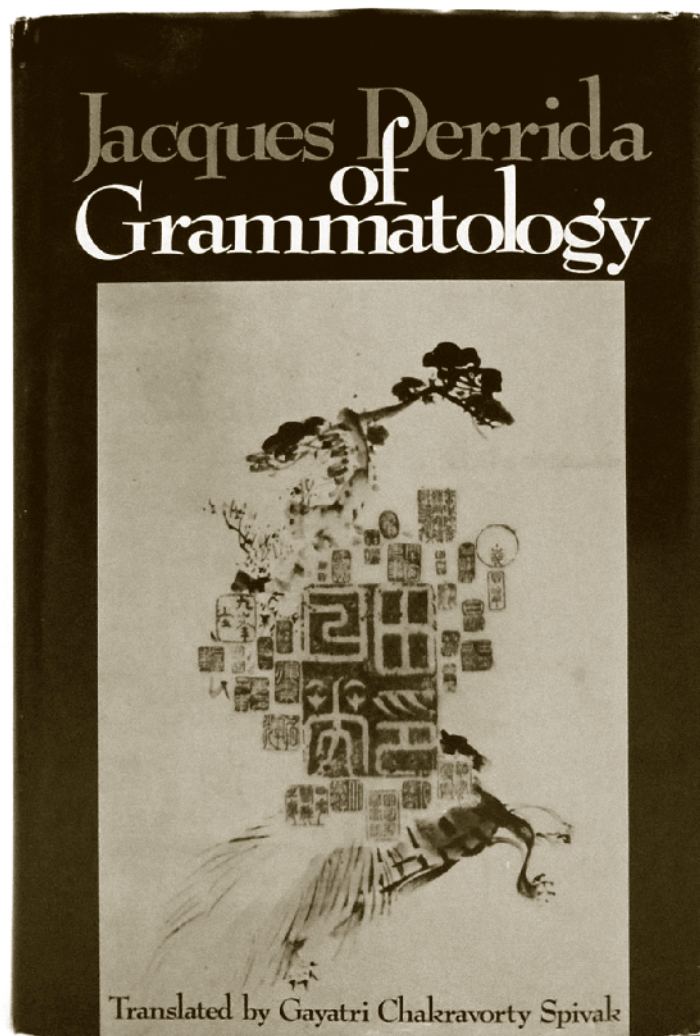


MARK WIGLEY

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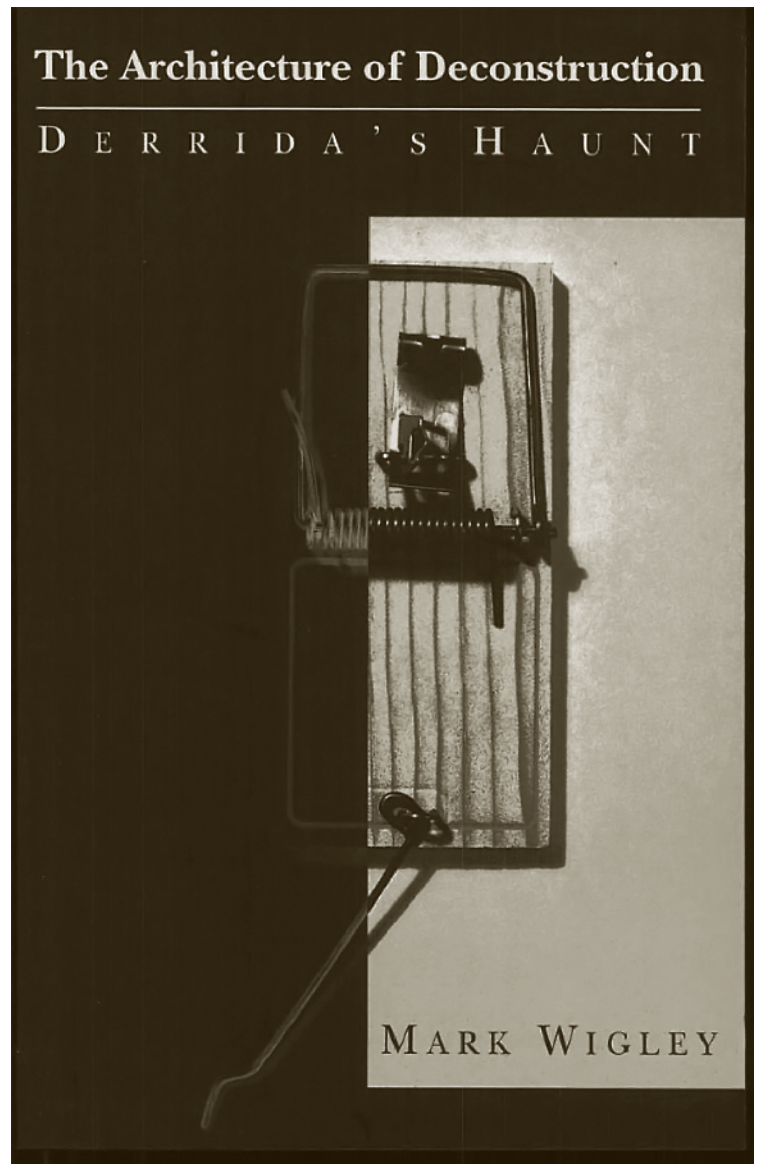


Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, London, 1974). Portada / Cover

THE DECONSTRUCTIVE PROJECT IS A PROJECT OF OPTIMISM

ENTREVISTADO POR / *Interviewed by*
FRANCISCO DÍAZ

The architecture behind philosophy, and therefore behind deconstruction, is the subject Mark Wigley has investigated over the last few decades. Understanding deconstruction as a way of thinking and comprehending the world, his ideas have been displayed in different formats: from exhibitions to academic projects. In this interview, Wigley reflects on these ideas again, allowing us to see the structure behind his philosophy and his way of understanding architecture and the world.



