Contents

7 Director's Note
PHYLIS LAMBERT

9 Introduction
JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDAIR

19 Eisenman/Robertson's City of Artificial Excavation
KURT W. FORSTER

27 Modernity versus Postmodernity in Peter Eisenman
FREDRIC JAMESON

38 Surfaces
YVE-ALAIN BOIS

46 Cannaregio
Three Texts for Venice
PETER EISENMAN

Project History
JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDAIR

Catalogue of Drawings (1–28)

72 Berlin
The City of Artificial Excavation
PETER EISENMAN

Project History
JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDAIR

Catalogue of Drawings (29–60)
Director's Note

"Our fame should be all the greater if without preceptors and without any models to imitate we discover arts and sciences hitherto unheard of and unseen."

(Leon Battista Alberti in a letter to Filippo Brunelleschi)

It may seem anomalous to start a work on Peter Eisenman with a citation from a Renaissance authority on architecture: Eisenman who rejects precedent, who rejects authority, whose "desire is to displace from within, from the center." But the purpose of this book and the exhibition it accompanies is to explore Eisenman's search through drawing and text for the fundamentals of architecture at the end of the twentieth century, when our view of the world seems to break as radically from the past as did the anthropocentric concepts of the Renaissance from a medieval theocentric vision.

Cities of Artificial Excavation is about invention in architecture. For Alberti, Brunelleschi's dome for Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence was a feat of engineering "unknown and unimaginable among the ancients" and evidence that the power to invent derived from the interaction between the individual ingegno and the prevailing body of new knowledge. Eisenman searches, as did his predecessors in the Renaissance, to generate architecture through his understanding of current literary, philosophical, and scientific theory. He derives his ingegno from "arts and sciences hitherto unheard of and unseen."

Eisenman's intention is to free architecture of its own traditional language and canons. In Cities of Artificial Excavation he searches, as he must, beyond the modernists' predominating interest in material-generated form, for form generated by the critical reading of key texts. He uses these as a point of departure for "excavating," abstracting, and reassembling the particularities of site.

The projects presented here trace the history of an idea that marks a significant departure from Eisenman's earlier body of work. In the 1970s he had explored the cube in space, siteless, as an iconic object, the cube itself a form inviting excavation. The Cities of Artificial Excavation translate this investigation of the isolated, abstract, three-dimensional object to the vast plane of physical and historical topographies of specific sites.

On another level the body of work presented here reveals the power of drawing to generate form. Eisenman uses drawings related to the geometries of site, iterated and superposed according to procedures suggested by a "narrative," to locate the elements that can underlie building form. The nature of his drawings may be clarified by comparing them with the stereometric projections of Philibert de Lorme for the Trompe at Anet. De Lorme's drawings were mathematical investigations in the realm of theory that could be used to describe a complex surface so that a mason could build it.
Eisenman draws to find an object, not to make it; with an idea in mind, not with a form in mind.

The projects of *Cities of Artificial Excavation* also trace Eisenman's move from small, largely theoretical propositions to larger-scale projects meant to be built, and to a full-time practice. They have since led him to a new body of work in which he has reached a synthesis of these ideas. By uniting the mysteries of internal structure with the many meanings of site, in his more recent work he has found other areas of investigation, opened by once unheard of philosophies and unseen geometries.

The CCA is pleased to have organized this book and exhibition as a contribution to knowledge about the ways in which critical ideas and the culture of architecture are developed.

**Phyllis Lambert**

Director, Canadian Centre for Architecture
Introduction

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDARD

Since the late 1960s the practice of American architect Peter Eisenman has opened architectural discourse to the contemporary intellectual debates of other disciplines. Both the rigorous formalism of Eisenman’s house projects of the 1970s and his reflections on the status of aesthetic form, begun in the 1980s, express his concern to confront theories in the humanities – from linguistics and psychology to philosophy and art criticism – with architectural theory. The cohesive body of work he carried out between 1978 and 1988 under the title “Cities of Artificial Excavation” clarifies this intention.¹

These projects – submissions to competitions, theoretical works, and public commissions – are situated between the abstract design methodology, derived from modernism, of Eisenman’s earlier houses and his current experiments in complex, three-dimensional geometry. They also constitute a distinct phase in his architectural practice during which he tested theoretical reflections on the nature of site, architectural representation, and program with specific drawing techniques involving tracing, superposition, and layering. The “architectural topographies” produced and the drawings and models from which they resulted are testimony to Eisenman’s rejection of the aesthetic composition of form, an element of architectural theory which had remained unquestioned in architecture since its establishment as an autonomous discipline during the Renaissance. With the Cities of Artificial Excavation, Eisenman echoes the reflections on the nature of the work of art which were taking place at the same time in philosophy, literature, and the visual arts.

Of the eleven projects which constitute the Cities of Artificial Excavation, the Canadian Centre for Architecture has selected for this publication four of the most representative and best documented examples, all part of its collection. The dense sequence of conceptual sketches, models, and notes created for the submission to the International Seminar of Design for Camarregio West, Venice (1978); for the submission to the Restricted International Competition “South Friedrichstadt as a Place to Live and Work,” of the Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin (1982-1983, partially realized between 1982 and 1986); for the University Art Museum of the California State University at Long Beach, California (unbuilt design, 1986); and for “Chora L Works,” a garden for the Parc de la Villette, Paris (unbuilt design, 1985-1986) – uncover the most important ideas Eisenman explored during this decade.²

The Camarregio project introduces Eisenman’s reflections on the idea of site. He uses as points of departure for this project Le Corbusier’s 1964-1965 design for a hospital in Venice and one of his own projects, House III A. As he explores the Venetian site with the help of topological geometry, he develops
the tracing method used throughout his excavations. It is, however, with his entry to the Berlin competition that Eisenman first crystallizes this approach to design into the notion of artificial excavation. Balanced between the recollection of the history of the Friedrichstadt site and "anti-memory," which points to the universality of the city of Berlin, Eisenman's project is created out of the construction of "ruins" recalling the urban geometry and of walls aligned on the geographer's Mercator grid. His topographical strategy is fully fleshed out with the Long Beach museum. Conceived as a radical criticism of the symbolic role of architecture, this museum is created out of the overlapping, at different scales, of maps recording significant site conditions at specific dates, a design technique first developed in the "Romeo and Juliet" project realized for the 1985 Venice Biennale. The cycle of artificial excavations ends with the La Villette project. Discovering surprising analogies between the history of the La Villette site, with its canals and slaughterhouses, the grid of follies designed by Bernard Tschumi, and his own project for Camarregio, Eisenman reinterprets his Venetian project on the Parisian site, thus recapitulating nearly ten years of research.

While the critical acclaim which followed the inauguration of the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts at the Ohio State University, Columbus (1983–1989), gave the Cities of Artificial Excavation broad exposure, the process by which they were created has been little examined. This exhibition and catalogue propose to show the fundamental role of drawing and model making in the elaboration of Peter Eisenman's theoretical discourse. The numerous sketches and working models not only trace vividly the evolution of the architect's ideas; they demonstrate how, through these practices, Eisenman could develop the critical discourse which had a profound impact on contemporary architecture.

From Composition to Decomposition to Excavation

Before the artificial excavation projects Eisenman had established his reputation as architect and theorician with numerous publications and a series of houses designed and built between 1967 and 1980. This period in his architectural practice corresponds to his directorship of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, an organization he founded in 1967 as a tribune for architectural discourse in the United States. The Institute, through the publication of the journal Oppositions and, starting in 1975, of the series Oppositions Books, had a profound impact on American architectural culture until its dissolution after Eisenman's resignation in 1982.

During these thirteen years Eisenman's work focused on the house. Influenced by the analytical methods of the architectural critic and teacher Colin Rowe, he studied closely the morphology of seminal works of the Modern Movement such as Le Corbusier's 1920s villas and Giuseppe Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como (1932–1936). His search for an architectural syntax derived from these buildings was also prompted by his readings on structural linguistics, notably Noam Chomsky's research on the "deep," conceptual structure of language. Inspired by this linguistic model, Eisenman tackled


With House VI (Frank residence, Cornwall, Connecticut, 1972–1976), Eisenman moved away from compositions based on the codified arrangement of parts. Influenced by theorists of modern art and critics such as Clement Greenberg and Rosalind Krauss, but also by the work of conceptual and minimalist artists, he took a more critical approach to his house designs. According to Krauss, the formal and compositional ambiguities of House VI (most notably its two staircases, one painted green, the other painted red and placed on the ceiling) point outside the self-imposed limits of the autonomous language Eisenman had sought to create and mark the abandonment of his early formalism in favor of a new linguistic and semantic sensibility.\(^7\)

This shift was complete with House X (Aronoff residence, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, unbuilt design, 1975–1977; fig. 1).\(^8\) In this project Eisenman advanced his criticism of composition by attempting to suspend the human subject – whether creator or spectator – still implicit in his previous designs, which were based on the manipulation of Euclidean solids.\(^9\) To achieve this suspension, Eisenman developed "decomposition," a process by which he tried to circumvent both classical composition, based on rules reflecting an underlying order in nature, and what he termed "modernist transformation," a design process generated from ideal types.\(^10\) Eisenman’s use of decomposition made him replace the cube, the preferred generating volume of his first houses, with the fragmentary "cl," a three-sided portion of a hollow cube. House X is the result of the manipulation of four of these els separated by a cruciform void at the heart of the house, symbolic to Eisenman of the elimination of the human subject.\(^11\)
In the same way in which House VI marked the replacement of compositional strategies by textual ones, the last houses signal a break in Eisenman’s thinking. With House 11a (Forster residence, Palo Alto, California, unbuilt design, 1978), House El Even Odd (unbuilt design, 1980), and Fin d’Ou T Hou S (project, 1983), the intentions displayed in the early houses were definitively abandoned. House 11a, like the two other houses of that period, was assembled (or rather, decomposed) from House X’s els (fig. 2). For Eisenman, the els, by putting an end to the tyranny of Euclidean geometry in House X, expressed the uncertainty and pluralism characteristic of the contemporary world that his client wished to address.

The incompleteness of the els is echoed in the asymmetrical massing of the house, suggesting instability and imperfection, properties enhanced by the disquieting use of materials, most notably glazing in the floors. The unconventionality of the design is reinforced by the siting of House 11a partly underground, in an excavated hole. As the architect himself remarks, it is the first example of excavation in his work.

As autonomous forms the houses disregarded the particularities of their sites, an attitude expressed by Eisenman’s choice of axonometry as his preferred drawing technique. In contrast the Cities of Artificial Excavation directly address urban context. For Eisenman this new interest in the city did not mean replicating its formal or typological characteristics, as did the most banal postmodern architecture at that time. With his 1978 submission to the International Seminar of Design in Venice Eisenman began to explore urban sites with the same critical strategies tested in the last house projects. In this project he added, to the physical context of the assigned site, a construction of Le Corbusier’s unrealized Venice Hospital, which he then distorted with “topological” deformations resembling the ones used in House 11a. Eisenman extended Le Corbusier’s geometrical grid to cover the entire Venetian neighborhood and placed his excavations, which were shaped like the hospital’s structural cores, on its coordinates (see cat. no. 28). Unlike authentic archaeology, these diggings do not attempt to discover evidence which would illuminate the history of the site but rather, as “absences,”
express the meaningfulness of modernist rationality that Eisenman saw in Le Corbusier's design."

By the time of his 1981 submission to the Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1984, Eisenman's attitude to site had undergone further development. While House X's walls did not disappear and became, as vector-like objects, the skeletons of the proposed buildings for Berlin, some new, cartographic methods emerged that would be used throughout the Cities. In their rudimentary and abstract form, the grids of the Mercator coordinates and the South Friedrichstadt urban plan of the Berlin project, like those representing the city and the campus geometries in the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, go beyond formal manipulation and create fictive identities for the city and site (see cat. no. 44). Having abandoned formalism in favor of fiction, Eisenman would state by 1982:

*I am no longer interested in semiology. I am interested in poetics, and I think they are very different concerns. Equally, I am no longer interested in philosophy, but rather fiction. I think fiction is much more philosophical than philosophy. I do not have much relationship today with my earlier work dealing with syntax. I do not reject it or deny it. It merely is something else... It is the poetic aspect of architecture which now interests me. No matter how many syntactically correct architectural sentences we might make, they may not contain poetry."

The Fictional City and the End of the Classical

The phrase Cities of Artificial Excavation embraces three main ideas: the relationship of architecture to the city; the elimination of the value attached to rational design processes; and the fictitious creation, through texts and drawings, of traces associated with the site. In pursuing these Eisenman refers to concepts he outlined in a seminal essay of 1984, entitled "The End of the Classical, the End of the Beginning, the End of the End."

In this essay he identifies three "fictions" that have deluded architects since the fifteenth century and that need to be overcome. For Eisenman the quests for a timeless architecture (the "fiction of history"), a meaningful architecture (the "fiction of representation") and a true architecture (the "fiction of reason") have plagued the classic and the modern alike and have prevented the emergence of alternative architectural discourses and values. The Moderns might have claimed complete independence from the architecture of the past, yet Eisenman finds in their work the same ancient fascination with the classical ideal of the "timeless, meaningful, and true." He explains how the Moderns rejected divine order, the timeless origin of architecture, only to replace it by their concern with representing historical progress in architecture. Their obsession with the prevailing conditions of culture became, paradoxically, a new timeless principle. They abandoned the imitation of the antique, but adopted function as a concept that gave meaning to their architecture. Finally, they discarded the classical search for caves, huts, and temples as the origins of a "true" architecture and replaced them with function, typology.
and technique—all without questioning the very idea of truth in architecture.

Eisenman proposes a series of strategies to eliminate these three fictions and create an alternative architecture he names “not-classical.” To counter the simulations of history, representation, and reason, he favors dissimulation, a mechanism which produces an “artificial” architecture, an architecture that is without origin or end (thus eluding the fiction of history), free of meaning (thus escaping the fiction of representation), and arbitrary (thus avoiding the fiction of truth). To illustrate the nature of this artificial architecture, Eisenman uses the metaphor of the graft. He explains it as follows:

One example of an artificial origin is a graft, as in the genetic insertion of an alien body into a host to provide a new result. As opposed to a collage or a montage, which lives within a context and alludes to an origin, a graft is an invented site, which does not so much have object characteristics as those of process. A graft is not in itself genetically arbitrary. Its arbitrariness is in its freedom from a value system of non-arbitrariness (that is, the classical). It is arbitrary in its provision of a choice of reading which brings no external value to the process. But further, in its artificial and relative nature a graft is not in itself necessarily an achievable result, but merely a site that contains motivation for action—that is the beginning of a process.22

The graft for Eisenman is the arbitrary and artificial site which frees the architect from the automatisms of tradition. An open field of possibilities, the graft places the emphasis not on the final product but on the architectural process itself.

Grafting is made apparent in Eisenman’s notion of “scaling.”23 As a procedure which displaces and multiplies architectural plans of existing buildings or topographical contours of a given site and places them in altogether different contexts, thereby removing any fixed and identifiable reality, scaling preserves Eisenman’s interest in the modernist practice of defamiliarization, at play in the early houses.24 It also systematizes the technique of superposition he

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23. For the importance to Eisenman of the modernist practice of defamiliarization, see Rosalind Krauss’s discussion of Viktor Shklovsky in “Death of the Hermeneutic Phantom” and K. Michael Hay’s, “From Structure to Site to Text: Eisenman’s Trajectory,” Thinking the Present: Recent American Architecture (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1990), p. 64.
34. I think the scaling has made superpositions as a strategy more conscious. It was probably not as conscious in Ohio State and I think it's an interesting point. It certainly was not conscious in Berlin. They were there. Scaling has brought up the notion of how do you register, how do you get those analogic relationships. Eisenman to Lynne Beccia, in "Interview: On Architecture of Text," p. 65.

35. "Posed self-consciously against anthropomorphic analogies, closed formal systems and functionalist derivations, these designs implicitly overturn the classical system of representation, while denying any authenticity to the grand master narratives of architectural history," Anthony Vidler, "After the End of the Line," p. 148.

36. Instead of dealing with abstraction I was dealing with the idea of the actual figure. This was a real boost for me, to introduce figuration into the work, but not as historical or natural figuration, but as textual figure. These can be called rhetorical figures that deal with the notion of text. I think the Romeo and Juliet project is the first of a series which includes the Long Beach Art Museum, the Cleveland Waterfront project, and the Rome project for the Milan Biennale last year. Carsten Juel-Christiansen, "Interview with Peter Eisenman," p. 11.

37. For a detailed account of scaling as it relates to the Romeo and Juliet project, see Peter Eisenman, "Moving Arrows, Lox, and Other Errors," p. 143.

38. It does not simulate the real, but represents and records the action inherent in a former or future reality, which has a value no more or less real than the trace itself. That is, the trace is uncorrelated with forming an image which is the representation of a previous architecture or of social customs and usages; rather, it is concerned with the marking—literally the figuration—of its own internal processes. Thus the trace is the record of motivation, the record of an action, not an image of another object-origin, Peter Eisenman, "The End of the Classical, the End of the Beginning, the End of the End," p. 177.

44. Scaling, as Eisenman defines it, encompasses three interdependent principles, which together constitute the operative model of his "not-classical" architecture. Recursivity, the recurrence of mathematical shapes through subdivision, is meant to destroy the primacy of the original; self-similarity, the proliferation of non-identical shapes, intends to eliminate human scale as a point of reference; and discontinuity, the fragmentation of geometric figures, tries to weaken the power implicit in geometric form. When Eisenman takes existing forms from historical maps of a given site and "scales" them according to a scenario associated with site or program, he not only eliminates traditional design methods based on causal relationships between architectural intention and form but also lays aside the self-referential, abstract language of his early houses. Fiction is at the origin of this architectural process; its meaning is found in the riddle of the analogous relationships between figures.

This new interest in fiction is most evident in Eisenman's "Romeo and Juliet" project, presented at the Third International Exhibition of Architecture of the Venice Biennale in 1985 (fig. 3). Given the program of rehabilitating the castles associated with the Montagues and Capulets at Montecchio Maggiore in the Veneto, Eisenman begins with an analysis of the plot of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. He first associates each character with an emblematic architectural plan (the plan of Juliet's castle with Juliet, for example). He then directs these "architectural characters" in a series of scalings registered on the sites marking the significant events of the story (the union of Romeo and Juliet represented by the church in which they were married, their separation symbolized by Juliet's tomb, etc.). The scalings obtained are developed volumetrically in axonometrics and models according to the relationship of the characters in the scene.

In this project and in subsequent experiments at Long Beach and La Villette directly inspired by it, scaling never produces definitive architectural forms. It determines architectural objects which are only possible occurrences among many, moments in a continuous process of transformation. Eisenman names two stages in this constant flux: palimpsest and quarry. Beyond the actual conditions of the site as given to the architect, the palimpsest holds
the traces of the site's memories. Conversely, the quarry represents immanence, or latent future transformations. With scaling, the design process moves between the layered result of possible superpositions and the raw material for future excavations without ever achieving final synthesis.

The drawing methods with which Eisenman experiments in the Cities of Artificial Excavation closely reflect his scaling procedure. Unlike the house designs, which were mostly conceived in axonometric projection, the artificial excavations are developed in plan. Eisenman typically begins these projects with figures taken from historical maps—river contours, plans of buildings, shapes of territories, or settlement patterns—which he then reduces or enlarges according to the directives given by scaling. By using tracing paper (sometimes even the photocopier), these traces are registered on specific coordinates (the summit of a hill, a line separating two territories, or the contour of a building) and superposed. The complex composite drawings which result from these superpositions typically display different colors, each associated with one of the original figures, now duplicated at different sizes and in different locations (see, for example, cat. no. 74). The transparent presentation drawings for the Romeo and Juliet project vividly illustrate this drawing method; here Plexiglas replaces tracing paper, and the different colors of the traces symbolize their fictitious existence in the past (as memory), present (as presence), or future (as immanence).

In contrast to the complexity of the planimetric design, the three-dimensional development of the buildings of the Cities of Artificial Excavation is simple; the volumes are readily extruded from the plans. In the Long Beach project, Foam-Cor working models are used to explore the possibilities created by the vertical extrusion of the superpositions (see cat. nos. 103–105). Eisenman, evidently inspired by these three-dimensional studies, places most of the required spaces of the museum underground, on either side of a deep trench through which he provides access to the building (fig. 4). Eluding the issue of the facade, the spaces are contained within largely blank volumes. In the Wexner Center, the extruded volumes are relieved by the three-dimensional grid of the gallery and the fragments of the 1898 armory which formerly occupied the site. In both projects, Eisenman's underground architecture hides itself by imitating the landscape's contours. In this way it dramatically achieves his goal of destabilizing architecture's traditional figurative presence.

Building

The dedication of the Wexner Center on November 17, 1989, marks the conclusion of Eisenman's artificial excavations. The only built project of the series (excluding the housing in Berlin, only partially realized), the Wexner Center opened when Eisenman was already exploring new concerns. He identifies the unrealized Guardiola house at Cadiz (1988) as the turning point (fig. 5). Abandoning the simple extrusion of two-dimensional superpositions determined by scaling, Eisenman creates in the Guardiola design a complex, three-dimensional form. His signature els, earlier eclipsed by cartography, return: their interpenetration produces volumetrically what
was once achieved in plan. The more recent projects such as the Biology Center for the J. W. Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, Germany (unbuilt project, 1987), or the Carnegie-Mellon Research Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (unbuilt project, 1988), develop these formal manipulations, now with the help of computers (fig. 6). Eisenman’s desire to eliminate the authorial presence of the architect, implicit in the deanthropomorphizing process of his houses and excavations, is fulfilled through the computer’s ability to create forms without human intervention. \(26\)

Yet, beyond the computer’s promises of ever more sophisticated forms, the years spent on the construction of the Wexner Center (fig. 7) have had perhaps the greatest impact on the architect’s practice. With the more recent completion of large commissions such as the Columbus Convention Center (Columbus, Ohio, 1989–1993), Eisenman has now to confront issues made apparent by physical construction. In place of a belief in the virtues of a “cardboard architecture” and a denial of the value of materials – which resulted in his deliberately constructing buildings to look like models – Eisenman now considers spatial experience crucial for the development of his architectural theory:

While all initial moves in my work are still informed by my theoretical work, I now believe, perhaps because I am working at a large scale, that the
haptic and sensuous qualities in real space are important; while these may
have nothing to do with theory, they do affect the same space, which in turn
is impacted by theory. The more I learn to put things together, and you
cannot do that from drawing, but rather from the fact of building, the more
my spaces will be able to articulate my theoretical concerns. 39

This statement is perhaps less discordant with the architect's earlier inten-
tions than it appears. Even at the time of his most daring experiments with
decomposition and scaling, Eisenman had never intended to limit himself
to the drawing board. As Anthony Vidler points out, the real issue that the
most recent projects confront is his capacity to construct a critical, "non-
monumental" architecture. 39 It remains to be seen if Eisenman can success-
fully achieve this goal: nevertheless the drawings, models, and texts of the
Cities of Artificial Excavation stand as witnesses to an alternative practice
which, at the time of postmodernism's nostalgic return to a reputedly auton-
omous and timeless classical architecture, broke from the narrow limits of
architecture and reestablished its relevance among the contemporary arts.
Eisenman/Robertson’s
City of Artificial Excavation

KURT W. FORSTER

I. The City and Its Specter

Until modern times, the city of Rome was the paradigm for urban civilization. The continuous cycle of construction and destruction occurring on one and the same ground throughout her history accumulated layer upon layer as ancient structures became buried in their own rubble and new ones rose over them. For centuries, the giant public buildings of ancient times stood as reminders of their past glory while they also shrank to mere reminders of their former selves. In their ruined state they were seen as symbols of the futility and vanity of human accomplishment, or as objects of nostalgic contemplation.

As Rome was periodically renovated and partially rebuilt, she became several cities, one above the other: ancient, Christian, and finally, modern. Each new culture dug down to its predecessor, first to secure foundations, then to explore history, and in recent times, to reclaim and assert a continuity of political inspiration. If the early Christian basilica of St. Peter’s rested on the foundations of the Neronian circus, Bramante’s new St. Peter’s owed more to the architect’s investigation of ancient building technology and design than it did to the partially available ancient groundwork. Finally, Mussolini’s excavation of the Roman Forum was fraught with the contradictions of his policies: his claim of succession to the Empire of Augustus countermanded the sense of a radically new departure. After the fora had been excavated, they were partially covered again by the vast Via del’Impero. From the imperial avenue, the ancient remains appeared to be distant and disjointed objects. Starkly exposed within the modern city, the ancient ruins would ultimately be complemented by modern buildings of the state, so that ancient Roman and modern fascist buildings would close ranks, crowding out any other witnesses of the past. Centuries earlier, Michel de Montaigne put the conflict between ancient remains and modern occupation in Rome very succinctly when he noted in his travel diary of 1583 “that one saw nothing of Rome but the sky under which it had been grounded and the outline of its form; that the knowledge he had of it was an abstract knowledge and founded on reflection, of which there was nothing perceptible by the senses; that those who said that one saw at least the ruins of Rome affirmed too much, for the ruins of so awe-inspiring a machine would bring more honour and reverence for its memory: it was no more than its sepulchre.” The living city hid within itself the specter of another. The present harbored death as much as it beheld the memory of its own past.
If Rome symbolized the historic life and death of cities for some fifteen hundred years, Berlin became, after the Second World War, the mirror of a divided world. Utterly devastated and quartered by the occupation armies, Berlin was cut in half by the construction of the wall and its virtually impenetrable “deathstrip” in 1961. Hitler’s wartime threat to “erase” the enemy cities has instead been inflicted upon the former capital of the Reich itself. A mere carcass remained.

Enclosed deep inside the German Democratic Republic, the western half of the city became an enclave, a disparate fragment of its former self, politically suspended in the vacuum of Allied treaties and economically dependent on the distant Bonn government. After the war, the city was gutted even further, chiefly in the eastern parts, where a sense of vengeance and political expurgation extended to virtually any building prominently associated with Prussian history, while breathless commercialism in the western half was all too ready to sack the inconvenient remains of a dubious past. Both east and west shunned the border and the Wall blighted large areas, some of which have remained no-man’s-land to this day. One of these, a zone of several blocks south of Checkpoint Charlie, was chosen as a site of future redevelopment for the International Building Exhibition of 1984. Each city block was assigned to several architects in a restricted competition, one to the southeast of the Allied checkpoint, right along the Berlin Wall, falling to a group which included Eisenman/Robertson Architects. The jury accorded a special first prize to the entry submitted by Eisenman/Robertson.

II. The Site: Nowhere and Everywhere

The city block for which Eisenman/Robertson developed their project is a highly peculiar one, in that it lies astride the perimeter of the first major expansion of the city, the Friedrichstadt (fig. 8). The urban expansion of the early sixteenth century occurred so rapidly that the walls of the city were pushed farther west and south than had been anticipated, adding to the uniformity of the Friedrichstadt: a large southern triangle of garden plots enclosed by continuous rangings of burgher houses along the streets.
original perimeter of the first phase in the urban expansion is readily apparent on the map, marked by a peripheral street which sweeps across the southwestern quadrant of the city, sparing only our block, the last one to the south of the Friedrichstadt. It is probably no coincidence that the checkpoint between the former Russian and American sectors was established in this inexplicit juncture of two phases in the early growth of the city. To these historical conditions of the site must be added three buildings which were salvaged after the war, remaining as stark reminders of destruction. Their rear brick walls once faced the narrow, deep courtyards typical of crowded city blocks in central Berlin, and their side walls abutted other buildings, linking with their facades to form a continuous street front. The tacit assumption behind the competition was infill, the restoration of the block perimeter and its courtyards. But the most severe condition of the site was no doubt the most recent scar of its history, the Berlin Wall, which bounds the northern side of this block.

In their presentation, Eisenman/Robertson argued as follows:

*Our strategy for developing the site was twofold. The first intention was to expose the particular history of the site; that is, to render visible its specific memories, to acknowledge that it once was special, was some place. The second was to acknowledge that Berlin today belongs to the world in the largest sense, that its specificity and identity have been sacrificed on the altar of modern history, that it is now the crossroads of every place and no place.*

If all the aforementioned historical determinants - the peripheral site in the first urban expansion, the nature of Berlin city blocks, the surviving buildings - belong very much to this singular place, the abstract and unspecific dimension springs from the standard technique of mapping a site, any site: the Mercator grid, the coordinates of the four winds traced across the site. All modern maps, including the map from the mid-nineteenth century shown in fig. 9, contain this grid.

Fig. 9. Detail of a mid-nineteenth century plan of Berlin showing city blocks at the intersection of Friedrichstrasse and Kochstrasse overlaid by the thin lines of the Mercator grid.
III. The City of Artificial Excavation

Urban architecture always stands in relation to earlier building activity. New and old construction constitute reciprocal identities; planning for the future and recovering the past occur in communicating vessels. Even when the imagination takes flight, it rarely clears the hurdles of the present. When Filarete elaborated the plan for an entirely new town in the early 1460s (named Sforzinda after his Milanese patron, Francesco Sforza), he placed the fictional account of the construction of its port city into an inverse relationship with the excavation of documents which purported to describe the ancient town that had previously occupied the site.

The layout of Sforzinda (fig. 10) is based on a radial plan with alternating streets and canals linking the periphery with the center. In the heart of this town, major buildings and public squares conform to the familiar grid pattern of ancient Roman settlements. Filarete superimposed two schemes, the radial plan, with singular focus, and the grid plan, with its additive, linear sequence of streets and blocks. Both schemes remain in conflict to this day, each representing one principle of urban organization to the point of excluding the other. The centering purpose of the radial plan is imposed upon the additive one of the grid pattern, and from the conflict between them arises the architectural solution in the layout of the quadrants, such as the radially oriented squares in each segment of the town.

The arbitrary dialectic of Filarete’s scheme, engineered in the void of imagination, nevertheless contains a truth: The grid stands for the reality of traditional land division and urban building, the radial plan represents the universality of a political and architectural order of things. The subdivision of the urban territory with the manifold requirements of its population and production is difficult to square with the demands of a symbolic unity. Similarly the Friedrichstrasse block in Berlin acquires a dual reference to the remains of an established urban order on the one hand, and to the abstract mapping of sites on the other. Moreover, the area of the block reveals its own archaeology, both real and hypothetical: The early perimeter of the expanding city – never completed on the site – “surfaces” below ground.
while above it rise the bare and scarred brickwork remnants of three buildings. One is merely a trace, cast like the shadow of an absent object; the others are habitable ruins.

There are two distinct levels implicit in the site: the street level and the height of the Berlin Wall. As an absolute barrier, Eisenman/Robertson adopt the 3.3 meter height of the latter for those walls which mark the Mercator grid; they then use them as elevated walkways criss-crossing the block (fig. 1). From these catwalks one can “oversee” the categorical divider of the city and inspect this particular block like an excavation site. Low brick walls emerge from the sandy subsoil of Berlin like ancient foundations, aligned with the street grid of Friedrichstadt. This hypothetical excavation site makes the customary ground level and its predictable “finds” inaccessible, while visitors will walk on the elevated limestone walls of the Mercator grid. As Eisenman writes,

The Mercator grid superimposes itself as a second set of walls upon and among the historical walls. It is built to 3.3 meters height – the same height as the Berlin Wall. In this way the artificial or ‘neutral’ walls begin to erase the physical presence of the historical walls. It also renders them inaccessible by causing the ground plane – upon which so much Enlightenment history has been acted out – to become deeply eroded; the ground now becomes a figure of its own history. This ground plane is disconnected both vertically and horizontally from the existing city by canting it 3.3 degrees, creating, this time architecturally, another condition of blockage and division.3

In its layering, from the natural subsoil to the arbitrary height of the Berlin Wall, and in the displacement of the abstract Mercator grid from the historical reticulate of the city blocks, the site is wrenched open, its history exposed in a series of substitutions, erasures, and impositions of elements. The conceptual basis of the project recalls Freud’s fanciful but frustrating analogy between archaeology and “preservation in the sphere of the mind.... Since we overcame the error of supposing that the forgetting we are familiar with signified a destruction of the memory-trace – that is, its annihilation – we have been inclined to take the opposite view, that in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish – that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances (when, for instance, regression goes back far enough) it can once more be brought to life.” 4 Freud goes on to propose the Eternal City as an analogue to the mechanics of memory and suggests “by a flight of imagination” that “Rome is not a human habitation but a physical entity” like human memory. Then, “indeed, the same piece of ground would be supporting the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and the ancient temple over which it was built. And the observer would perhaps only have to change the direction of his glance or his position in order to call up the one view or the other.” Freud was soon discouraged by the absurdity of the exercise, and he warned that “the assumption that everything past is preserved holds good even in mental life only on condition that the organ of the mind has remained intact and that its tissues have not been damaged by trauma or inflammation.”5
Trauma and conflagration have certainly reduced the city of Berlin to a mere ruin of its former state, and the remaining walls of its bombed houses are now divided by yet another wall (fig. 12). Projecting Freud's image of the city back onto the mind, our modern condition has so traumatized our sense of history that to forget and to remember may be equally defensive, and sometimes desperate moves. Eisenman/Robertson's project creates a place in the homelessness of the ravaged and divided city, not by convenient patchwork or futile utopian gestures, but by offering up the wrenching experience of memory and forgetfulness in an archaeology of the present. "In this way memory and anti-memory work oppositely but in collusion to produce a suspended object, a frozen fragment of no past and no future, a place. Let us say it is of its own time."

