging the notion of permanence in architecture.
4. Interactivity with Users: Designing spaces that change based on user interaction or environmental conditions. This could involve elements that move, change color, or alter lighting based on the presence or actions of people, making the architecture an active participant in the creation of meaning.
5. Non-Linear Narratives: The design might encourage users to experience the space in non-linear ways, offering multiple paths or sequences that can be explored, each providing a different perspective or story.

By embracing iterability, deconstructivist architecture moves away from static, unchanging structures to create spaces that are alive with potential meanings, inviting constant re-interpretation and engagement from both users and the environment. This

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approach reflects a more fluid and dynamic understanding of space and its relationship with its inhabitants.

**Image 5.** Illustration Of The Principle Of Iterability And Meaning In Deconstructivist Architecture.

This interior architecture emphasizes the concept of marginality in deconstructivist higher education architecture. The image shows an alternative interior design focusing on the concept of marginality in deconstructivist architecture, particularly in higher education buildings. The design highlights the innovative use of spaces that are often overlooked or underutilized, making them an integral part of the learning environment. It pays special attention to elements usually considered excessive or unimportant in traditional architecture, including the utilization of corners, corridors, and spaces within buildings that are often neglected or underused. The design cleverly uses these areas to create unique and engaging learning spaces that support social interaction and academic collaboration.

The use of different materials, textures, and color schemes brings life and character to the space, drawing attention and encouraging users to interact with their surroundings. Design elements like modular furniture, art installations, and interactive technology are integrated to enrich the learning experience, making every corner of the building a potential learning area. This design not only makes underutilized spaces more functional but also makes a statement about the value and importance of every part of the educational environment.

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Modern Architecture

Dekonstruction Modern

**Image 6.** Illustration Of Two Different Interior Classroom Designs, Showing The Contrast Between Modern Architecture And Deconstructivist Architecture

Illustration of two different classroom designs, showcasing the contrast between modern and deconstructivist architecture. The first classroom, representing modern architecture, should feature a clean, geometric, and symmetrical layout with structured seating. Its focus is on functionality and efficiency, using traditional desks and chairs, a central teaching area, and minimalist decoration. This approach reflects an efficient and organized modern aesthetic, with space designed for traditional and focused learning.

The second classroom, representing deconstructivist architecture, shows a dynamic, asymmetrical layout with flexible seating, designed for collaboration and creativity. This room is equipped with movable furniture, areas for group discussions and creative activities, as well as integrated technology for interactive learning. This design encourages a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment, with flexibility to support various ways of learning and interacting."

## CONCLUSION

The deconstructivist approach in higher education architecture, inspired by Derrida's philosophy, offers an innovative perspective that differs from conventional modern architectural approaches. In the context of education, deconstructivist architecture not only physically facilitates learning and collaboration spaces but also symbolizes the critical and innovative thinking characteristic of 21st-century education. Concepts like differance, hierarchical reversal, marginality, centrality, and iterability, when applied to the design of learning spaces, result in a dynamic, inclusive, and stimulating environment, encouraging students to think outside the box and appreciate diverse viewpoints. By adopting this approach, higher education architecture responds not only to functional and aesthetic needs but also reflects and promotes contemporary educational values such as creativity, diversity, and critical thinking.

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