Keywords Interview
Architecture
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Mark Wigley. *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (The MIT Press: Cambridge, 1993). Portada / Cover

Francisco Díaz: Mark, you are perhaps the architecture intellectual and scholar with closer ties to deconstruction as a philosophical stream of thought. Can you tell us how such a relationship started? How did you begin to be interested in deconstruction?

Mark Wigley: I was in New Zealand working on my PhD, but the theme was not so clear. Then, in the second-hand bookshop in Auckland, I found a copy of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* translated by Gayatri Spivak (an important figure in postcolonial feminist theory, who would later become my colleague and friend). Inside the book, there was a small newspaper clipping explaining that philosopher Jacques Derrida had been arrested in Czechoslovakia, and I immediately thought, "any philosopher that gets arrested must be interesting." I bought that book. And like in a romance, when you meet somebody you have dreamed about before you meet them, it was as if deconstruction was addressing the geometry of the things I was thinking about. I was thinking about architecture's relationship to the world and to thought, and the way Derrida thinks about things resonated so strongly with what could be said about architecture that I became immediately interested. But not interested in applying it to architecture – like a vaccine of intelligence that architecture should need. Instead, my question was, what kind of thinking about architecture makes deconstruction possible? To what extent is Derrida already in an intimate relationship with architecture? So that became the subject of my PhD.

FD: In his book *Margins of Philosophy*, Derrida (1982:224) wrote, "What is fundamental corresponds to the desire for a firm and ultimate ground, a terrain to build on, the earth as the support of an artificial structure." Commenting on that quote, you wrote that philosophy uses an architectural metaphor. Can you expand a little bit on that idea? What does it mean?

MW: Philosophy cannot think of itself without thinking about architecture. But the thought that it has about architecture is not very complicated: that architecture is a structure built on solid ground to which then there might be added a superstructure, a decoration, a supplement, and so on. The task of philosophy – to ask the question of why things exist – is looking for the foundations (and already, when I say "foundations," I speak that language). Philosophy thinks of itself as an enterprise of seeing what it is that enables a structure to stand. Thus, it carries within it this logic of a ground, foundation, structure, superstructure, and decoration. Philosophy is classically understood as the attempt to find the ground of things.

Inasmuch as deconstruction is a critique of philosophy, it is a critique of that model of architecture – which means that Derrida is dependent on a certain image of architecture as a vertical hierarchical system. Since Derrida is part of philosophy but also critical of it, he has to draw on architecture in the same way as the tradition that he critiques does, and this is obvious in the word 'deconstruction' (even the very name of the philosophical enterprise, is already architectural, or anti-architectural). In the quote you mentioned, Derrida explains that the philosopher thinks like an architect, but only if we agree that the architect is just a builder, somebody who answers questions with stability, certainty, and security. However, as architects, most of us think that architecture is actually full of mystery and that we don't provide answers but questions.

This was my PhD subject: trying to show in which way Derrida was thinking through this understanding of architecture. And it becomes complicated because if a certain image of architecture is what makes philosophy possible, you could also say that philosophy is not able to think about architecture. That's the paradox. Since a certain idea of architecture makes philosophy possible, philosophy is not able to examine its own ground. In other words: that image of architecture is foundational for philosophy. But I have already doubled the problem since

I've said that the image "is" the foundation. This is what I was trying to think through.

Maybe somebody reading this will think, "that's too complicated." But what if architecture is complicated? As architects, we think that buildings are much more enigmatic, mysterious, and complex than ground-foundation-structure-superstructure. I think we have the right to read philosophy as architects. However, when architects read philosophy, there's always this assumption that we are just architects, amateurs, or savages, and that philosophy is the authority. This puts us into a colonial relationship: we think that we are the colonial subaltern speaking; we have no right to speak to the master's voice.

I was an architecture student and an architect trained in New Zealand, a former colony. This made deconstruction resonate so strongly for me: I thought that the relationship between architecture and philosophy was very much the same as between New Zealand and the North. Since you're from Chile – New Zealand's only rival to be "the south" – I think perhaps you have the same New Zealand personality: a genuine humility, a sense that we are so far away from the center of the world that we are not worthy to participate in conversations, which is immediately followed by the opposite, a super arrogance which says "since we are so far away from the center of conversations, actually we can speak the truth." I don't know if this is true of the Chilean philosophy, but the New Zealand philosophy is to be genuinely modest and genuinely arrogant.

Architecture may be like a New Zealander: genuinely thinks of itself as subordinate to all these other fields while secretly believing that architecture is actually the truth, the beginning of everything. If, as an architect, I see that philosophy cannot do what it wants to do without a certain image of architecture, I want to assert a claim from the colonies that we have the right to speak. Going back to Gayatri Spivak's famous argument, "does the subaltern speak?" I say we have the right

(...) if a certain image of architecture is what makes philosophy possible, you could also say that philosophy is not able to think about architecture. That's the paradox. Since a certain idea of architecture makes philosophy possible, philosophy is not able to examine its own ground. In other words: that image of architecture is foundational for philosophy.