6. Peter Eisenman, Eisenman/Robertson Architects, "The City of Artificial Excavation."

**Author's Postscript, December 1992**

The span of a decade is a modest measure in the life of a building, but it may well represent a decisive era in the biography of an architect. By 1981, Peter Eisenman had only begun to exchange his public role as an instigator of architectural debate—and director of the now legendary Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York—for that of a practicing architect in the full sense of the term. I would imagine that the discussions he conducted with Philip Johnson during this period of transition helped him crack the shell of an identity that had grown to be both too protective and too inhibitory for him. The records of these probing conversations are to remain tantalizingly sealed for years to come, but they acted as a solvent on Eisenman's encrusted self. The private reaches of his life shifted no less than did his professional identity in the early 1980s. Eisenman separated from his Institute, his wife, Harvard, and the conceptual grounds on which he had erected the idea of his houses and the notion of his architectural identity.

By early 1983, the competition for the Wexner Center at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, became the proving ground for Eisenman's new professional capacity which, once it had gained a foothold, expanded into a stunning series of commissions. Eisenman's architectural thinking won as much new ground as his professional persona, brilliantly proving those of his critics wrong who had long chastised his work as the machination of an arid and contrived mind. In fact, his steadily widening reach,
beginning with the Wexner Center, and expanding by leaps and bounds from the School of Architecture at the University of Cincinnati to the Biology Center for the University of Frankfurt and the Rebusch development project for the same city, propelled Eisenman into an orbit traveled by few architects.

If the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York had suddenly focused architectural debate in the 1970s, the Internationale Bauausstellung in Berlin inaugurated a stage for another kind of "debate": the confrontation of buildings under the harsh light of international scrutiny. It seems fitting that Eisenman's transition from his chamber music, the microcosm of small experimental houses, to grand orchestral ensembles should have been accomplished in Berlin. The City of Artificial Excavation, had it been realized more fully in accord with its idea, would have become an even more telling piece of its time. While it marked a compelling juncture in Eisenman's work, it found itself curiously displaced by the buildings that followed in its wake. Only today – after the unification of Germany, and long after the project itself – does the idea of this project weigh in with the aplomb it can claim for its architect's work.

The City of Artificial Excavation mapped the territory of an ancient fault line in the history of Berlin, probing at once the city's ground and its horizon (fig. 13). Between the layers of past divisions the architect divined lineaments of a future. But the actual events ran a countercourse to our intuitions. Borderlines that had assumed the appearance of fortresses and come to symbolize a divided world, collapsed. They may soon be superseded by new construction and obscured by reconstruction of earlier stages in the urban geography of the city. Had Eisenman's original project – rather than the truncated version of only one of its elements – taken shape, one might imagine it to stand out as a reminder of the early years of the Reagan era, as a stark landmark emblazoned in the black and white of Cold War history. Disavowed by history itself, it might then have become a mere leftover from its passing moment, surviving as a hapless reminder that the power of actual events easily eclipses the figments of imagination. Conversely, I venture to suggest, it might well offer the only site in town where both past and present become transparencies of the future, where a coign of vantage on time itself rises out of the rushing stream of history.

Fig. 13. A segment of the Berlin wall seen from a viewing platform adjacent to the building site.
I had a certain intuition about this in 1983 when I prepared a collage for a lecture (fig. 14) in which I juxtaposed the frontispiece to Sebastiano Serlio's *Third Book*, on ancient architecture, with Peter Eisenman's presentation drawing of The City of Artificial Excavation. If the emblematic inscription of the former states that "Roma, quanta fuit, ipsa reina docet," then the corresponding dictum for Berlin would need to warn us that "Berolina, quanta fuit, ipsa reina negat." To deny that the ruins of Berlin can reveal what the city had really been is not to rule out the possibility that a modern building like Eisenman's could accomplish the feat performed by ancient ruins in the Renaissance. I would claim that The City of Artificial Excavation does precisely that: Only a decade after its conception, is capable of extending our focal length so as to encompass the entire urban history of the spot it occupies in Berlin.
Modernity versus Postmodernity
in Peter Eisenman

FREDRIC JAMESON

The context in which these reflections on Peter Eisenman were made needs clarification: It was an attempt to construct a typology (or a permutation scheme) for various different and even incompatible tendencies in contemporary architecture (sometimes called postmodernism). The basic axis of this typology projected a high modernism — against which all the tendencies are in various stages of revolt — whose two basic impulses or poles were those of totality, or the drive toward larger and ever more inclusive forms, and innovation, or the valorization of the new, the utopian quest for the Novum. It follows, then, that three distinct logical possibilities can be derived from this initial dualism. I thus imagined one possibility in which a (more properly modernist) “aspiration to totality” (as Lukács termed it) was combined with a refusal of innovation and a commitment to replication; I imagined another combinational position in which it was, on the contrary, the modernist commitment to innovation which was retained, but in a new synthesis in which this value was combined with a principled repudiation of totality and a commitment to the part, the fragment, the component, or the part-object. Finally, a more classical poststructural catch-all position can be posited in which replication and the antitotalizing valorization of the fragment as such together generate an attempt more completely to overturn the modernist system: here, familiar names such as those of Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, and Michael Graves find their place. As for the first of my quadrants, the one which united totality and replication, I have felt it offered an interesting framework in which to explore some of Rem Koolhaas’s recent projects. But it is the second moment — innovation harnessed to the part or fragment — that is an appropriate framework in which to examine the recent (post-Cannaregio) projects of Peter Eisenman.

In effect, the typological scheme I am proposing here associates Eisenman’s work with that high modernist impulse to innovate, and thus interprets it in terms of an aesthetic which still wishes to make a radical break, which stands in principled opposition to the complacencies of replication, which somehow continues to identify its formal innovations with a kind of protopolitics in the most general cultural or philosophical sense. But when we begin to doubt syntax itself, and to wonder whether its operations assure coherence and meaning; and to suspect that the very form of its necessary figures and tropes ensures their internal contradiction, then that politics is itself modified, and a place is reached in which linguistic structuralism has already generated deconstruction out of itself. It is also a place in which spatial formalism is unable to rest calmly within itself but begins to generate
a nonstructural negation of its own system; a development which in the case of Peter Eisenman has won his work the unloved qualification of “deconstructionist”; it is a move, not exactly beyond formalism and rationalism, but against formalism and rationalism undermined by their own weapons and undone in a formalist and rationalist manner. The motivation of the device, here, remains philosophical; it is formulated in terms of the critique of humanism and of anthropocentrism (in other words, of a world view or lived, preconscious philosophy): “Though Freud’s exposition of the unconscious rendered this naive anthropocentric view forever untenable,” Eisenman tells us.

its roots persist in the architecture of today. The issues of presence and origin are central to the question of anthropocentrism. In order to effect a response in architecture to this new circumstance of man, this project proposes to employ an other discourse, one which attempts to eschew the anthropocentric organizing principles of presence and origin...²

This passage derives from a somewhat later stage in Eisenman’s own development (the one primarily of interest to us here), a stage in which temporal layers
and levels have come to add content to the pure and contradictory geometric syntax of Houses VI and X in much the same way that the color schemes of the Romeo and Juliet project (from which the quote was taken) are superimposed on the black and white of the axonometric figures.

But I raise the matter of the philosophical program of the "deconstructionist" period in order to clarify Eisenman's relationship with high modernism, whose fundamental value of innovation is certainly rehearsed here. Not in the banal sense of the achievement of a vivid, new, unique personal style that is immediately distinctive and sets you off from the older generation, that is only the most obvious and aesthetic form taken by the high
modernist logic of innovation, and the category of style it invents and deploys would in itself be enough to alert us to its incompatibility with this particular postcontemporary artist whose rational or geometric formalism is already a repudiation of personal style in that warm, visceral sense, fully as much as his antihumanism explicitly identifies and excludes it.

But the Novum can take many forms; and the notion of the revolutionary break is yet another, and not the most negligible of them: it can be realized on whatever level, from politics to philosophy. In this purely formal sense, it is all one whether you have in mind a louting for the overstuffed interiors of Victorian private life and wish to abolish all that in the name of a proletarian way with machinery and praxis or in the name of some Lawrentian vitalism; or whether you think that it is the intellectual or spiritual formation of the world’s current generation that is at fault – their metaphysics or their relationship to the question of being, their ideological values, their episteme, the quality of their consciousness, their mental equipment, or the very shape of their being-in-the-world. In all these different configurations, materialist and idealist, what counts is the will to some kind of absolute break with all that, or even only the possibility of forming the idea of the very possibility of such a break: that breath of a thought, possibility of a possibility, is enough to ground the notion of the modern as some radical difference with what has gone before; and the great antimeetaphysical project remains in that sense, even residually, modern. It is in any case repudiated by a variety of ideological postmodernists, for whom, in their very different ways, it is crucial to refuse the notion of radical change, historical difference, revolution, the break itself (even as a concept).

But obviously, like Koolhaas, Eisenman is more and other than a residual modernist, not even a late modernist of the Jencks type; and it therefore becomes crucial to specify the other, nonmodernist component of his aesthetic mode. It is clear (at least a priori) that the category of the part or element cannot in Eisenman play the same role or occupy the same function that we have found it to do in the practice of a Koolhaas on the one hand, or as it can be anticipated to do in work like that of Graves or Moore.

The very formalism of Eisenman’s first period suggests that the part as such will have been repressed, and will emerge only in the more generalized position of content, where it is neither particularly identified with any specific objects or ornaments nor thought of as raw material in any conventional sense. Content, for the most abstract of all buildings (that is to say, for whatever idea we may achieve of such a building), would necessarily and stubbornly remain the ineradicability of what is traditionally called site.

But to put it this way is to glimpse a fundamental (and historically new), properly postmodern possibility, that even site itself may be capable of being done away with. This should not too rapidly be taken as an ecological truth: for its ecological form (which is very real indeed, and chilling enough) needs to be ranged under a larger diagnostic rubric in order to avoid the still humanist pathos of the demeannation of the “domination of nature,” the rape of and will to power over the earth itself. Ecological damage in that sense is a subset of capitalist fungibility in general: the technological trans-
formation of all forms of ground and raw material, including space itself, into the indifferent materials of commodification and purely formal occasions for profit. At any rate we need to take into consideration the possibility that the renewed attention to the problem of the site is itself a function of the imminent extinction of the very category in question: an urgency and a desperation that then washes back over this theme to lend it a kind of second-degree historical content in its own right, the return of “content” itself as a new event.

Site could not, clearly, have been absent from Eisenman’s earlier, more “formalist” moment; indeed, he goes to some lengths to explain how, in House X, “site was a major consideration,” because of the automotive relationship between this suburban house and the city, as a result of which “the house became—for the first time in my work—a model of the reality of car/house seen as part of the total fabric of urbanism, an icon of that relationship.” Here, significantly, a part/whole relationship is rewritten allegorically rather than functionally, as a mere synecdoche; and the discussion of the site in terms of the structural relationship of city to suburb precedes its evocation in purely physical terms (“a fairly steep continuous slope running downhill from south to north,” etc.). These two developments are in reality the same: The allegory is at one with the overlapping of place into space, with the mapping of the house in terms of the absent geopolitical axis of country and city rather than the perceptual and phenomenological, experiential data of the isolated plot of land.

I take it for granted that some form of allegory has always been implicit in architecture, although in its classical forms perhaps so entangled with the immediacies of perception that its filigree could not be detected: thus, it is difficult, when it is a question of building along the line of a hill, to distinguish between the physical requirements of the site and a wall or plumbline that necessarily alludes to the ridge, repeating and reproducing its specific orientation. Such difficulties are compounded by the multiple echoes the site leaves within the construct, which must nonetheless, as they grow more numerous and complex, separate themselves from sheer contiguity to become a kind of idea or even a meaning; to lean against a rise is to turn a natural accident into a support and the approach to a mode of dwelling; to multiply such attitudes is to produce a veritable mimesis of leaning that then becomes endowed with a semiautonomous meaning of its own, or at least gradually comes to ask for interpretation. I am struck by the omnipresence of these allegorical patterns (often termed “analogy”) in contemporary architecture and even more by the way in which they are taken for granted as the inevitable fabric of the thing. But if one wanted to resist anthropomorphism and humanism, would this not offer a different but no less dramatic starting point—a principled effort to do away with just such an allegorical infrastructure, and to imagine an architecture capable of doing without such allusions and such geographical mimetisms?

Eisenman’s earlier houses were, as I understand it, generally taken to have attempted just that kind of antifoundationalism in the philosophy of construction. Nor, probably, am I alone in seeing his later trajectory as
exemplary of the various passages out of high structuralism toward the reinvention of this or that kind of content, which structuralist formalism began to demand as with a chemical craving. Many of these returns from formalism found an easy missing content in psychoanalysis, which seems also to have played a significant role in Eisenman's development: Marxism meanwhile offered a more demanding "absolute formalism," while deconstruction, as we have seen, also put a "post" to structuralism in its commitment to the implacable foregrounding of the metaphysical structure of modern thought and consciousness.

As Eisenman's association with Derrida is more than well known, and as the analogies between this architecture and philosophical deconstruction have been so often rehearsed, it may not seem altogether abusive to experiment with a somewhat different analogy and to confront Eisenman's practice with another philosophical work of the same period, which has not yet, I think, been mentioned in its connection. Indeed, particularly in the light of the relationship between Derrida and Althusser, and in view of the more than occasional intersections between their thinking, it does not seem inappropriate to stage a discussion of the later buildings in terms of a once classical text from the now extinct Althusserian canon - I refer to Pierre Macherey's Theory of Literary Production (1966), the major aesthetic contribution of Althusserianism, and a work that has, particularly via Terry Eagleton's reading of it, known some influence in England, and, to a lesser degree, in the United States.

The first half of this book develops a polemic against naive or referential reading of a type familiar as long ago as the New Criticism; but it is with the later, analytical readings that we rather have to do here, whose practice seems to me to offer a method and a model of far greater originality and interest.

Those chapters deal unevenly with Borges and Jules Verne, with Balzac's novel The Peasants and with Lenin's views on Tolstoy. I want to give a very general feel for these readings, all of which express a polemic, but also an experiential, feeling that the "work of art" as such is not the organic unity it normally passes itself off as being: that its unity is indeed a sham and a make-shift, if not very precisely a kind of ideology in its own right (this is a position which Eagleton's related Criticism and Ideology has very strongly defended in the English-language critical tradition). The work, then, the former work, is rather to be seen as an act whereby a batch of disparate materials, a kind of lumber room of all kinds of different contents, partial forms, linguistic phenomena, social and psychological raw material, semi-autonomous ideological fantasies, local period concepts, scientific spare parts, and random topical themes are forcibly yoked together and fused by the power of aesthetic ideology into what looks like an organic whole. What used to be considered a "work" therefore is now to be treated at best as a kind of anthology of disconnected parts and pieces, and at worst as a kind of dumping ground for objective spirit.

Yet the disparate raw materials are all clearly in one way or another social and historical: they come from someplace real; they bear, even cold,
represents another turning point, where there is the introduction of scaling and a conscious use of text, issues which were not originally dominant in Wexner. They were introduced through issues raised in Romeo and Juliet. Wexner is a turning point in one sense in terms of my professional work. It is my first major, constructed building. But theoretically and architecturally it is not. You could say that the turning point projects for me were Cambreange, Romeo and Juliet, and the Guardiola House. The rest are all developed from them, projects like the Columbus Convention Center, the University of Cincinnati College of DAAP, the Biomedical Hotel, the Carnegie-Mellon Research Institute, all in a sense are developments from the Guardiola House.

the traces of ancient struggles and of a once historical emergence. This is why the tension between such seemingly unrelated levels and building materials can be rewritten in the strong forms of the antinomy if not the contradiction itself (from the Machereyan standpoint) - the incompatibility between, say, this or that sentimental experience in the novel as content and this or that anecdotal unit or this or that mode of stylistic formulation, an incompatibility potentially so great as to show up as a kind of jarring wrong note on the very surface of the text. Such incompatibility is now to be read as a sign and symptom of some deeper historical and social contradiction which it is the business of the analyst to bring to light. But if that is the case, then we must now, in a second moment, reevaluate the act of aesthetic reunification denounced a moment ago. Freud indeed often spoke of what he called the "secondary elaboration" of the dream process, wherein the disparate wish-fulfillments and the random content of the nascent dream were then sewn and resewn together in a multiplication of ornamental interrelations which the earliest translators called "overdetermination."

This process of aesthetic and formal unification after the fact - getting rid of the loose threads, making up plausible connections where none existed before, rationalizing the coexistence of the different materials in a secondary and misleading way - this is surely very close to what Macherey and Eagleton have in mind, save for the consequence that if the disrelation of the materials is here seen as a contradiction, then the smoothing over of those incommensurabilities and the forging of something that looks unified must now be seen as more than a mere aesthetic act; it is also an ideological one, and aims at nothing less than the resolution of the contradiction itself.

Organic form thereby reacquires its value as a social and protopolitical act. On the other hand, it should also be stressed that from the standpoint of Machereyan analysis, this act remains ambiguous, and must continue to be readable in two distinct and antithetical ways: for i is seen as unifying the material and resolving the contradictions by papering them over with form, but on the other hand the analysis itself demonstrates that contradictions can never be resolved and that the "work" itself - the former work - is for all that nothing but a coexistence of discontinuous materials.

Something like this seems to me to be happening in the Eisenman projects, where a layering - literally reified or published for us in the Romeo and Juliet box, with its superimposed transparencies - marks the irreducibility of each of the levels to each other. This is dramatized in the superimpositions of the Long Beach University Art Museum, for example, in the incompatibility between the coordinates of various time zones resulting from a history "given to" the building. In Eisenman's words, "these 'superpositions' reveal analogical relationships that were obscured when some notations, such as social delineations, were accorded more importance." For example, the relationship of the channel at the northern edge of the museum site is similar to the relationship of the river to the entire campus site. Thus, the building can be seen as an archaeological artifact, a palimpsest both of its formation and of its superposed "histories."

A certain antipolitical bias here - the diagnosis that too much emphasis
on social history has had the effect of repressing the other histories – will not be particularly binding on us if, on the contrary, we think that it is rather social history that has suffered repression in American intellectual life. A more significant paradox emerges classically in the flip-over from description to prescription, from analysis to fresh production, and can be articulated in terms of the problem of the unified work. If that was a lie to begin with and the work never was unified, and if you know that and still want to produce a work of your own, then do you produce random fragments and discontinuous remains, or do you first imagine a unified thing and then deconstruct yourself? What strikes me in all Eisenman’s recent projects is the return of history, via the discontinuities of the site itself: the layerings are now historical, ghosts of various pasts, presents, and futures which may in fact be alternate worlds, but whose tensions and incompatibilities are all mediated through some larger absent cause which is History itself.

If so, it is history of a very different quality from what high modernism claimed to supply: cleanly fictive pasts, as surgical as the transparencies of the Romeo and Juliet box, without anything of the archaic shadows of that “well of the past” that overflows like the periodicity of the Nile in the Prelude to Thomas Mann’s Joseph tetralogy, bottomless, each deeper memory proving to be a “time-coulisse” behind which, like a screen, some yet deeper layer of the older and earlier lies concealed. “Was aber ist die Zeit?” There is no origin either, in this modernist “time sense,” but a virtually Althusserian “always-already.” It is not the reality of the concept but the passion for it, in the modernist period, that demands explanation. (We wiser postmoderns know already what Norman Holland pointed out so long ago – about “myth criticism” – that a text doesn’t yield a “mythic-effect” unless it is marked that way in advance, suggestively, like directions on a package.) Still, even the relatively postmodern revel in their own forms of this desire for a deep past: as witness Lucy Lippard’s striking Overlay, in which the affinities and intricate retroactivities among archaic tribal art of various kinds and post-Smithsonian conceptuality are richly documented: although the crucial nuance must be resonated, that not some thrilling Jungian bass note is demanded of these dolmens and cave paintings today, but rather, for Lippard, the communal and collective social life that speaks through them and that we continue, ever so faintly, to hear, in our postindividual solitude.

The temptation is great to assimilate something of Eisenman to contemporary science fiction (Kenneth Frampton does not altogether resist it in his critical essay in Peter Eisenman: Recent Projects, adding in addition the “disturbing” allusion to Edward Albee’s unmanly play Tiny Alice). The Long Beach project in particular can trigger associations with J. G. Ballard (and his own ready-made California ruins) which are perhaps a little too apocalyptic (and also too narrative) for this orthogonal architecture. The latter’s primal splitting of the atom seems to lie in the fracturing of the cube into so many hollowed el-blocks which are not merely systematically rearranged (in an interminable geometrical permutation), but ultimately held apart and wedged open by a great, nameless, cage-like force, an empty wedge that seems already allegorical (in a somewhat different sense from our use
here) of that “betweenness” that Eisenman evokes as a kind of third party to his various dualisms. The full spatial enactment and embodiment of this primal drama is then exhibited in the Wexner Center, where ready-made mint ruins (old battlements, earthworks, armories) spring into life around the irresistible movement of the glass scaffolding that is driven slantways through them.

Here we return again to the superposition of grids, of which the Wexner Center wedge is a dramatic exemplar, not least because it may correspond to an altogether fictive set of coordinates. It is indeed from this possibility of multiple grids in an articulated simultaneity that the possibilities of Eisenman’s new kind of historical projection derives. But the grids also return us to that other primal dilemma of all modern architecture, which is the incompatibility of a focus on the individual building (the individual architectural “work of art”) with that on the city, or the urban “fabric” (no matter that this dilemma is itself historically generated by a private property system). Grids clearly correspond to precisely that fabric, into whose vernacular fluency we have seen Venturi suggest that we insert ourselves; and to that heterogeneous macrocosm of the urban which it became the vocation of Koolhaas’s enormous microcosms to replicate like so many self-sufficient monads. Eisenman’s Ohio State version of a formal response (for one does not “solve” a form-problem like this, which is an irresolvable contradiction; rather one acknowledges it ad hoc in some new, form-producing way) is suggestively characterized by Rafael Moneo as follows: “The entire construction becomes a fragment of a city and, as a consequence, it loses the unitary and synthetic image that building once had. Here, structures and grids are what our eyes see rather than references to figural aspects which used to characterize buildings. This most probably is purposefully sought. Eisenman/Trott’s architecture emerges as an architectural phenomenon without assuming the condition of a building.”

“Without assuming the condition of a building...” These altogether remarkable words suddenly join the ground-base of the deepest vocations of all the modern arts: to put off, as long as possible, as Roland Barthes once put it, the status of the finished work, of what, as a reified object, was then at once by definition over and done with; “to prolong that penumbral existence, as in a waiting room,” between Art as such and the individual work. Identification with the various grids now for one long moment makes this possible for Eisenman as well, but generates some supplementary problems in its turn.

For nothing could be more congenial, or so it might seem, to the amateur of undecidability than the multiple and incompatible “readings” given off by each of these optional grids in turn. What threatens this innocent pleasure is the nostalgia for harmony implicit in all such pluralisms (the very fact of naming the situation and promising to turn it into a method is a symptom of “humanism” and of the promise that the incompatibles will all, on the other side of the rainbow, eventually be reconciled); in this case, it is Gestalt psychology that menaces otherwise scandalous dualisms and offers to turn them back into the placid, Javan-faced natural alternation of the rabbit and its Other.
I believe that Eisenman's specific new historicity is to be grasped as a response to this immediate form-problem: seen in this way, it is not a stylistic option or embellishment but an unavoidable next move. He calls this, first of all, "scaling," a word presumably derived from Mandelbrot and chaos theory (in which infinite enlargements and reductions infallibly repeat the "self-same" constitutive irregularities and anomalies); in my view, however, it is the motivation by way of an appeal to the authority of science (particularly Mandelbrot's fractals) which is optional. In reality scaling achieves something more fundamental and formal: namely, to un wedge multiple readings from the Gestalt, by projecting the lines of force of the synchronic (the grids) onto any number of diachronic axes. Scaling is therefore the equivalent in the realm of scale itself, or dimension, of what the various color schemes of the Romeo and Juliet box offered to model in the realm of temporality: "present elements (in colour), elements of memory (in grey), and elements of immanence (in white)" — in fact, the very forces Raymond Williams tried to x-ray out of actuality with his notions of the "residual" and the "emergent."

In the Romeo and Juliet box, indeed, both these processes are at work simultaneously, offering an interplay of aesthetic perceptions more complex than anything since Schoenberg's Klangfarbenmelodie, in which the sequence of specific instruments (flute, drum, string, trumpet) was rigorously coded according to notes in the theme, of which the recurrence of that particular sequence thus also unexpectedly constituted a repetition, but in some other dimension of the work altogether.

Scaling is also appealed to, in Eisenman, as a way of "destabilizing" narrative, or at least "the traditional idea of what is an architectural narrative"? but the context makes it clear he has in mind all the stale narrativities still implicit in the various architectural metaphors — something it was the historical merit of his own purism to have shown up, and another reason why one should hesitate before receiving the various themes of "ruin" here in
some more properly science-fictional way (it being understood that sr is taken here as a signal historical achievement of the rarest kind, and not some high-cultural reproach). But the words “traditional idea of” authorize us to suppose what new kinds of narratives are then not altogether undesirable or impossible; and I will indeed take the Eisenman dimensional effect (still most programmatically visible in the Long Beach project) as just such a projection of a new kind of historical narrative, one in which the present invents its own past, much like Bertrand Russell's God, who created this present only a moment ago, with a wondrous craftsmanship that rendered all the “always-already” and the temporal perspectives, the local and more distant depths of past in such an uncanny and lifelike fashion that we are tempted to think it has been standing there for thousands of years. Postmodern historicity then immediately becomes self-conscious and modestly embarrassed about its achievement, which it protests (“following Nietzsche”) to be only a fiction. But we need not make up our minds too hastily about that, since it may turn out that if this is the only kind of historicity we can have, we will have more ambitious plans for it. (I once found myself thinking that the postmodern “historical novel,” with all its false chronologies and made-up chronicles and genealogies, constituted a referential use of fiction to free ourselves from the irrevocability of the “facts” of the history manuals and to institute a simultaneity of multiple worlds.) In Long Beach the problem may be that of activating and deploying narratives without ending up producing a single narrative object that would finally be “only that”: “One recognizes in this project that architecture is about the telling of stories, and this stone text that is being written, this fiction, might tell a very different story about Long Beach than has ever been recorded before.”
Surfaces

YVE-ALAIN BOIS

The last time I saw a large number of Peter Eisenman's working drawings was in 1980, when I talked with him about his use of axonometry (I was then already involved with a study of this means of graphic representation and have been, on and off, ever since). Apart from the often reproduced axonometric diagrams of his houses, the drawings I saw at that time were akin to the "quivering line" sketches published in Peter Eisenman Houses Of Cards. Although some were plans and others perspectival views, most were drawn in axonometric projection.

Struck by the trembling contours, I immediately thought of Cennino Cennini's admonition to Renaissance painters that they avoid everything—throwing stones, drinking wine, having sex, etc.—that might make their hands shake. And I was intrigued by a contradiction: that of the association of that simplest and most precise geometric idiom, the axonometric projection, with what one could call an expressive or even expressionist line. In the nineteenth century axonometry was hailed by its modern inventors as a perfect tool for rendering the isomorphic nature of space and for advocating a standardization of measurement. In the twentieth, the modern movement found in it the master code by which its dream of a universal space could be visualized. All along it was viewed as a means of freeing the representation of space at last from the point of view of the subject.

It seemed to me both logical and admirable that Eisenman, wanting to engage in a dialogue with the Modern Movement (De Stijl, Terragni, Le Corbusier, the Bauhaus), a dialogue that would be not simply an Oedipal protest but also a revision, would choose to take up that movement's own favorite means of graphic communication. (A reminder: with the exceptions of Peter and Alison Smithson and James Stirling in England, who used it in the early 1950s for the rhetorical reason just mentioned, axonometry had fallen into oblivion during the 1940s; Eisenman and, collectively, the Five Architects are largely responsible for its reemergence as a major graphic code from the late 1950s on.)

What was surprising in Eisenman's freehand sketches for his houses, then, was the reintroduction of subjectivity into a visual languange that in itself signified a certain de-anthropomorphism. (There is no point of view in axonometry because there is no vanishing point.) In fact Eisenman's diagrams emphasized this de-anthropomorphizing nature of axonometric projection. Since it was the sole graphic means he chose to employ, it was as if he had been particularly drawn to the grid, the least anthropomorphic element in the modernist arsenal. It could, of course, have been the other way around: perhaps it was his reduction of architecture to its basic elements, his desire to chart its displacements and dislocations, that led him to the grid, and the
necessity of showing the distortion of the grid unambiguously (without any perspectival distortion) that in turn led him to axonometry. Whichever came first, the chicken or the egg, Eisenman’s cardboard architecture and his clearcut diagrams seemed made for each other. (This perfect translatability from one order to the other even led to some confusion, as shown by the somewhat absurd invention of the “axonometric” model for House X, a model that looks like an axonometric drawing only from a specific point of view— that is, to a spectator bound by the constraint Brunelleschi had demonstrated to be one of the theoretical requirements of single-point perspective.)

The House X model was a red herring, an illusionistic pun that Eisenman never repeated. (Some contradictions are productive, others not.) But the shuddering lines of the sketches seemed too consistent to be a transitory game. Surely one does not expect the architect’s hand, Gitto notwithstanding, to be as secure as that of Giotto tracing perfect circles. And surely the first ideas for a building are bound to be jotted down on paper quickly. But some of these drawings are much more than mere notations; in fact the more complex and elaborate they are, the more wiggly are the contours (fig. 26).

Why, I wondered, did Eisenman need to work with such fuzzy-looking images while conceiving his architecture? What did he gain from visualizing his projects as if through shimmering waves of heat? Why this insistent effect of irreality? Was it in order not to lose touch with the fictional character of his future buildings, was it to keep in abeyance, until the last moment, the iron-willed, definitive either/or of geometry?

These were the questions I had set out to answer when, on a cold, rainy day, I arrived in Montréal to look at a vast ensemble of drawings grouped around four projects collectively labeled Cities of Artificial Excavation (Cannaregio, Berlin, Long Beach, and La Villette). Although I had kept relatively abreast of Eisenman’s publications over the years and had noticed his growing interest in urban contextualization, my surprise was total when opening the folders kept at the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

The trembling lines were the dominant features of the drawings, to be sure, but gone were the axons. Or, rather, almost gone, for in the Cannaregio project and in the initial phase of the Berlin one, Eisenman
retained an interest in the kind of spatial and structural relationships that had until then been the hallmark of his architecture and for which axonometry was the best possible transcription (inversions of void and mass, or supported and supporting elements, and so on, made visible through the repeated beat of a module). For the follies of the Cannaregio project, which are a version of House III at three different scales, Eisenman still needed a volumetric mode of representation, and the same is true of the Berlin project at its inception, when it still involved a fairly large ensemble of intricate buildings spanning a whole block and related by promenades in a semipublic garden. But even in those cases axonometry was no longer preeminent, its reign being gradually supplanted by that of the map.

Indeed, the generative role of a ground plan is immediately striking in all four of the projects, as is the demise of volumes and elevations. In Berlin, the facade of the building as it stands today is clearly a partial representation of the general plan of the whole project, with its superimposition of grids of different scales; and the determination of the facade design by that of the ground’s articulation is even clearer in the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, which partakes of the same problematic as the four projects to which this book is devoted.

