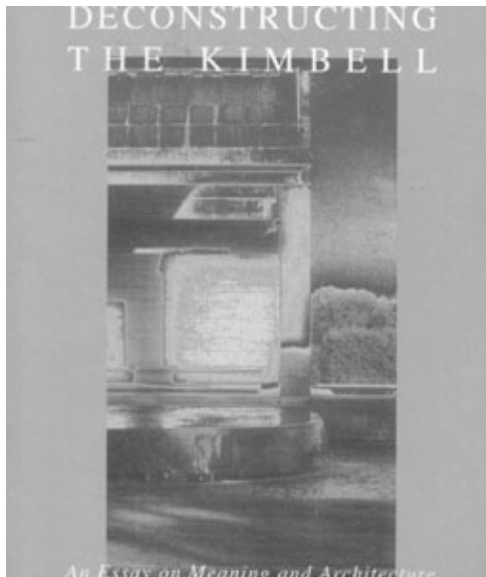


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## a weekly dose of architecture

### *Deconstructing the Kimbell: An Essay on Meaning and Architecture*, by Michael Benedikt.

In 1991 - the heyday's of architecture's borrowing of themes from Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction and early 20th-century Constructivism - Benedikt published a long form essay deciphering some of the philosopher's ideas and interpreting and applying them towards architecture. But instead of looking at projects by architects most overtly influenced by Derrida (Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Bernard Tschumi), the author steps back and applies Deconstruction to Louis I. Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas. By doing this, he attempts to see if the philosophy is a valid method for extracting meaning from architecture. Opting for this seminal late-Modern building over, say, Tschumi's Parc de la Villette, he also sets a precedent for a deeper reading and application of Deconstruction over a more direct, surface reading. Benedikt acknowledges that Derrida's text, albeit difficult, is ripe with physical metaphors that make its application to architecture understandable, but he goes beyond these metaphors to define four ideas present in the late philosopher's writings: *différance*, hierarchy reversal, marginality and centrality, and iterability and meaning.

At the halfway point of the essay Benedikt has done an admiral job of making these ideas somewhat understandable (to the consternation of many Derrida scholars who see the difficulty of his writings as a necessary trait), then applying them to the Kimbell in the last half. While the application of, say, hierarchy reversal isn't explicit in the latter half, the description of the building - from its siting to the geometrical construction of the vaults to the location of the library - is fascinating and illuminating. Even though Benedikt is describing, and finding meaning in, a building few architects would not admit to like or love, his "reading" of the building increases that appreciation. The novel idea of applying Deconstruction to a building that coincides with or even predates that philosophy yields not only a strong argument for finding meaning in architecture, but a pleasurable read as well.

While this book includes images and drawings of the Kimbell, they are a wee bit small, so *Light is the Theme* is a handy companion to Benedikt's essay, especially for those unfamiliar with the building.



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