Philip Johnson & Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture* (Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1988). Portada / Cover

to speak. In fact, Derrida was very supportive and kind about my work, but that was not the point. It was not a question of “would Derrida agree with this reading?” or “would other philosophers agree?” It was more of an alternative point of view. And, to this day, I still think that everything I say is based on this sense of living on a disconnected island in the South, able to see the North differently; to be at once a victim of the North, but at the same time able to speak some kind of truth to the North. And I think Chile is also an island.

FD: Well, in Chile you'll find many architects still quoting Heidegger and calling philosophers to tell us what to do... On the same line, I remember a conference you gave in Belgrade a few years ago in which you said, “Philosophers bought architecture's advertisement.” Do you remember this?

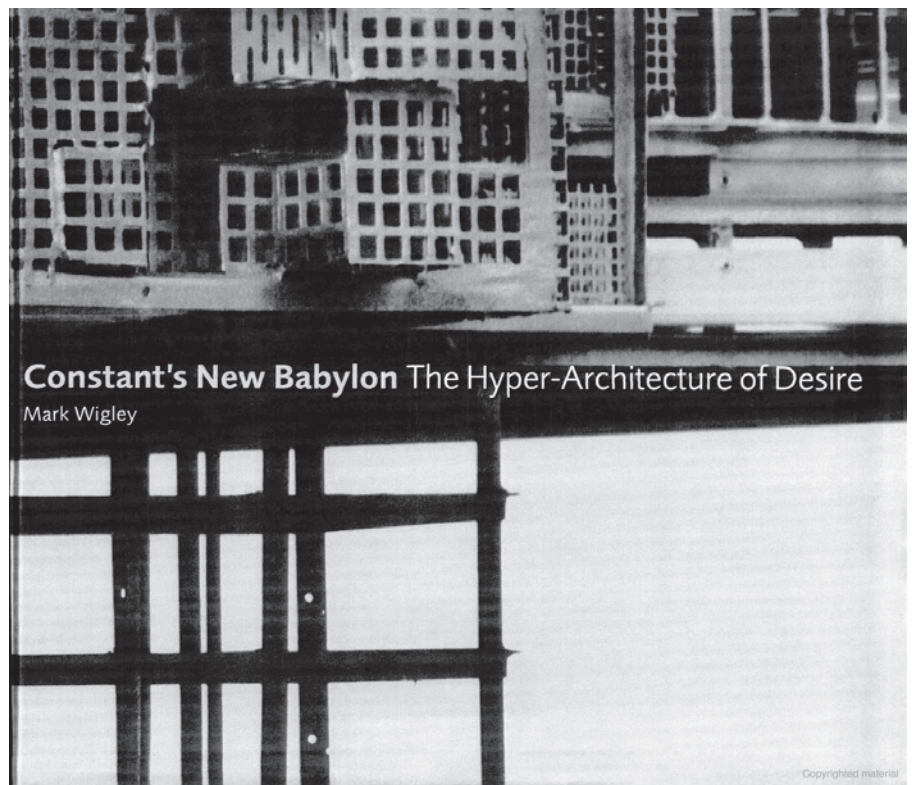
MW: Yes. If you look at the history of architectural theory in the so-called West – from Vitruvius onwards – there's a claim that the architectural object is not like other objects in the world; instead, it is a special one that offers a connection between the material and the immaterial world. For example, classical theory suggests that the Greek temple is more beautiful than a tree or a human body. It is as if a classical temple wouldn't be built on the ground but visiting us from the world of ideas. Architecture presents itself as ideas in material form, which is the great dream of philosophy: to have an object that speaks of ideas. Thus, Western philosophy accepts the description of what makes an architectural object important and says, “indeed, architecture is the perfect combination.” Even Plato, when explaining his idea of ideas, says, “think of the builder” – the word architect did not exist at that time – “first he has the idea in his head and then he makes it.” And then Plato says something similar about the world, that first there are the ideas, and then the world is an imperfect imprint of those ideas. So, from the beginning, when Western philosophy wants to describe itself, it appeals to a certain image of architecture, which is the image that we propagate in the architectural community.

We, as architects, always say that we make ideas, not buildings; therefore, we are intellectuals, and we should be welcomed in the community of intellectuals. The architecture field has often used that claim as an attempt to gain status in society (usually unsuccessfully). But this image of architecture as a synthesis between the world of ideas and the material world, the image that architecture is philosophy in action, ideas made visible, is how we place ourselves in society. It's also an image of clarity, orientation, stability, safety, security, order, and harmony. So, we publicly describe architecture as a source of certainty. But what attracts us to architecture is the idea that it's uncertain, that it's a mystery, an exploration, or an investigation. This is what I mean when I say philosophers bought the advertisement; they bought the public discourse of architecture, which is, “yes, we are the agents of certainty.” But the truth is that architecture is a kind of mystery story. Most architects feel unloved by society, but we have accepted that because what we love is the mystery story. What if a right angle is actually not a source of clarity but of questions? That's what we talk about forever in architecture schools, magazines, and so on.

FD: On this relationship between architecture and philosophy, you said: “deconstructive discourse subverts an edifice by demonstrating that the

ground on which it is erected is insecure, insecure precisely because it veils an underground” (Wigley, 1993:36). In a way, architecture covers the ground; it's like this idea of advertisement, that we cover our work with words and with an image of what architecture is. So, can architecture be understood as a cover or a disguise? Is it veiling something else or just our own insecurity?