Abandoning the dream of a cardboard architecture that would manifest the (nonanthropocentric) permutability of all directions of space, and thus contest the traditional supremacy of the ground plan, Eisenman seems at first, in these projects, to side with the partisans of two opposite antmoderndist programs, today more vocal than ever: contextualism on the one hand and a return to the baroque system of the Beaux-Arts on the other. It is as if his architecture had shifted from a multidirectional, indefinite spatial play, full of unexpected utterances, to strict obedience to a master plan controlling both the inscription of the proposed building in its urbanistic context and the particular features of the building itself (including its elevation). Volumes have dwindled away from the drawings.

But in looking more closely one realizes that Eisenman’s maps are anti-maps. His first attempts at destabilizing the mapping power of the grid were, as the House X model had earlier been, a red herring — related to his interest at that time in topological transformations. Thus the first maps for Cannaregio are grids deformed as if they were drawn on tensile surfaces, in a precarious state of fluidity (cat. nos. 20, 24). It is as if the only way to avoid the nostalgic and maudlin reference to the historical context were, for Eisenman, to melt its topography. But melted maps and Möbius strips do not easily yield to architecture: it is from within that the combined institutional powers of the grid and of history had to be checked.

The solution came, as it were, from a mutual cancellation of both. It was through an operation of anamnesis, through a call to the recent past, that Eisenman was led to fold the grid upon itself and expunge its autonomous certainty. Neighboring the site of the Cannaregio competition lay the ghost of Le Corbusier’s never-built Venice Hospital, an extraordinary city within the city whose plan was a modular, thus infinitely expandable, grid. It is from the imposition of this absent grid as fictional memory onto the real
urban fabric of the site, a much looser and more hierarchical pattern with specific axes, that the most important aspect of Eisenman’s Cities of Artificial Excavation emerged: that of chance encounters engendered by the superposition of two or more grids drawn at various angles and scales. It is through these superpositions that what Eisenman called “rhetorical figures” arose by themselves, so to speak; and it is these fictional events, the nuclei created at the arbitrary congruences of the various grids, that destabilized or even annulled both the orthogonal order and the geohistorical context.

For I am not convinced that without Le Corbusier’s modular grid the whole principle of artificial excavation would have been invented at all; not convinced, in other words, by the various commentaries on the inscription of memory in the recent work of Peter Eisenman. Of all the amnestic features of the Wexner Art Center, for example, it is the stylized turrets and the marking on the ground of the plan of the old armory that seem the least persuasive. In other words, what matters in the Berlin project is not so much that the grids that intertwine are representations of the Mercator grid, of the foundation walls dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and of the present-day urbanistic module. What matters much more is that their intertwining produces a moiré effect which dissolves, or rather is constantly on the verge of dissolving, their identity. The unreadability of the palimpsest is even more striking in the much more elaborate Long Beach project; which is why, perhaps, Eisenman had recourse to the old concept of the geological relief – although to no avail, if we are to believe Kenneth Frampton, according to whom “the design team [found] itself virtually incapable of reconstructing the superpositions of the physical features that went into the ‘mapping’ of [this project].”

Eisenman’s discourse on memory and antitheatrical, decentering, displacement, absence, and reinvented history is shrewd but to my taste much too metaphorical. (It is paradoxical that a philosophy coined as an attack on metaphoricity has become, once “applied” to architecture, a vehicle of metaphor.) Certainly deconstruction is tempting as a strategy to envelop any kind of enemy in a paralyzing cocoon – the enemy in Eisenman’s case being humanism and its historicist fantasies – but I do not think it is of much help to the architect who gets hoisted with his own petard for lack of philosophical training. During the last ten years or so we have seen architectural theory achieve its level of incompetence. It is simply not the case that architects write such good books or that philosophers have such interesting ideas about architecture, and in a sense Eisenman’s recent exchange with Jacques Derrida marks a recognition, on both sides, that perhaps it is now time to put an end to the reciprocal trivialization of their own discourses and the flood of gobbledygook than poured out of their disciples’ word processors. 

The defense and illustration of Eisenman’s new development could have been much simpler, it seems to me, if it had not been forgotten that palimpsests have no depth, that they are an erasure of time, that they are surfaces. It would perhaps have been much more efficient to say that the Cities of Artificial Excavation represented a reversal from Eisenman’s very early

program, when he was searching, via Chomsky, for the “deep structure” of architecture. (But perhaps Eisenman’s fascination for language made this detour via deconstruction inevitable. It was at least productive: it provided him with some myths to get going, just as did his short-lived apprenticeship in generative grammar in the early 1970s).

Palimpsests are surfaces, and palimpsests of grids are the shallowest of all. Grids are written on the skin of things, and if they can be used as generators of fiction it is at the condition that all pretense of profundity be flattened out, as in a chess game or the I-Ching. And Eisenman’s strategy in his Cities of Artificial Excavation is just that, despite all the historicico-geological mythology: a surface strategy in which grids are a means of producing events (that is, fiction). At this juncture it is interesting to note that the principles that Eisenman is exploring in his artificial excavations were systematically investigated in painting by the French artist François Morellet from the early 1950s on. The issue of course is not that of anteriority; but painting is an art of surface indeed, and the similarities are telling.

Two of the five strategies used by Morellet in his paintings are of direct relevance here. (The three others, “juxtaposition,” “chance,” and “fragmentation,” also play a role in Eisenman’s projects.) Under the label, “superpositions,” Morellet groups all his works in which two or more identical grids superimposed at different angles completely cover a surface. This principle may lead to sheer cacophony, a noise due to the saturation of visual information – as can be seen in a pedagogical analysis made by Morellet, after the fact, of a portion of one of his grid paintings (fig. 21). But it can also create visual bewilderment: one would never guess at first glance that the end result, in the diagrams reproduced in fig. 22, is the product of the mere addition Morellet describes.

The second principle, which Morellet calls “interferences,” involves the superimposition of grids made of similar elements but not separated by the same intervals (fig. 23). For Morellet, “superpositions” and “interferences” were a means of reducing the arbitrariness of composition. He conceived these devices as a reaction against the sentimental rhetoric of “informel” art.
in post-World War II Paris.) In both cases, once the initial element is chosen (for example, a line or the module of a grid), the decision process is minimal (a choice of angles, of intervals). The arbitrariness resides in the system, both very coercive and very simple, rather than in the subjectivity of the artist; and the surprises that the system creates are all the more striking for being entirely predictable. They are chance events that spring from those least eventful of matrices, the modular grid.\(^5\)

Had he been acquainted with Morellet's use of such systems when he was working on his houses, Eisenman might have avoided some of the mannerisms resulting from his desire, at the time, to differentiate his design process from the work of Sol LeWitt. (Although some of LeWitt's and Morellet's grids can look similar, and although both artists were moved by the same desire to eliminate composition, their impulses have always been almost opposite: LeWitt is obsessively involved with the entropic exhaustion of a system while Morellet searches for the accident that the system itself can engender.\(^6\)) Suffice it to say that with his artificial excavations, Eisenman discovered that superpositions and interferences, although the most elementary operations, were quite enough to create a whole range of unforeseeable and intricate effects. Early sketches for the Berlin project seem to indicate that he had thought of translating these planar devices from the level of urbanistic palimpsests to that of individual buildings (fig. 25), and the somewhat rudimentary clash of grids on the elevation of the Wexner Center is a step in this direction. But it was not until very recently, with his forthcoming addition to the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning that Eisenman relinquished the contextual connotations of his superpositions of grids (no more Mercator, no more Jefferson) and decided to let these surface strategies determine the shape of his architecture by themselves, without recourse to grandiose mythologies: nothing is closer to a Morellet painting, say, for example, 4 double grids: 
\[-r^0 + r^0, -r^0 + 2^0 (\text{fig. } 24)\] than some of the diagrams with which Eisenman presented this new project (fig. 26): the same moiré effect, the same periodicity, the same unpredictability emerging from a total predictability. The similarity is even more apparent when the surface strategies of superpositions and interferences are then expanded to the whole volume (fig. 27).

All this is not to say that there is a fundamental break between Eisenman's recent work and the Cities of Artificial Excavation. On the contrary, the same principles are applied, but in a much more arresting manner. At one level, however, that of the production of fiction, the effect of the surface strategies is now far less conspicuous (although no less extant, for in all his current presentational essays Eisenman insists on the "hidden figures" resulting from his superpositions, "ghosted blurred images that could never have been
produced by traditional design methods”). Perhaps it has to do with our inveterate difficulty in perceiving architectural events, while a long practice of cities leaves us better aware of the sudden, silent jolt of a ghost. I would rather assume that Eisenman got tired of providing us with narratives, that he came to the conclusion that there was something paradoxical in advocating a dissemination of meaning and in insisting that we closely read the caption.

Perhaps, after all, Eisenman decided that amphiony was a rather limited art. The word *amphiony* was coined by Apollinaire in a short story called “The Guide.” In this tale the narrator meets a school friend whom he has not seen for fifteen years, and who now calls himself Ignace d’Ormesson. Pretending to be a baron, d’Ormesson gives an account of himself that suggests he is in fact a tour guide. Yet he energetically rejects such a characterization: he is not a mere guide; he has invented a new art form, which he has baptized in homage to Amphion, a son of Zeus who moved the heavy stones of Thebes’s fortifications by the sheer sound of his lyre. The instrument and medium of d’Ormesson’s art are a city; the “Amphionic symphonies” are promenades destined to emulate a certain mood according to the areas of town and the monuments that are visited. There is nothing very special so far. But the narrator marvels at d’Ormesson’s poetical genius when the latter performs for him (and for a couple of clients) one of his “symphonies,” called *Lutèce* – a short piece, says d’Ormesson, one that allows him to show the whole of Paris in half an hour:

“The tourists, the Baron and I clambered onto the top of a bus plying between the Madeleine and the Bastille. As we passed the Opéra, the Baron announced this in a loud voice. He added, however, as we went by a branch of the Comptoir d’Escompte: ‘The Luxembourg Palace, the Senate.’ In front of the Napolitain, he announced emphatically: ‘The AcadémieFrançaise.’ The Crédit Lyonnais he indicated as being the Élysée Palace, and so on, in this manner, until by the time we reached the Bastille he had shown us our principal museums, Notre-Dame, the Panthéon, the Madeleine, all the large department stores, the Ministries and the houses of our famous men, both dead and alive; indeed, everything a foreigner should see in Paris.”

— François Morelet, *4 double grids—t4t6, t4t8, 1961*. Courtesy François Morelet.
No doubt Eisenman showed a much richer imagination when he grafted Cannaregio's unbuilt grid onto the ground plan of his project for La Villette, or when he conceived an apocalyptic scenario for his Long Beach project, but to my mind this novelistic vein in his work was not worthy of the strategies I have tried to describe here (although it gradually led Eisenman to their full appreciation). There was something histrionic in this desire to reshape geology, geography, and history, a strange refusal to take full advantage of the superpositions and interferences of the grids. The carnival is not over, but through and after the excavation and the deconstruction, Eisenman has now found the means to organize the masquerade in his own medium — which is, notwithstanding what he or others might say, and for better or for worse, architecture.
Cannaregio:
Submission to the International Seminar
of Design for Cannaregio West, Venice, 1978

Three Texts for Venice

Three prevailing “isms” of architecture all involve nostalgia, a malaise involving memory – modernism, a nostalgia for the future; postmodernism, a nostalgia for the past; and contextualism, a nostalgia for the present.

Text One: The Emptiness of the Future

The Cannaregio is the site of Le Corbusier’s Venice Hospital project – one of the last anguishs of heroic modernism. The hospital program is symbolic of modernism’s remedial ideology: Its complete grid is superimposed on the irregular context of Venice. Text One continues the imposition of Le Corbusier’s grid on the entire Cannaregio. This grid is articulated as a series of voids – holes in the ground. These holes are potential sites for future houses or potential sites for future graves. They embody the emptiness of rationality.

Text Two: The Emptiness of the Present

The second text constructs several objects which appear to be part of the existing context – contextual objects. Upon close examination these objects reveal that they contain nothing – they are solid, lifeless blocks which seem to have been formerly attached to the context. On the ground is the trace of their movement, their detachment from life. They leave a trace, mark the absence of their former presence; their presence is nothing but an absence.

Text Two also constructs a second series of objects. These objects deny the existing context in order to establish the primacy of the context of the voids. While all the objects have the same form, the form of a house, they appear at three different scales. The first object is smaller than a house, the second is the size of a house, the third is larger than a house. The three different scales change not only the way man possesses objects in terms of their physical presence but even in the way they are named. The first object is about five feet high. It is smaller than a man, but it is usable to the extent that someone can crouch in it and it provides shelter. But is it a house or a model of a house? The second object is the size of a house. But inside it contains the shell of the first object and nothing else. The first object is a replica of the exterior of the second object. Is it a house, or is it a tomb for itself, or
for a model of itself, or for a real object? If it is a mausoleum, then the first object, the five-foot “house,” is no longer a model of something real, but a reality itself, no longer a model of something else but something in itself. The fact of the change in name, from house to mausoleum, changes the reality of the first object from model to house. The third object is twice the size of the second object and nothing else. How is it named? It is not the scale of a model, a house, or a mausoleum. Can it be a museum of houses, or a museum of mausoleums? The question is, Which object is the house, if in fact one of them is a house? Which one is the correct size? Which one is the real object? Since both of the larger objects contain a smaller version of themselves, is the smallest object the real object, and are the larger objects merely containers for the smaller? The three objects together stand at the limits of architecture, in terms both of their scale and of their naming.

Text Three: The Emptiness of the Past

The third text constructs a diagonal line in the ground. This line is the topological axis of symmetry for the objects and a physical cut in the surface of the earth. The earth's surface is peeled back slightly, as if it were the skin of some unknown body, suggesting that there is another level, some “inside” which cannot forever be suppressed by or submerged under the rationality of an axis. It suggests something that may erupt and that perhaps will not stay down: the unconscious or the shadow of memory? Giordano Bruno was an alchemist. He practiced the art of memory. He was brought to Venice in 1600 at the request of a rich nobleman, and it was there that he was incarcerated and eventually burned at the stake for practicing his art. Alchemists thought that through mystical intervention they could turn dross into gold.
Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect.

Presentation drawing: axonometric
including Cannaregio West and Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital, 1978.

Pen and black ink with transparent colored adhesive film on acetate over gold cardboard, 99.7 x 99.7 cm.

CCA DR1991:0017:093
The model of Cannaregio is painted gold. It is the gold of Venice, and it symbolizes the mysticism of the alchemist. The objects are a pink-red. This is a Venetian red, and it symbolizes the martyrdom of Bruno. The colors remind us of the irrationality of a Venice in 1600 turned against the act of memory. Now [in 1986] seemingly rational projects for Venice have embraced memory: All three memories—future, present, past—have their shadows, the loss of memory.

Perhaps we must now learn how to forget.

PETER EISENMAN
Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect.


Pen and black ink with transparent colored adhesive film on acetate over beige Pantone paper, 99.7 x 99.7 cm.

CCA DR1991:0017:090
Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect. 
Pen and black ink with transparent colored adhesive film on acetate over beige Pantone paper, 99.7 x 99.7 cm. 
CCA DR1991:0017:001
Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect.
Project History

In July 1978 the city of Venice and the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia organized an international design seminar to plan housing for the western portion of the Venetian district of Cannaregio. The seminar’s main objective was to discuss new urban solutions for historic centers. The foreign architects invited to this seminar – Raimund Abraham, Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk, Bernard Hoesli, Rafael Moneo, Oswald Mathias Ungers – had previously participated in the Venice Biennale of 1976, during which they explored European and American urban and suburban architecture. An exhibition of the projects produced during the seminar took place in Venice in April 1980.

The Site

The area designated for study lies at the northwestern edge of the city of Venice and is bounded to the southwest by the railway station, to the northwest by the lagoon, to the northeast by the Cannaregio canal – once the principal point of entry into Venice from the mainland – and to the southeast by the Grand Canal (fig. 28). The compact urban frontage on the two canals and the densely built-up southeastern area along the principal pedestrian
Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect,
Sectional model of el structure,
1978. Gray, beige, and pink paint over wood with Plexiglas, 100.3 x 100.3 x 37.0 cm. DCA DR1992.0010
route leading from the train station to the Campo San Geremia contrasts with the open land at the heart of this area. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the gardens of the palazzi facing the Cannaregio canal and the land belonging to the Franciscan monastery of San Giobbe — partly demolished under Napoleonic rule — were subdivided and turned to industrial uses. This transformation is most evident at the very northwestern end of the site, where the street names recall the industries — dye works, nail mills, match and wax factories — which existed there in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The construction of the railway bridge linking Venice to the mainland in 1841 and of the railway station in 1860 accelerated the industrialization of the Cannaregio district (fig. 29); one of the most notable transformations was the construction on the edge of the lagoon of centralized municipal slaughterhouses designed by Giuseppe Salvadori and G. B. Meduna between 1841 and 1843. It was on the site of the slaughterhouses that the Venetian municipality proposed in 1962 to establish a new hospital, to be designed by Le Corbusier (fig. 30). The project, submitted as a preliminary proposal in 1964 and revised in 1965, was modified after Le Corbusier’s death and was definitively suspended by 1971.
Peter Eisenman,

Sketch site plan showing grid of el structures at two different scales, 1978. Pen and black, blue, and red ink on tracing paper, 48.0 x 63.0 cm. CCA DR1981.0017:026, Inscription: Upper center, SITE MAP/REAL UNREAL/ 4 - DISTORTED/S DISTORTED =

Peter Eisenman,

Volumetric studies of el structures, 1978. Pen and black and red ink on wove paper, 41.8 x 28.6 cm. CCA DR1981.0017:011
Design Strategy

Eisenman's reflection on modernity, at the root of his criticism of contemporary architecture, was extended to the urban domain with his proposal for dwellings in the Canaregio district. The theoretical positions the architect disclosed in House X (1975-1977) and House II (1978) were for the first time confronted with the idea of site with his Venetian project. In House II, Eisenman used the spatial discontinuity of fragmented volumes to represent the end of the human subject as the dictatorial creator of the environment; for Eisenman this abdication corresponded to an "emancipation" of the architectural object from the constraints of usage and convention. He conceived House II as an unstable construction resulting from the collision of three-dimensional, L-shaped volumes which challenge the notion of enclosure as the essential characteristic of dwellings (fig. 32).

Eisenman's project of destruction of anthropocentric mimesis in architecture also hinged on the supersession of the instrumental role of Euclidean geometry in the architectural process. Topology, a branch of geometry which studies the properties of structures that remain unchanged upon transformation, seemed to him to reflect more accurately a contemporary architectural condition. With "topological" architecture he wished to obliterate the hegemony of proportion, which has traditionally shaped architectural forms after the human body. According to Eisenman, the "els" used in House II not only represent the fragmentation of the cube but, because they reveal simultaneously their "exterior" and "interior" surfaces, approximate the properties of the Möbius strip, a topological object which possesses a continuous surface and thus has neither an inside nor an outside. The design for House II is produced by the collision and the deformation of these metaphorically topological "els" (figs. 31, 33).
Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch site plan showing grid of 11 structures at two different scales*, 1976. Pen and black and red ink on tracing paper, 62.8 x 52.2 cm.
CCA DR1991:0017:016

Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch site plan showing development of grids of 11 structures within the urban context*, 1978. Pen and black ink with blue and brown pencil on tracing paper, 75.8 x 62.8 cm.
CCA DR1991:0017:017
The proposal for Cannaregio owes much to the theoretical and formal developments of House 11а. Not only are the so-called intransitive objects that Eisenman laid on the site variations of House 11а (as shown in cat. no. 9), but the discussion of topology accompanying the Cannaregio proposal is borrowed from the house project. After a brief inventory of the various ways in which the architect traditionally conceived of the city, Eisenman rejects equally "contextualism" and its opposite, the utopian urbanism of replacement characteristic of the Modern Movement. He conceives of a series of autonomous objects, scaled smaller or larger than conventional dwellings. He hopes by this to achieve a “non-scale-specific” architecture, a term he borrows from contemporary sculpture, indicating a condition in which relationships based on human proportion are eliminated. For Eisenman, the ambiguity of scale implied in such an architecture puts in question the representational nature and thus the very “reality” of architectural space.

The Drawings

In the Cannaregio project, Eisenman uses his interpretation of topology as a device for planning. In the earliest phase of the design, the open space lying to the south of one of the canals dividing the site transversely is organized according to a grid which is then inflected to follow the irregularity of the site; this grid is then colonized by individual buildings (cat. nos. 16–15). Cat. no. 20 summarizes the ideas explored in the project. It shows the dialectic between the grid of modernist urbanism (extrapolated from Le Corbusier’s hospital; cat. no. 18) and its “topological” deformation according to “forces” represented by concentric lines centered on two points, their triangular fields separated by a diagonal line. Eisenman names the “topological axis of symmetry.” In cat. no. 16 these deformations are carried to the sectional positioning of the “houses” themselves as they are alternatively pushed below the ground or emerge from it.

A similar strategy is adopted in cat. nos. 17, 21, and 25, but, in contrast to the final project, the geometry of the implantation of the individual constructions is determined by a square traced from an existing housing block. Cat. nos. 26, 27, and 28 follow the final project closely: the organizational grid of Le Corbusier’s hospital is extended on the entire site in a series of eighteen square holes, or voids, and the constructions are laid out on the diagonal “topological” axis now connecting two bridges, the Ponte dei Scalzi to the south and the Ponte dei Tre Archi to the north.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDARD
Peter Eisenman.

Sketch site plan showing grid of EL structures and its partial deformation, 1978. Pen and black and red ink with blue pencil on tracing paper. 62.8 x 63.5 cm. CCA DR1981.0017:018.

Inscription: Lower right, SITE = MOON/INTERIORS [?]/OBJECTS—OTHER

Peter Eisenman.

Sketch site plan showing deformation of grid of EL structures, 1978. Pen and black ink with blue pencil on tracing paper. 64.5 x 63.0 cm. CCA DR1981.0017:015
Credits

ARCHITECT:
Peter Eisenman, principal in charge. Peter Eisenman, Architect

ASSISTANTS:
David Buege, John Namba, Joan Ockman

MODEL MAKERS:
Sam Anderson, Andrew Bartle, John Bellettier, Caroline Hancock,
Jay Johnson, William Scheer, Glen Weiss

References


Raggi, Franco, ed. Europa/America: Architetture urbane alternative subur-


Peter Eisenman, Sketch site plan showing development of grids of Ei structures at different scales, 1978. Pen and black and red ink with blue pencil on tracing paper, 62.8 x 73.6 cm. CCA DR1991-0017.019.

FAMILIES OF 5

Peter Eisenman, Sketch site plan showing deformation of grid of Ei structures, 1978. Pen and black ink on tracing paper, 43.5 x 40.4 cm. CCA DR1991-0017.020
Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect, Diagrams showing topological deformation of site plan horizontally and vertically, 1978. Pen and black ink on wove paper, 41.8 x 29.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0017:010

Peter Eisenman, Sketch site plan showing geometric disposition of EL structures and diagonal axis of symmetry, 1978. Pen and black-and-red ink on wove paper, 41.8 x 29.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0017:008
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan incorporating elements of Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital plan with plan of S. Simeone Piccolo church at two different scales, 1978. Pen and black and red ink with blue pencil on vellum paper, 41.8 x 29.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0017:002. Inscriptions: Center right, [arrow] 2; lower right, CORNERS VS FRONTS/ AFFECTING WITHOUT CONGRUENCE

Peter Eisenman,
Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect.
Sketch site plan showing structural grid of Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital extended over Cannaregio West (lower center) and diagrams of the topological deformation of grid with diagonal axis (upper center and center right), 1978. Pen and black and red ink with graphite on wove paper, 41.8 x 29.7 cm.
CCA DR1991:0017:009

Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing geometric disposition of el structures and diagonal axis of symmetry, 1978. Pen and black and red ink on wove paper, 41.8 x 29.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0017:007
22
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan incorporating elements of Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital plan with plan of S. Simeone Piccolo church at two different scales, diagonal axis, and deformed grid of el structures.
1978. Pen and black and red ink with blue pencil on wove paper. 41.8 x 29.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0017:003

23
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan incorporating elements of Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital plan with grid of el structures, 1978. Pen and black ink and blue pencil on wove paper. 41.8 x 29.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0017:005
24
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan with plan of S.
Simeone Piccolo church at two dif-
ferent scales and deformed grid of
el structures, June 30, 1978. Pen
and black and red ink with blue pencil
on wove paper, 27.0 x 20.7 cm.
CCA DR1991:0017:001

25
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing geometric
disposition of el structures, diagonal
axis of symmetry, and grid derived
from Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital,
July 4, 1978. Pen and black and red
ink on wove paper, 41.8 x 29.7 cm.
CCA DR1991:0017:005
26

Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing grid derived from Le Corbusier’s Venice Hospital, of structures, and diagonal axis of symmetry, July 7, 1978. Pen and black, sepia, and red ink with graphite and blue pencil on wove paper, 41.3 x 29.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0017:012

27

Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing grid derived from Le Corbusier’s Venice Hospital, of structures, and diagonal axis of symmetry, July 7, 1978. Pen and black, sepia, and red ink with graphite and blue pencil on wove paper, 29.7 x 41.9 cm. CCA DR1991:0017:013
Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect,
*Sketch site plan of Cannaregio West with Le Corbusier's Hospital,*
showing disposition of all structures
with grid derived from hospital and
Pen and black, sepia, and red ink and
yellow felt-tip pen with graphite and
blue pencil on white tracing paper
 taped to diazo type. 50.5 x 87.6 cm.
CCA-DR1991:0017:050
Berlin:
Submission to the Restricted International Competition
"South Friedrichstadt as a Place to Live and Work,"

The City of Artificial Excavation

History is not continuous. It is made up of stops and starts, of presences and absences. The presences are the times when history is vital, is "running," is feeding on itself and deriving its energy from its own momentum. The absences are the times when the propulsive organism is dead, the voids in between one "run" of history and the next. These are filled by memory. Where history ends, memory begins.

The European city today is a manifestation of such a memory-void. As such it represents a crisis not only of history but of architecture itself. During the period of the Modern Movement, historic city centers became places for plunder. With their demolition during the war, and then with the rebuilding and development that followed after the war, they rapidly began to lose their identity. As a reaction to this failure of modern architecture to understand, enhance, or even conserve the historic centers, a "postmodern" attitude came into being: the centers were transformed into fetish objects. In general they were treated in two ways. Either discrete fragments of the old urban structure were preserved like bones or relics in a natural history museum, or the bones were reassembled, the skin and flesh restored or hypothetically recreated, and the new assemblage appeared as a kind of stuffed animal, a cagoulette in a "natural" setting. The former attitude attempted to freeze or embalm time, the latter to reverse or relive it. In both cases history was reduced to a form of nostalgia, and it reflected an unacknowledged anxiety toward the present.

The city of Berlin offers a potential alternative to these processes. For it is in itself a record not just of the continuity but of the end of the history of the Enlightenment. In this sense it is a unique object: the locus of a historical void. The wall that runs around it and through it already makes it almost a museum-city; it is an organism cut off from a part of itself, and a capital cut off from its own country. Thus it is the essential fragment: a petrified piece of something old and a living piece of something "other." In displaying, unavoidably, the presence of its former self, it is nothing more nor less than the memory of its own interrupted history.

The competition site – the intersection of the Friedrichstrasse and the Berlin Wall – is the paradigmatic locus of this notion of memory. Certainly it represents the place of the city's most significant and most compacted
transformations. In the eighteenth century, the site, located in Friedrichstadt, on the perimeter of Berlin's development, constituted the only place where the encircling city wall was left incomplete. In maps of the time, its anomalous condition already signals the future possibility of some other pattern of settlement, and indeed, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the site became the precise place where the next two phases of the development of Berlin occurred. These were characterized by the development of two typologically different urban models: the earlier a smaller, square grid realized in tight, volumetric blocks with central courts; the latter a larger, elongated, rectangular grid defined by the street facades of buildings with continuous open spaces behind them. Then, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a major overhaul took place. The area was rebuilt as a hub of commercial activity, with Friedrichstrasse as the major north-south connector.

By the middle of this century, this chain of history was rudely broken. In 1945 bombing left Friedrichstadt in ruins. Three buildings remained standing on the site, their scarred walls a reminder of their beginning and their end. Then the imposition of the Berlin Wall in 1961 felled the Angel of History forever: the city was decisively severed from its past and from itself. It ceased to function as the Enlightenment capital of Germany, and that part of its history was transformed entirely into memory.

The competition site is the symbolic locus of that memory. But it is memory with an ambivalent nature: the memory of something that once existed and thrived, but also, in its peculiar condition, the embalming of something living in the present. Thus Checkpoint Charlie on the Berlin Wall encapsulates the dual condition of severance and connection, exclusion and inclusion. The ritual of passage, the apparatus of engineering and barricades, simultaneously alludes to the former whole and denies its continuance. It obliges both remembering and forgetting.

In the conscious act of forgetting, one cannot help but remember.

Our strategy for developing the site was twofold. The first intention was to expose the particular history of the site; that is, to render visible its specific memories, to acknowledge that it once was special, was someplace. The second was to acknowledge that Berlin today belongs to the world in the largest sense, that its specificity and identity have been sacrificed on the altar of modern history, that it is now the crossroads of every place and no place. In the process of materializing this duality the architecture attempts to erect the structure of both somewhere and nowhere, of here and not here; to memorialize a place and to deny the efficacy of that memory.

This brings us to the concept of anti-memory. Anti-memory is different from sentimental or nostalgic memory since it neither demands nor seeks a past (or, for that matter, a future). But it is not mere forgetting; either, because it uses the act of forgetting, the reduction of the former pattern, to arrive at its own structure or order.

The act of memory obscures the reality of the present, that is, attempts to deny the existence of the Berlin Wall in order to restore the someplace of the past. Anti-memory, on the other hand, obscures the reality of the past—the past, which is in fact what renders the reality of the present no place—t
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,

Presentation model, January 1981.
Gray and red paint over basswood and cardboard with Plexiglas. 7.0 x 22.0 x 27.0 cm. ARCHIV Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin, KOC 007 22 M1
create another place, to create someplace. Anti-memory does not seek or
post progress, makes no claims to a more perfect future or a new order,
predicts nothing. It has nothing to do with historicist illusion or with the
values or functions of particular forms; it instead involves the making of a
place that derives its order from the obscuring of its own recollected past.

In this very memory and anti-memory work oppositely but in collusion to
produce a suspended object, a frozen fragment of no past and no future, a
place. Let us say it is of its own time.

Our design is highly specific to its site in that it begins from the conditions
we found there: three scarred but extant buildings on the site and the Berlin
Wall on the north. But proceeding without nostalgia or sentimentality; it
eschews patching up, filling in, restoring — which suffocate memory — for
another alternative. This alternative, which suggests both presences and
absences, which heightens memory in order to enable it to recognize the
erasures produced by anti-memory, which depends on the erasures in order
to present itself, involves both the making and the unmaking of the previous
hierarchy. It does this through a process of artificial excavation, superimpo-
sition, and substitution. The ground becomes an archaeological site. The
most important tool for digging is the Mercator grid; this becomes the means
of access to the archaeological artifact, the implement of anti-memory. A
universal geometric pattern without history, place, or specificity, this grid
ties Berlin to the world; it is the most neutral and artificial system of marking.
This implement serves to etch the plate of memory; it finds and then impresses
itself. Through the trace of itself, which in inscribing it obliterates, the archi-

te
tecture evolves as a tabula of both the actual condition and the artificial one.

Memory is developed, deepened. Working downward, the grid discovers
at the lowest level of excavation the trace of the absent wall of the eighteenth
century. This invisible wall is plotted on the lowest ground plane as a shadow.
Next comes the excavation of the foundation walls of nineteenth-century
Berlin — not the actual foundation walls which once existed, but an artificial
reconstruction, a hypothetical rationalization of what they might have been.
These walls derive their location from the position of the three existing
buildings, which, taken together, provide the fragments of a former grid.
These are then incorporated in a regular and symmetrical pattern on the
site: an AABA bay system in the east-west direction, and an AABA altern-
ation in the north-south direction. The final a bay at the north is incomplete,
to be completed only by reading the Berlin Wall as part of this older grid.
This pattern of foundation walls conforms to the regular street grid of Berlin.
The walls are made of Berlin brick, and the top of the walls comes up to the
present-day ground level of the city. Thus the absent city wall of the eigh-
teenth century, the foundation walls of the nineteenth century, the remnants
of the twentieth-century grid as projected upward in the vertical walls of
the existing buildings, and finally the Berlin Wall, a monument to the erosion
of the unity of the city and the world, form a nexus of walls at different levels
which become a composite datum of memory.