MW: There are many questions inside this. First, deconstruction is a theory of structure, an alternative theory to the classical one. The classical theory says, “ground: solid; foundations: solid; connected structure: solid; and then a not-so-solid superstructure.” There's a hierarchy in which the most visible surface, the decoration, is connected to the deep invisible certainties. But you cannot see foundations: if you could see them, they wouldn't work as foundations. This system suggests that what you see is connected to what you don't see. Deconstruction proposes an alternative image of the structure, saying that the ground is unstable and that what you see produces the effect of stable ground. Derrida reads through all the different philosophical traditions to demonstrate that, unwittingly, they start to speak a contradictory and paradoxical logic as they reach for the ground and try to explain it. He does not say this is a mistake. He says this is the nature of structure: structure is exactly



Mark Wigley. *Constant's New Babylon. The Hyper-Architecture of Desire* (010 Publishers: Rotterdam, 1999). Portada / Cover

that which emerges out of an enigma. What's underneath everything is an enigma, what he would call "undecidability": you cannot say, you cannot be sure, there's no ground, no guide to a decision. So philosophy is the construction of an image of the ground, not something that is built upon the ground.

Likewise, architecture pretends to be about building on a site, but in truth, architecture produces the idea of the site in the first place. One of the effects of architecture is the ground. Different architects produce different grounds and different ideas about the ground. But the ground is never simply what's underneath the building. We don't even want to know what's underneath the building (for example, shit sewage). Every building is connected to every other building by umbilical cords or information, sewage pipes, electricity, and so on, but these are never part of the architecture's imaginary. So, is architecture veiling any secret? So many secrets, I would say.

But even more. We could argue that architecture rises and is most certain, stable, and clear when we are most unsure. If architecture is an image of certainty in an uncertain world, then it will appear more when we are uncertain because it's a kind of antidote to uncertainty. Cities have become so strong and so big because of enigmas. And almost all of my work is to try to understand what is repressed.

To answer your question, is there more? There's always more. Architecture is primarily a system of hiding things. When we are in a room, we get no information about what that room is made of or how it stands. But, actually, you just don't want to know what is holding you up. Most of us experience architecture without wanting to know the truth about buildings. Buildings are a kind of avatar of certainty inserted when we are uncertain. This means that architecture might be something very important in society.

Why do you need a family house? So that the idea of family continues to be projected even when you're not there. The house

says nothing about the family to the street. Nobody wants an architecture that reveals that this week there's no one at home, that there's a conflict, or that somebody in the house is drugged. The house exudes the image of a family that simply doesn't exist. Thus, architecture as a whole is a kind of substitute system. This doesn't make it fake; on the contrary, it gives it purpose.

Architecture is a system for covering uncertainties to let them continue. If I don't know who I am or what my culture is, I might use an avatar, not to hide this, but to let it continue. Maybe a family house just allows the weirdness, the unknowability, and the undecidability of family life, to just let it continue. Architecture covers up confusion, contradiction, paradox, and enigma and allows it to multiply and continue. That would be my image of what a city is: many systems that allow an unthinkable complexity and confusion to continue.

Deconstruction says something similar about philosophy: that this endless search for clarity or stability if really thought through, leads to the opposite. Derrida does not want to throw away Western philosophy; it's the contrary. Deconstruction is not the end of construction; it's not the undoing of construction. Deconstruction is the principle of construction. Derrida is very interested in what allows things to stand. It turns out that what allows things to stand is totally weird. So, he comes up with the idea of structure as a kind of weirdness, as a very complicated artifact.

This sounds like a more provocative description of architecture than the ones that we use. Because – returning to the colonial model – we sit in architecture imagining that some other field, especially philosophy, has the right to tell us what we are doing. And what I'm saying is that most philosophy has a deeply uninteresting role for architecture to play, and Derrida's work allows for a much more complex role. Heidegger is a good example that you could say something very stupid about buildings, and it will be quoted again and again by architects. This I regard

as the worst form of colonial behavior. As if we want to be invited into the club to have one drink and then go home because we're not members of the club, but we would be dressed up to look acceptable.

FD: That's true. Now I would like to move to more historical questions. In 1988, together with Philip Johnson, you curated the "Deconstructivist Architecture" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. 34 years later, how do you assess this exhibition's impact on the architectural discourse?

MW: It was 1988, more or less the same year that I started to teach at Princeton. The PhD that I had just finished was all about the architecture inside Derrida rather than what architecture could become if it would read Derrida. For me, the least interesting use of philosophy is as a set of instructions. So I had to insist a lot in 1988 that the "Deconstructivist Architecture" show was not an exhibition of what happens to architecture after deconstruction is injected into it. What I argued there was, nevertheless, that if you are interested in deconstruction, this might be the kind of architecture or the dimension of architecture that you would be interested in since primarily deconstruction rethinks the relationship between structure and ground, on the one side, and ornament on the other. It was a work within architecture that torments the relationship between structure and ornament that would be of the greatest interest to a deconstructivist thinker. It was not about work that had been influenced by deconstruction but work that would be likely of interest to deconstruction.

Also, I insisted that their work was not new. On the opposite, the exhibition was a report on one dimension of work produced over the previous ten years. In that sense, it was intended to be a historical exhibition, not the generation of a new way of operating. Of course, the idea was to wake up the museum and, also, to kill postmodernism. This was the real goal. In that sense, the exhibition was

(...) this image of architecture as a synthesis between the world of ideas and the material world, the image that architecture is philosophy in action, ideas made visible, is how we place ourselves in society. It's also an image of clarity, orientation, stability, safety, security, order, and harmony. So, we publicly describe architecture as a source of certainty. But what attracts us to architecture is the idea that it's uncertain, that it's a mystery, an exploration, or an investigation.

Mark Wigley

CUTTING MATTACK-CLARK

THE ANARCHITECTURE INVESTIGATION



Lars Müller Publishers

Mark Wigley. *Cutting Matta-Clark: The Anarchitecture Investigation*
(Lars Müller Publishers, Columbia GSAPP, Zurich, New York, 2018).
Portada / Cover

alarmingly successful. It remains a turning point in the trajectory of postmodernism. Almost all the architects involved in the exhibition – perhaps all of them – became absurdly successful afterward. But, in a certain sense, none of them were actually ever exhibited in the show; by this, I mean that I used their work to isolate certain enigmas about structure and ornament. So, all of them would rightly say, “I’m not deconstructionist. And I’m not doing what Wigley says I’m doing.” But all were very happy to be there.

At the time, it produced an enormous amount of terrible writing, a kind of reaction. People revealed themselves in their reactions: those who loved the exhibition and those who didn’t. But it quickly became a respectable exhibition in that it was admired, and the selection of architects was appreciated. All of this respectability annoys me more than criticism. But it was also refreshing. It’s like saying, “ok, we can move on.”

And I want to add one other point. When I did my PhD (which is, of course, the reason that I got invited to do the exhibition), I really thought that deconstruction was a way of thinking developed by Jacques Derrida in the late 60s. It never occurred to me that anyone else would be interested in architecture this way. I was in the late 70s and early 80s, trying to understand what this might mean in architectural terms, but I never thought there would be an audience for it. It was more of a private reflection written on the beach in New Zealand. Then I discovered a real audience and a great interest in it in New York, and then I was suddenly on the biggest platform of all, at the Museum of Modern Art. All this was surprising and quite exciting. But then I watched this huge range of symptoms. I suddenly saw the field so graphically, primarily with embarrassment, almost horrified by everything going on around me. And now we’re in a strange situation. Back then, I really thought that the argument was historical, that what was being discussed in the exhibition was a form of thinking from the

60s applied to work of the 70s and exhibited in the 80s. So now, in the twenty-first century, I look back with you at that moment of the 80s, and it’s a bit strange.

What’s surprising is the lack of transformative exhibitions since then. I think there is a question about the museum, its responsibilities, and our field. I would defend all the decisions and arguments made around that exhibition. I’m proud of it. But I can’t say I’m very proud of architecture as a field in its attempts to continue the conversation. I don’t mean to be self-congratulatory; actually, the opposite. The point is that everything radical becomes acceptable later.

FD: But don’t you think that being in the Museum of Modern Art contributed to a misunderstanding of the kind of thought you were trying to raise?

MW: Of course, the Museum of Modern Art is not known as a site of radicality. It’s a primarily conservative institution that generally reacts slowly and institutionally. This was not always true because, in 1932, Phillip Johnson curated the International

Style show. Now you could say that it was related to the architecture of the 20s, and there are a lot of critiques of that exhibition: that it codified, normalized, and even capitalized on the artistic diversity and political undercurrents of so-called modern architecture – though I think the truth is more complex.

Johnson asked me to make the exhibition because he was completely disappointed in the Museum of Modern Art since it was no longer changing the way people think about things. He really wanted to create trouble, so I was hired as a troublemaker, and I made it. Precisely because the MoMA was known as the sort of gold standard or seal of approval – almost operating like the royal academies of the past blessing works with its stamp of approval so that you could spend more money on it because it’s been approved as a piece of good design – doing a subversive show inside an institution devoted to not being subversive created a lot of attention around the exhibition and a lot of paradoxes. If you thought the show was genuinely radical, then you were shocked that it was happening at the Museum; if you thought that it couldn’t be radical because it was happening in the Museum, then you



Mark Wigley. *Buckminster Fuller Inc. Architecture in the Age of Radio* (Lars Müller Publishers: Zurich, 2015). Portada / Cover

wanted to point to that. This is what created all this kind of confusion. I think it's true that since then, the Museum of Modern Art has not taken advantage of this potential to create confusion about what's radical and what's not.

At the time of the exhibition, almost none of the architects in the show had built anything – except for Frank Gehry. But all of them became well-known and successful designers. Some would say, “that’s because they were in this exhibition in the MoMA,” but I totally disagree with that. They were remarkable individuals following very interesting trajectories, and I think the best thing a museum can do is to identify before the marketplace – and also the intellectual marketplace – tendencies that need to be discussed. And if they are discussed, they might get elevated to a different level.

So, I think the MoMA was the best place to do such an exhibition. I still think today that the Museum, with not much difficulty, could have everybody arguing about architecture’s responsibilities. But it chooses not to, not in architecture, painting, or other fields. Nevertheless, pretty radical works in the arts are displayed in the Museum, even if the framing of that work is not very radical. And I don’t think that’s not true of architecture. Within the Museum, architecture behaves like a good colony. And the great advantage of being the colonial subject is that you can misbehave because the authority thinks you’re going to do it anyway, so why not? So I have this romantic view that exhibitions are one of the ways that we can accelerate and intensify our conversation, and architecture is primarily conversation.