Anti-memory is developed. The Mercator grid superimposes itself as a second
set of walls upon and among the historical walls. The new walls are built of
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects:
Presentation drawing: site plan,
1980. Transparent colored adhesive
film on photostat, 92.0 x 92.0 cm.
ARCHIV Internationale Bauausstellung
Berlin, KOC 007.01-1
limestone to a height of 3.3 meters – the same height as the Berlin Wall. These artificial or “neutral” walls begin to erase the physical and symbolic presence of the historical walls. They also render them inaccessible by causing the ground plane – upon which so much Enlightenment history has been acted out – to become deeply eroded; the ground now becomes a figure of its own history. This ground plane is disconnected both vertically and horizontally from the existing city by canting it 3.3 degrees, creating, this time architecturally, another condition of blockage and division. The horizontal wrenching apart of the site from its surround leaves a permanent scar – a gap between the site and the Berlin Wall. The vertical “wrenching” of the site reveals the old Berlin grid, like an object on the high seas, rising above and below the datum of the city, progressively excavating, as it plunges deeper into the ground, the sand and ultimately the water upon which Berlin has been built. Because of the canting of the ground plane, the reconstructed grid of the foundation walls forms a series of void containers. These can be viewed by walking out over the Mercator grid, much as one views the ruins of the border castles of Scotland or the ruins of ancient Rome. The walls of the Mercator grid become the new horizontal datum; formerly man walked on the ground; now he walks on the walls. The Berlin Wall becomes merely another wall in a city of walls.

Urban grids generally mark out the negative spaces, the streets, between the positive spaces of buildings. Here the architecture privileges the grid itself and the intersections in it – the corner spaces. In doing so it suggests an architecture of L-shaped plans and elevations, fragments of squares, which have a rotational symmetry about their corners rather than their centers. The canting ground plane at these corners also is impressed by the Mercator grid, either upward or downward, so that the L-shaped structures either rise above the ground or burrow below it. What is left over is a site of intense overlays and erasures. The same structure of marking the ground plane is also tipped up literally onto the elevations of the buildings, the L-shapes moving forward and backward through the buildings’ vertical planes. Thus the plans and the elevations refer to each other and, in their reflection upon themselves, create within the void of anti-memory a space of memory.

The site becomes a place of activity and reflection. The new buildings on three of the corners, the infill of the Mercator grid, take up their specified, programmed functions. As forms they neither recall the past, validate the present, nor aspire to the future. Their scale and proportions are their own – they do not conform to the anthropomorphic base-middle-cornice of Enlightenment architecture – and their glass material is at once opaque and reflective, turning their meaning outward. Their linear configurations, running alongside the Mercator grid on both sides, call into question the dimensions of that grid, suggesting that it was once wider and that they are vertical projections of it.

Programmatically, the rest of the site is devoted to self-reflection. It becomes a museum of its own archaeology – the archaeology which has been revealed for the first time by the artificial excavation. The museum is entered by crossing the Mercator walls to a central stair tower, at which
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,
Conceptual diagrams, 1980
Transparent colored adhesive film on
photostat, 46.2 x 36.0 cm and 46.6 x
37.3 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:47/4-5
point one descends to a large cruciform space occupying one intersection of the Mercator grid. Three arms of this cruciform are made up of hollow sections of the grid walls and allow visual access through peepholes to a series of excavated tableaux – from the eighteenth-century city wall to the restored graffiti of the twentieth-century Berlin Wall. The fourth arm is open and permits one to walk into and onto the actual excavation. In this way, the site of artificial excavation becomes the museum’s exhibit.

The project is not intended to suggest a larger order or a new form of pattern making in the context of Berlin but rather to create a heightened urban energy, a symbolic place, as one approaches the site of the Berlin Wall. Thus, in the overall competition site plan, only traces of the Mercator grid appear here and there, as the premonitions of the grid’s more memorial appearance on the Friedrichstrasse site.

The architecture of the Mercator grid thus begins by taking up the structure of its unique Friedrichstrasse site condition and then, in the process of its own realization, fragments and destroys this former structure. Through superimposition and erasure it reveals the double nature of memory and anti-memory; the fragments become a whole as the whole becomes fragment. Time is collapsed into a nondirectional moment in which the three isolated core towers become the sign of this stasis. Are these towers in the process of growing or of disappearing? The architecture does not predict this; additions and subtractions, further erasures of memory in which the new project itself becomes a fragment of history, could ensue. The architecture admits of these possibilities without preconceiving them. But the object designed for this space neither progresses nor looks back; it is suspended in the present archaeological moment.

PETER EISENMAN
Project History

In September 1980 the corporation of the Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1984 sponsored an international restricted competition for the area of the Kochstrasse and Friedrichstrasse in the Berlin district of South Friedrichstadt. Eisenman/Robertson Architects were invited, along with five other teams, to submit designs for one of four urban blocks, with the option of expanding the design to all blocks. The competition brief for block 5 called for the preservation of three existing buildings and the construction of mixed-use buildings on the vacant lots. It required a five-story building on the corner of Friedrichstrasse and Kochstrasse containing a cafe on the ground floor, offices on the second and third floors with housing above, and a six-story office building on the northeast corner of the site for the Gemeinwesige Siedlungs- und Wohnungsbau (csw), a nonprofit real estate and construction company. In February 1981, a special first prize was awarded to the Eisenman/Robertson proposal. Of their original scheme, only one 37-unit housing block at the corner of Friedrichstrasse and Kochstrasse was completed, in 1986, in collaboration with the German architecture firm Groetzebach, Plessow and Ehlers. (fig. 34).

The Site

With the foundation of Friedrichstadt in 1688, Elector Friedrich I of Prussia initiated the westward expansion of the medieval twin cities of Coln-Berlin. Between 1732 and 1738, the regular orthogonal plan of Friedrichstadt was extended toward the south by Paul Gerlach, architect of King Friedrich-Wilhelm I. Gerlach gave Friedrichstadt its characteristic triangular plan by
33

Peter Eisenman,
Sketch axonometric showing existing buildings and proposed infills,
October 27, 1980. Pen and black ink on vellum, 28.0 x 21.7 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018.002
laying out three principal streets—Wilhelmstrasse, Friedrichstrasse, and Lindenstrasse—converging at a circular plaza, the Rondel, today Mehring Platz (fig. 35). During the nineteenth century, and more particularly after the founding of the Reich in 1871, rapid urbanization transformed Friedrichstadt into the political, commercial, and business center of the new German capital. By the end of World War I its urbanization was complete, and even the ambitious construction program of the National Socialist regime, begun in 1937, barely altered its fabric. The bombing raids of April 1945 and postwar reconstruction virtually obliterated Friedrichstadt; the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the displacement of the economic center of West Berlin to the area around the Gedächtniskirche transformed the once central South Friedrichstadt into a devastated periphery (fig. 36).
Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch axonometric showing proposed wall infills*, 1980. Pen and black ink on vellum, 21.7 x 28.0 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:006

Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch site plan of block 4 and block 5 showing Berlin Wall and proposed infills*, October 28, 1980. Pen and red ink on vellum, 28.0 x 21.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:011
Fig. 37. Plan of Friedrichstadt, Berlin, 1932. cca 06119010018-478a

Block 5, assigned to Eisenman, is bounded to the west by Friedrichstrasse, to the south by Kochstrasse, and to the east by Charlottenstrasse, the Berlin Wall forming its northern boundary. In a peculiar twist of fate, the block recovered its eighteenth-century peripheral condition after the construction of the wall; once the boundary between two successive phases of urban expansion, it became the limit of West Berlin and the gateway between Berlin's Allied and Soviet sectors (fig. 37).

The Drawings

In the earliest phases of the design, Eisenman extrudes a series of thick walls from the geometry of the three existing buildings (cat. nos. 33, 34, 36,
36
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch axonometric showing proposed wall infills, October 27, 1980
Black felt-tip pen on vellum, 21.7 x 28.0 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:004

37
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan of block 5 showing geometry of proposed solids and voids, October 26, 1980. Red and black felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 21.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:012.
Inscriptions: Upper right, 29 OCT 80; lower center, GLASS WALL/VOID
WALL/VOID WALL
In accordance with his theories of context, memory, and anti-memory he produces a site plan in which alternating voids and solids form a dense plaid pattern (cat. nos. 35, 37) infilled with glazed volumes recalling House X (cat. no. 39).

In cat. no. 41, he places a second grid, the Mercator grid, over the street grid. The sectional relationships retained for the final project—the network of raised walks and the sunken squares from which emerge the buildings representing an “artificial” eighteenth-century Berlin—are established in cat. nos. 46, 42, and 43. The shaded triangular surface bridging the geometries of the wall and the Mercator grid, a symbolic cut between the site and the wall, will be used later to give access to the underground parking garage placed on the northern edge of the site. The familiar “els” used by Eisenman late in his house sequence and in the Cangaregio project reappear in plan and later as forms emerging from the square compartments delimited by the Mercator grid, now developed three-dimensionally (cat. nos. 48, 49) or multiplied in a sequence of geometric permutations (cat. nos. 47, 50, 53).

Cat. no. 44 summarizes the key elements of Eisenman’s design: the interference between the parallel and Mercator walls, the tipped ground within the three-dimensional compartments, and the construction of structures—single circulation cores in the area facing the wall and buildings on the street frontage—at the intersections of the Mercator grid. Eisenman even considers expanding his planning strategy toward the west in block 4 or to the south in block 11 (cat. nos. 45, 46).

After finalizing the urban concept, Eisenman concentrates his efforts on the planning of individual buildings. He develops the massing of the buildings facing Kochstrasse in a series of axonometrics (cat. nos. 52, 54–57), sections (cat. no. 54), and facade studies. The thin slabs are folded vertically from the ground plan and bear the characteristic gridded surfaces and L-shaped elements, which are studied in a series of scroll drawings (cat. nos. 58–60c).
38
Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch axonometric showing existing buildings and proposed infills*,
October 27, 1980. Black felt-tip pen on vellum, 21.7 x 28.0 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018:005

39
Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch axonometric showing existing buildings, proposed walls and glazed infills*, October 27, 1980. Red felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 21.7 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018:009
Credits

ARCHITECT:
Peter Eisenman, principal in charge, Eisenman/Robertson Architects
ASSOCIATE IN CHARGE:
Thomas Leeser
PROJECT COORDINATOR:
Thomas Hut
ASSISTANT:
Michelle Andrew
RENDERER:
Brian Burr
MODELS MAKERS:
Sam Anderson, John Leeper, Vera Marjanovic

References

Peter Eisenman,

Sketch site plan showing intersection between urban and Mercator grids (upper part of sheet) and diagram of solids and voids (lower part of sheet), October 30, 1980. Black felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 21.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:018. Inscriptions:

Upper right, 30 OCT 80/VIBRATION ALONG A LINE/ON A DIFFERENT GRID/FROM THE WALL; center right, DEEPEST NOTE; lower right, GROWING OUT OF GROUND/FROM WALL.

Peter Eisenman,

Sketch site plan showing intersection between urban and Mercator grids, October 29, 1980. Black and red felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 21.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:016. Inscriptions: Upper right, 29 OCT 80; center left, GRID A CONVERSION/AN IDEA NOT A REALITY; center right, MERCATOR GRID/GRID OF INEXORABLE TIME/NO MEMORY/BERLIN THE CITY WITH NO COUNTRY.
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing urban and Mercator grids with trace of the eighteenth-century fortification wall (upper part of sheet) and of structures within the urban grid laid on site (lower part of sheet),

Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan and axonometric showing el structures within urban grid, October 30, 1980. Black felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 21.7 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018:019. Inscriptions:
Upper right: 30 OCT; center, WALK ON WALLS/EGGS CRATE/OF WALLS/
BELOW/GROUND/ON OLD/GRID/
ISOLATION/SEPARATION BY WALLS/COFFINS/EGG CRATE/WITH NEW EGGS/GROWING OUT OF NEW/GRID/FRAGMENTATION/ANTI-
MEMORY/FACADES BELOW/A MUSEUM OF/GERMAN HISTORY/
SCHINKEL/VON ERLACH/VON KLEISEN/TAUT/BEHRENS;
lower left, WITHIN CONCEPTUAL/STRUCTURE NEW 'OLD' BERLIN.
Peter Eisenman,

Sketch site plans and sections showing urban and Mercator grids laid on sites with existing and proposed buildings, 1980. Black and red felt-tip pen with gray-blue marker and white pencil on yellow tracing paper, 30.5 x 42.0 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:044.

Inscriptions: Center left, PARALLEL WALLS [arrow] TOPS JUST DATUM/MERCATOR GRID BECOMES/NEW CIRCULATION AS A SECOND SET OF WALLS/TIPPED GROUND PLANE IS NOW CALCULATED ON THROUGH SITE/NEW BUILDINGS GROW FROM/MERCATOR GRID INTERSECTION; center, MERCATOR MARK AS BRIDGEWORK/ABOVE OLD CITY GRID; and NEW FOOTPATH AS MERCATOR GRID.

BERLIN
Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch site plan of block 11 with urban and Mercator grids and of structures*, 1980. Pen and black and red ink with graphite on vellum, 30.5 x 22.9 cm. CCA DR1991.0018.046.

Inscription: Center left, **CUT IN**
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch axonometric showing massing of 11 structures, 1980. Pen and black and red ink on yellow tracing paper, 30.3 x 42.0 cm. CCA DR1991.0016.108
Peter Eisenman,

Sketch axonometric of el structures (center left) and site plan with trace of eighteenth-century wall (lower center), 1980. Pen and black ink on vellum, 22.9 x 30.5 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018:037

Peter Eisenman,

Sketch axonometrics of el structures, 1980. Pen and black ink on vellum, 22.9 x 30.5 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018:035
Peter Eisserman,
Sketch plan, axonometrics, and sections showing massing of EI structures, 1990. Pen and black and red ink on yellow tracing paper, 30.3 x 25.8 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:112
Peter Eisenman,
Sectional axonometric of housing block, 1980. Pen and black ink on vellum, 30.5 x 22.9 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018:009. Inscription:
Upper right. GLASS BLOCK/WALLS/
GLASS BLOCK SOLIDS/SOLID
GROUND

Peter Eisenman,
Sketch axonometric of southeastern housing block, 1980. Pen and black ink with red pencil on vellum, 22.9 x 30.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:089
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch section showing vertical stacking of el structures, 1980. Pen and black and red ink on yellow tracing paper, 30.3 x 40.7 cm.
CCA DR1991 0018:108
Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch axonometric of southwestern housing block*, 1980. Pen and black ink with graphite on vellum, 22.9 x 30.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:068

Peter Eisenman,
*Sketch axonometric of southeastern housing block*, 1980. Pen and black ink on vellum, 22.9 x 30.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:091
Peter Eisenman,
**Sketch axonometric of southwestern and southeastern housing blocks**, 1980. Pen and black ink on vellum, 22.9 x 30.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:092

Peter Eisenman,
**Sketch axonometric of southwestern and southeastern housing blocks**, 1980. Pen and black ink with red pencil on vellum, 22.9 x 30.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:090
58
Peter Eisenman,
Facade studies, 1980. Black and blue
felt-tip pen on yellow tracing paper,
45.5 x 216.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0018:210

59
Peter Eisenman,
Facade studies, 1980. Black felt-tip
pen with graphite and pink pencil on
yellow tracing paper, 45.6 x 109.8 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018:204

60
Peter Eisenman,
Facade studies, 1980. Black felt-tip
pen with graphite on yellow tracing
paper, 45.0 x 157.5 cm.
CCA DR1991:0018:209
Allegory unto Death:
An Etiology of Eisenman’s Repetition

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“The game is already played, the die already cast. It is already cast, with the following proviso, that we can pick it up again, and throw it anew.”
(Jacques Lacan, Seminar)

Peter Eisenman, more than any contemporary architect, has sought a space for architecture outside the traditional parameters of the sensual and the built. Even if his recent professional rhetoric has returned to the need for building, there remains in his work a trajectory that leads in an altogether different direction, indeed, to a dead end. I shall be concerned here with that end and its logic, and with the architectural drawing as its iteration.
I shall be concerned with what may properly be called a conceptual architecture – one that seeks through an aesthetic withdrawal to replace the built object with a diagram of its formative procedures, investigating, exposing, and repeating the most basic disciplinary conventions of architectural practice while at the same time liquidating the last vestiges of sensual architectural experience. My intention is ultimately to query not only the conceptual workings of this architecture but also its historicity, and to develop a pathology of self-reflexive formalism that can identify the historical illness of which I will claim, Eisenman’s architecture is an elaborate symptom. The illness, not to make a mystery of it, will turn out to be just what Marxians call reification: a kind of epistemic anomaly that results from the systematic fragmentation, quantification, and depletion of every realm of subjective experience. In Eisenman’s “excavations” the contours of that historical condition remain legible after all other meanings have been hollowed out.

Before 1978 Eisenman’s work was concerned almost exclusively with isolating and elaborating the architectural elements and operations that would ensure the autonomy and self-reflexivity of the architectural object so that the object could verify and purify itself in resistance to all encircling determinants of architectural form. One such determinant is physical construction and materiality: Eisenman’s notion of “cardboard” architecture unloads the physical object of all traditional senses of building. Second is the building’s actual use: His notion of “postfunctionalism” shifts our engagement with form from utilization to a consideration of architectural elements as the material support of signals or notations for a conceptual state of the object. A final determinant is all contextual, narrative, or associational potentials of built form; His emphasis on the syntactic over the semantic dimension of form proposes on behalf of the architect and the viewer a “competence,” or knowledge of the discipline – understood as an internalized system of archi-
tectural principles and underlying rules of combination — and stresses the deep, conceptual structures from which various architectures can be generated over the surface, sensual, perceptual characteristics of any built instance.

Eisenman’s early work thus incorporates two standard structuralist principles: the bracketing off of the context, both physical and historical, and, with that, the bracketing off of the subject in favor of a notion of an intersubjective structure of architectural signification that, like language, predates any individual and is much less his or her product than he or she is the product of it.2

We have been taught to think of this as “mere” formalism. But in House I through House VI, Eisenman follows the modernist strategies of distancing, defamiliarization, and deployment of alienation effects to reorient our apprehension of architectural form away from standard perceptual conventions.

In a traditional “representational” architecture whose form has its referent in, say, the human body, vernacular environments, or some preformed classical system of meaning, our attention as viewers is drawn not to the act of representing — not to how the particular object has been conceived and constructed, from what kind of position and with what end in view — but simply to what is already there; to the “quoted” referent that stands before and external to the architectural sign. Any traditional or conventional form is likely to have more authority, to engage our ascent more readily, than a form that tries to expose the complex matrix of disciplinary procedures and institutional apparatuses through which the object is actually constructed. Part of the power of such a representational architecture lies in its suppression of its modes of production, of how it got to be what it is. Strategies of defamiliarization and estrangement, by contrast, attempt to make the processes of the object’s production and the mechanisms of its representation part of its content. The object does not attempt to pass itself off as unquestionable, but rather seeks to lay bare the devices of its own formation so that the viewer will be encouraged to reflect critically on the particular, partial ways in which it is constituted.3

Eisenman situates his work in a line descending from modernist defamiliarization practices, producing in the early houses a state of estrangement that corresponds to the absolute divorce of form from all reference to materiality, use, and association. In a commentary on House III, significantly entitled “To Adolf Loos & Bertolt Brecht,” Eisenman confirms this understanding:

While the architectural system may be complete, the environment “house” is almost a void. And quite unintentionally — like the audience of the film — the owner has been alienated from his environment. In this sense, when the owner first enters “his house” he is an intruder; he must begin to regain possession — to occupy a foreign container. In the process of taking possession the owner begins to destroy, albeit in a positive sense, the initial unity and completeness of the architectural structure. ... By acting in response to a given structure, the owner is now almost working against this pattern. By working to come to terms with this structure, design is not decoration but

165
rather becomes a process of inquiry into one’s own latent capacity to understand any man-made space.\(^4\)

The emphasis in this passage is on the identification of an independent conceptual notational system distanced both from any external referent and from any determinable individual viewer (such as the owner), on what Roland Barthes has termed the “amputation” of the signifying system from the individual.\(^5\) The object and its elements—the cube in its particular emblematic status, the fundamental units of plane, volume, and frame and their mutual interactions—are foregrounded as a language distinct from a subject, but nevertheless writeable and readable. Now, in recognizing that the architectural object in some sense adequately names that which propels the activity of viewing and reading—propels, that is, any possible viewer’s recognition and repetition of disciplinarily structured modes of interpretation—we have broached a notion of performativity, understood in the sense that the object-as-performative-production constitutes that which in the object-as-representation always escapes us.\(^6\) House III produces in its own internal structure those transformational procedures which at the same time it presents as legitimating its reading. Thus, “working to come to terms with this structure”—the reading of the performative production—means trying to make sense not only of the formal object but also of the perceptual conventions and disciplinary institutions that it activates, and, in activating, repeats. Conformance to these conventions and institutions is precipitated, it needs underscoring, by the architectural object itself in its structured legibility and iterability.

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6. My use of the term performative is adapted from J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), which is concerned with speech acts and communication. A performative utterance, as Austin defined it, is a statement—such as a promise—that accomplishes the act to which it refers.


In the Cannaregio project, we witness a movement that will henceforth characterize Eisenman’s work, including the development of the Berlin project: the movement from structure to site to text, or better, from the structuralization of the object to the textualization of site.\(^7\) This movement is a consequence, I shall argue, of following through on the alienation effects mentioned above and the performativity of the object, taking these to their

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Fig. 38. Office of Peter Eisenman, Architect, *Presentation plan including Le Corbusier’s Venice Hospital, submission to the International Seminar of Design, Cannaregio, 1978.

\(^7\) This is not to say that Eisenman’s early works and projects are absent from this trajectory, but rather that they are complicit in the movement that has since characterized his later projects.
Conclusion in a critique of the fundamental techniques and procedures of the discipline that the early works attempt to isolate and codify.

- Cannaregio is the first of Eisenman’s projects in which the site becomes a major factor in the signifying practice. The grid of Le Corbusier’s unrealized Venice Hospital project — itself an absent emblem of the utopian, salutary ambition of modern architecture and, at the same time, a rationalization of the ad hoc urban structure of Venice — is reduced to a geometrical abstraction and replicated onto the irregular fabric of the adjacent site. Here we have for the first time, then, not only an incorporation of the immediate context into the structure of the work, but also an important new operation: that of appropriation and the concomitant nullification of semantic qualities of the image that was confiscated. Le Corbusier’s project is reduced to a series of voids, holes in the ground, hollowed out so utterly that only an imprint of the material remains, calibrated and reiterated to become a procedure of inscription and repetition rather than an identifiable form.

- I want to ask questions about the logic behind these procedures in an effort to describe the territories of deprival and loss within the field of geometrical, indexical forms. What figures can be adduced to capture the movement from the decontextualized structuring principles of the early houses to the site-specific appropriations and repetitions in Venice? First it can be noted that this appropriation and consequent formal and semantic depletion of Le Corbusier’s project follows in its general logic of transformation what Walter Benjamin, in his study of Trauerspiel, has identified as a figure of allegory. Allegory appears in periods of crisis, when, through metaphysical or historical causes, some unspeakable loss is imposed on what had been presumed to be permanent and unchanging. Consequently, myths are demythologized and nature is historicized. “Allegory is in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things,” Benjamin wrote, insisting that the structure of allegory as an artistic procedure is imposed upon the artist by external physical and social conditions as a cognitive imperative, not chosen by the artist as a mere aesthetic preference.9

For Benjamin, the ruins of modernity — from buildings blasted apart by war to the detritus of commodity culture — force the recognition, not of culture’s permanence, but of its temporality and transience, just as the decay and disintegration of nature forced baroque poets to confront in their own time the inevitability of catastrophe and death. Like his baroque counterpart, the modern allegorist (think of the dadaist photomonteur, for example) piles up lifeless, fragmented, arbitrarily exchangeable images “in the unremitting expectation of a miracle,” as if the sheer clutter of signs could compensate for the regressive conditions of reception imposed by the depletion of solidly meaningful forms.9 But whereas the baroque allegorist, in his melancholic contemplation, attempted to leave behind the fragmented, transitory realm of failed nature by making the very procedure of objective devaluation in this world the sign of its opposite, of refuge in the eternally redeemed world of the spirit,8 the modern allegorist confronts a desultory “new nature” whose source of fragmentation is the modern process of production and consumption: “The devaluation of the world of

8. Walter Benjamin, Trauerspiel
9. Ibid.
10. [The baroque allegorical] intention ultimately does not remain loyal (treu) to the spectacle of the skeleton, but, treacherously (verdor), leaps over to the Resurrection.” Ibid., p. 466.

ALLEGORY UNTO DEATH
objects within allegory is outdone within the world of objects itself by the commodity." But, characteristically, the allegorist appropriates these objects and devalues them a second time, repeating the same logic of commodification whereby the object is split off from its use value to become a mere signifier of monetary exchange, but now in order to dialectically re juxtapose the hollowed-out fragments and imbue them with new signification. "The allegorical mind arbitrarily selects from the vast and disordered material that its knowledge has to offer. It tries to match one piece with another to figure out whether they can be combined. This meaning with that image, or that image with this meaning. The result is never predictable since there is no organic mediation between the two." Thus the sequence of appropriation, devaluation, re juxtaposition, and redistribution of depleted signifiers transforms these signifiers, allegorically, into new emblems, redeems them through the very logic by which they were first devalued. Allegory appears, then, as a displacement of or compensation for a disappearing and irretrievable past, a past foreclosed by the historical and social present.

In Cannaregio the appropriated, fragmented, and doubly depleted signifiers are nothing if not emblematized iterations of loss in the Benjaminian sense. Indeed, according to Eisenman himself, the series of ghostly voids or holes in the ground that articulate the palpably absent Corbusian origin of the project's grid "embody the emptiness of rationality," "the emptiness of the future," and may be understood as "potential sites for future houses or potential sites for future graves." Now literally unspeakable because revalued as something else entirely, these rewritings of modernist ambitions, I suggest, are allegorical figures. (It is interesting to note in this context the rather enigmatic insertion of the following passage at the end of Eisenman's text: "Giordano Bruno was an alchemist. He practiced the art of memory.... Perhaps we must now learn to forget." Alchemists, like allegorists, preside over a well-nigh infinite transformation and redistribution of meanings through mnemonic distortions.)

It also seems correct to see in this project, involved as it is with the
appropriation of signs and with their semantic nullification, a deliberate and thematic confrontation with the effects of present-day commodification of architecture; that is, with the inevitable process in modernity whereby any architectural element loses its use value to become a unit of visual exchange. After all, it is the definitive characteristic of the allegorical object that, once hollowed out, it can be refilled with an altogether different content. And indeed, by 1978 we were surrounded by various attempts to ballast the free-floating signs of visual exchange by filling them with a dissimulating aura of humanist functionality, cultural continuity, and individual bodily experience, as if such conceptions would restore the symbolic authenticity of thoroughly inauthentic images and ease the passage of the visual commodity into the private domain of the architectural consumer. But Eisenman’s appropriation and redistribution of architectural signifiers explicitly and emphatically renounce such attempts at psychic comfort:

Upon close examination these objects reveal that they contain nothing—they are solid, lifeless blocks which seem to have been formerly attached to the context. On the ground is the trace of their movement, their detachment from life. They leave a trace, mark the absence of their former presence: their presence is nothing but an absence."

For Eisenman, as Benjamin wrote for Baudelaire, “the century surrounding him that otherwise seems to be flourishing and manifold, assumes the terrible appearance of a desert.” Where other architects see in their postmodernism a return to plenitude, Eisenman sees in his only an inscription of deprivation.

"In the conscious act of forgetting, one cannot but remember": In what could be one of the most concise definitions of allegory, Eisenman (paraphrasing Nietzsche) introduces his project for the Koch-/Friedrichstrasse block of Berlin (where the Friedrichstrasse intersects the Berlin Wall) as the site of anti-memory.
Anti-memory is different from sentimental or nostalgic memory since it neither demands nor seeks a past (or, for that matter, a future). But it is not more forgetting either, because it uses the act of forgetting, the reduction of the former pattern, to arrive at its own structure or order... Anti-memory does not seek or posit progress, makes no claims to a more perfect future or a new order, predicts nothing. It has nothing to do with historicist allusion or with the values or functions of particular forms; it instead involves the making of a place that derives its order from the obscuring of its own recollected past.16

Following the same strategies used in Venice, the Berlin project begins with the erasure, reproduction, and superimposition of contingent features of its site. The hypothetically reconstructed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foundation walls, the Mercator projection, and the implication of the Berlin Wall itself are marked as so many countervailing grids laminated onto the site at varying heights developed from the heights of the present streets and the Berlin Wall. All of the buildings proposed for the project can be seen as emerging almost automatically from the initial planimetric strategy. The Koch-/Friedrichstrasse project thus makes explicit what was already implied in Camarregio: the triadic vocation of the grid as an architectural signifier – at once a diagram of the hypothetical structures of the site (an appropriation of a fictive archaeology), a material support for the building’s functions (here little more than an economic division of housing cells, at Camarregio even less than that), and a reiterated, self-reflexive structure – a vocation we will see tested out later in variations in Columbus, Frankfurt, Cincinnati, Long Beach, Paris, Verona, and elsewhere.17

Here Eisenman confronts, squarely and architecturally, what Benjamin Buchloh has described as “the essential dilemma” of conceptual art of the mid-1960s, “the conflict between structural specificity and random organization. For the need, on the one hand, for both a systematic reduction and an empirical verification of the perceptual data of a visual structure stands opposed to the desire, on the other hand, to assign a new ‘idea’ or meaning to an object randomly... as though the object were an empty (linguistic) signifier.”18 The random, arbitrary assignment, even invention, of “archaeological” meaning in Venice and Berlin stands in opposition to the empty, geometrical tautologies of the grid; the historical permeability of concrete architectural form stands in opposition to the structure’s utter occlusion of any historical reference. And the only available figure of thought that can hold these oppositions of excess and lack together is the text – a tissue, textile, or texture of referral and delay in which there is neither beginning nor end, neither a past nor a future. Now, whether Eisenman’s conceptual architecture, with its textualization of every domain of the practice – the site as text, the program as text, the body as text – is a redemptive detour out of relicification (the identification of a possible critical vocation for the tissue of fragmented, floating, reified signs) or a postmodern flattening of allegory’s material and tragic dimensions is, I suggest, not so much a dilemma of alternatives as a paradox: the historical paradox of postmodern allegory...
itself, a paradox that cannot be escaped, a paradox in which Eisenman’s work is fully immersed.

Twisting the paradox even tighter, Eisenman’s appropriation of already reified material moves to yet a different level in a second operation of Cannaregio. The previously worked out House ita—its formal record of the history of its own formation, comprising nothing more than a series of film-like stills that trace the steps of devaluation from one state of the object to the next—now becomes the appropriated object installed on the site in Venice. Again, already depleted of its functional, material, and semantic potentials, the house is devalued even more thoroughly, first by its repetition across the site and again by changes in size from that of a house to a series of objects either smaller than a house or larger than a house, each of which, in turn, contains nothing but the shell of the next-smallest object. A kind of diachronic sequence, analogous to Berlin’s fictive archaeology, is thereby superinduced on the synchronic structure of the Venetian grid. And finally, the topological axis of symmetry of the inserted objects is traced as a cut in the ground, a line that connects the two bridges across the canals that delimit the Cannaregio, reinscribing the territory already defined by the canals. Thus, the boundaries of the site and Eisenman’s own earlier work, as well as Le Corbusier’s project, are all incorporated into the structure of the new work, now as so many redundant texts that oppose all rooted or solidly signifying usages of presumably authentic, historical languages (such as that of Le Corbusier or Venice’s vernacular or Berlin’s history) in favor of an architectural material, well-formed and precise, that renounces any harmonizing or humanizing refilling in order to move toward the very limits of the signifying practice: an architecture connected not to a pretense of authenticity but to its own abolition. And Eisenman’s eschatology of forever deferred ends developed from never begun beginnings is stretched to its breaking point when, in the Chora L Works, the Cannaregio project is transported to Paris and superimposed, at a different scale, on Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette. Within the framework of the Chora L Works, Eisenman establishes the possibility of reduplication in a nonlinear way, pushing past the arbitrary starting point in Cannaregio toward some incomprehensible, forever deferred limit.

This ceaseless repetition and retracing of elements across different sites, the telescoping fall of one element into another that itself duplicates the first and sets up a virtually uncontrollable metonymic series, are by no means inconsistent with the logic of allegory: rather such obsessional repetition foregrounds the structural aspect of allegory as distinct from the thematic: allegory emptied of content by the very structure of repetition that governs its elements. It is as if the allegorical signifiers carry within themselves the structurality of the larger allegorical system even as they are only the structure-effects of that system. And if later we will want to ask whence comes Eisenman’s seeming compulsion to repeat, let us first ask of its effects.

I have already suggested that this group of projects is a meditation on the journey of the architectural sign to a visual commodity. But to this, I wish to add that the repetition and depletion of signs is a successor to the production
of defamiliarization and alienation effects mentioned above, a procedure that repeats its object in order to interrogate it, to examine how it came into being, to foreground its arbitrariness, to show, that is, the object as constructed according to the conventional techniques and categories authorized by the discipline itself. The paradigmatic modernist object and its ideology of rationalization and remedial progress toward the future are here grasped as myth. ("The Camnaregio is the site of Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital project—one of the last distinguishes of heroic modernism. The hospital program is symbolic of modernism's remedial ideology." Berlin "is in itself a record not just of the continuity but of the end of the history of the Enlightenment.") Building on already existing architectures and urban structures but shifting our attention to the ideological devices that normally frame our understanding of form, the Camnaregio and Koch-/Friedrichstrasse projects, as metalevel systems of signification, cause us to reflect directly on architecture's disciplinary presumptions—presumptions about the determinate structure of the site, about architecture's mimetic function, about the ideological status of form. By sliding a hiatus between form and content, these projects render the architectural sign exterior to itself and thus dismantle the ideological self-identity of the routine business of design in order to show just how deeply arbitrary and questionable what everyone takes for granted as obvious, real, and correct actually is. In construing the Camnaregio and Koch-/Friedrichstrasse projects in this way, I am insisting that it is by hooking into material institutions—in the sense that the discipline of architecture itself is an institution—and not merely by playing with detached forms, that Eisenman's work finds its ideological teeth.

But there is more: Eisenman's layering of visual texts—the superimposition of preexisting fabrics, the erasure of their use value, the redoubling of this visual text by his own interventions—and the shift of attention to ideologically motivated disciplinary devices further oblige us to locate the possibility of disciplinary critique in the process of constituting the object in interpretation, that is to say, in the practice of reading. And here we circle back to the notion of performativity. Concretely, this emphasis on performativity implies that the potential of critical action—the critique of the legitimating commercial and educational apparatuses and their classificatory and interpretive procedures—is produced and made available, if only in a symbolic mode, through new practices of reading propelled by the objects themselves. Through an almost complete "de-skilling" of the architect—an evacuation of craft, taste, and any notion of "good design" as criteria of aesthetic judgment—Eisenman's projects become almost pure ideology effects: registrations of the discursive, not merely formal, features of architecture as an institution, of the very rules of the architectural discourse that determine what can be thought and done.

But to dwell only on the "critical object" as the site of disciplinary critique is to miss the other, related side of Eisenman's paradoxical procedure, which could be characterized as a kind of euphoria uniting the repetition of discursive codes [in the sense that Eisenman's projects are themselves readings, interpretations, and reproductions of the codes of a preexisting cultural and
disciplinary order) with the moment in which the subject of the discourse is obliterated. Roland Barthes describes this as an act of reading—or better, of rewriting—the doxologies of culture: a simultaneous pleasure of repeating what already exists (the enjoyment of cultural disciplinary identity) and a jouissance of aesthetic disruption. An architecture of pleasure would be a transaction within a bounded inventory of cultural codes, of preexisting elements lifted out from the history of the discipline and redeployed: Barthes uses the untranslatable jouissance to describe the experience of the abyss that such transactions open up. This is the same “perverse” coupling of affirmation and negation, of reproduction and disruption, that we find in the allegorical operations of Eisenman, whose projects are invaded by the ideologies and repetitions of the disciplinary code even as he issues exhortations against them. What else are Eisenman’s early houses but empiricist studies of the structural doxologies of modern architecture and art from Le Corbusier, Terragni, and De Stijl, to Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt? In these houses the production of meaning is still a closed process in the sense that we return, again and again, to the most basic cognitive forms of architecture—the cube, the plane, the line, and the point—dissociated forms, perhaps, but closed nevertheless. And it is that same doxa that is entered into, opened up, and unsettled in the profound disenchantments of Venice and Berlin, where modernist formal logic is systematically reduced and superinduced upon specific sites, absorbing those sites into its own structure, forcing modernist critique to the sterile condition of tautology. It is here that the modernist aspiration for total self-referentiality coupled with utter randomness is achieved, but we must also recognize the heavy price to be paid for that achievement: the complete evacuation of the signified. To read the Camareggio and Koch-Friedrichstrasse projects for their significance is to read them as a mobile play of signifiers that register the ideologies (Barthes would say connotations) of the architectural discipline itself. But the tragedy of history is not thereby transcended, as in classical allegory, nor are its shattered elements refunctionalized, as in modernist allegory; rather history is merely displaced by a bleached-out texxtuality: the “anachronic” subject falls into non-place and non-time (Eisenman is explicit about this), into infinite deferral without the conflict of intervening meaning.

Barthes’s coupling of jouissance and loss strikingly reveals the extreme, outer limits of postmodern subjectivity—the threshold of complete senseliquidation—and, at that borderline, the implacable closure of Eisenman’s signifying economy, whose only (impossible) escape is a kind of death wish. Eisenman’s texte de jouissance takes a quasi-erotic pleasure in accomplishing the death of its subject in two senses: the dissolution of its content (its discursive subject matter) and of its agent (the author or reader as a subject possessing a disciplinary competence), creating a textual solution wherein the death wish is driven into the very aesthetic reflexivity of his architecture, leaving virtually no material residue to be found within the arid compartments of mirrors constructed by the architecture itself. In contemporary theory the mise en abyme—the casting into an abyss—has usually been taken as the sign of such aesthetic closure as well as the denial of the historical
and sociopolitical contexts that such a mechanism of self-reflection ensures. But what should be underscored again is that the infinite redoubling of the sign right up to the edge of the void is only the most extreme register of allegory. Eisenman’s allegorical structure emanates from the start its lost center and establishes as its project to reiterate that loss, infinitely deferring the redemption that it nevertheless promises.

We can now query the force behind this death of the subject, but we need to move to yet another level of interpretation to reveal its contours. For what links allegorical repetition to a final, shuddering release, and indeed what seems to lie behind Barthes’s own fusion of repetition, self-immolation, and jouissance is the Freudian mechanism of Wiederholungszwang, or repetition-compulsion, which is itself motivated by the so-called death instinct (Todestrieb, literally death drive) — an aggression that is directed inward toward the subject and strives for a kind of subject degree zero through the neutralization of all internal tensions and quantities. The death instinct is as fully developed a form of desire as the goal-oriented sexual instincts or life instincts. Indeed, the latter are themselves provoked in characteristic Freudian binary opposition to death’s “silent” drive: they are but recuperative responses to the differentiated death drive that continually introduce new desires and tensions into the system.

Freud took as one of the principal starting points for his theory of the death instinct the clinical phenomenon of repetition compulsion — a syndrome he observed both in the child’s tendency to repeat, as in the game of Fort-Da, anything once found effective in diminishing the displeasure of the mother’s absence, and in certain neurotic fixations on traumatic events and the paradoxical regression to unpleasure through the repetition of those events. In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud identifies different forces behind the syndrome of repetition and ascribes both kinds to an instinctual impulse to achieve stasis in the psychic economy and reduce the quantity of stimulation and internal tension to the lowest possible level. On the one hand, there is a seemingly progressive force — prior to but not inconsistent with the pleasure principle — by which the subject stages the effects of absence and loss, then works over that material so as to master unpleasure itself by means of repetition. On the other hand, there is a force beyond the pleasure principle — which is to say inconsistent with it — a regressive force that compels the subject to reinitiate some previous psychic state (such as a fixation on traumas of war) even when that state yields unpleasure. Giving priority to the regression side of the progression-pleasure/regression-unpleasure dichotomy, and combining this with the hypothesis that all repetition is a form of regulatory discharge within the psychic economy, Freud devised a formal definition of instinct: “But how is the predicate of being ‘instinctual’ related to the compulsion to repeat?... It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces.”

But if instinct is really a drive to restore an earlier state of things, then a degree zero stage of nonlife appears to be life’s ultimate historical aim: and the apparatus that strives to nullify all inherent tensions, to divest itself

utterly of quantity, is an apparatus that ultimately extinguishes its subject: the death instinct. So Freud concludes, “Everything living dies for internal reasons... the aim of all life is death.”

It seems to me that Freud’s equilibration between the developmental forces of progressive evolution (prior to the pleasure principle) and regressive involution (beyond the pleasure principle) is structurally congruent with both Barthes’s and Eisenman’s conjunction of the pleasure of repeating “a comfortable practice of reading” with the bliss of imposing “a state of loss.” Eisenman’s pleasure conforms to the Freudian construction of homeo-stasis whereby, through repetition as discharge, the psyche seeks to eliminate all quantity. Houses I through VI encode the pleasure of such a reading: they embrace rather than refuse the doxas of the discipline. Reading these projects reproduces within the viewer the pleasure of the paradigms of culture the viewer has internalized – the genre of the single-family house, for example, or the articulation and legibility of forms and procedures still overseen, as it were, by the authority of architectural institutions behind the scene. Fort-Da Authority is removed, then reconstituted. The subject gravitates to death’s void but preserves pleasure by covering over the void with repeated signs. 

The jouissance of Venice and Berlin, the mise en abyme their repetitions induce, jams the pleasures of reading to train our attention on the shattered origins of the architectural discourse and prevents the architectural text from closing in on a signified: it exploits the elements out of which architectural signs are made, quoting the discourse that circulates around it, but only to pin them to the ultimate impossibility of meaning anything. The desire of meaning infinitely deferred must, at its extreme, rid the subject of all desire. And thus Eisenman’s repetition follows. I am arguing, the logic of Freud’s repetition compulsion as an avatar of the death drive, where the erotic and thanatotic functions are conjugated in a signifier – the repetition – that has as its signified the impossibility of its own signification: death. The death drive is a maximum resolution of the compulsory return to lost origins; and jouissance is but the little death, the orgasmic shudder, experienced when we rehearse that finality.

But if the reader of Freud is hard put to find material evidence of the instinct underlying the compulsion, in Eisenman one faces the fact head-on: The repetition compulsion is driven by the windless void of present history and the utter loss of the possibility of signification itself. In a 1970 essay on Aldo Rossi, Eisenman asserted the exigent program for present-day architecture to be to reckon with post-signification:

The problem [we face now is] choosing between an anachronistic continuance of hope and an acceptance of the bare conditions of survival.... Incapable of believing in reason, uncertain of the significance of his objects, man [has lost] his capacity for signifying.... The context which gave ideas and objects their previous significance is gone.... The [modernist proposal of the] “death of art” no longer offers a polemical possibility, because the former meaning of art no longer obtains. There is now merely a landscape.
of objects; new and old are the same; they appear to have meaning but they speak into a void of history. The realization of this void, at once cataclysmic and claustrophobic, demands that past, present, and future be reconfigured. To have meaning, both objects and life must acknowledge and symbolize this new reality.\textsuperscript{24}

We must signify the fact that we can no longer signify: Eisenman generalizes the historical condition of loss and anticipates performative objects able to sign their own certificate of death. Reification — the complete penetration of the commodity fetish (the desertscape of objects) into the very structure of subjective relations, the complete erasure of all traces of object production — exasperates the desire to mean and forces a leap into the void. Eisenman here stages his own overall project (as well as Rossi’s) as just such a leap, as the becoming aware of loss — a kind of architectural death drive already inherent, if not instinctive, in the modernism on which Eisenman’s work is based.\textsuperscript{25} What, then, is his objects’ performativity if not the disclosing of the last remaining discursive procedures for signification; and what is his continual appropriation, depletion, and reappropriation of depleted signifiers if not a practical, allegorical use of the compulsion to repeat, an incessant replaying of the reification of signs and the cancellation of the subject, all as a signification that signification is henceforth impossible?

I have insisted that the reiterability of Eisenman’s discursive processes and its consequences — the liquidation of traditional aesthetic experience, the potentiality of disciplinary critique — are played out in the economy of the architectural drawing. When Eisenman’s projects, understood as a kind of conceptual architecture, remain within the problematic of representation and its defamiliarization — forcing as they do the recognition that the production of architectural meaning is understandable only as the transformation of a meaning already given by the conventions and techniques of the discipline itself, that the discursive categories and technical procedures architects routinely employ are shot through with value judgments and presumptions — then it seems to me that the critical force of the work is effective, even if in a limited way. But it is a paradoxical force, as I say. For the medium of the critique must needs be the same abstract and reified material that the critique discloses; and the attempt of these “excavations” to evacuate history, past and future, is itself historically determined: it is just in the nature of the historical moment Eisenman confronts that it is experienced as the pathetic finish of modernist ambitions to graphically reification abstract signs. Eisenman’s architecture is accurate, legitimate, but perhaps also obedient, in its representation of a culture dispossessed of meaning.

When the drawings are translated into built works, as in the housing block in Koch-/Friedrichstrasse, Eisenman’s glass beads of perfect repetition are thrown against the hard floor of building practice, and there emerges a contradiction he was able to avoid in the never-to-be-built Cannaregio project: the functionalization of the dysfunctional diagram and the aestheticization of the conceptual sign. Eisenman’s response is a conservative one: it derives from a reluctance to accept the complete disintegration of the aesthetic


\textsuperscript{25} Roland Barthes has observed that “the greatest modernist works linger as long as possible, in a sort of miraculous stasis, on the threshold of literature itself, in this anticipatory situation in which the density of life is given and developed without yet being destroyed through its consecration as an institutionalized sign system.” Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 39.
object even after the radically altered historical circumstances that affect the conditions of architectural production and reception were recognized in Camnaregio and such a disintegration was first enunciated. The purely technical, anti-aesthetic signifiers now reappear in a kind of aesthetic atavism, attempting (one last time) to recoup investments in meaning already liquidated, refusing the destiny Eisenman himself had already predicted. And whose interests does this atavism serve if not those of the architectural institutions whose processes the conceptual work discloses? Yet in its contradiction (its refused destiny) the Berlin building repeats the objective conditions under which any work of architecture, under the present conditions of total reification, must be produced: the constant struggle against the two equally intolerable poles of mere obedient service to existing institutions and mere aesthetic voluntarism.
Conversation with Peter Eisenman

Office of Eisenman Architects. New York, April 10, 1992

PARTICIPANTS: Alan Balfour, Jean-François Bédard, Yve-Alain Bois, Jean-Louis Cohen, Peter Eisenman, K. Michael Hays
CHAIR: Nicholasolsberg, Canadian Centre for Architecture

NO: Maybe you can begin by telling us how the artificial excavation projects developed out of your work.

PE: *For me these projects represent an alternative attitude to the notion of context. In modernism buildings were not about context; they were placeless. In a sense the building—the figure—was the context. But in the late sixties and early seventies, especially from the work of Colin Rowe, there was a reawakening to the fact that buildings sat on an active ground which could reframe the idea of the figure. Having been with Colin Rowe, I watched this develop.*

KMH: And you knew Rosalind Krauss then, when conceptual art was at its peak.

PE: *She and Colin Rowe were in a sense both mentors of mine. Rosalind introduced me to another type of context in contemporary sculpture—in particular the work of Robert Morris, and his el-shaped pieces. From these two points of view, I became convinced that Rowe was on the wrong track. Obviously, it was partly for psychological reasons, because I needed to make a break with his ideas. If you look at my Ph.D. thesis and my work on Terragni there is already a subtle change from the Wolffian formalism—the lineage from Wittkower to Rowe—to an idea of an objective language as an idea of text that was not based solely on formal principles. I was certain that reading Terragni as a formalist was limiting. I was also certain that the reading of context as a Gestalt icon missed much of the buried history of*
site. Rowe's work understood context as a condition of the now. But it was equally obvious to me that one could project the future based on a past possibility of the site, or on what I called imminent in any site. Site had never been an issue in my work until 1975 in the Cannaregio project. It was a competition in Venice, and a very interesting collection of people were there working at the same time — Rafael Moneo, John Hejduk, Aldo Rossi, Carlo Aymonino. In the context of my work it was a very important project. It was there that I dealt with the invention of site as outside of contextualism. It was around this time that my psychological work started to ground me — the idea of going into the ground in a new way, so as not to become grounded in the old formalisms or the old contextualisms. As one looks back on each project, Berlin, Wexner, one realizes the impact of the psychological work. It all begins in Cannaregio and in a sense ends in La Villette. There are many parallels between the two: the same grid, the same slaughterhouse site, the same invention of a program that never existed; it is merely doubled onto itself.

ILG: You seem to be saying that you were reacting against the notion of context. But in digging out the slaughterhouses and the fortifications at La Villette, in inserting Le Corbusier's unbuilt project in Venice, weren't you assuming there was a specific context?

PE: The contextualism I was reacting against was the Colin Rowe figure-ground projects, where the issue was how one reinforces, in a classical-compositional Gestalt, what is there. In other words, context was always a fragment of something that could exist. My projects created what can be called superposition, which is a simultaneous existence of two or three formal and historical layers to produce another condition which is totally artificial — a hypercondition, if you like, that has nothing to do with whatever was there, or could be there, but exists only in the juxtaposition. In the Cannaregio project there is both the Le Corbusier grid, superposed with House IVa, and a diagonal cut. These three conditions overlay each other, at different scales.

YAR: It seems to me that the inspiration for Cannaregio would not have been triggered without an absent grid, that is, if Le Corbusier's hospital had not been a grid.

PE: There is no question that the nonbuilding of the Le Corbusier hospital was the trigger.

ILG: But here we go back to the question of contextuality. You have a structure provided by missing pieces of Le Corbusier, missing contextual pieces provided by topographic aberration, by a slaughterhouse existing on the site, and from this you distill a grid which becomes one of the generating factors of the project.
PE: Yes, but House 11a is a topological structure; it is a Möbius strip. And the diagonal cut in the site becomes the surface by which the little House 11as are disposed topologically; they disturb the Le Corbusier grid, by superposing on that grid, so that they blur each other.

JLC: Aren't you providing a sort of hypercontextuality? You're giving more dimensions to the notion of context. In fact you're enriching the notion instead of killing it.

PE: I deny contextuality insofar as it has become an occupied term. It is like the American flag; it has become a symbol for the right; it is in a sense occupied. From my position the flag of contextuality is occupied by Léon Krier, Robert Venturi, Prince Charles, and Colin Rowe.

KMH: Though Cannaregio was the first project to deal with site, though in a way it is the first City of Artificial Excavation, and though the early work pretends to be radically acontextual, aren't there continuities? At least in the sense that the early houses isolate and verify in a self-reflexive way some fundamental elements and operations of architecture - relationships of frame to plane, volume to plane, doubling, rotation. Cannaregio extends the work into the idea of territory, the idea of site, where before it dealt only with the object.

PE: Now it is dealing with the ground as object. In other words, the ground is no longer seen as the frame but as the object itself. Each of the artificial excavation projects, even Berlin, in which the buildings are tipped out of the ground, are two-dimensional; there is no z dimension. The problem for architecture is that it is an extrusion from a ground plan. Traditional classical planning is always an extrusion of a planar condition. And since I did not want to extrude, I never made a third dimension. The exhibition for me ends with La Villette, because it is finally an extrusion, even though it doubles and layers scale. I felt that these projects had reached a dead end, the dead end of extrusion. I did not know how to activate the third dimension. The axonometric model of House X was an attempt as far back as 1973 to undermine this idea of extrusion.

YAB: I consider this model a kind of red herring, in the sense that the 1920s idea of axonometry was the abandonment of a point of view. And the House X model looks like an axonometric drawing only from a certain point of view. It functions like Pozzo's fresco in S. Ignazio in Rome, that is, like one of the most rigid perspectival constructions ever. Perspective is a very closed system that painters have loosened most of the time (except in anamorphoses, where the system is carried to the limit, ad absurdum, so to speak). But right from the start, with Brunelleschi's first experiment, described at great length by Manetti, the fixed specular relationship between the vanishing point and the position of the spectator...
was established as the condition of possibility of monocular perspective. Your position as a beholder is entirely determined in this experiment: you can’t move, you are totally frozen, totally paralyzed, and then the image functions perspectively. The same is true for the axonometric model: it basically transforms axonometry into the most absolute kind of perspective. So it’s a paradox. It’s a kind of telescoping of two systems. It helped you do other things, but –

PE: It got me to House El Even Odd, which is a collapsed axonometric. The axonometric model of House X is an attempt to displace both the monocular vision of the subject and the idea of extrusion. This leads to House El Even Odd, which takes the idea of axonometric as a ground condition and collapses it into the ground. This collapsed axonometric leads to the folding projects. The intent of folding was to do something with the z dimension that is not just facade projection. So the origins of folding are in the House X model.

KMH: It seems to me that context gives the work, after 1978, something that in a way the early work was looking for, which is at once to be a kind of verification, or a self-verifying, self-reflexive system, but at the same time to have a kind of randomness – that what the context gives you from Cannaregio forward, whether it’s Berlin or any of the projects, is a way of generating accidents systematically.

PE: The early projects all dealt with the notion of originary values; with generative systems from platonic solids. There was some idea of a pre-existing, imminent (or as I called it at the time) a deep structure, which suggested that there were such things as regularities as opposed to essences. And that these regularities could generate and transform primary configurations to produce conditions of meaning and thus of value. This changes in House X, where there is the denial of any value-laden origins. Something is set in motion, but you cannot predict where it will end up because it has no given origin and thus no trajectory. Context for me became a hammer against originary value, which I could use to find a way to uncover accidents, arbitrariness: superpositions which cannot be read back to any order or ground zero. To use the idea of ground, which is the traditional reference of
upright humanity, against itself and the notion of valued origin is a difficult problem. The Romeo and Juliet project is the most complex attempt to erase the idea of a valued origin.

JLC: Are there any natural excavations that approach your notion of artificial excavation?

PE: When I went to Rome the first time, I tromped around with Colin Rowe — to the Roman Forum, and the excavations. I found that true archaeology was boring. So that I have always had a horror of real excavation. And that is why I dealt with the idea of artificial excavation. It became conscious only in Berlin, where all of the grids were totally fabricated. The red, gray, and white grids never existed; they were truly artificial. What Le Corbusier gave me in Camargue, I invented, except for the line of the other Berlin Wall, the eighteenth-century wall, which ran through the Koch-Friedrichstrasse site; it became the vehicle for this city of walls.

YAB: Since it was invented, why did it need the backup grid of the eighteenth-century wall? Why did you need history?

PE: It was a way to legitimate the project because I felt I was so far out on a limb. To this day, I am still inventing stories about these projects, because I am so fearful of any personal expressionism, let us say of the hand of the author.

NO: I think authorship and your attitude toward it is a big question. Yve-Alain has drawn attention to the ambivalence of the fact that your axonometric drawings are actually drawings with an expressionist kind of line. And I get a sense that while you enjoy your own pencil drawings, there's a part of you that prefers to be represented by drawings that are at a farther distance from the author's hand, that you prefer to show your work by things that have been through a more controlled process.

PE: I would rather say a more neutralized process.

NO: More neutral, more unauthorial, more unexpressive. Is it a result of some anxiety of yours?

PE: My own authorship is always an anxiety for me. In the office, where I have, in a sense, total control, I do not have any anxiety. I set up the intellectual framework for the work. I do not know what the formal outcome will be, so we set off in various directions exploring formal possibilities within the conceptual strategy. Now I hardly ever start a project from a sketch or a drawing. That is why the computer has become important to me. It is a distancing mechanism, perhaps the ultimate distancing mechanism.
We've been talking about the grid strategy of the early work, and then about the three-dimensional strategy of the more recent work. But we're not paying much attention to the cartographic nature of the artificial excavation projects. It seems to me that the use of maps is not so much a modification of the grid, but that it actually has an intrinsic value. There's a real interest in figuration in this work.

But the figures are never drawn by me. They are always found figures. Any figuration is cartographic, accidental, whatever, and there is never an intentional figure. They are more accidental or hidden, teased out of one context, to have meaning in another. I am so wary of personal figuration that I have used cartography as a prosthetic device, to manufacture figuration.

They may not be drawn, not your creation, your invention, but they are an interpretation. When you say, There is the slaughterhouse, you have to delineate it. When you are adding a project which could have been there but is not there, that is invention as discovery. So I don't think you are simply finding figures; I think you are, in your strategy, planning a specific stage at which you designate the figures you want to find, and then you find them.

I never draw toward that kind of ideal figuration in my mind. Rather it is a found figuration which I then use as a text to be interpreted.

Throughout this discussion I've been hearing some ambiguity as to how much is a deliberate strategy and how much is an unconscious strategy that you discover afterward.

I can honestly tell you that most of my work is unconscious. Most of the time the discoveries are made in the misreading of something else. I never read Deleuze on folding until after the fact.

Clearly the text is very important.

Yes, and in many ways the text is more important to me than the drawing.

And it's a trigger. It instructs you in some way. What happens in your imagination with this instruction? What do you see in the mind's eye?

I try never to see anything.

But the drawing betrays that.

I know, I am drawing all the time. But I am not trying to draw things that I know; I draw and then decide what can be found in the drawing.
AR: But the imagination is still in control. Do you see things in your mind? Are there landscapes in your mind?

FE: No, I do not conceptualize that way. It is more a stream of consciousness; I write, think, and draw. This way I look for the accident.

AR: But the fallacy about this is that these things are completely yours.

FE: While I am interested in neutralizing the authorial center, it seems to me that Cities of Artificial Excavation is not a neutral exhibition. The way the subject matter is framed, not as text but as drawings, which in a sense is saying, We do not believe in the notion of the animating device and the neutrality of text, the neutrality of the author—that the author is very much present in all of these projects through many, many sketches. I think the interest in the exhibition is not so much in the subject matter of artificial excavation as it is in the nature of the working process and the control of the working process.

NO: No, I think the drawings are not being seen as revealing a design process. They are being seen as a narrative. They're there to open up the inquiry that you were making. It's basically seeing drawings as text—What were the questions you were asking, what were the surprises you discovered?

YAB: The aspect of play in your work has been characterized as baroque. Baroque is a very absolutist system that pretends not to be absolutist. Playing ... but actually, you know, it's a very controlling system. Let the baby play, but in the end, the mother controls. Would you consider that what you're doing?

FE: I think that it is a much too conscious, much too diabolical interpretation of my activity. Suppose that instead of saying that my work was baroque I said to you that it was post-Aalto. Does that say anything different to you? To me, it is much more in this spirit, because Aalto was neither baroque nor expressionist nor modernist, he was a figure on the edge. I never see my work as baroque—although, in the folding work, it begins to explore issues that arise in the baroque.
that is, the question of overcoming the grid. There is no question the new work is saying that while there will always be four walls, they are not the absolute condition of being. That we can implode, explode, and play with the four walls in some way. I do not know if the terms baroque and control describe this.

KME: You could look at the work as a history of a search for systems that are completely rigid, like the grid, then superposing it, unfolding it, promoting or enabling accidents, randomness, even improvisation, right? You are saying that the baroque is both absolutist and playful. It's holding that contradiction together, in a way.

YAB: In Scully's history of modern architecture, there's a wonderful characterization of Piranesi as the first modern architect. He says that what Piranesi did was fight the baroque. Everybody knew exactly how to play the game and nobody else went too far from it, but that wasn't true of Piranesi.

PE: The four drawings that have really influenced a lot of my work are the Capricci of Piranesi, which are very different from other Piranesi, for me. They reveal an attitude toward the work which I don't think is involved necessarily with total control.

But I believe that in the execution of my work demands an enormous amount of control. If you look at the 600 working drawings for the project in Cincinnati you see the energy there is in the detail and the control you must have of every piece to make it work. The building becomes Swiss cheese if you do not have control of the pieces.

LIC: A question about the cycle of excavations is how much you can stay in control once you start to build them. When you have to adapt a specific fictional strategy to specific Berlin Walls, specific local codes, isn't this architecture doomed to be ever leading to a complete loss of control at the moment at which it begins to need it the most?

PE: Any architecture is subject to this total loss of control any time you begin to realize a building whether it is because of cost, or because the client is not interested in ideology or conceptualization, or
because of zoning. Every time you challenge the conditions of authority, of what is realizable in whatever kind of project you do, it becomes an enormous problem. And certainly my architecture pushes the limit of what is realizable.

KMB: It seems to me that the conceptual project is mostly what we’ve been talking about, and the building projects are incompatible in the way you set up your work – that the work, at least in the period we’ve been talking about, is epistemological, not functional, not constructional, and that maybe the fact that you have to have six hundred sheets to detail it actually shows incompatibility, not energy.

PE: The issue is, Is architecture grounded in presence? Is the object realization necessary? And does the idea, if it is necessary, have to be there, or is it enough that it’s in the drawing? Even though Piranesi never built a thing but a small church, Piranesi was a great architect. Ledoux built little. But I believe that the real proof of my work is in the built realization. Because the denial of effective or functional space means that you have to build a three-dimensional condition of it. Otherwise you lose out to the condition of the function that you are trying to superpose, for me now the great drive is not to conceptualize things but to see how it’s possible to build.

ILC: And I think maybe having the first feedback on your buildings is challenging the way you’re designing – reintroducing thickness, prethinking the problem of how to deal with both the theory of catastrophes and the theory of stability.

NO: This brings up the question of the disjunction between the history of the idea of excavation and what then occurs.

PE: Clearly the idea originated as a theoretical, conceptual project in the manner of conceptual art. When I began these projects, I even wrote that it was not necessary to build them. But once you build, you realize that the process of building does condition the next project. There is no question that the realization of Werner has conditioned everything that followed, because you begin to think, How do you build ideas, and not just project them?

ILC: What about La Villette?

PE: Do you think it could have been built? I think it could have been built.

ILC: I think you were facing, as Tschumi did, a giant bureaucracy. Tschumi was able to handle the bureaucracy because his project was vast, full of empty spaces, so that he was free to design his “follies.” But I think you
were adding too much complexity in a small space at precisely the time when the money was already absorbed by other buildings.

KMII: It seems to me that after Wexner there are some very fundamental shifts – to the extent that the conceptual projects were antimaterial, cardboard architecture, systematic research into everything that excludes the sensual domain of architecture.

PE: There is no question that the notion of materiality, and the experience of space, its affect, becomes important in the post-Wexner projects. The notion of distortion in the Cincinnati project, in the Kiozumi building in Tokyo, and then in the Naotami project, comes out of this question of affect. You have to experience Wexner to understand this. You do not realize the problematic of building until you are in the space.

YAR: I tend not to see a major break between the Cities of Artificial Excavation and the later projects, but to see them as different versions of the same thing – a difference of degree, not of kind. It seems to me that at the time of your cardboard architecture idea, one of the models you were thinking of was Chomsky’s deep structure. What we have here, in Camnaregio and then later, is on the contrary a notion of surface structure. There is no root. When you bring Camnaregio into La Villette, for example, it’s a gliding plan. In the recent work, in Cincinnati, various surface structures are sliding into one another. It’s as if the Chomskian myth were totally eliminated. Although it’s presented as a strategy of depth, of profundity, of historical resonance, even though it is perceived in depth, in terms of composition, this is a surface strategy, friction of surfaces.

PE: Whereas in Wexner the grid is dominant, in Cincinnati the volumetric structure and walls are dominant, which produces a totally different architectural space. You say that theoretically they are the same proposition because they work with two-dimensional overlays. This may be so, but I would like to think that the experience of the space is going to be completely different.

PB: I have a related question about the use of a historical framework in your work. I’ve read commentaries on the Wexner focusing on the so-called rebuilding of the armory, a misreading of the original intention from the public’s or the writer’s side. The project arouses public interest – maybe unintentionally – from what is understood as a contextual strategy.

PE: The armory piece in the Wexner is a very important strategic and discursive piece. The actual foundations were there, and we chose quite consciously to move the reconstruction off of these foundations to show both the new and the old, and that the new was intentionally a simulation. We built it clearly as a fake.
JB: There is a very interesting tension between what your intentions seem to be and what the public reads.

PE: There is no question that the public is not interested in the fact that we moved the armory. For them it is the same thing.