FD: Following this idea of architecture as conversation and also your role as a troublemaker, you were dean at Columbia GSAPP for ten years, transforming that school into an amazing place for conversations. Was your deconstructive way of thinking translated to this academic project?

MW: Yes. Absolutely. And the geometry of your question is the same as the previous one, like, can there be a radical Dean? I think the answer is absolutely, and why not? If the relationship between architecture

and other fields is like the relationship between New Zealand to the world, then an architecture school in a university is the same. Nobody knows how architecture got into the university. Of course, I know, but within the university, everybody’s always surprised that architecture is there. Architecture schools can be easily found: they’re the only buildings with lights on at 2:00 a.m. But everybody knows that something strange happens in there, some kind of collaborative combination of ideas: that people are mixing philosophy with mathematics with climate with carbon with anthropology; that almost every form of knowledge is combined and brought to bear on design projects. Thus, architecture schools are an exception in the university, a strange space. But this combination of all forms of knowledge sounds like what the university deeply thinks it is. So, architecture is simultaneously the kind of exception school and the school that perhaps most clearly represents the university’s ambition. We are strangely the best example of what university can be, and we have the thing that the university understands the least.

In that context, if you are the Dean of a school of architecture, you are helping one of the colonies, architecture, to misbehave relative to the conventions of the university. But misbehave in a way that the university will never fully understand but will deeply appreciate. It’s like when architects meet humans, and humans tend to say, “I always wanted to be an architect!” Likewise, every department in the university – philosophy, mathematics, law, religion, art – thinks of architecture as a sort of magical knowledge. And it’s true: architecture schools are places of magic, quite literally – it’s magical thinking to believe that all these incompatible forms of knowledge could be combined to think what a library would be in the twenty-first century, for example. So, I think it’s not only possible to be a radical Dean, but it’s a responsibility.

I inherited the school from Bernard Tschumi, who brought from London the idea of an architecture school as an experimental laboratory and a generator of different ideas.

I had been invited to the school by Bernard against enormous opposition. There was a huge campaign by the tenured faculty to block me from entering. They wrote endless letters full of lies, mainly saying, “how can someone who is deconstructive be admitted?” Every neoconservative argument against deconstruction was exactly mapped onto a personal criticism to me. So intense were the lies that, after reviewing the case, the Provost said, “since you produced this kind of reaction, we want to have you here. You must be doing something interesting to get under the skin of these people so deeply.” And then, within about three years, I was invited to run the school. Again, when I was suggested to be Dean, it was the university that invited me against enormous resistance; and the university again said, “this is what we want.” I deeply admire Columbia University for saying, “we want that strange kid from New Zealand that keeps upsetting so many people; we see there the possible future.”

This is a long answer to your question, but now, talking to you, I remember the ugliness of the attempts to block me and the responsibility it meant to take care of the school, including those people that had never wanted me there. My task was to maximize the opportunities of about a thousand people – teachers, faculty staff, students, and so on – to rethink architecture from their different perspectives. It was enormous work but unbelievably rewarding and pleasurable.

Having given you this long answer, now I can answer it more shortly: it was undoubtedly a deconstructive project. Since deconstruction is not the taking apart of structure but an attempt to understand it, this was not a taking apart of the school or throwing away the deepest hopes for architecture, but an attempt to allow the conversation about that to be less boring and less stupid. I saw my role as, to quote Cedric Price when I interviewed him once, “to reduce the level of my stupidity.” And the best way to do that was to help other people say amazing things. For ten years or so, I was fortunate enough to listen to people around me say wonderful things.

(...) most philosophy has a deeply uninteresting role for architecture to play, and Derrida’s work allows for a much more complex role. Heidegger is a good example that you could say something very stupid about buildings, and it will be quoted again and again by architects. This I regard as the worst form of colonial behavior.

I think that the deconstructive project is always a project of optimism. And the people who conceive of deconstruction as a negative act or a demolishing act are idiots, stupid, incredibly conservative, or both. The reaction against deconstruction is what most revealed its precision. Like if it had touched an acupuncture point. Also, a lot of people think of deconstruction as being a historical thing, like, “Ok, that was the 80s.” But I think it’s instead the other way around. Since deconstruction is a way of thinking, it had a transformative effect on so many disciplines, so it no longer needs to be named as such, nor should it be named as such. If deconstruction is interesting, it would surely have taken a new form, or new forms, or multiplied. I look around me, and I see a lot of work that I consider having been very inspired by deconstruction but rightfully does not use that name.

FD: You’ve written about some key figures of architecture, like Wachsmann, Constant, Gordon Matta-Clark, or Buckminster Fuller. Although they are not marginal characters, architectural historiography has somehow seen them as peripheral, almost non-architectural cases. In parallel, in some architecture schools, there has been an ongoing discussion about the discipline’s core – as they call it. So, from the study of those figures, how do you see this obsession to define a core of architecture or a sort of official discourse of architecture?

MW: Yes. I’m deeply obsessed with what could be called “anti-architects.” Constant, Gordon Matta-Clark, Buckminster Fuller, or Konrad Wachsmann call themselves “de-architects,” or “anti-architects,” or in Matta-Clark’s case, “an-architects.” These are all architects; that is to say, they operate within architectural discourse, are published in architectural magazines, work in architectural schools, and make reflections upon buildings and cities. Still, they’re always doing so in a way that dissolves traditional assumptions about those buildings. They all, in a certain way, want architecture in its current form to dissolve in favor of a

different understanding of the structure, society, or information. I find them deeply fascinating, and they don’t abandon the so-called discipline.