AB: In the Long Beach drawings, the critical consistency, the intensity with which this thing is sustained, is astonishing. It seems as if there must be a political motivation - political in the grander sense. Look at the drawings in Cincinnati. How do you describe all these new shifts, new adjustments, which are completely new conditions of structure? - A completely new condition of the language? That's what a liberal dimension talks to, to a liberated reality.

PE: But I never think of the work politically. I think anything that has the potential to affect the status quo is problematizing for people who are responsible for maintaining it. Therefore my work is seen as galvanizing, as problematizing, precisely because it is not merely dealing with style. My desire is to displace from within, from the center. But I have always in a sense been marginalized; when I teach at Harvard I am seen as too radical, when I teach at Cooper Union I am seen as too conservative. I have never found a middle ground from which to work. I am not interested in being an emarginated architect like Gaudi, having little or no effect on the culture of architecture.

NO: But in doing what an architect must do to sell these projects to the client, you are engaging in a political process. You are persuading someone of an idea and you are converting their view of architecture.

PE: Yes, but I did it through a conceptual and cultural ideology rather than with a utilitarian one saying that this is a better way for people to live. I have never done that. I could argue that the reason I have better luck in Europe than in America is that projects in America are run by capital and in Europe they are run by ideology.

JLC: Then would you describe your work as a critical practice?

PE: I would like to think that I have a critical practice, in the sense of a distance: humorous, ironic, critical of architecture in its most fundamental sense, but also critical of the way architecture deals with the public domain, its public responsibility.

JLG: So how can you have effect as a builder? I mean, challenging the rules and observing them enough to build. How does this work?

PE: It is working.
JLC: It is finally working now.

PE: When the city planning commissioner of Frankfurt and the head of the Green Party talk to each other about a project, they both defend the ideas of the project, and they say, “Peter, you are becoming too pragmatic, we do not want you to lose the idea, we have got to make sure that we hold the idea for you.”

But when one is dealing with the reality of a forty-hectare site in Frankfurt it is not merely an intellectual game. When you get down to the actual ground level of these projects, they have an enormous effect on public space. At the level of the Fussganger it certainly does change the world.
The Museum Rediscovered

Frank Lloyd Wright called architecture the mother of all arts. He was not trying to elevate architecture to a role of greater importance than painting or sculpture; he was merely referring to the notion that architecture has a sheltering or motherly function. It is a sheltering art; it contains and encloses. For instance, a house is a shelter and it encloses. Shelter is a primary aspect of the metaphysics of architecture. Painting, sculpture, photography, and graphics do not have that kind of symbolic content; there is no such requirement to shelter in the metaphysics of these disciplines. For example, to question the metaphysics of painting means to question the nature of canvas, of surface, of frame, of edge, of the application of paint to canvas, of the nature of representation.

The traditional role of architecture has been to represent and symbolize this sheltering function. The idea of an architecture which attempts to address the question of its own metaphysics by challenging and dislocating the notion of architecture as the representation of nature is problematic. It is difficult for architecture to question its own condition of representation precisely because it must, above all, shelter. What is proposed here says that while a house must shelter people, it does not necessarily have to be symbolic of shelter; it may also be symbolic of many other things. Likewise, while a museum must shelter art, that is, it must be able to keep the art at a certain temperature, dry, free from contamination and dust, it does not necessarily have to symbolize this activity. It could symbolize, for example, the relationship of art to society or of art to politics, or it could criticize the institution of the museum or propose a new institution. Thus, an objective of architecture could be to break down the traditional role that accompanies the idea of the museum as a shelter. Instead of symbolizing its function, it could symbolize that it shelters nothing. The building may literally enclose, but symbolically it does not shelter.

The University Art Museum of the California State University at Long Beach does not symbolize the sheltering of art. Instead the program is the invention of a fiction about the building's own history. A series of significant dates was created, including the settlement of California in 1849, the creation of the campus in 1949, and the rediscovery of the museum in 1949. The idea was to imagine the site 100 years after the university campus was founded and 200 years after the period of the gold rush. The idea was for it to be
possible for someone who stumbles upon the site in 2049 to learn about the culture that existed for the 200 years previous to the discovery by reading the building as an architectural artifact, a palimpsest of its own history. This capacity of architecture to tell a story, a narrative about 200 years of history, is the important condition that is marked by the architecture. Sometimes the stone bears the mark of a riverbed, sometimes the outline of county lines, sometimes the mark of writing. Thus the stone of this architecture, instead of representing the museum, records the traces of a lost and future civilization.

But it is also necessary to provide for the functions of a museum within the stone that is 200 years of history. And in the same way as the history that will be recorded is known, it is known what the function of a museum has been and presently is. But just as the years from now until 2049 are unknown, it is unknown what a museum of the future could be or might be. And in recognition of this, the building, the stone, is also metamorphic. It is layered and shifting, continually exposing different surfaces.

It records information from six maps that speak to different conditions of man – some geological, some political, some scientific; for instance, one map shows adjustments that were made to arrive at magnetic north. All of these notations are made at scales which do not relate to man as a measure. In other words, as in modern sculpture, the relationships are non-scale-specific. And they are combined in such a way that none of the notations takes precedence over any other. These “superpositions” reveal relationships that were never visible when some things, such as social delineations, were given more importance than, for instance, the site of a riverbed. Even oil derricks appear in the project, all at different scales.

In this way pieces of information become marks of intelligence, glimpses of the way the culture organized itself. The combination of these maps shows how areas gradually became civilized and how man-made patterns came to supersede natural ones. The relationship of the natural to the man-made is symbolized in the constantly changing condition. One recognizes in this project that architecture is about the telling of stories, and this stone text that is being written, this fiction, might tell a very different story about Long Beach than has ever been recorded before.

PETER EISENMAN
Fig. 43. Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects. Presentation model for University Art Museum, phase 4, California State University at Long Beach, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Courtesy Eisenman Architects.
Project History

In 1985 the California State University at Long Beach (CSULB) commissioned Eisenman/Robertson Architects to design an art museum on part of a 23-acre arboretum adjacent to the main campus entrance. The 67,500-square-foot building was planned to contain four exhibition galleries, a black-box theater and auditorium, a cafe, conference rooms, a library, administrative offices, preparation spaces, and storage vaults. In addition to the requirements of the program, the project includes landscaping articulated in a series of terraced sculpture courtyards and botanical gardens complete with a two-acre pond. An elevated public walkway passing through and above the museum links the northern to the southern portions of the arboretum. After the resignation in November 1987 of Stephen Horn, president of CSULB, the construction of the project was abandoned.

The Site

In 1784 Charles III, King of Spain and of Mexico, granted to one of his officers, Manuel Nieto, the newly conquered territory on the Bay of San Pedro, lying south of the village of Santa María Reina de Los Angeles. Devoted to cattle farming, Nieto’s territory was divided into two ranches – the Rancho Los Alamitos and the Rancho Los Cerritos – which became in 1846 the property of John Temple and Abel Stearns, naturalized emigrants from Massachusetts (fig. 44). Persistent drought and the transformation of the economic structure of the area by a major influx of settlers from the eastern United States brought an end to the prosperous lifestyle of the Los Angeles River valley cattle breeders in the decade between 1860 and 1870. The urbanization
Fig. 45. Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects, Presentation model for University Art Museum, phase 4, California State University at Long Beach, between June 2 and August 5, 1976. Courtesy Eisenman Architects.
of the Long Beach area began in earnest in 1881 with the development by W. E. Willmore of Willmore City, incorporated as the city of Long Beach seven years later. Like most Southern California cities, Long Beach experienced rapid population growth at the turn of the century. With the discovery of oil at Signal Hill in 1921, the city's development accelerated (fig. 46). The municipality completed important civic buildings such as the Municipal Auditorium, an imposing structure built on a lagoon surrounded by the 3,800-foot-long Rainbow Pier, which juts into San Pedro Bay (fig. 47). The growth of Long Beach was abruptly stopped by a severe earthquake in 1933 but picked up during World War II with the establishment of an important naval base. The largest campus of the California State University system was established in Long Beach in 1949 (fig. 48).
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,

Presentation model: roof plan relief, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Transparent colored adhesive film and gold paint on white museum board, 80.0 x 75.5 cm.
CCA DR1987:0659:001
Design Strategy

The architect's design strategy hinges on the superposition, at different scales, of maps representing the geographic or political history of the immediate vicinity of Long Beach. The outlines of the campus and the museum site, the configuration of the ranch on which the city of Long Beach was established, changes caused by shifts in the coastline and the canalization of rivers, the system of land division (the so-called Jefferson grid), and the straight line representing the Newport-Inglewood geographic fault are so many figures that embody for the architect significant dates in the history of the area. Icons by which architectural meaning is conveyed, they reappear variously juxtaposed throughout the development of the project.
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,

Presentation model: upper level plan relief, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1980. Transparent colored adhesive film and gold paint on white museum board, 80.0 x 75.5 cm. CCA DR1987.0859:003
The Drawings

The project was conceived in four phases between February and August 1986; sets of drawings were presented on April 8, April 30, June 2, and August 5. The final project takes the form of a series of relief models (cat. nos. 61, 62), rendered presentation drawings (cat. nos. 63–65) and models (figs. 43, 45).

First Phase

In the first phase Eisenman explores the cartographic figures which, superposed, form the basis of his artificial excavation: the plan of the California State University at Long Beach campus, the plan of the site of the future museum, the plan of the Los Alamitos ranch, the shape of the coastline, the land division grid. A series of sketches by the architect establishes the analogical relationships which fix the relative scales of the plans and produce the superpositions (cat. nos. 66–71). In these drawings, the figures are interlocked according to the alignment of boundaries (for example, the edge of the museum site aligned to the figure of the Los Alamitos ranch in cat. no. 68) or to the registration of points extraneous to the outline of the particular figure (as in the case of the Los Alamitos ranch house placed on the summit of the Palos Verdes mountains in cat. no. 66). The result of this superposition process is documented in a presentation panel (cat. no. 75).

In a second series of drawings, the architect contextualizes the superposed figures by placing them within the perimeter of the museum site (cat. nos. 72–74). Cat. no. 74 serves as a key to decode the architect’s method: each superposition is represented by a specific color and is associated with a significant date in the history of Southern California in general and Long Beach in particular. The resulting site plan was presented on April 8, 1980 (cat. no. 76).

Second Phase

The second phase marks a shift in the architect’s intentions, which move to a closer scrutiny of the configuration of the building itself. Nevertheless, the territorial strategy is not abandoned: one can still recognize the figures devised during the first phase. The Jefferson grid provides the architect with a precisely delimited frame in which he can accomplish his excavation work (as demonstrated in cat. nos. 78 and 79). The working model for this phase shows the building carved out from a square pit, from which spring two figural elements: an oil derrick and the reconstruction of the Rainbow Pier as a circulatory bridge. Both features will be preserved in the final version of the project.

Third Phase

With the third phase, the architect has systematized his archaeological procedure. The significant cartographic dates have been reduced to five (1849, 1889, 1949, 1989, 2049), and each corresponds to a specific superposition (cat. nos. 96 and 97). Notes from Eisenman’s hand clarify the analogies.
Presentation drawing: site plan, phase 4, August 5, 1986. Transparent colored adhesive film and gold paint on photostat, 28.1 x 22.0 cm.

CCA DR1987.0859:004
used in the superposition process (cat. no. 82). Here, Eisenman’s registration method is articulated in three components: registration by edge, by center point, and by perimeter. The five superpositions can be summarized as follows:

- Superposition “1849” consists of the overlay of the canal to the north of the museum site on the edge of the 1849 plan of the ranch. The same figure is repeated at a smaller scale and registered on the outline of the San Gabriel River (cat. no. 81).

- Superposition “1839” uses a triple overlay of coastlines on the Newport-Ingleside fault line in the 1869 and the 1839 ranch map (cat. no. 83).

- Superposition “1049” places the shapes of the coastlines tangentially to the canal which crosses the campus diagonally and forms the north edge of the museum site (cat. nos. 84–86).

- Superposition “1089” collages the San Gabriel river on the ranch site taken at different moments of its history. The fault line is then turned 90 degrees and is placed between two configurations of the river (cat. nos. 87–89).

- Superposition “2049” is the result of all preceding superpositions, each placed in a precise relationship to the next (cat. no. 92). From the mass of lines, an area of great density appears along the canal.

Fourth Phase

In the fourth and final phase, using drawings at a larger scale and a medium and technique which permit greater precision, Eisenman simplifies the 2049 superposition to a few iconic forms (cat. no. 93). From the superpositions developed in the third phase, the following elements are preserved: the doubled campus plan (1049); the doubled ranch plans (1089); the doubled ranch plans with the lake (1889); the river forms (1089); the Rainbow Pier (1049); and the Jefferson grid, oriented now along the canal. These elements are color-coded: the ranches in green, the campus sites in red, the ranch houses in blue, the water – the river and a projected lake – in gold.

It is in this phase that the architect starts inhabiting his artificial archaeology by the detailed planning of the interior spaces (cat. nos. 94–96). He gives substance to his cartographic traces in a series of sketch sections, perspectives, and working models (cat. nos. 97–102). The working models reveal how the canal area progressively became the trench through which the artificial archaeology is revealed and the point of access to the museum (cat. nos. 103–106). The final project is placed on both sides of this deep cut: the museum, its galleries, offices, and preparation spaces on one side and, on the other, two pavilions housing the cafeteria and the black-box theater. From the arborium-shaped vestibule one proceeds through the main circulation route, tangential to the trench to the galleries and lit along its entire length by an irregular wall of glass which takes the shape of the San Gabriel River. The upper level houses administrative offices, meeting rooms, and the library.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDARD

CITIES OF ARTIFICIAL EXCAVATION
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Presentation drawing: exploded axonometric, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986.

Translucent colored adhesive film with gold paint on photostat mounted on black painted paper, 26.0 x 21.5 cm.

CCA DR1987.0859/008

LONG BEACH
Credits

ARCHITECTS:
Peter Eisenman, partner in charge, Eisenman/Robinson Architects, and Donald Gibbs, partner in charge, Gibbs and Gibbs Architects

ASSOCIATE IN CHARGE:
Thomas Leeser

PROJECT ARCHITECTS:
Hiroshi Maruyama, Graeme Morland

ASSISTANTS:
Michael Duncan, Manou Ernster, Judy Geib, Fabio Ghersi, Frances Hsu, Christian Kohl, Paolo Marzatico, Fabio Nonis, Joe Tamey, Mark Wamble, Sarah Whiting, Gilly Youner

COMPUTER DRAWINGS:
Kurt Gibbs, Maurice Silva

References


Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
Presentation drawing: transverse and longitudinal sections, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Transparent colored adhesive film with gold paint on photostat mounted on black painted paper, 28.0 x 21.5 cm. CCA DR1987:0859.007
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing campus and museum sites and canal superposed on coastline, phase 1, between February and April 8, 1986. Black and red felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm. CCA DR1987:0869:062. Inscription: Center right, RANCH HOUSE = MUSEUM = SITE = CAMPUS = RANCH.

Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing campus and museum sites superposed on ranch site and coastline, registered on their periphery, phase 1, between February and April 8, 1986. Black, blue, and red felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm. CCA DR1987:0869:084. Inscription: Lower right, CAMPUS IS TO RANCH (WATERWAY SUPERPOSITION) IN SCALING 1 AS RANCH IN SCALING 2 (IS SUPERPOSED OVER SITE IN SCALING 1) SO THAT PALOS VERDES IN SCALING 2 SUPERPOSES OVER SIGNAL HILL IN SCALEING 1.

Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing superposition of museum site on ranch site, registered along one of their edges, phase 1, between February and April 8, 1986. Black and red felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm. CCA DR1987:0869:057. Inscriptions: Lower center, LOS ALAMITOS BECOMES OUR SITE/SITE BECOMES CAMPUS, lower right, CROSSING SCALES/INTERLOCK TAKEN ONE AWAY AND WHOLE THING FALLS APART.
Peter Eisenman,

Sketch site plan showing coastline and ranch site with land division grid, phase 1, between February and April 8, 1986. Blue, red, and black felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:073

Peter Eisenman,

Sketch site plan showing campus and museum sites superposed on coastline and ranch site at two different scales, phase 1, between February and April 8, 1986. Black, blue, and red felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:065. Inscription: Lower right, INDIAN MOUND ON OUR SITE IS TO RANCH HOUSE AS RANCH HOUSE SUPERPOSED ON OUR SITE IS TO PALO[5] VERDE[5]

Peter Eisenman,

Sketch site plan showing museum and campus sites superposed on coastline with land division grid, phase 1, between February and April 8, 1986. Black and red felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:071
72
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
Sketch site plan of superpositions within museum site, phase 1,
between February and April 8, 1986.
Black, blue, and red felt-tip pen with green pencil on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859:090

73
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
Sketch site plan of superpositions within museum site, phase 1,
between February and April 8, 1986.
Black, blue, and red felt-tip pen with green pencil on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859:086

74
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
Sketch site plan of superpositions within museum site, phase 1,
between February and April 8, 1986.
Black, blue, and red felt-tip pen with green pencil on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859:087. Inscriptions:
Upper right, RANCH [arrow] CAMPUSS/
RH [arrow] IND. HILL/CAMP. [arrow]
R.H. [arrow] B.GR./IND. HILL [arrow]
B.GR.RH [arrow] B.GR.: center right,
RANCH 1985/CAMP. 1949/LONG B.
1989/CAMP 1983
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
Presentation drawing: diagrams of superpositions, phase 1, April 8, 1986. Pen and black ink, color pencils, and red felt-tip pen on vellum and adhesive lettering on photostat office title block mounted on Foam-Core, 101.5 x 82.5 cm. CCA DR1987:0659:015

Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
Presentation drawing: plan, phase 1, April 8, 1986. Transparent colored adhesive film on photostat, 29.0 x 21.7 cm. CCA DR1987:0659:122.
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

**Study model, phase 2, between April 8 and April 30, 1986. Chipboard and wood. 11.9 x 62.0 x 52.0 cm.**

CCA DR1987:0859:160
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

**Sketch site plan and section including Rainbow Pier, phase 2,** between April 8 and April 30, 1986. Black, blue, and red felt-tip pen with graphite on yellow tracing paper, 121.0 x 45.7 cm. CCA DR1987.0858.142.


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Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

**Sketch plan with derricks and Rainbow Pier, phase 2,** between April 8 and April 30, 1986. Black felt-tip pen with graphite and purple and red pencil on yellow tracing paper, 63.0 x 45.7 cm. CCA DR1987.0859.144

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LONG BEACH
80
Peter Eisenman,
**Sketch plane of superpositions 1849 and 1949, phase 3**, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper; 45.7 x 63.8 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:331. Inscriptions: Upper right, DIAG 1/ RIVER/IN RANCH/BECOMES/FAULT/LINE IN SITE/AT JUMP/IN SCALE; center right, DIAGRAM 3/ON SITE

81
Peter Eisenman,
**Sketch of superposition 1849, phase 3**, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Black and red felt-tip pen on vellum photocopy, 43.3 x 28.0 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:204. Inscriptions: Center left, CHANNEL; lower left, GABRIEL RIVER
Diagram and notes relating to scaling process, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Pen and black ink with black felt-tip pen on yellow tracing paper, 45.7 x 58.5 cm.
CCA DR1987.0859:333. Inscriptions:

Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects
Sketch of superposition 1889, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Black and red felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm. CCA DR1987.0859:250. Inscriptions: Lower left, COAST LINE = FAULT LINE, lower center, FAULT LINE = COAST LINE
Peter Eisenman,

Sketch of superposition 1949, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986.
Black felt-tip pen on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm. CCA DR1987:0859.243

Peter Eisenman,

Sketch plan of superposition 1949, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Red felt-tip pen on a photocopy on vellum; 28.0 x 43.3 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859.244

Peter Eisenman,

Sketch plan of superposition 1949, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Red felt-tip pen on a photocopy on vellum; 28.0 x 43.3 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859.237
87
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.
Sketch of superposition 1989, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Red felt-tip pen on a photocopy on vellum, 26.0 x 43.3 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859:209

88
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.
Sketch of superposition 1989, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Red felt-tip pen on a photocopy on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859:210

89
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.
Sketch of superposition 1989, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Red felt-tip pen on a photocopy on vellum, 28.0 x 43.3 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859:211
90
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.
Presentation drawing: diagrams of superpositions 1849 and 1889, phase 3, June 2, 1986. Transparent colored adhesive film with blue and red ink on photostat, 28.0 x 21.5 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859:275

91
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.
CCA DR1987:0859:274

92
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.
Presentation drawing: diagram of superposition 2049, phase 3, between April 30 and June 2, 1986. Pen and black ink and transparent colored adhesive film with adhesive lettering on photostat, 28.0 x 21.5 cm.
CCA DR1987:0859:277

CITIES OF ARTIFICIAL EXCAVATION
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,

Sketch site plan, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink, graphite, and purple and red pencil with adhesive tape on Mylar. 101.5 x 106.0 cm.

CCA DR1987:0859:302
Peter Eisenman,
**Functional study, phase 4**, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink on vellum, 30.0 x 22.8 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:447

Peter Eisenman,
**Functional study, phase 4**, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink on vellum, 22.8 x 30.2 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:446

Peter Eisenman,
**Functional study, phase 4**, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and green ink on vellum, 22.8 x 30.2 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:400

Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
**Sketch transverse section through Rainbow Pier, phase 4**, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 30.6 x 81.0 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:378

Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
**Sketch transverse section through black box theater, phase 4**, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 30.6 x 72.5 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:380

Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
**Sketch transverse section through entrance lobby, phase 4**, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 30.6 x 103.0 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:379

Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
**Sketch longitudinal section, phase 4**, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 30.6 x 94.7 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:381
101
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch perspective of entrance passageway, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 61.0 x 83.0 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:373

102
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch perspective of entrance passageway showing derricks and pedestrian bridge, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 61.0 x 84.0 cm. CCA DR1987:0859:374
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Study model, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Dioxotype laid down on Foam-Cor, 1.5 x 40.6 x 37.5 cm. CCA DR1087:0859.485
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Study model, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1988. Diazotype with graphite additions laid down on Foam-Cor, 2.1 x 45.6 x 38.6 cm.

CCA DR1987:0859.487
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,
Study model, phase 4, between
June 2 and August 5, 1986. Diazotype
laid down on Foam-Cor, 3.4 x 37.3 x
46.9 cm. CCA DR1987:0859.466
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Study model, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1980. Diazo type with graphite additions laid down on Foam-Dor, 3.6 x 46.0 x 39.9 cm.

CCA DR1987:0859:468
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Study model, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1988. Black felt-tip pen and red pencil on paper, laid down on Foam-Cor with blue ink and diazo-type, 37.0 x 41.3 cm.

CCA DR1987:0859:409
Office of Eisenman/Roberto
Architects,

Study model, phase 4, between
June 2 and August 5, 1986. Red felt-tip pen on diazo print laid down on
Foam-Dr, 3.2 x 44.4 x 37.4 cm.

CCA DR1987:0859:492
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,

Study model, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Red, blue, and green pencil, black and red felt-tip pen, and graphite on diazo copy laid down on Foam-Gor, 3.5 x 36.7 x 41.1 cm. CCA DR 1987.9958-490
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects.

Study model, phase 4, between June 2 and August 5, 1986. Red and black felt-tip pen with graphite on diazo print laid down on Foam-Cor with white museum board, 6.5 x 77.0 x 102.0 cm. CCA D11897:0659:484
Peter Eisenman's work seeks to undermine the conventions of architectural formulation. It does so without reference to external cause but wholly through a critical manipulation of figural content. The comfortable deception of past realities embodied in architecture demands confrontation, yet such is the complexity of the task that few have been able to approach it. As is inevitable in any experimental procedure, Eisenman's critical development has not been without confusion and uncertainty; yet at every step it has offered insights that must be subjected to close critical scrutiny.

The proposal for a new art museum on the campus of California State University at Long Beach marked the most complete development of a conceptual process that began with the CamaRegio project of 1976 and was evolved in the Friedrichstrasse housing project, designed in 1980 and 1981. The work on the museum also followed Eisenman's success in the 1983 competition for the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts on the campus of Ohio State University. In the first half of 1986, when the museum was being designed, both the Berlin project and the Wexner Center were being prepared for construction. Radical projects that in the 1970s had been seen as marginal were now being realized and becoming known internationally. The confidence that grew from this success makes the Long Beach project of particular interest.

The 526 items recording the development of the design for Long Beach document every aspect of the evolving design, from the hastily scribbled exploration of a fleeting idea to elaborate polychrome presentation drawings.

The Eisenman/Robertson office in New York, on the ninth floor of a 1960s loft building west of Broadway, is a raw space with little to suggest the creative character of the enterprise being conducted within, save the spotlighting of several project models. Eisenman has two work spaces, a private office where he takes phone calls and reads—he surrounds himself with books—and a desk in the main drawing office. The drawing office has work stations for fifteen people, and it is here, surrounded by his assistants, that Eisenman designs. There was and remains an intensity of mood to the place. Work on the Wexner and Berlin projects shared the space with Long Beach and Eisenman would move through the day from one project to another, as his interest and enthusiasm dictated, maintaining a rolling creative energy in which each activity would feed on another. A typical discussion might draw on the meal or the movie of the night before, some contractual nuance of Berlin or Wexner, or the specifics of Long Beach.

Of the fifteen associates named on the Long Beach project two were central to the process: the German Thomas Leeser, associate in charge, and the Japanese Hiroshi Maruyama, project architect. Eisenman was in daily dis-
cussion with Leeser, testing ideas, at first verbally and then through drawings and models. The assessment of each formal move as represented in drawings would lead to further drawings, and, at key points in the process, to simple, layered models in Foam-Cor. Eisenman held the center, redrawing and over-drawing as one idea supplanted another. Throughout, Eisenman safeguarded the central proposition that drove the work while encouraging continual critical reexamination, not only to clarify the intention but also to give it the validation essential to an activity of such an esoteric nature. While Leeser was the handyman to the creative process, Maruyama played the role of devil's advocate. Leeser, with great formal sensitivity, advanced the evolution and transformation of the abstract proposition into the real, drawing on an association of almost ten years to maintain rigorous consistency with Eisenman's critical program, while Maruyama played the role of spoiler, continually seeking to undermine or disturb the proposition with new evidence and new ideas. Both Leeser and Maruyama draw in a style similar to Eisenman's but with perhaps a little more precision. However, neither Leeser, Maruyama, nor any of the assistants appear to have used texts in relation to drawing. This act belonged to Eisenman. It is the interaction between text and image that places him at the center of the critical exchange.

Within this highly verbal and interactive group, against what was the work being judged? The debates were often elliptical and made reference to philosophical and literary ideas and to the texts and objects of others. The critical exchange could be characterized as a search for a particular visual direction to emerge from the drawings. This was not some rarefied intellectual puzzle (though the process certainly was) but the creation of a tangible presence that had visceral force. This force would lie not in the beautiful or sublime, but in something systemic yet difficult to retrace or recompose, a quality revealed in the drawings and models that was latent in the rational process and yet disturbed by it, something new and inexplicable that occurred where the critical strategy eroded or displaced the essence of the originating object or idea.

In each part of the process, the frequency and character of different types of drawings reflect the fascinations of the author and can therefore serve as an index to the creative intention. The Long Beach project is documented in more than 510 drawings and 14 models. The great majority of the drawings (nearly 300 sheets) are on yellow tracing paper or vellum, and most of these are worked in freehand by Peter Eisenman. The last of the four phases in the development process consists mostly of formal drawings in ink on Mylar. There are 96 of these, in turn reworked in various forms of reproduction, frequently overdrawn in colored pencils. The prevalent graphic procedure is one of tracing and retracing from some preexisting mechanical plan or map, for the most part in fine lines of black ink. Out of almost 250 freehand tracings, approximately forty contain texts. These drive the narrative character of the work and range from small word puzzles to lengthy diagrammatic assessments of the relationships between graphic figures. The texts seem to reflect the way in which the author sustained his interest and pleasure in the process, and their frequency and length seem to relate to specific points in
the evolution of ideas. The importance of text seems to have declined as the process of clarifying the conceptual proposition moves from narrative idea to graphic form.

Four hundred thirty-four drawings, or 81 percent of the total creative activity, consider the problem only in plan. A clear majority of the plans concern not the practical resolution of specific problems but a progressive examination of the relationships between overlaid figural patterns. Eisenman calls this process "superpositioning," a superposition being a superimposition without domination. For Eisenman, superpositions reveal analogous relationships that were previously obscured.

Eisenman's hand is evident in all the advancing and compounding of the layers of traced figures. His presence is less evident in the more formal and mechanical drawings prepared for presentation. Twenty-seven drawings are axonometric drawings, or oblique projections. These were used for converting the two-dimensional compound tracings into three-dimensional results. From this oblique projection, layered models were constructed (eight of the models are of this type). They were formed by pasting blue-line prints from the most potent of the superposition studies onto layers of Foam-Cor to represent in three dimensions the intersection of the figures. These then were overdrawn in colored pencil or carved to consider options in the way each layer was superposed on its associated figure. They were clearly used as critical evidence of formal evolution through which the team debated whether the pictorial process of superposition was creating appropriate disturbance. The models are followed by sectional drawings, twenty-five in all. They are mechanically drawn and suggest the two-dimensional character of this phase of the conceptual strategy, implying that the procedure of superpositioning was not able to operate in section. Similarly, the fifteen perspective drawings, the majority made at the end of the design program, suggest that Eisenman did not care to imagine in this form the three-dimensional results of his figural studies.

Throughout the material, there seems to be a clear distinction between drawings that seek to present new thought and drawings that represent the result. The perspective drawings are among the most impassionate documents of the archive. By not allowing himself to pictorialize, Eisenman seeks to avoid the trap of corrupted representation. Similar distinction cannot be made in the development of the model studies. The eight Foam-Cor models clearly serve the drawings and are continually worked over, while the more detailed models that move toward a final state of the project maintain a level of conceptual exploration that is possible only in model form. The effect of complex, intersecting layers was studied first in a chipboard model, then in a highly detailed basswood construction. The second model was clearly built more for intellectual and sensual pleasure than for practical description. It was followed by the most highly developed model in the collection, one in which each intersecting figure and layer is carefully picked out in complex sets of muted colors. The forms are lovingly explored, much more for their own sake than for any semblance to the real. It is a beautiful object whose character was to influence the final presentation, and one can
imagine the pleasure it gave the team in its extraordinary freshness and strangeness. Its conviction would silence any of the pragmatics of its reality.

It is apparent from this analysis of the working materials that the conceptual process that shaped or structured the design for Long Beach arose early in the design activity and remained consistent until the end. This is unusual, but it is characteristic of Eisenman’s work. Many architects seek inspiration in a fairly loose and random way and describe the process by which creative synthesis is achieved as “having a concept.” This tends to describe a point in their assessment of the problem where a significant pattern or figure has emerged that seems to accommodate all the competing demands of the program. Eisenman rejects such a process absolutely. Instead, he seeks to establish a strategic text or narrative related in some way to the subject at hand. This relationship has no concern with the performance of the physical characteristics of the building. Rather, it searches in the circumstances of a specific place for patterns of order unique to that place. In the case of Long Beach, Eisenman wrote post facto that the formal project was “the outcome of a history ‘given to’ the building.”

This history was compiled from a series of significant dates, beginning with the Gold Rush settlement of California in 1849, the creation of the campus in 1949, and the projected “rediscovery” of the museum in 2049. The idea was to imagine the site one hundred years after the founding of the university and 200 years after the period of the Gold Rush.

Eisenman’s descriptive text for the project was written July 6, 1988, but it fairly represents a conceptual program that arose very early in the design activity. Eisenman represents this history with simple line tracings of what he selects as appropriate figures for the respective themes, all drawn in plan view. The Long Beach project takes its form from the overlapping registration of several maps: of the ranch that once existed on the site, the site of the campus, and the changing configurations of fault lines, a river, a channel, and the coastline. They are combined in such a way that none of the notations takes precedence over any other, and so as to textualize coincidental overlaps by subjective interpretation.

For example, he traces the full extent of a ranch which occupied the area of the campus, including a significant piece of California coastline and a river that runs through the site.

This series of tracings in the end amounts to seven figures – ranch (and later ranch house), campus, fault lines, grids, river, channel, and coastline – which represent the total formal language from which the art museum will be formed. They also become the set of keys by which the process can be opened. Importantly, once they are detached from the original context, each figure is allowed to shrink, expand, or rotate to wherever or whatever associated position the syntactical process demands. In overviewing all of the fruits of this activity, one senses the way in which Eisenman begins to empathize with these sets of significant traces, the way in which they excite him. Although it is dispassionate, this is not a bloodless process. Eisenman
sustains in his imagination the meaning of each trace and feels satisfaction in the revelations of paradoxical relationships.