Konrad Wachsmann is probably the greatest expert on how to join joints; how to join things together. People who think that they love the discipline of architecture, who believe that it has a core, almost all think that the core has something to do with joints, the way things fit together. When people who believe that there’s a core to the discipline talk about joints, even when they look at Wachsmann’s detail of a joint, they start to cry with emotion, like, “this is brilliant.” But I try to indicate what Wachsmann said: that every joint has a hole, that there’s a gap at every joint. So, if architecture is held together by a system of joints and these joints have gaps, then you’re looking at a network of holes, a network of emptiness wrapped with steel. So Wachsmann’s dream was that architecture should – if it could – dissolve and liberate the individual into a kind of radical democracy.

Something very similar to Buckminster Fuller, who said, “we should do more and more with less and less until, eventually, we can do everything with nothing.” In other words, architecture should disappear not because he was against architecture but because he thought architecture would reach its ethical, spiritual, and technological apex in the moment of dissolving into a mirage. Matta Clark, on the other hand, took existing buildings and cut into them in such a way as to reveal the hidden secrets of every building, the extent to which we don’t know what it is that we live in. Constant thought the figure of a building should disappear in favor of an endless redistribution of desire.

Of course, my interest in those figures is directly related to an interest in deconstruction, but it’s not that I look at them because I was interested in deconstruction. These kinds of architects are the reason why I was interested in deconstruction in the first place. I’m interested in the enigmas around which architects are galvanized and grouped together but don’t want to admit – at least in public. I’m always interested in those that

challenge discipline, not to destroy it, but to realize it.

Those who believe that there’s a deep core to the discipline are almost always a policeman, whether male or female. They argue that there is a core that organizes the field and that they represent that core, so they represent the organization. They’re always into a police function: they want to discipline the discipline. However, my argument would be that if there is a core that is organizing the field, then there it is, and you don’t need to say it is. The very fact that they keep saying this means they are not sure.

Usually, those people say that we must return to the core. And I think all calls for return are very dangerous. Almost every war, including the one in Ukraine, is based on a claim to return. Putin has developed a narrative saying, “Ukraine is not being invaded; mother Russia is just recovering it.” Likewise, when people say they want to keep the core of architecture, they’re almost asking for some things to return and for certain people to be excluded. Somebody who says, “I want to restore the core of architecture,” almost inevitably finds ways to isolate people of color, women, etc. What follows from the appeal to the core is a kind of violence and the preservation of a male-northern-capitalist-straight identity. Any historian knows that there have been many definitions of what constitutes the core. At anyone’s time, the core is a space of enormous debate. You could argue that the core is where the debate is, where the doubt is, and the non-core is more or less ok.

Of course, the people who are going on and on about the core are the same people who quote Heidegger, right? That’s the same group because they want to say, “there’s a truth to architecture, and we just have to nurture that truth.” But if there is a truth to architecture, as they say, it doesn’t need them to tell us what to do. For example, suppose there is a form of beauty that comes from a particular relationship to the land, to the site, nature, or technology. In that case, if it’s there, it will make certain buildings more beautiful, more interesting than others, and everybody will feel it. We don’t need them to say, “this building by this architect.” I couldn’t be more opposed to that.

Since deconstruction is not the taking apart of structure but an attempt to understand it, this was not a taking apart of the school or throwing away the deepest hopes for architecture, but it was an attempt to allow the conversation about that to be less boring and less stupid. I saw my role as, to quote Cedric Price when I interviewed him once, “to reduce the level of my stupidity.” And the best way to do that was to help other people say amazing things.

Having said that, in Columbia, we have a distinction between the core and the electives. Mario Gooden, who's currently running the master's program in architecture, is asking, "can we make the core the most radical part of the curriculum?" That's why it's exciting to be at Columbia: because people like Mario are asking these questions. Could we radicalize the core? Now, from a deconstructive point of view, the core is empty. Think of the word 'core'; it's like the space in the middle, a space in which we cannot be sure. In a nuclear reactor, the core is where the explosion happens. Don't forget that every student from every school thinks that they got the truth. And then they turned up at Columbia, and suddenly everything they have been told – that's a kind of religion or a kind of truth – gets dissolved in a second. It's very exciting when a student realizes that there are 100 different ideas of what is the core of the discipline, and the school asks, "what would you like to do?" So, I'm very interested in Mario's provocation that you can make the transformation and subversion of traditional notions of the core the main responsibility of the architect.

But the number of people in architecture who would like it to be boring is too high, and many have permanent teaching positions in universities. Fortunately, there are teachers and students challenging that. And maybe we need boring people close to us to try to be more interesting.

FD: I was thinking about what you said before about deconstruction: if it's effective it should disappear. The same you said about architecture. So, in a way, the core, if it's true that it exists, should be so evident we shouldn't have discussions about it.

MW: Yes. All the talk about core and even the word 'discipline' is already there in Vitruvius, *disciplina*. Discipline is something that is always desired. As architects, we want to say to the world that there is a discipline, that we have the knowledge of that discipline, and that our knowledge should have value in society. But what architects have in common is that they love buildings, and love means

that you don't know: you know that you want to be with buildings your whole life, but you don't know why exactly. Our secret is that we don't know. That's a working definition of an architect: the only person in society that doesn't know what a building is, while everybody else thinks it's super clear. So, if you have a field of millions of people who love buildings and don't know what buildings are, and keep sharing thoughts about what they could be, what they might be, then the core call for a discipline is the call to say to the world that we know what we don't know. For me, that's an uninteresting gesture.

And it's specifically uninteresting because it's associated with different forms of violence. People who love the core of architecture are not comfortable with the idea of women architects, women clients, people of color, the poor, the disenfranchised, the distant, the indigenous, bacteria, insects, or plants. Inevitably, the call for a core is a call for exclusion. For instance, if there was a core to the discipline, and women had a very difficult time within the discipline when that core was respected, then the discipline wouldn't be a safe place for a woman. Then, why do we defend the discipline? The discipline is disciplining women. That doesn't mean they're simply excluded; they are used – they are there, but used. Likewise, the poor, people of color, children, the lonely, the sick, the complicated, the transsexual, the transversal, the confused, the despaired, all these figures that never appear in an architectural rendering. You don't see children or lonely people; you don't see people missing legs, or missing friends; you don't see confusions of identity; you just see perfectly happy white consumers on skateboards or fashion runways. So, if there was a core, that core would be horrific. If there is a discipline, it should be overthrown because it's wrong.

Even if such people don't like the conversation about identity, class, and so on, they think it's safe to talk about climate change. So, climate change has become an acceptable crisis even for the core. Then the core should include climate responsibility.

But none of those people go deep into the extractive logic that made that possible. I think that people who insist on a single stable core are very useful because they make public what we need to attack and undermine. They represent the worst of us, which is the police function. A lot of architecture has a complicity with authority; maybe 90% of architecture is complicit in this way. At least, we've got to ask these questions. Perhaps architecture school magazines, or conversations like this one, are a place for voicing these questions.

FD: I really appreciate that you are putting that on the agenda because it will be published. So, just to finish, I guess you have realized that in the last years both feminist and decolonial discourses have made a renewed use of deconstruction. Many people are saying, "you have to deconstruct yourself." They see it as a process to dismantle, so perhaps it's not the same as the idea you have of deconstruction. What's your view on those new interpretations or readings of deconstruction?

MW: For me, deconstruction – a reflection on structure – is immediately political. At the time, in the 70s and 80s, people who thought of themselves as political – on the left in terms of class systems, or for feminism on the side of gender systems, or race in terms of racialization – worked with a definition of politics that didn't allow for deconstruction itself to be political. They made a distinction between theories of structure and politics. And, just because of the architect in me, I always said that there is absolutely a politics to rethinking structure, but it's a politics that doesn't fit into the map you're using. And over time, in our field, now there is so much extraordinary work in postcolonial, gender, race, inequity, disability, or climate; there's so much interesting work going on by new scholars, that this older idea about politics has disappeared. These older figures of the so-called left, who couldn't see the politics of deconstruction, also don't like what's happening today. They don't recognize it, and they're lost in their old definitions.

So we've seen a deepening of political thinking in architecture. Also, we now have a

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student generation that is immediately ethical. Every student is fully engaged in questions of equity, information, privacy issues, sexuality issues, and trans identity issues. So you have an intensely activist and politicized student body and a younger generation of scholars opening up crucial political questions. And now it's more or less obvious that that work is consistent with or resonates with deconstruction philosophy. So that's why I think the word deconstruction returns. It's no longer the name of a specific French-based philosophy of the late 60s, as it became more globalized in the 70s and 80s, but it's a return to a philosophical understanding.

Anybody who reads Derrida would realize that at least 50% of his writings are directly engaged with political questions. It's not by accident that Gayatri Spivak translated *Of Grammatology*. It's not by chance that, at a certain point in time, one of the most influential postcolonial feminist theorists felt the need to understand and disseminate this way of thinking for its political value. And in Gayatri's case, she never needed to make an explanation; it was just obvious. If I think of

questions of race, climate, species, sexuality, and so on, I can quickly identify Derrida's books specifically on those themes – not just essays but books and seminars. So, it was a deeply political project from the beginning but involved the transformation of what's considered to be political.

I think a lot of the work going on now cannot be thought of as derived from, inspired by, or students of Derrida's work. The work being done today is interesting for its own reasons. But you can sense the kinship. The generation working today doesn't care about whether Derrida is good, or important, or not. They care about the political analysis they're pursuing and find that work relevant or a reference point.

For example, I never taught Derrida. I once gave the paper "Archive fever" in a PhD seminar at Princeton, but only because one of my students, Arindam Dutta, insisted. I never thought that Derrida was the philosophy king who could upgrade architecture or that should be taught. I never thought it was anything more than my own psycho-problem. I still don't think Derrida is required reading. However, it's fascinating that new work, new kinds of provocations,

and a new kind of dissemination of the political battlefield, a multiplication of battlefields, are recovering the word. And also the intersectionality, the understanding that all these different battlefields are all connected, and how different connections produce very different politics. I think it's an astonishing moment. **ARQ**

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Are We Human? Notes on an Archaeology of Design (2016) with Beatriz Colomina when they were co-curators of the 3rd Istanbul Design Biennial. He also curated the exhibition *Deconstructivist Architecture* at The Museum of Modern Art (1988), and others at The Drawing Center, New York; Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal; Witte de With Museum and Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam; and The Power Station of Art, Shanghai. Mark Wigley received both his Bachelor of Architecture (1979) and his Ph.D. (1987) from the University of Auckland, New Zealand.