Almost without exception, but particularly in those drawings which can be characterized as concerned with the conceptual process, there is no evidence of any interest in the actual place, in the way the project will be constructed, or in the experience it will offer those who enter it. These are not capricious oversights but crucial to Eisenman's intent to redefine architecture by deriving it in a manner free from past modes of representation and symbolism, a manner that must displace program and must avoid representation in any form, human, natural, contextual, or architectural. Underlying this intent is the belief that overconsumption of the convention of past and present realities has eroded their meaning. The documents, therefore, represent a design process which operates totally without reference to any of the conventions of architecture or of building. In this way, it might be argued, a construction will emerge that will not only disturb past realities but will also make at Long Beach a wholly new performance of the idea of art museum. By any objective measure, the drawings show an obsessive singleness of mind both in terms of the obliqueness of the proposition and the conviction that it will lead to a productive conclusion. The activity is driven at the center by the question to which Eisenman continues to return: why does architecture look the way it does and how might it be otherwise?

Although in these operations Eisenman represents the plan tracings of past orders that in various ways have touched the site for the museum, and although he manipulates the scale and rotates the positions of these trace representations, he operates on the resulting figures without reference to their nature, with utter neutrality. In other words, he has no interest in their figural or symbolic nature. For some architects (Michael Graves or John Hejduk, for example), the drawing hand is so sensually linked to feeling that each line unavoidably embodies qualities of the thing represented. Such imaginations infuse the idea of things drawn, be it clouds, water, stone, or trees, into the rhythm and weight of the pencil line as it touches the sheet. Eisenman is blessed with a hand that appears incapable of conveying emotion: a hand without empathy that must find meaning wholly outside the character of the drawing. Overheated drawings would pollute the objectivity of the process. This unemotional hand is essential in depersonalizing the process, in removing not only emotions, but also human scale. Nowhere in his drawings does a human figure appear. Nowhere in his drawings is the spectated reality allowed to seduce.

In the beginning, this “synthetic history” is established as much by words as by the slender traces. The words initiate the pictorial imagining. The words are written in haiku-like figures, which guide the drawing. In drawing 116/c1 (cat. no. 66; the drawing sequence numbers referenced throughout this essay were given to the drawings after the project was concluded), from the first series of studies made in late February 1986, he writes:

LOS ALAMITOS BECOMES OUR SITE / SITE BECOMES CAMPUS

As a companion to this idea, he overlays four traces: the boundaries of the
ranch plan from 1849, which extends to the California coastline; at an equivalent scale, the actual site within which the project will sit and at the center, in a diminutive form, the plan of the campus. Almost as an afterthought, he notes hurriedly at the edge of the paper:

*CROSSING SCALES / INTERLOCK / TAKE ONE AWAY AND / WHOLE THING FALLS APART

He appears, here, to be reflecting on what he has drawn and begins to enjoy the intimation of possible tensions to come.

The character of the imagining involved in this process can be seen in the next drawing in the sequence (16/62, fig. 49). The coastline and ranch trace remains at the scale of the preceding drawing, but the full campus plan has been enlarged to become an equivalent and rival figure. Attached to its western border the same plan reemerges, rotated, as a diminutive echo or coda of itself. Here the text reads:

*CITY B IS COUNTY B / RANCHO LOS ALAMITOS IS CAMPUS / WATER IS WATER

"Rancho...is campus" clearly indicates the intersection of the similarly scaled figures.

In drawing 16/64 (cat. no. 67) he writes:

*CAMPUS IS TO RANCH (WATER IS) SUPERPOSITION IN SCALING 1 / AS RANCH IN SCALING 2 (IS SUPERPOSED OVER SITE IN / SCALING 1 SO THAT PALOS VERDES [inserted] / IN SCALING 2) SUPERPOSES OVER / SIGNAL HILL IN SCALING 1

These are specific instructions to himself that he faithfully carries out, carefully doubling or halving the size of the figures and examining the interrelation between the layers of time and event. For example, when the campus is at a scale to match the ranch, the site for the building within the campus trace is also given the ranch, appropriately scaled down. Such a process requires a remarkable suspension of disbelief.

Consider again that this activity is explicitly about the design of a real facility for a demanding client on an actual site. One might ask of such an elliptical path: by what means is progress measured? Perhaps it is difficult to admit the necessarily indulged character of creative activity. Eisenman appears to be investing his traces with what might be called scientific qualities. He appears to see them as part of the equivalency of all matter. No matter how confounded the individual traces become in the process of interactive layering, they retain their essential nature while bonding and being transformed by the interference of equally self-sufficient patterns. As in the preparation of a vaccine, the result is a compound antidote, in this case designed to combat the disease of overconsumed reality.

Progress appears to be measured in two ways: first, by the completeness and richness of the textual instructions and constructions, second, by the density of the resulting figuration. Continuing with the examples, many of the major figural associations are established in drawing 16/60 (fig. 50), where Eisenman writes:
By drawing 19/11 (fig. 51), late in March of 1986, his imagination reduces these complex associations to a series of formulas with graphic additions that have the quality of equations waiting to be resolved:

\[
R \rightarrow \text{CAMP} / R \rightarrow C / S \rightarrow \text{PV} / S \rightarrow R / S \rightarrow C / S \rightarrow \text{BG} / R \rightarrow S \rightarrow B / S \rightarrow A / R \rightarrow B = A
\]

The problem of resolving S (site) appears to be how the actual site, the place of the building, will cut into the layers of the emerging palimpsested traces. Drawing series 119 ends in a dense set of associations including all the figures of the found vocabulary (fig. 52; 19/10), which serves as the problem field in which drawing series 120 will place the actual site.

The conceptual struggle in drawing series 120 is almost silent. Here, the large, axlike form of the site's footprint fills the page and is moved over the palimpsested drawings to determine how best to frame the traces of history. It is not until layer 26/65 (cat. no. 74) that something clicks. Tentatively at first, but clearly noted in the corner of the drawing, the figural elements become layers in time. He writes:

**RANCH 1885 / CAMP. 1949 / LONG B, 1899 / CAMP 1983**

The drawing with this note contains fragments of all the traces, positioned with increasing tension, and one senses pleasure in the transformation of the trace: an emergence of new meaning and a new potency in this tactical game. The lines have become, in his imagination, actual sections through time. He explains his perceptions in the descriptive text for the project:

*The different historical layers and shifts could be understood as marks of intelligence or glimpses of the way a culture organizes itself. In this sense, architecture becomes the intervention into and the invention of stories,* and
this project represents a story about Long Beach that is different from those which have spoken for it previously.

The process continues into drawing series 122. Again free from text, Eisenman traces and traces over the mix of campus, ranch, burial ground, coastline, and river, always constrained by the now omnipresent frame of the actual site that will hold this museum. This frame becomes the window through which the traces are continually reassessed to find that significant disturbance that seems to promise the potential of a new state of the real.

In drawing 21/c1 (fig. 53) dates replace words as the driving stimulus:


Through time he finds the appropriate figure for the appropriate date, and there is clear concern that the figure in time be substantial or substantiated. At the edge of the drawing, he notes, “1885 irrigation system,” against a long parallel bar that runs through the site.

Drawing series 122 and 123 pursue these layers with a disciplined regularity and silence. By drawing series 124 (fig. 54) the site plan frames a wonderfully rich palimpsest of layered landscapes. Is this silence, this absence of textual provocation, the result of the process being passed on to his assistants, to Lecser or to Maruyama? Is it that only Eisenman possesses the right, the key to the full syntactical game?

An observer, in time removed, wandering again through this extraordinary sweep of drawings, slowly enters Eisenman’s imagination, and more forcefully, Eisenman’s quest. There is a sense that for him all these traces become in his mind tangible forces with which he must do battle. Forces that surround him are not to be tamed, but to be fused together as if by alchemy, into a new and transcendent state of order, state of matter. The struggle, as one encounters it as a stranger, lies somewhere between that of Don Quixote and that of Ahab. Phase one of the activity ended, in his mind, on April 8.
1986. It had produced 24 series of drawings, all plans, and concluded with the superposed layers apparently unyielding. It is unclear from the evidence why Eisenman decided that the drawings made from April 9 until April 30 represented a distinct phase of activity. As a modest body of work, phase two lacks any fresh critical insight that the process needed to sustain in order to advance. This slowing down must be characteristic of such activity, as it involves acts of elaborate intellectual speculation without an objective basis for assessing progress, without rules for judging when enough is enough. However, it is clear that the process can and did lose energy in the second phase and a renewed intellectual push was needed to drive it on.

Beginning in May, Eisenman exerted all his will and concentration to renew and dramatically confront the myriad illusions that he had cast abroad – that is, as far as the surface of the yellow trace. The third phase contains a series of drawings that are exemplary of Eisenman’s mental process, at least as it was in 1986. The first (fig. 55) is numbered 3 14/01 and is dated May 24, 1986. It is worked on a letter-sized sheet of paper and takes stock of the ideas that have informed the project up to this time. At the top of the page he lists all the trace elements that are active at this stage, setting them out, for example, in tactical groups, for instance:

SAME / SIZE / SAME / SCALE
beside
COASTLINE 1 / COASTLINE 2 / COASTLINE 3
and
SAME / SIZE / DIFFERENT / SCALE
beside
WATER GRID 1 / JEFFERSON GRID 2 / TOWN GRID 3
The first set of associations is related to a group of words that includes *Rainbow Pier* and then to *edge*, perhaps indicating the seed of a figural idea that could be useful within the evolving grid texture.

On the right in fig. 55 is, I am assured, a typical Eisenman doodle. It does not seem to represent any of the ideas or figures within the Long Beach frame. Below it is a series of drawings and diagrams in a form which appears nowhere else in the Long Beach materials. The notes refer to fault lines and ask, “how does it get to the site” and seem to be specifically concerned with anticipating the way in which architectural form might emerge from process. They are coupled with elemental yet descriptive drawings which could become the outlines of simple buildings.

Below this are paired diagrams that illustrate exactly how Eisenman imagines the operation of superposition. The lines in the diagram on the left indicate how he sees the transference and rescaling of images. The drawing on the right is quite explicit in diagramming an interactive process. These small, studied figures represent the conceptual and pictorial activity within his imagination. He may in a detached way rescale and rotate, yet the search for underlying logic in the process is prefigured in his imagination. Below this, all the critical dates are restated. In among the familiar, there are two brief notes that seem to anticipate the need for a more forceful intervention. He writes:

*FAULT / REVEALS ALL / REVERBERATIONS*

and then alongside he writes:

*RAINBOW OIL WELLS*
These two fleeting thoughts will become powerful critical instructions as the project moves to a close.

The next drawing, 3.14/c4 (fig. 56) seems much more spontaneous. Eisenman again shows his formative concern for the relation between time and figure:

1849 RANCH ON SITE CANAL IS RIVER (COAST LINE) AND EDGE OF RANCH / 1889 RANCH HOUSE ON SITE CANAL IS COAST LINE (FAULT LINE) S/C / 1949 CAMPUS ON SITE CANAL IS FAULT LINE (RIVER) / 1989 MUSEUM ON SITE / 2049 FIND 1989, MUSEUM

On the right is one dense inscription that seems, in its terse clarity, to suggest that he has achieved a clear visceral and conceptual understanding. It states:

2049 START TO DIG ALONG A / FAULT LINE AND IT REVEALS: / 4 PLACES /
4 SUPERPOSITIONS

Under this he writes:

4 DIFF SIZES / NOW AS / SAME OR / SIM. SIZE / AT 4 DIFF / SCALES / AT 4 DIFF TIMES

Alongside this he writes:

MUSEUM WITH ALL THINGS IN IT 2049 / SITE 1889 / CAMPUS - 1949 / RANCH HOUSE - 1889 / RANCH - 1849

Even as it sits on the page, there seems delight in the instruction, “find museum by going ahead in time to 2049.” And he begins a very excited series of drawings in which he feels for the figural potency of this idea.

The idea of describing the future is certainly the most agitated in the whole process, and after many quick and quite specific investigations, he returns in drawing 3.21 (fig. 57) to the same question, “going ahead in time.” On this page, he seems to demonstrate both visually and sensually the relation between his thoughts and his drawings. As he draws, he looks for encouraging
conflicts as well as specific rational, conceptual associations that justify location. The ranch house in the top sketch is the tiny speck by the river. It is placed here in its actual relation to the Long Beach campus. The same relation then reappears, and the campus figure is scaled up and transposed to the edge of what were once the boundaries of the nineteenth-century ranch. These studies are revealing in the way in which they begin to establish the principal relationships that are sustained into the final resolution. Progress is being made, and by drawing 328/c6 (fig. 58), the notes have moved in tone from proposition to instruction to confirmation. He writes:


There is one additional trace on this drawing that seems to strengthen his trust in the merging configuration. This comprises an extension of the city grid, which he names the Jefferson grid, and is a point at which the grid slips - a device that was important in ordering Wexner. It here represents the fault line; a reasoned figure for a cut through the layers of history. In drawing 328/c6 (fig. 59), the fault line between the Jefferson grid and all other elements associated with this trace, including the coastline, are shifted up through the campus site plans to allow a more full-bodied intersection.
with the layers of history. Although, as the process continues, all these elements will undergo extensive readjustment, this drawing marks a point at which the experiment appears to be proven in the sense that the author has confidence that the activity will lead to the appropriate disturbed markings that he seeks. It is only after this point is passed that the process leads to more formal mechanical drawings and to the construction of layered models that explore the external spatial result.

What has been presented here is a synopsis of design activity that extended over a period of three or four months and involved 250 drawings. Given the extent of the drawings and the intensity with which the strategy is sustained, it comes as a surprise to discover how much looser and more gestural the activity becomes as it moves toward a usable building. In its final form the proposal for a university art museum in Long Beach is dominated by three figural elements that come later in the process than the profiles of superpositioned historical mapping that have consumed so much of the activity.

This timing would seem to be typical of creative processes; moreover, two of the late arrivals are rooted in the text. The three are a rectangular trench, the “fault line”; a semicircular passage partly above ground, called the Rainbow Bridge; and a towering, open structure that appears to represent an oil derrick. The Rainbow Bridge grows grandly out of the tiny pier on the west side of the coastline. It appears to be necessitated by a realization, as the project is literally drawing to a close, that the compound palimpsest of layers has produced insufficient climactic force. The Rainbow Bridge emerges swiftly and late between drawing series 3.30 and 3.35, apparently as a ubiquitous device to give vigor to these fields of ambiguous trace.

The idea of the great fault, the great cut through the layers of history, had been very much in Eisenman’s mind from the midpoint of the process. He saw it operating like the Grand Canyon in carving a vast space that would give order at the center of his palimpsested plan. Yet when all the forces are mustered in the last phase, neither coastline, canal, nor river appear to combine to offer the appropriate measure of force that the concept
demands. So, like any good director, Eisenman takes all the plays and players in hand and under his will forces a grand, broad, rectangular trench large enough to allow conventional building figures to arise from these edges of synthetic history. In the later descriptive text he writes as he feels:

In areas, the stone of the building bears the mark of a once existing river bed or the outline of former ranch boundaries, always overlaid with similar textual marks of fictive conditions. Thus, the stone of this architecture, instead of “configuring” an “image” of a museum, records the traces of a lost and future history.

Once in place the trench and bridge are quickly given a companion in the form of a tall, open-structured oil derrick. This is an uninflected object, yet so much clearer than the superposed traces that it acts to diminish the process. On the oblique perspective in the final presentation, it straddles the fault line, cutting through the layers of history. However, unlike the synthetic armory at the Wexner, it is untouched by this disturbing force.

One last set of drawings is stranger from a critical perspective than all that precedes it. Late in the fourth phase, as the project moves toward conclusion, Eisenman sits down with a letter-sized pad of white tracing paper and a pen with green ink, and at one sitting attempts to accommodate the needs of the art museum within the multiple layers of patterns of his traced and invented history. He makes sixty-four drawings which raise difficult questions about the completeness of his conceptual strategy. He clearly is ambivalent about the analogical relation between the traced form and the required building function. In drawing 4 6c/ct (fig. 6c) the toilets become the leg of the campus plan, and a major circulation ramp seems to follow the sections of these conceptual traces. He shows great confidence in packing the building function into the traces with a result that is clearly much less refined or critically shaped than the superpositioned elements, which can be assumed to have become roofs of the building. None of the interior spaces
that emerge from this process share any of the figural or formal significance of the surface relief.

The final presentation boards maintain clear confidence and pleasure in viewing the building as a polychromatic relief. The main drawing is a vividly colored and layered relief of the final resolution of the figural traces. The remaining boards were designed to take the client into the various activities of the building, but as each board moves beneath the layers of the conceptual figure to reveal the detailed workings of the building, the drawings assume a quite different character. Plans are shown as though they were sections through the relief map. Color disappears as the sections move below the surface. Thus, the process of excavation affects only the surface of the artifact.

This last series of drawings, and especially the final presentation, raises a question about the overall activity. Is the essential process one of play and discovery, or of self-conscious manipulation? The sweeping conceptual acts leading up to the final presentation have all the marks and gestures of play. This is seen most clearly in the insertion of the gorge through all the layers of collage to dominate the confusion. One can empathize with the author as he sits trapped in a labyrinth of his own invention which he knows to be a combination of eyeballed composing and specious rules: x is to house as house is to river, as river is to self, and so on. It is his intuition, not his intellect, that forces the idea of a natural displacement to cut through the mass. And the final drawings take playful pleasure in the abstract collage that results: a collage with the painterly qualities of a latter-day Juan Gris that clearly takes its sympathetic tones from the advice of a color consultant, gaining an elegance and substance which have no relation to the realization of the project. In other words, there is no evidence that the final construction would have been so colored or have gained from the elaboration.

This outcome raises the question of the relationship between the obvious artistic and compositional nature of the drawings and the realization of the
project, Le Corbusier used painting and sculpture to explore compositional
and symbolic ideas, not to suggest that painting was a servant of architecture,
but that architecture benefited from this exchange. In Aldo Rossi’s work, the
relationship between painting and realized object seems much more obvious:
The painting is used to establish a mythic context which in some palpable
way remains an unseen presence in the completed work. In Long Beach, the
problem with both the final presentation drawings and, in some sense, the
overall process, is that they are caught halfway between self-reference and
representation with no obvious benefits to either state from this ambiguity.

It would have been preferable, I would argue, had the process remained
wholly self-referential. It would then have forced more complex strategic
gains to accommodate the three-dimensional interpretation of the traces.
The sectional and spatial consequences would have shared in the decon-
struction and juxtaposition of the plan traces with much more disturbance
than Eisenman’s insertion of the conventional plan, and the resulting occupa-
tion would have had a much more unsettling and renewing effect on the
institution. But, for all its intelligent manipulation, the process results in a
construction whose complexity is demonstrably skin-deep; a construction
that has none of the mass or inscribed content that the text promises.

Apart from the still evolving garden entitled Chora I. Works which
Eisenman is designing with Jacques Derrida, the Long Beach project
appears to conclude an activity which was fundamentally limited by the
two-dimensional nature of the graphic process. Projects since Long Beach
have had far more forceful, immanent texts at the center of their develop-
ment. Unlike Long Beach, which relies on two-dimensional tracing, the
Biology Center proposed for Frankfurt has both the conceptual and physical
structure of the DNA molecule. In the program for Carnegie-Mellon
University, the Boolean cube provided a much more robust and resilient
three-dimensional strategy than mapped tracings. What is clear from the
evidence is that the representational material that built the palimpsested
figures out of which the plans were carved lacked what might be called an
originating significance. It lacked enough physical and conceptual body for
their transformation to be truly disturbing and revealing.

The process just described demonstrates a concern with, yet fails to resolve,
the ambiguous relationship between a narrative idea and its disembodied
visual equivalent. During the major part of this activity, the relationship
remains in a state of unrefined generality. The Long Beach project sought,
in bringing together in a specific, singular place various tracings of its history,
to disturb and transform each figure’s iconic state. However, as is clear from
the plans, tracings are so inadequate in representing any aspect of the iconic
condition that the erosion remains as meaningless as the undisturbed remains
of coastlines and rivers and rainbow bridges.

Disembodied, two-dimensional tracing coupled with Eisenman’s apparent
disinterest in thinking three-dimensionally results in a strategy often inade-
quate to the intellectual task (particularly when compared with the work of
Tschumi or Libeskind from the same years). Though he demonstrates exception-

CITIES OF ARTIFICIAL EXCAVATION
conceptual invention is too self-conscious and too consistent to derive the transformation he seeks. From the evidence, no matter how energetically the figures are permuted and how intricate the texts that guide them, they are unable to realize the full disturbance or the full reembodiment that is the stated intention.

To return to Eisenman's description of the project written in 1988, he was explicit in what he believed had been achieved:

*The traditional role of architecture has been not only to realize a sheltering function, but to represent and symbolize it as well. It is proposed in this project that while a museum must shelter art, it does not necessarily follow that it must symbolize its activity. Instead, it could represent the relationship of art to society, raise questions about the museum as a social institution, or it could propose a new representation of that institution.*

In this work Eisenman demonstrated a brilliant critical imagination and a profound and provocative belief in the infinite possibilities of reality; however, from the reading of the evidence the invention was insufficiently developed to give full form to the spatial promise of the intention. This exercise did not achieve a “new” representation.
La Villette:
Project for a Garden, Parc de La Villette, Paris (Chora L Works), 1985–1986

Chora L Works

This project for a garden in the Parc de la Villette is an attempt to dislocate the notions of metaphor and metonymy so that actual time, place, and scale are replaced by analogies of these conditions. For example, the site will be an actual place but will also have another time, scale, and place in it. The site will contain its own presence as well as the absence of its presence in a set of superpositions.

Analogies are made between La Villette in 1867, when an abattoir occupied the site of the park; Paris in 1548, before the abattoir, when the walls of the city occupied the site; and Paris in the time of Bernard Tschumi’s La Villette project. Superposed on these are the different times of the Cannaregio project, which also had an abattoir as well as the city “wall” of the canal.

The process of scaling – the use of analogous material at differing scales – revealed some surprising relationships between the site of La Villette, the project for Cannaregio, and Tschumi’s project for La Villette. For example, the grid for La Villette, at a scale change, coincides with the grid for Cannaregio at a ratio of two to one. Thus, if the Cannaregio project is registered with Tschumi’s project at an appropriate scale, other relationships that could not be read before become clear. For example, the major axis of Tschumi’s La Villette is 90 degrees north relative to the axis of Cannaregio. In addition each axis cuts one of the squares in the project in exactly the same way. The abattoir/canal relationship at each site provides another opportunity for superposition, which was explored for analogic possibilities. The relationships of canal to canal, abattoir to abattoir, grid to grid, Tschumi to Eisenman begin to create an analogic space.

Scaling has several purposes. One is to subvert the notion of the human body as the source-authority of scale. Second, by presenting analogous material at different scales in the same project, we subvert the value of the thing itself, the privilege of a specific object at a specific scale. The process, like Freud’s dreamwork, is one of condensation and displacement: displacement of scale, condensation by superposition. Then new analogies are made from the condensed or superposed material, used at again-displaced scales.

At each scaling, aspects of change over time – changes in rivers, borders, and so on – are introduced. Thus reverberations occur not only in scale but in time, resulting in self-similar, but not self-same, analogies. It is as if there were infinite reflections in an imperfect mirror.
This analogy seeks dislocation between architectures. There must be both architecture and an-architecture, not one or the other. Thus this project is about both metaphor and metonymy yet neither metaphor nor metonymy. It is a cut between them. It is the “difference between” that is being sought.

PETER EISENMAN

Fig. 6c. J. L. G. B. Palaisseau, engraver, and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, designer. Barrière de La Villette. 1809. From Palaisseau. *Les Barrières de Paris*, 3 vols., n.m., 1810. E19B0412/000019

Project History

In 1982 the French Ministry of Culture and the Établissement Public du Parc de La Villette organized a competition for “an urban park of the twenty-first century” to be created on a 125-acre site in the northeastern part of Paris, the location, during the nineteenth century, of the municipal slaughterhouses and meat markets. The brief called for an innovative design which would incorporate a wide range of cultural and entertainment facilities, including open-air theaters, restaurants, video arcades, sports fields, and gardens designed by individual architects. In March 1983 the Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi was selected as coordinating architect of the park, responsible for the construction of the principal buildings and the coordination of the interventions of other architects, landscape architects, artists, and designers. As part of this program, in May 1985 project manager François Barré, the Commission de la Politique Artistique, and Bernard Tschumi invited Peter Eisenman to collaborate with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida on the design of a garden. The construction of the project was delayed and in 1990 was suspended.
Office of Eisenman/Robortson
Architects,
Presentation model of first scheme,
June 1986. Pink, mauve, and gold
paint over basswood, 7.6 x 41.3 x
50.6 cm. CCA DR1992:0008:001
At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the La Villette district was an agricultural plain dotted with villages (villettes) situated beyond the boundary of the city of Paris as delimited by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's mur d'octroi (fig. 61). The Napoleonic regime initiated a series of profound transformations in the French capital and its periphery. To supply Paris with an adequate quantity of water, the government constructed the reservoir of La Villette, a canal which also served as a transportation route for merchandise (fig. 62). Changes accelerated as the nineteenth century progressed; New Year's Day 1867 marked the opening of the municipal cattle markets and slaughterhouses which made La Villette the principal meat supply and distribution center for Paris. The transformation of meat production forced the closing in 1974 of the markets and slaughterhouses, including the most recent slaughterhouse complex, left unfinished in 1976, which was transformed into a museum of science and industry.

Tschumi's solution for a new urban park that would accommodate diverse contemporary uses was to create what he called "the biggest discontinuous building in the world." The architect distributed the components of the program uniformly across the site in a grid of red cubic edifices, called "follies" (fig. 63). On this grid he superposed a series of linear promenades, geometric surfaces, and a sinuous ribbon of gardens he called a promenade cinématicque. This dispersal facilitated the intervention of other architects and artists to complete his project. Three sites along the promenade cinématicque were originally assigned to the Eisenman/Derrida design team, which in turn developed three distinct projects. A final project was proposed for the first site, which had been reconfigured in March 1986 by modifications made to
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,

Presentation model of second scheme, September 1986. Pink, gray, and gold paint over basswood, 10.2 x 61.3 x 61.1 cm.

CCA DR1992:0008:002
the promenade cinématique. The technical specifications for the site near the intersection of the north-south circulation axis and the canal de l'Oureq, immediately north of the Grande Halle, called for a water and stone garden with no vegetation and no vertical elements higher than 1.2 meters (fig. 64).

**Design Strategy**

The analogies between the Cannaregio and the La Villette sites— their location at the city limits, the presence of slaughterhouses, and the similarities
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,
Presentation drawing: exploded axonometric, between January 30 and August 1996. Transparent colored adhesive film with gold paint and silver adhesive foil on photostat. 112.0 x 76.2 cm. CCA OR1991-0019-140
between Tschumi's project and Eisenman's proposal for Cannaregio (both of which take the grid of Le Corbusier's Venice hospital project as a point of departure) — prompted the latter to bring his Venetian project to the Parisian site, thus recapitulating eight years of work on the theme of artificial excavation.

As in his preceding projects, Eisenman devised a temporal strategy to systematize the permutations among four site configurations: the La Villette and Cannaregio sites before the interventions of the architects, Eisenman's Venice project, and Tschumi's scheme for La Villette. Past, present, and future are combined with these four site plans to establish a matrix which regulates the horizontal and vertical proportional relationships of the various superpositions.

Jacques Derrida's reflection on architectural practice based on the notion of *chora* in Plato's *Timaeus* inspired Eisenman, notably in his notions of palimpsest and quarry, two stages in the stratification process used at La Villette. Derrida's interpretation of *chora* enriched Eisenman's superpositional strategy and gave a new direction to his work, initiated with the 1980 Guardiola house project. Derrida's most tangible contribution remains his proposal, made in May 1980, for a gilded object "that would resemble at once a web, a sieve, or a grille [grid] and a stringed musical instrument," inspired by Plato's elusive description of *chora*. This element was added to the final model as an inclined and striated object reflecting, at a smaller scale, the outline of the site.

**The Drawings**

The architect begins the project with a diagram explaining the palimpsest/quarry method (cat. no. 114). He then explores the superpositions of the Venetian and the Parisian sites and projects, considering even the registration of Tschumi's project at a reduced scale on site 1 together with superposition of the Parisian fortifications (cat. no. 120).

The relationship between his Cannaregio project and Tschumi's La Villette proposal is then clarified. In cat. nos. 123, 124, and 126 he places the principal axes of the two projects at right angles and studies the angular relationship. The 2:1 ratio between the spacing of the squares in Tschumi's La Villette project and those in Cannaregio becomes another registration method explored in a series of diagrams (cat. nos. 128, 128, 130). With these two analogies, the superpositions become progressively more complex, according to the prescribed juxtaposition of the elements at varying scales (cat. nos. 124, 125, 127, 129).

In August 1986, Eisenman and Derrida finalized three projects for the three sites. Site 1 displays the familiar registration of the Cannaregio grid on Tschumi's at twice the interval, the two orders united at the intersection of the two axes placed at right angles (cat. no. 138). The diagram for site 2 inverts the relationship used for the first site; the La Villette grid becomes twice as large as the Cannaregio grid but stays in the same angular relationship to it (cat. no. 140). In site 3, Eisenman places the superposition made
Sketch site plan of Cannaregio project (center and lower center) and sectional diagrams describing palimpsest and quarry procedures, December 19, 1985. Pen and black, blue, and red ink with red felt-tip pen on vellum, 41.8 x 29.5 cm.

CCA DR1991:0019:001. Inscriptions:
- Upper left, SECTION;
- Upper center, Q LEAVES P/P BECOMES Q FOR Y;
- Upper right, P BECOMES Q FOR Z;
- Center left, 1/PLATO/DERRIDA/2/CAI/PEI/BUY/1/11/1/3/LV/1/1/E/D/;
- PALIMPSEST/SOMETHING/NOT MADE/REVERSE OF/ERASURE;
- Lower left, PROCESS/IS/PLATO/DERRIDA;
- Lower right, +10 WHICH IS/PALIMPSEST IN ITSELF/19 DEC 85

Sketch site plan of Cannaregio project superposed with La Villette sites placed on its diagonal axis, December 19, 1985. Pen and blue and red ink with red felt-tip pen on vellum, 33.0 x 41.8 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:002. Inscription: Lower right, REGISTER/ALONG RUPTURE.
for site I within the Venetian site (cat. no. 142). Each of these plan diagrams is developed vertically in elevations and axonometrics (cat. nos. 137, 139, 141).

In June 1986 Renato Rizzi supervised the construction of a presentation model of the first scheme and, in September of the same year, of a second version incorporating Derrida’s chora figure. Detailed construction documents, including plan, lighting plan, and sections and decisions concerning the choice of materials were finalized at the same time (cat. nos. 143, 144).

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDARD

Credits

ARCHITECTS:
Peter Eisenman, partner in charge, Eisenman/Robertson Architects;
Jacques Derrida with Renato Rizzi

PROJECT ARCHITECTS:
Thomas Leezer, Renato Rizzi

ASSISTANTS:
Franco Alloca, Manou Ernster, Gerard de Gorter, Christian Kohl,
Hiroshi Maruyama, Paola Marzatico

References


Peter Eisenman,

**Sketch site plan of Parc de La Villette.**

Plan superposed with Cannaregio grid and three proposed La Villette sites, December 19, 1985.
Pen and black, blue, and red ink with red felt-tip pen on vellum, 41.8 x 29.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:004

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Peter Eisenman,

**Sketch site plan showing Cannaregio site superposed on La Villette site.**

Pen and black and red ink with red felt-tip pen on vellum, 29.5 x 41.8 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:005. Inscription:

*Lower right, Socrates as a recollection/reckoning in an abyss?* / OBTAIN A MELTDOWN OF THE FIRST IS? [?]

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*LA VILLETTE*
118
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing Parc de La Villette plan superposed with the Cannaregio grid and the three proposed La Villette sites,
December 19, 1985. Pen and black, blue, and red ink with red felt-tip pen on vellum. 41.8 x 29.5 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:003

119
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch of the fortified wall of Thiers, December 19, 1985. Pen and black ink on vellum. 41.8 x 29.5 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:008

CITIES OF ARTIFICIAL EXCAVATION
120
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing superposition of La Villette site, fortified wall, and proposed sites,
December 19, 1985. Pen and black, blue, and red ink on vellum, 41.8 x 29.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:006

121
Peter Eisenman,
Sketch site plan showing nineteenth-century La Villette site with axes generated by two of the proposed sites, December 19, 1985. Pen and black ink with red felt-tip pen on vellum, 41.8 x 29.5 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:007 Inscription:

LA VILLETTE
122

Peter Eisenman,

Sketch site plan showing superposition of La Villette and Cannaregio sites with diagonal axes at right angles, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 45.7 x 34.0 cm.

CCA DR1991.0019.014
Peter Eisenman.
Sketch site plan showing superposition of La Villette fortified wall and canals and Canмарғio site, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 41.5 x 46.7 cm. CCA DR1991.0019.013
Sketch site plan showing superposition of Cannaregio and La Villette sites with the Cannaregio grid twice as large as the La Villette grid, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with graphite on yellow tracing paper. 50.0 x 41.4 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:047
125
Office of Elsman/Robertson
Architects,

Sketch site plan showing superposition of Cannaregio and La Villette sites with the Cannaregio grid
twice as large as the La Villette grid, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow
tracing paper, 48.5 x 45.7 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:050
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,

Sketch diagram of two Cannaregio grids, one five times larger than the other, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with graphite on yellow tracing paper. 47.7 x 30.5 cm. CCA DR1991.0019.016
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,

Sketch site plan showing superposition of Cannaregio and La Villette sites at different scales, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with graphite on yellow tracing paper, 45.7 x 34.4 cm.

CCA DR1991.0019:053
Office of Eisenman Robertson Architects,

Sketch diagram of two Cannaregio grids, one five times larger than the other, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with graphite and red pencil on yellow tracing paper, 48.3 x 30.5 cm.

CCA DR1991:0019:017
Sketch site plan showing superposition of Cannaregio and La Villette sites at different scales, between January 20 and August 1986. Pen and black ink on yellow tracing paper, 45.7 x 51.5 cm. CCA DR1981:0019:054
130

Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects.

Sketch diagram of Cannaregio project with grid derived from Le Corbusier’s Venice Hospital, el structures, and diagonal axis, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with yellow felt-tip pen and graphite on yellow tracing paper, 45.7 x 31.7 cm.

CCA DR1991:0019:018
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Sketch site plan showing superposition of Cassaregio project at different scales with La Villette fortified wall and canals, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with red, pink, gold, and light blue pencil on yellow tracing paper, 61.1 x 41.3 cm. CCA DR1991.2019.068. Inscriptions: Upper left, TECHNICAL/SCALE/1/2000; center right, 1/2000/Venice.
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,

Sketch site plan showing angular relationship between La Villette grid and Cannaregio grid of el structures, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with red felt-tip pen on yellow tracing paper, 45.6 x 28.9 cm. DCA DR1991:0019.058.

Inscriptions: Upper left, COMMON
AXIS FOR ABATTOIRS/OF VENICE &
LA VILLETTA; center right, -6.5°;
lower center, -6.5°
133
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Sketch site plan showing superposition of Camargue project at different scales with La Villette fortified wall and canals, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with red, pink, and light blue pencil and graphite on yellow tracing paper, 65.5 x 45.7 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:069.


LA VILLETTE
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects

Sketch plan showing angular relationship between La Villette grid and Cannaregio grid of el structures, with the plan of Venice, between January 30 and August 1989. Red felt-tip pen on a photocopy on vellum, 43.2 x 28.0 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:059.

Inscriptions: Upper left, COMMON AXIS FOR ABATTOIRS/OF VENICE & LA VILLETTE; center right, -6.5°; lower center, -6.5°
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Sketch site plan showing superposition of Cannaregio project at different scales with La Villette fortified walls and canals within site no. 3, between January 30 and August 1986. Pen and black ink with purple, pink, dark blue, and blue pencil on yellow tracing paper, 50.2 x 29.5 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:070.
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,

Sketch plan showing angular relationship between La Villette grid and Cannaregio grid of ed structures, with the plan of Venice, between January 30 and August 1986. Red felt-tip pen on a photocopy on vellum. 43.2 x 28.0 cm. CCA DR1901:2010:060.

Inscriptions: Upper left, COMMON AXIS FOR ABATTOIRS/OF VENICE & LA VILLETTE; center, xo; center right, -6.5° and 28.5°/45°; lower center, -6.5° and 38.5°/45°.
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects.

Presentation drawing: axonometric of scheme for site 1, August 1986. Pen and black ink with adhesive office title block on vellum, 43.3 x 28.0 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:093

Presentation drawing: plan of scheme for site 1, August 1986. Pen and black ink with adhesive office title block on vellum, 43.3 x 28.0 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:691
139
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects.
Presentation drawing: axonometric
of scheme for site 2, August 1986.
Pen and black ink with adhesive office
title block on vellum, 43.3 x 28.0 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:099

140
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects.
Presentation drawing: plan of
scheme for site 2, August 1986. Pen
and black ink with adhesive office title
block on vellum, 43.3 x 28.0 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:097

CITIES OF ARTIFICIAL EXCAVATION
Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
Presentation drawing: axonometric of scheme for site 3, August 1986. Pen and black ink with adhesive office title block on vellum, 43.3 x 28.0 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:106

Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects,
Presentation drawing: plan of scheme for site 3, August 1986. Pen and black ink with adhesive office title block on vellum, 43.3 x 28.0 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:104
143
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,
Sketch section of second scheme
for site 1, between January 30 and
August 1986. Pen and black ink with
graphite and orange and purple pencil
on yellow tracing paper; 27.8 x 63.5 cm.
CCA DR1991:0019:120

144
Office of Eisenman/Robertson
Architects,
Sketch section of second scheme for
site 1, between January 30 and August
1986. Pen and black ink with orange
pencil on yellow tracing paper; 29.0 x
62.1 cm. CCA DR1991:0019:121
The Architect in the Philosopher’s Garden:
Eisenman at La Villette

JEAN-LOUIS COHEN

The intellectual space that Peter Eisenman has defined for himself between Europe and the United States over the past two decades is the product of a unique attempt to shape the public sphere of architectural culture through personal inquiry and experiment. Initially founded on the shift toward New York of questions arising from the formal analysis of major avant-garde architectural works, as well as from consideration of fundamental theoretical problems new to America, this transatlantic space has since been shaped by other ambitions. The brief and intense episode of Eisenman’s work on a “thematic garden” for the Parc de la Villette reveals not only the design techniques, but also the new intellectual ambitions that informed his work in the mid-1980s. This project coincides with the encounter between Eisenman and Jacques Derrida and thus marks the peak of the elective affinities between architecture and deconstructionist discourse.

With the garden at La Villette, Eisenman took up a fragment of Parisian space that had already been overinvested with architectural and cultural intentions during the 1970s. Opened to competition in 1982, this program for a “twentieth-century park” drafted by François Barré did not lack ambition. More complex than the programs for the other grands travaux carried out under François Mitterrand, it was intended in some way to reconcile Paris and the suburbs, art and science, nature and culture, mineral and vegetable, France and its immigrants, and so on, in an infinite series of utopic couplings. Initially without results, the competition went through an unexpected second stage that ended with the naming of Bernard Tschumi as chief architect. The winning project, at the outset broken up into superimposed geometric systems, explicitly made room for other architects to contribute to portions of the park; and such latitude was a prime factor in the jury’s decision.

For the “thematic gardens” proposed in the program could easily be dissociated from Tschumi’s overall plan and become autonomous entities, as was to happen in the case of the gardens later executed by Alexandre Chemetoff and Gilles Vexlard.

This project was to provide Eisenman’s first contact with Paris, a city he had intended to go to in the early 1960s when, equipped with a Fulbright scholarship, he set out to discover European architecture. Back then, however, he had abandoned the boat that was to take him to France and stayed in Great Britain, having discovered instead the discourse of Colin Rowe. An almost total disregard for his work in France, with the exception of a few mentions in the 1970s (particularly in the magazine Architecture Mouvement Continuité, which was actively sympathetic with Oppositions’), had


2. While L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, under the direction of Bernard Huet, exhibited a strong interest in the work of the New York Five, it was in Architecture Mouvement Continuité in 1977 that Eisenman first got a chance to express his ideas. See Alessandra Loutot and Lauraeta Vancheri, “Entretien avec Peter Eisenman,” Architecture Mouvement Continuité 41 (March 1977): 66-76.
provoked a kind of love-hate relationship with Paris. This implicit rejection, coupled with the hostility manifested by certain Parisian architects during the 1970 Venice Biennale, had kept Eisenman at a distance from a scene that was at the time in a state of total upheaval. His entry, when it occurred, was to come not by the main gate but rather by the Porte de Pantin, on the ancient road to Germany, where La Villette is located. Since it was in Strasbourg that Eisenman held his first seminar in France at the beginning of November 1985, this Franco-Germanic axis seems to have been fairly significant in his approach to Parisian space.

The issues underlying the project are of another order and have more to do with Eisenman’s intellectual and professional ambitions than with Paris as a site for his work. The first issue, which is clear in the design process, has to do with the very legitimacy of Bernard Tschumi’s overall approach. The mapping of territory which forms the basis for Tschumi’s strategy for La Villette has certain affinities with the underlying principle that Eisenman worked out for Camarregio in 1978, and indeed this precedent accounts for one of the geometric operations executed at La Villette. The second issue is not so much the distancing of an architect such as Tschumi, who was actually in favor of letting Eisenman try his hand, but rather the parallel effort that, thanks to La Villette, could be undertaken with an intellectual who until that time was quite unfamiliar with the techniques of architectural work. This other intention undoubtedly has deeper roots in Eisenman’s longstanding desire to play his own strategies off against those of intellectuals in other fields. And his path had crossed Derrida’s, at a meeting that became public at a Paris lecture in 1983. But before a collaboration could emerge, someone had to take command, act as a catalyst; and this is where Bernard Tschumi and François Barré came in. The latter had wanted to bring together an architect, an artist, and an intellectual for each garden at La Villette—a wager on the multidisciplinary utopia mentioned above. Despite an analogous attempt to have Alexandre Chemetoff and Daniel Buren collaborate with Jean-François Lyotard, this ambition had gone unrealized.

The givens that Eisenman brings into play at La Villette refer to certain preexisting orders. These include the history of the specific site, the structure of Tschumi’s plan, and Eisenman’s own proposal (made in conjunction with Derrida) which is in turn based on the (somewhat antecedent) critique that his Camarregio project made of Tschumi’s project. Each of these three orders can be read and interpreted independently of the others in the initial drawings, so as to provide a system that can then be combined with the two others. The first order, which is contextual, alludes to the initial division of the site into several major territorial systems. First, the area was apparently enclosed by the fortified wall of Thiers, constructed under the July Monarchy between 1840 and 1845, and demolished after 1919. The plan for the abattoirs that came later was to follow the contours of former bastions 25 to 28, whose embankments also provided the foundation for the boulevard that overlooks the park today. In addition, the fork formed by the Ourcq and St. Denis canals was to leave its impress on a site already dense with relief. Finally,
the abattoirs opened in 1867, associating the cattle market with the slaughterhouses at various points along the canal (fig. 65).

At this point it is possible to define an ancient memorial layer that sets up a relationship between the Urform of the site and the vestiges that, like the canal and the market hall, are recycled in keeping with the requirements of the program and Tschumi's project (cat. no. 121). In his quotation of the Thiers wall, Eisenman puts his finger on the threshold condition of the La Villette site, one which discloses that "experience of the phenomenon of limits" in which Walter Benjamin saw the means of "locating the lines of demarcation - along viaducts, between buildings, in the middle of a park, along a riverbank." The marginal dimension of this Paris periphery must have been tempting for Eisenman, who, as his Berlin undertaking demonstrates, is always ready to use the precariousness of urban situations as the subject matter for new projects.

The second order refers to the general economy of Tschumi's project, which is based on the overlapping of an orthogonal grid (with garden "follies" as focal points) with a group of geometrical metafigures (demarcating large clearings in wooded areas) and a sinuous pathway designated as a "cinematic" promenade (fig. 66; cat. nos. 176, 196). Each of these elements has its own history, which can be traced in Tschumi's previous projects, where the principles of follies, of the articulation of urban movement, and of filmic sequences were developed independently of each other. And it should also be mentioned that the plan that won the competition of 1982-1983 in itself constitutes a metawork that serves as a commentary on Tschumi's own architectural past.⁶
The third order, as I have already indicated, refers neither to the site nor to the intellectual scheme for the garden, but to Eisenman's own experience and his collaboration with Jacques Derrida. More specifically, what we have here is an interpretation of the project that Eisenman devised for the Cannaregio quarter of Venice in 1978 for the forum, *Immagini per Venezia*.* The structural context for Cannaregio was supplied by the grid for Le Corbusier's hospital, which Eisenman took over and articulated through the device of proposing, at varying scales, a building derived from House Ma. Like the effect produced by the interference of two photographic screens, the moiré generated by the superimposition of two grids was to prove promising, and undoubtedly contributed, indirectly at least, to the references that Tschumi would manipulate at La Villette in 1982.

In their very statement these three orders suggest a new complexity in Peter Eisenman's development, after Cannaregio, Berlin, the Wexner Center, and *Moving Arrows, Eros, and Other Errors*. In Venice, Eisenman stood out from a strong context, which he reinvented in Berlin and Columbus, while the Verona project was founded upon a guiding fiction. La Villette marked a twofold displacement, a geographic displacement (from Venice to Paris) and the chronological displacement of a previous experience. To this was added a double narrative, the account of Eisenman's European adventures and the story of his meeting with Jacques Derrida and the interweaving of their work. At this point it would be well to elucidate the techniques that were employed to combine the three orders of La Villette. They derive from coincidences — intentional, provoked, yet objective — among all three.

These coincidences are first of all inscribed by a manipulation of scales via the alveolus which Tschumi's plan proposes for the "thematic garden." An initial operation comes into play at this point, occasioned by the correspondence between the contour of the garden and that of the park as a whole, and this makes it possible to inscribe a reduction of Tschumi's over-
all plan within the site, a reduction in which a reduction of the garden itself is in turn inserted in place. Eisenman then generates a second coincidence when he aligns a fragment of Tschumi's plan with another from the Cannaregio project along a common axis, one that in each case leads to the abattoir on the respective site. And this axiality governs the placement of a segment of the Thiér rampant opposite the concavity in the outline of the garden. A third coincidence resides in the fact that both sites, Paris and Venice, are scored by canals. The unfinished state of the project makes it impossible to gauge the effect that this theme might have had on the basic problems (such as the collection of rainwater) that the art of the garden has posed since antiquity.

The devices that combine to produce the “alignment” effects are not, however, entirely free of deformation. Indeed, each undergoes very specific transformations. The original scale is usually retained, which is not necessarily the case with the overall plan, which is inset, framed, within a given area. A metonymic operation comes into play at this point, insofar as a fragment or detail takes the place of the entire initial project. Likewise, the metaphoric dimension emerges in an identifiable manner, on the one hand through the displacement of the Venice project to the new site (cat. no. 114) and, on the other hand, in the whole process of montage at La Villette, which aims to be a metaphor for Eisenman's work.

In the new order that emerges from the overlapping and collage of textures arising from initially unrelated architectural ventures, Eisenman draws upon a syntagm that, while absent from his discourse, is nonetheless present here. This is the Merzbild of Kurt Schwitters. Like the wrappers, tram tickets, and postal stickers that Schwitters juxtaposed in such a way that none is entirely legible (fig. 67), the layers and lines of the La Villette project are so many indexes of Peter Eisenman's travels on the architectural scene. The Merzbilder employed superimposition and collage to erase the contours and surfaces of their elements, while retaining both the materials

![Fig. 67. Kurt Schwitters. Siegbild. c. 1922. Figure 4 from F. Lorch, Der Merz-Künstler Kurt Schwitters. (Cologne: M. Du Mont-Schauberg, c. 1971). Collection Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen](image)
and the scale. Eisenman, for his part, is not content with merely reframing
the devices mentioned above. Rather, these networks of forms are first of all
placed, in a dislocation not unlike a form of dismemberment, so that
they can take on a different meaning in their new circumstances. Second,
they are condensed, reduced to a more potent principle by being sealed
down to produce a concentrate or distillate. These effects of condensation
and displacement are the very processes that underlie the dreamwork in
Freud's analyses—which takes us back to the initial and all too forgotten
sources of the notion of deconstruction, that is, the psychoanalytic
cure, but also to the specifics of the joint effort undertaken by Eisenman
and Derrida for the La Villette project.

Among the aphorisms on architecture that Derrida formulated in 1987,
we read: "No deconstructive project exists, no project whose aim is decon-
struction." Whether or not this appraisal serves as an epitaph for the La
Villette project, the latter undoubtedly bears traces of the philosopher's
presence both in its final structure and in its constitutive elements. Joined
initially by a discussion of the Moving Arrows project in Verona, the
encounter with Derrida assumed a different meaning in Paris, where it was
supposed to sidestep intersecting exegeses to herald a common undertaking.
In coming together for a program Derrida described as "abyssal," Derrida
and Eisenman started out working independently of each other, one textually
and the other graphically. Then Eisenman seized upon Derrida's text on the
chora in Plato's Timeaus, and this suggested a new strategy for analyzing the
antecedent orders of Cammarregio and the La Villette project of Tschumi.

Subsequently, both participants settled on Chora I. Works as a title for the
project: the ever present wordplay in the titles of Eisenman's projects here
bears equally on the choral nature of the work and on the concept in Plato.
Thus, a sort of exchange of voices arises from the chorus.

While Derrida underscored Eisenman's verbal dexterity and his extreme
pleasure in the ambiguous use of words, Eisenman, for his part, encouraged
his partner to try his hand at drawing. The challenge proved to be produc-
tive, and Derrida suggested inserting in the project something "neither ver-
tical, nor horizontal, an extremely solid frame that would resemble at once
a web, a sieve, or a grille (grid) and a stringed musical instrument (piano,
harp, lyre?), strings, stringed instrument, vocal chord, etc." This philosop-
ical filter was inserted into the deposit of layers that made up the project,
whose reference plane was set on an incline in order to bring out the simous
contours of the garden as well as the sharp angles it formed as it intersected
the rectilinear lines of the park. Although Derrida's drawing (fig. 68) in-
scribes the sieve onto the entire site, the spatial impact is actually very slight,
and the device comes off as a partial order inserted within the antecedent
system instead of something that provokes a crisis in it. However, Eisenman
easily assimilated the verbal potential of this contribution, taking every
opportunity to confound the lyre with the concept of layer which plays such
determining role in the conception of the project.

The covering up of layers is far from secondary. Above I compared it to a
Merzbild, since the notion of palimpsest which crops up in the discourses of
Eisenman and Derrida appears to me to have been somewhat usurped. The technique of palimpsest resides in the covering over of an anterior surface which, although it has been previously concealed or erased, still exists as a grain, even as permanently legible traces of the former texts. In the project for La Villette, there is no support comparable to a parchment covered with successive inscriptions. And even if one did exist, the operations of sealing and displacement would have wiped it out. If there were a palimpsest here, it would be inverse, that is, arrived at through the inscription of partially erased text as background to the new text of the project itself. The image that occurs to me is not the palimpsest but the feuilleté — in the twofold meaning of the term. Feuilleté, of weightless layers — here the tracing paper at the drawing stage or metal sheets or plates at the (unrealized) construction stage. And feuilleté in the sense of being leafed through, as are the books that Eisenman consults in his voracious readings of philosophy. In other words, a double expression of Peter Eisenman's sensual and intellectual gourmandise.

However, neither the combined qualities of architect and philosopher nor their desire for a choral work would suffice to bring about the realization of the garden. Despite the initial enthusiasm of Serge Goldberg, director of the Établissement Public du Parc de La Villette, the project was doomed by its very perfectionism. The drawings remain as a trace of the somewhat crossed purposes of architect and philosopher. The "presence of absence" that Eisenman liked to point to in the projects he executed during the 1980s is, in the project for La Villette, the presence of a lack in both partners:
with Eisenman, a lack of intellectual recognition and a desire for the conquest of a theoretical aura; with Derrida, lack of fruitful contact with a material reality very removed from his world of words and concepts. As proof of the presence of these two absences, I would submit the preoccupations of each partner at the time the project was being developed. A kind of role reversal occurred, and I was quite surprised to see Eisenman concerned with the meaning of a project in which Derrida, for his part, was relishing the technical and regulatory aspects instead of the symbolic ramifications proposed by his partner. But a common penchant for playing with words and meanings (most likely inherited from Jewish traditions, albeit quite separate ones) was as much in evidence as a predilection for conspiracy and the subversion of institutions.

Unproductive as an effective urban proposal when measured against its own ambitions, the La Villette experience coincides with a consolidation of Peter Eisenman’s architectural intentions. It marks his discovery of urban issues associated with the recycling of parts of European cities. It also signals a transition from the self-referential architecture that had been his main concern since the 1960s, toward an architecture based on multiple fictions – beginning with the fiction of the project’s development. The impossible passage of the Parisian “thematic garden” to the execution stage reveals, however, some of the impasses of the course that Eisenman has pursued for two decades. He has sought to conduct a “critical practice” in architecture, one opposed to commercial practice: not so much in the intensity of its intellectual affinities as in its subversive and critical character. But at the same time Eisenman has never ceased striving after the institutional and media recognition that alone would make it possible for him to build the fragile (and costly) architectural objects he designs. Generally accepted in university and academic circles, the notion of critical practice nonetheless remains difficult to swallow in the sphere of material production, however delicate the proposed feuilleté may be. This is the lesson to be learned from Peter Eisenman’s first and, so far, last architectural adventures on the Parisian scene. And it is a lesson that is still valid today.
Take Two Every Four Hours

Dear Peter,

Forgive me for the scribbled style of this contribution to such an important publication on your work. It has been two years since I was first notified about the project, and I prepared for the writing to some extent; however, even though three feet of my bookshelf are filled with reference books gathered for the purpose of writing about your work, in the end there has not been enough time to reread them carefully for a thorough dissertation. Or, more accurately, I should admit that my attempt has been stalled. When I was preparing for the writing, I was stricken by a bad case of influenza, which lasted for weeks. During this calamity, many concerned friends gave me various admonitions; as many as three people (two of whom are respected professional psychics) pointed out that according to the oriental horoscope, Shichitsu-Shinmei, I am at present under the influence of the time called Kobo (empty, defunct) during which the cosmic energy which normally accumulates in an individual instead diminishes: it follows that the metabolism is weakened and one becomes susceptible to influenza and other diseases. What is more, there is a heightened potential for making mistakes or unwittingly becoming offensive in one’s communications, which in turn may cause enduring troubles; this derives from the disordered waves of ki (pneuma) around the person. Thus whoever is within the term must be extremely cautious; it would be best not to say anything until several months from now, when it would be over. That was the advice.

(I knew that you would not buy the reasoning of the horoscope, and neither do I, really. However, I have in fact been affected by influenza and consequently my writing has been interrupted, exactly as was predicted.)

Do you remember that we once had a debate about your habitual use of aspirin? I insisted that you should switch to organic medicine. If the discussion is extended, we might be able to propose this aspirin as a metaphor for modernism in architecture in a broad sense, not only for the 1920s. On the other hand, organic medicine could be likened to the vernacular way of thinking (topos), which you reject, and the historicity that supports this thinking (chronos). Insofar as they are both medicines, the value of either the aspirin or organic medicine is commonly measured according to how effectively it functions with respect to the physiology of our bodies. However, considering that pharmakon by etymology means either a remedy or a poison, it might be better not to rush to a conclusion so simplistically.

On the other hand, we could judge their values according to the sense of physical well-being they dispense; but this measure would depend on our “belief” - something you and I tend to fall into so easily these days. Therefore, to prove a point, for a week during which I had a high temperature I rejected both aspirin and antibiotics and determined to withstand the attack.
with nothing but tofu on my forehead and taro paste on my chest, all the while trusting the intense message of vernacular knowledge — that we must put faith in the natural healing power of our bodies; in other words, I determined to leave it to chance.

Among the books that fill the three-foot section of my bookshelf (it would probably be the same collection if I chose them all from your bookshelf) is one by my mutual friend — Fredric Jameson's *Prison-House of Language*. You may have forgotten, but you gave this book to me, even with your autograph, as if it were your own work. It was just after the publication of the first edition. Then, several years after our debut in the early seventies, we began to be able to publicize our methodological ideas and at the same time we discovered each other's existence as a sort of corresponding phenomenon, though you were in New York and I was in Tokyo. In the late sixties we happened both to be interested in conceptual art, and we both attempted to read Noam Chomsky's transformational grammar as a method of problematizing architecture. It was about this time that Jameson's book appeared. It seemed to us to delineate a precise outline for the worldwide syndrome of the middle of this century: the age of linguistics. Our works — your early series through *House X* and my formalist approaches that reveal geometric vocabularies — were both attempts to explore the poetics of architecture in proximity to this framework of linguistics.

"We were working in two different loci, and it follows that neither of us could be exempted from locational limitations: our architectural discourses could be concretized only in relation to the particular locus, and regardless of whether or not we acknowledge such limitations, the fact remains that we are thus restricted. For me this took the form of a commitment to the problematic context of "Japan" as a fictive construct, and for you it was an engagement in the context of "America" or "American modernism." Since this writing is for your publication, I will omit references to Japan for now and focus on your context. It seems to me that your strategic intention — of employing linguistic problematics in architectural writing — can be brought into relief by extracting, from my outsider's point of view, the dominant characteristics of American modernism.

In America it is still believed that an architectural style can predicate a whole epoch. Even modernism itself is regarded as a style, which is in fact a strange paradox: although it was originally a drive par excellence to undermine any stylistic domination, as soon as it moved across the Atlantic Ocean its attempt to embody an ideological project was erased, and it was reduced to such superficial modes as fashion, taste, and Zeitgeist. This is clearly exemplified in *Modern Architecture*, the exhibition that took place at MoMA in 1932, in which various intentions, with their individual manifestos, were gathered under the title of International Style, to be abstracted into a common standard. That is to say that what fulfills such a standard comes to be acknowledged as a style.

I think that the dynamism of modernity can be achieved only by criticizing both the self and the other; however, it appears to me that the peculiarity of the American way is to omit the critic from the discourse and to be obsessed
with making a standard of the manual of styles. This can be said not only of modernism but also of Palladianism, the Beaux-Arts, and even the recent deconstructivism.

Herein lies the reason you employed linguistics critically, I believe. Once the original constitution of language is viewed retrospectively, its essential ungroundedness is exposed: For instance, in Saussure the connection between *signifiant* and *signifié* is only arbitrary, and, as with Wittgenstein, it has a fundamental instability which is fixed only barely by the contextualization of daily idiomatic use. Moreover, for Heidegger it is impossible to demonstrate Being itself as it is; Being is only by means of the difference that time automatically produces. The 1970s version of the theorization of architecture began by taking as a clue the Russian formalists’ conversion of those views into poesis.

It seemed to me that your early work employed Chomsky’s concept of transformational-generative grammar as a sinue. In that period your objects of operation were reduced to the elements of line and plane, which showed that you were an orthodox descendant of American modernism, in the tradition of abstract art since Clement Greenberg. The framework that your method needed then was the same limit that Wittgenstein faced in his earlier work: the extremity of the recognition of language as logic itself. After the experience of designing his sister’s house, his concern shifted to the construction of the nontranscendental world – the analysis of the colloquial, idiomatic use of language. And it was the same sort of shift that you, too, experienced. In this context I see why you terminated the house series with House X; within your logic of the series, there was no trace of the intrusion of the other.

Your method in the work that followed was to visualize the memory that is buried in cities; it was applied to Venice, Berlin, Paris, Tokyo, and so on, to excavate and then layer the times latent in those cities. In these projects, the procedure of collage as layering stands out. However, to me the visualization of memory carries infinitely more importance than the layering itself, which, after all, is a technique just like that of transformational grammar. I think this is because the cities you worked on were not located in America; they have much longer and more complex histories than those in the United States. For the people who actually live in such cities, nothing is more troublesome than the memory that is buried in them (in terms of their topographies, soils, and localities). It pulls at one’s legs: If you acknowledge it as it is, historicism in its most vulgar sense will resurface; if you recognize it as a continuity, you are trapped like a blind believer in the *genius loci*. It is well known that Heidegger dared to challenge this danger. Yet there may be a way to extract it as Gianni Vattimo’s “weak thought.”

What must be remembered, however, is that the Europeans could devise the idea of making memory relative only after long struggles waged in the powerful gravity field of historical memory. You who are outside this restraining field naturally can take the position of making it relative. Also, remember that you are in a locus, “America,” where the past can be easily ignored or consigned to oblivion without the bother of such a process as critique.
The memories that you extract from cities are almost arbitrary. Since visible signs are in essence arbitrary anagrams, as Saussure pointed out, it is no mystery that the outcome of collage comes to appear as a combination of chance. I am especially intrigued by the fact that the items of memory that you extract are just like the highlights of a tourist’s guidebook. However, I do not mean that the operation would be more refined if the elements were chosen from something like The Odyssey or The Conquest of Gaul. An easy means to make others understand aspects of memory would be to use common parlance as a guide, going through a musique-concréte-like manipulation and applying a synthesizer. I can cool the fever on my forehead with such a tofu. It does not do much good to cool off a colleague, though. I hope that the Client as an absolute other understands this. There is a contradiction, however: many of them trust only the fashionable style that we attempt to criticize seriously. It is possible, from time to time, to succeed in persuading an individual client, but such a success cannot be considered to have confronted the whole city itself in a full sense. Instead, shall we live the modern myth of the tragedy of pioneers? Or shall we try to achieve secular fame, to be decorated by awards and medals, like many of our mutual friends? I myself am pensive about these things, as I have already reached the age of sixty.

As I observe your recent works, which are motivated by diastrophism as seen in plate tectonics theory, and whose detail of expression has been organized according to catastrophe theory, I become concerned, albeit not for myself, that even the operation of memory has become a pattern, an object of instantaneous consumption in this locus called “America.” But at the same time it is a proof that you are still sustaining the primal motive drive of modernism—advancement by critique. In any event, it is too early for either of us to be obsessed with secular fame. The secular itself must be a new object of operation, because such is the stance of the Demiurge that I would like to revive. Please forgive me for sending you this scribble—it is April Fool’s today.

**Arata Isozaki**

April 1, 1993
Cities of Artificial Excavation: A Chronology

1978
Submission to the International Seminar of Design for Cannaregio West, Venice
See catalogue, pp. 46–71

1980–1986
Submission to the Restricted International Competition “South Friedrichstadt as a Place to Live and Work,” Berlin; Kochstrasse/Friedrichstrasse Housing, Berlin
See catalogue, pp. 72–106

Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
Design and construction of a 140,000-square-foot visual arts center devoted to avant-garde and experimental arts at the Ohio State University in Columbus, in collaboration with Richard Trott & Partners, Columbus

Romeo and Juliet: Project for the Third International Exhibition of Architecture, Venice Biennale
In collaboration with Renato Rizzi, Rovereto, Italy. Published by the Architectural Association in 1986 under the title Moving Arrows, Eros, and Other Errors: An Architecture of Absence

1985–1986
Project for a Garden, Parc de La Villette, Paris (Chora L Works)
See catalogue, pp. 186–218

1986
Submission to the Competition for the New National Theater of Japan, Tokyo
Project for a performance arts center including a black-box theater, a 1,000-seat auditorium, and an 1,800-seat opera house, in collaboration with Richard Trott & Partners, Columbus, Ohio

University Art Museum of the California State University at Long Beach, Long Beach, California
See catalogue, pp. 136–168

Progressive Corporation Headquarters, Cleveland, Ohio
Design for insurance company headquarters in downtown Cleveland, Ohio, in collaboration with Frank O. Gehry, Venice, California (unbuilt)

Museum of Futurism, Rovereto, Italy
Project for a 60,000-square-foot museum dedicated to the Italian Futurist painter Fortunato Depero, in collaboration with Renato Rizzi, Rovereto

1987
Project for the Exhibition “Nove progetti per nove città,” Seventeenth Milan Triennale
Urban design project for the via Flaminia–via del Corso area, Rome, in collaboration with Renato Rizzi, Rovereto, Italy

1988
Submission to the First Stage of the International Competition for the Design of the Piazza Matteotti–La Lizza Area, Siena, Italy
Project for an economic and financial center for the Monte dei Paschi di Siena Bank and new headquarters for the Siena Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Craftsmanship, and Agriculture, in collaboration with Renato Rizzi, Rovereto, Italy